

On December 21, 1984, I committed a robbery and a man died because of what I set in motion. The hole I tore in the lives of his loved ones, I can never close, I know that.

After being sentenced to Death By Incarceration, I felt buried in guilt, shame and overwhelming feelings of hopelessness. I dealt with those feelings the way I always did, pushing it all down in a pool of alcohol and drugs. I lived that way for the next ten years. Its a longer story but there came a time when I had to choose between life or death and I chose to live.

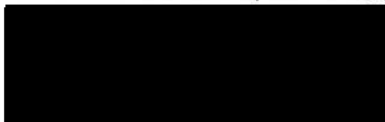
Since then, unable to fix the harm I caused, I set about to fix what I could, starting with my own broken self. In 1995, I sought help and finally stopped drinking and drugging. I have been clean ever since. Along with many other accomplishments, I earned a bachelor's degree which I am proud of. I have also had the opportunity to do redemptive work with at-risk youth and have met with and listened to many victims of crime and their advocates. Facing their pain, up close, showed me how harm echoes down the years for many people. And, put me in touch with my own remorse and acute feelings of guilt and shame for what I had done. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to meet these courageous people and for their generosity in sharing their stories with me and others. Meanwhile, the years have gone by.

When I feel sorry for myself, and nearing the end of my fourth decade in prison, I sometimes do, I remind myself that its my fault that I came to prison. Yet, after suffering those long years along with me, my family and friends remind me that its not my fault that I'm still in prison. That responsibility lies with others.

I have done everything possible to redeem myself in prison, I have tried mightily to remain positive and keep moving forward. Today, I am a good man, I know that too. Still, there remains a deep well of hopelessness and despair. It feels like I am always in mourning, mourning my own slow death in prison. My heart cries out, What more can I do? How much is enough? But all I hear in return are the echoes of the crime I committed so very long ago.

*Thomas Schilk*

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I, Thomas Schilk, authorize The Abolitionist Law Center to use the above writing - in whole or in part - as they choose to do.

*Mums Satia*

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