

## **Transcript: Episode 23 Knife Skills**

Hello and welcome to Episode 23 of the Decarceration Nation podcast, a podcast about radically reimagining America's criminal justice system.

I'm Josh, among other things, I'm formerly incarcerated, a freelance writer, criminal justice reform advocate and the author of the book *Writing Your Own Best Story: Addiction & Living Hope*.

First, the news I had a great time this week is one of the trainers at the Michigan Counsel On Crime and Delinquency event, which was training social workers who work with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated populations. I also published an article about the Supreme Court situation and an article about Solitary Confinement.

Some of my upcoming interviews include, as I mentioned before, an interview with Donna Hylton, the author of the book "A Little Piece of Light," I was very excited recently to get confirmation that I'm going to interview James Foreman Jr. who won the Pulitzer Prize for his book, "Locking Up Our Own" recently. I also a few other interviews that I'm working on setting up as we speak. So hopefully a lot of exciting stuff coming.

Okay, let's get to this week's interview with the folks behind the documentary *Knife Skills*.

I'm incredibly excited to welcome the folks behind the Oscar nominated documentary *Knife Skills* to the Decarceration Nation podcast today.

*Knife Skills* is a documentary about a restaurant in Cleveland, Ohio, but not just any restaurant. It's a high end French restaurant built on a business model which gives formerly incarcerated people the transferable and sustainable skills necessary to work in fine dining. If you have not seen the documentary. you absolutely should. It's only about 40 minutes long. I've seen it about 10 times. And if anyone walked into the room right now and said, Let's watch knife skills again, I would be all in. I will include a link to the documentary in the show notes. Seriously, it's a great documentary, you should check it out.

So anyway, who are my two actual guests. My first guest is Thomas F. Lennon, who should not be confused with Thomas P. Lennon. He's a winner of two Peabody awards

and an Academy Award as a documentarian, and in an odd coincidence, he also created another of my favorite documentaries, "The battle over Citizen Kane."

My second guest is Brandon Chrostowski the person who started Edwin's, the restaurant and the Institute, but he is doing much more he's also been doing in reach and training and mentoring inside prisons in Ohio to give you a feeling for what he stands for. And in his TED Talk he said his project is about revitalizing communities and reuniting families something I couldn't agree with more.

Hello gentlemen and welcome to the podcast!

It's just great to be here

I'm going to try to do this chronologically at first the first few questions will be for Brandon But Thomas you have if you have something to add. Feel free.

Brandon towards the end of the documentary and a scene that always hits me really hard. You talk about your son being named Leonard after your grandfather but also after the patron saint of prisoners, can you talk a little bit about your journey and where your passion to help prisoners began?

Absolutely it was a really began and 98 when I, when I graduated high school as the same time that I did I got thrown in jail and was facing some pretty hard time five to 10 years I was fortunate enough to get probation and then really a second life be handed and from that point on, it was really just great mentorship and the the idea of having the right fundamentals to work anywhere that I wish but that all goes back to, you know, being a younger man and, you know, facing that that sort of realization is that freedom it doesn't doesn't come from nothing.

And so when you decide to pay that forward, what really was I mean, you just it just became a passion for you or was there more of a story or Genesis to it?

Sure. The idea really didn't hit me until 2004 and this was after having worked in Charlie Trotter's kitchen having having gone to school with the Koreans to of America having worked in Paris and then I was actually at a restaurant in Manhattan called Le Cirque and this is when the idea hit to do something bigger to pay it forward as people say there's many many men back home in Detroit you know mentors of mine the men who helped me become a man there were getting killed murdered thrown in prison and I just

couldn't help but think that that I was here and they in fact we're not that's really the the genesis of the inspiration that that set this whole project in motion okay.

And so of course the next question is How was Edwin's itself born?

Well I mean again if you go back that story from that break that mentorship and then he'll just kind of working on that path to create something for others. So it was really you know, just really born through through hard work. An idea this this idea that it worked in my life it could work for others but you know when the restaurant open I mean how that all became boy I actually started started in prisons in 2011 and I just came simply by knocking on a prison wardens door and saying hey I'd like to teach a class and from there as developing that and into into what it is ultimately supposed to be which was a school restaurants campus and so on that that I'll just came within you know just throughout time

Can I can I jump in as as somebody who spent a lot of time with Brandon and and what I found is that the people who were in the restaurant who were trainees who were you know fighting for a second opportunity for themselves were very, very open about their lives but but Brandon kept his cards close to the vest and and it took maybe six months to a year of me doing filming in the restaurant and spending a lot of time there before I came to understand a branded story, and I think he's, you know appropriately downplaying it a little bit. Two things I want to save. Which is that I met people ultimately, who had known Brandon in his early 20s is so, like, 10 years before he opened Edwin's. He uh. He was already telling friends that he had this idea about this about this restaurant that would be staffed entirely by people, men and women just just out of incarceration. So this was a long plan coming at a passion that had stayed with him a long time The other thing that it took me a long time to understand and actually I didn't really do justice to in the film but because it's something that Brandon talks about very little but i think is is important to understand which is a personal faith. He didn't talk about it at all, in the in the in the restaurant setting or in prison, he just gets on with the business. But I think personal faith was important to him. And I think personal faith I found was very important to a lot of people who were fighting for a second life after they got out of jail or prison,

I would certainly cosign on that myself.

So one of the things that we're really interested in as a general principle with this podcast is the notion of how people can build systems like this that help people with re entry. So how in the world did you get buy in from investors, stakeholders, the city of

Cleveland, the state of Ohio, the governor, etc, the wardens to support a restaurant and Institute based entirely around a reentry model?

Yeah, that's a question Josh, it just took time I think is first and foremost it took it took time and effort and sacrifice which I think was the ultimate employment when someone looked at me and said, Hey, you know, either he's crazy or is really on to something that would be one or possibly the idea that there was a very solid plan. The first thing was there was a there was a lock tight business plan. I had a curriculum attached to this. That was, you know, that was bulletproof. There were partnerships in place, they were already being worked, you know, wherever the restaurants that I ran out, you know, in Cleveland, I would have better women coming out of prison staff them so there was there's an proven track record of this happening and then, you know, push it further that the program in prison was taking place that I started doing this in a women's prison and people took notice he said, Hey, you know, this is this is this is the real thing and if if, in fact, it can go a little further, maybe you could do that much more. I don't think anyone envisioned around me this idea that we could take it this far, but this is always felt natural that we could we could do this you know simply by taking someone's potential and and pushing it forward yeah

Yeah yeah can I just can I jump in and to say look I'm not trying to the to Brendan's or at all but but I again a few things that I think are relevant first of all go back to what I said about 10 years before he had decided this was something he wants to do. Right. And again, this is all stuff I learned months into the filming but that so but he you know, he apprenticed in these very very very fancy establishments in Chicago, New York, even Paris. That's in fact how I met him because I happen to be family friends with a with a very well known chef in New York. And that's how I was lucky enough to meet Brandon before he'd opened the restaurant which gave me a chance to sort of film from the ground up. So so there was a determination and then a kind of a building off of credentials and then as I as brand and correct me if I'm wrong, but as I understand it, you sort of said okay, where where what's the city that needs is that this kind of a program this is when you were living in New York and said okay, lots of dropouts and Cleveland high school dropouts it's got a high correlation between high school dropout and client problems How about I set it up in Cleveland bend managing a restaurant in Cleveland developing a real following in Cleveland this restaurant that had nothing to do with incarceration but it can gave him the credit to then go to investors and say okay here's the next plan so it's you know for a guy who's I mean you'll sit anybody watches the film will see that that that this is a pretty eccentric venture and a pretty eccentric founder of a restaurant but at the same time very strategic

Did you have anything that yep

Hey Josh, until you know you invest in yourself, you're less likely people. invest in you. So just take it as much investment as I could without making the you know, purchasing a restaurant and so on. So the nonprofit and so I started seeing solid plan self investment it actually being done and that's when the first person just gave and you know, start the domino effect.

That's awesome. Are the people you recruited for that first class in 2014 where they still on paper or were they finished with parole and probation?

It was a mix it was a mix so you have to have buy in from the pearl department in Ohio and and yeah i think i think is is is you pass this cookie down there's some you know individual pills are making making their discretion upon the person that they know best and what might work best for them and if you think about we're all reasonable people on this podcast and probably listening who's going to really say no to you know a free training program that can help better ones future as opposed to the current track sometimes people I'm which is so from deployment or you know it's trying to get some traction society so anyway that wasn't that wasn't the hard sell that really was a pretty easy sell.

I don't know I've seen some pretty some parole agents that weren't necessarily follow your rational course, but I see what you're saying.

Yeah.

So okay now we've set the scene Thomas first. I wasn't kidding. I own that Wells documentary and I've watched it many times. It's one of my favorites.

Well Well, I love it. Yeah. How that's a long time ago around 1996?

Yeah, yeah but it's about one of the greatest movies of all time and I you know, it's part of the criterion box

Right, you know it

But how or when did you get involved and how did you start the process that became Jnife Skills?

Pure love pure luck with you know, I, my wife is family friends with a woman who's married to a really, really big chef in New York, David Wolter he used to run chanterelle which was up in the top five restaurants in New York for you know 20 years and turns out that as Brandon was trying to train and get and learn from the best and apprentice with the best he spent a couple of years working for Karen and David Wolter. I didn't know any of that I got invited to dinner I thought it was just going to be my wife and, and David and Karen and me. But there was this other guy there. And and it was Brandon. And he was kind of I couldn't quite get a read on him. But at one point, he sort of like said, Well, I'm going to be opening the greatest French restaurant in the United States. And I went like, okay, and he said, could be in Cleveland that was, you know, a little bit of a surprise. We New York snobs we figure either it's going to be you know, East Coast or west coast. But he said Cleveland and he said and it's going to be staffed by people were just out of prison. And I mean, I hadn't even finished my appetizer. And I knew that was a film. And but as I said, the great luck was that I was having this conversation with him. He said, I just, I'm about to sign a lease. So he This was in the summer of 2013, and he was going to open in September, October and I was free and I just bought a new camera and I was I said to him, Well, how would you feel if I just came out and started hanging around a little bit and that was that was the beginning I think the film would not have been as strong if the all the kinks had been worked out. You know, I went back there recently a few months ago and it's a very well oiled machine now everybody knows that part everybody knows what they're doing not everybody knows what they're doing all the time. But you know, it's it's, it's it's much more smoothly running, which is good for the restaurant, but would have been bad for the film.

Can either of you explain one of the things I wondered about every time I've seen the documentary, And that is the seemingly compressed six week timeline that's referred to throughout.

Oh, that's okay. Let me first of all, explain to listeners what, what Josh is referring to, is that when you do that, after the people come off, come into the program, and most of whom have done any work at all in a restaurant. The restaurant has to be open. Six weeks later, six weeks later, Brandon announces they're going to open their doors and there are different explanations for that brand or have a different one. I think it's because Brandon was crazy.

Is that fair Brandon?

It's. It's called um, you know, the cash on hand and how fast it goes.

Gotcha.

Who there there. There was a desperate time. I mean, I knew how much cash that we have had a house a new pay. If we didn't hit this point. In the fourth quarter. We were dead in the water. So it's a little bit of a lot of live business sense but also that something happens when your backs against the wall there's also something special to humans that happens when you when you push them against the wall they have to do something to survive and it's also get some some special energy out of it so there's a calculation by yeah I actually went

After watching the documentary I didn't know you but when I got from the documentary I thought the theory might have been pressure makes diamonds?

Yeah I think there was that a little about it I you know I'm supposed to be a fly on the wall I'm supposed to be the well trained journalists are just absorbs all at But I say to Brandon I said I think you're nuts you know you've got a good good idea but you you're starting to soon and the business calculation was that the trainees came in early in October or maybe that last week in September and the end the best time for a restaurant or a restaurant makes most of its money.

Before leading up to Thanksgiving and then through Christmas and into the new year that's those steps the golden time so Brandon didn't want to miss that and I understand that but but it put unbelievable pressure on everybody involved which is a filmmaker but I was really biting my name is I didn't think it was gonna work.

I think there was someone else who is really looked throughout the documentary a bit like they were freaked out by that and that was Gilbert.

He was and he and I was interviewing them and so when the camera wasn't rolling she'll bear would say to me oh man crazy he's out of his mind absolutely crazy is going to be a disaster and then I think we should talk a little bit about that so I turn on the recorder and he goes when I see is interesting because it's going to be some of your going to do the best we can.

Which leads me to a question. I wanted to talk a little bit about the characters in the, in the documentary and one of the ones who says the least, but has some of the best expressions in the movie is Gilbert can you explain how Gilbert came to Edwin's and how you sold him on the business model

So I had a small office space somebody let me use in a section of Cleveland called Little Italy and Gilbert had a restaurant he had owned restaurant across the street there in Little Italy. So I have tried to run this restaurant here in Cleveland from like, you know, midnight till two or 3am I work on the headwinds project at this office space. And obviously, you'd be done with, you know, service and he'd walk by and every now and then he popped his head and asked me what I'm doing what I'm doing. And towards a month or two into this. He said, What do you think what's going on? How's it going to work in he wants to get into teaching more often. And I said, Hey, you'd be a great teacher, you're great chef and so on. And so he was looking for a place you could kind of step off the gas a bit more and Not own but also give back what he what he he has learned so that's how I mean that's how we kicked it off and then we just started going

And Thomas what were your feelings of your interactions with Gilbert?

Well when he gets introduced in the film there's a guy listening to him one of the the people just out of prison who says first you just amazed listening to this guy this chef that sounds like he's something out of TV or the movies so my first reaction was really just as a filmmaker I just thought man this guy's heaven sent to me you know cuz he he talks like this guy is angry all the time he swears all the time and but he's buddy buddy love those trainees and they could feel his love for them and their loved him back I it was, you know, a class is a really amazing character and the connection between him and those trainees was amazing. He's one of the he's one of the very few people in the program who didn't hadn't had any brush with the law, at least that I know that's not why he was there. And so, so I didn't feature him heavily in terms of his backstory, but by the amazing guy and and very important to the film.

So one of the compliments I would definitely give to you, Thomas is that for a short documentary, I really ended up feeling like I knew many of the people in the film Alan Marley, Dorian, Mike and dowdy and of course, Brandon a little bit. So what drew you to these folks and where are we with their story now?

you know, it's been a few years Yeah, yeah, let me let me first of all say that, um, that the film was actually I don't think it plays this way, but it was actually very difficult to make and part of why was difficult.

make is that I wanted to introduce you to a lot of different people. I didn't want to make this a story about any one person. I wanted to make it a story about what it's like to come out of prison and build a new life that involve jumping around from one person to the next. And yet, I still wanted you to feel really connected to everybody. And I want to do it in a short period of time and short period of running time. I want to keep the film



short, you know, Billie Holiday said to people said like oh, what advice do you have for me as a singer? She said get off the stage while people are still shouting for another song. You know, so that's my view. Like get off the stage what people still want to know more and there's a lot that I leave out of the film but I think that hopefully just leaves you hungry not just for Edwin's is delicious food but to know more about the books. So I thank you for that comment. Because that's really what that's really what the film was all about was how how can I make you care about people without spending a lot of time with them or any more than I have to now Actually everybody in the film is you know really doing well there's only one person you got to know there who's not in food and that's Dorian the guy who has the fight with Brandon not physical fight but purple clash with with Brandon in the middle of the of the program and he is doing great but he decided he got a great after he dropped out of the program he got a great job in manufacturing and stayed with it. But he loved that time that he was there at the restaurant and looks back on it with a lot of pride. Everybody else is a doing well and be earning a living and

Awesome

Isn't it?

Isn't it awesome?

And this leads me back to Brandon. I think probably my favorite moment of the film isn't really about the graduation. It's before that there's a scene where one of the people who we get to know in the film is back in court and has been picked up for another offense and the camera pans and Brandon's in the courtroom, which says a lot to anyone like me was formerly incarcerated. And at the end during graduation you mentioned this Brandon and you say in the end we still have their backs we visit them downtown we send them books they're part of a family in this family won't be broken I promise you that. And I think for anyone like me who's been through this process just hearing anyone say that is incredibly powerful and I just want to thank you for that and also ask you you know where this kind of rock hard solid commitment I know I've asked you this a couple ways before but really ask again...

Ask again Josh

Maybe if you could talk a little bit about that because that spoke so powerfully to me?

Yeah well I you know Josh, I think that you've been down that road and being those shows unit you know what I'm, you know what it feels like. So, if given the strength and

given the other talent you know, you only feel compelled to do it right away I feel it has a responsibility to have some things that maybe others don't. But knowing what it feels like to not have to be without that's that's what it is that strong conviction of having you know having someone's back comes from  
i feel like i said i just...

You know I just had an insight that that just now while I was listening but I want to add which is you know Brandon said like well why did he create such a short time between when the people entered the program and when they had that restaurant had to open he said sometimes when people's backs are against the wall that's that's when they come up with with you know that's when they come up with their best stuff when they come up with more than they thought they had I just realized this obvious thing Brandon loves to have his back up against the wall and so so so it's not just that he's doing it to the other people in the program but he's doing it to himself. And and you know if I think there's a testing of self that is involved in always expanding the mission at Michael I took me a long long time to finish this film because I was I had to make my money doing something else because I was doing some other projects because I wasn't making any money on this film. And I had to raise money and and then and then the Edit as I said, was difficult. And, you know, I started like, using my phone ID to avoid picking up any calls from Brandon because he's one of the most impatient people in the old world, and you always want something to happen the next day. And I had to say to them, well, I, you know, I don't know exactly what I'm going to finish. I don't know. And after saying that about seven times, I just like started ducking because you know, we like to we all like to push ourselves and something exciting happens when you expand your own mission, you know, and I don't I still don't know. What? Brandon's really like he's spent 10 years plotting this thing. And now that restaurant is a success, and the message is getting out to a wider audience. So what's the next 10 years going to be? I don't think I know. I don't think Brandon knows. But I think it's gonna be fun to watch.

So, that brings us to the question of how is the Edwin's Institute and how's the restaurant doing now?

Good Josh, we're thriving This is this can be our most powerful year ever in terms of you know bottom line so we are keeping the seats filled we're now at the 13 different prisons with our corner clubs where we empower inmates to be able to teach you know what we what we guide them through we still teach that hands on class and graft in prison is also going on today. The we finished a campus you know after the first year was there was apparent that housing has to take place so we we have a campus three blocks away so there's free housing for current students. There is...

Seriously?

Oh yeah it has 22 beds I've got a second building for eight beds for alumni it as a fitness center library and test kitchen so that's all been complete since 2015 and just just this week started construction on the butcher shop so the idea is to continue to take our supply chain you know build out these little ecosystems where our our students can go through learn that skilled straight to the top environment that's all that skill it also you know increase their bottom line because we're selling to ourselves wholesale and you know I only build in the hood so it's a it's given the community something that they so much deserved so that's that's butcher shop there'll be this winter complete functioning and the idea is to do that with a bakery up you know, a fish shop and so on all the way down the road so you know built

wow

I didn't know about the bakery and the fish are so cool.

What's amazing what ideas I had to build the best corners school in the country done so by men or women out of prison just you know, showing showing the world that hey, look, you know, we're not discounted. We're not, you know, we're not individuals whose you know, who are less we infected doing the best and more in society.

So Brandon, in Michigan recently, we've had a lot of problems. First they privatized the prison food service for many years now, they've gone back from that and they were asking or they were starting to look at different models is this model that you're building transportable? Do you feel like that it could be a model for other states?

Oh, absolutely. I'm three months ago just open a restaurant in a place called Medina. There's the two judges, the probation departments as if you know, I'd come down there and start the same project and so put the full way behind that we opened up So that's, that's a restaurant for people in recovery. We just got actually yesterday time that you may not know this, but the, the Plain Dealer reviewed as four out of four stars.

I saw that.

So so you know it's possible and it can be done at a higher level of quality so that you're always employable. I mean we got 54 jobs waiting to hire, you know, we got 1% recidivism when you graduate this program, you're, you're, you're strong enough, you're

smart enough and you're you know, you've got you've got what it takes to succeed in this business and in life. So it is exportable is certainly as just takes the right group of leaders and leadership to to see it through is...

Have you considered almost having some kind of class or a or a handbook or something that could be given to other leaders and other states that might be able to work to reproduce this

Can I can I jump in and saying one thing about that? Sure. You know, Brandon and I circled around each other a little bit whereas

During this project, he wasn't eager to reveal much about himself. And he was really eager to. If you notice in the film The first time he really talks about himself. He says, okay, turn off the camera and let's talk, you know, yeah. So he was careful. But again, go back to that strategic sense that I said, Why did he let me in? I think it's clear that he wanted to, but he figured, okay, this guy has has some credibility as a filmmaker, maybe it'll get my message out wider. Yep. I think that's the only reason I was allowed in doing so Josh over doing so with integrity the number of networks and and sharks that one of the you know, just capitalizing some, you know, drama, you know, here's someone who can portray it in a way that that helps others understand this, this difficulty of coming home and though and the work that needs to be done in that in that can be done. Yeah, let's see. So for sure. So, I guess what I'm saying is, I think the film is a little bit of that. handbook that you're talking about Josh

You know, and not that it's not that it's adequate, but I'm saying it's, it's, it's, it's a it's a thing to get people interested in replicating the model elsewhere. So Josh, I've got, I've got hours of the classes have been taped, edited and developed around this, you know, I got, like a 250 page curriculum that's bound. I mean, everything here is exportable again doesn't matter what you export, it's, it's the individuals who...

Oh, sure,

...who are able to execute that that plan. So I mean, it's here, not the not the blueprint of how to build it because its case by case but the curriculum is definitely, you know, package ready to go.

That's awesome. I'm just so impressed by this whole project. I mean, I've heard a lot of different re entry models and in reach models, but I haven't heard one that is providing jobs, creating housing, creating larger transportable skill sets. I just can't tell you how blown away I am by what you're building there, and I guess that's a good enough place to stop.

No, No, No, it isn't. Because Josh, I want to ask you, I want to ask you what you're building because I, I'm first of all, you know, I'm very impressed with all the prep you did on this, and you chase me relentlessly because I was a pain in the neck to get to agree. But I but you know, you've got your own story, and you've got your own message that you're coming out of, what are you building?

Well, I mean, I say that this is a podcast about radically reimagining America's criminal justice system. And to some extent, that's true because I went through it as a privileged person who had an education and I saw all of the things that I could maybe work my way around, but nobody else could. Right. And so to me, it became I mean, a lot of people say that the people left behind are their brothers and sisters. I literally see them as my brother and sisters and so the most important thing to me every day is what I'm doing for people on the inside and for people coming back and it sounds like Brandon it's just a lot better at it than I am.

Well you know a podcasts are very important tool and and I I just I salute you for what you're doing. But I think that that you know there is a lot of work to be done and I'm glad you're in the trenches.

Thanks man and Brandon, I like I said, I can't tell you how much I admire what you're doing. And thanks for coming on and talking about it.

Oh, it's a pleasure. Really fun.

And last thing I'll say is there's several of us in the reform community here who've been talking for at least a couple of months about coming to Edwin so don't be surprised if

...I should have a percentage man I'm really booming the best of that restaurant. But what do I get from it? Nothing.

Your name is on the movie.

Well, thank you Josh.

Alright guys, thanks so much, guys.

Bye bye.

Okay, and thanks so much to Brandon and Thomas for joining me for that interview. Now, my take since January when I started this podcast. One of the things that I've said over and over and over again, is that we need a re entry system or re entry systems that start immediately after someone has sentenced to prison or jail and then only after someone has a safe place to live a job with a living wage and health insurance and where they are reconnecting with their communities. In the past I have said that prison reentry should operate like a hospital or the administration of that prisoner jails. main concern from the minute someone enters is how to ensure that that person returns as quickly and successfully as possible when I left prison, my count counselor and in prison we have these things called a Ross's and Michigan their counselor so in theory they're supposed to help you but when I left present my account for despite multiple planning meetings released me to the wrong county I'm not kidding you I ended up being in a county I had never lived in where I had to report and I had to find a place to live on the fly while they had a place for me like a board how a halfway house and I had to figure out where it was and I had to get there and then I had to get to the office. I'd never been in that county before in my life. And I had been planning and everything I'd done to set up everything was set in the county where I actually lived, it was insane. In addition, I had zero re entry assistance, no help with jobs, no training while in prison, and I was expected to simply overcome employment discrimination, housing discrimination and make connections in my community on my own.

There were some pretty programs like I had to go to, to offender to therapy. But mostly I was locked in my house all the time and was only lead out to get food, get a job or or work. So the idea it speaks very deeply to me to think of re entry in a different way. I am blown away by what Brandon is doing in Ohio. He is starting to teach people while they are in prison. He is hiring folks, when they leave jails and prisons. He is providing them with skills that they can take anywhere in the world. And remember, he has worked in Paris, in New York, in you know, all over the world. And he is even building in housing for folks so that when they get out they have somewhere to live until they can acquire housing for themselves. I suspect that he's made all this happen in a political environment where folks were not exactly tripping over themselves. To help him build a better re entry system, but he somehow made it work and got the buy in from all the important stakeholders and according to Thomas he created this vision well before Brandon created this vision well before he ever settled on building a restaurant and as he puts it the hood in Cleveland, Ohio before Edwin's even existed. He didn't wait for the government to do something. He made it happen. And as a result, thousands of people in Ohio are coming back from prison or jail to a real chance at a better life. And most important as long as you can find a Brandon and while he is clearly one in a million. There are millions of hungry, formerly incarcerated folks what he is building could be built anywhere. He's even made manuals and why wouldn't we want that

thousands of people come out of jail or prison to a meaningful job and a chance at a better life and all with a 1% recidivism rate. What Brandon has done what Brandon is doing is amazing. The term paying it forward barely does his project justice. I think you can hear in the interview how shocked and amazed I was by what he is pulling off. There are people all over the country accomplishing parts of what Brandon is doing. But I have seen very few people do it all. This is the first time I've seen the entire model, an entire cradle, you know, pardon the phrase cradle to grave re entry model. And to do it all from scratch with only some chutzpah, some training and a plan. I just am blown away by what he has accomplished. I guess at the end of the day, I just want to thank Brandon for all he is doing. I know I'm thinking about ways to take what he has done to apply it all in my home state of Michigan. I've already started making calls and talking with people. And I want to also say that a lot of what I'm doing, you know, getting these interviews, making connections with people all over the country. Making connections in Michigan for criminal justice reform is stuff that all of us can do as incarcerated, formerly incarcerated people, when we get the opportunity, I record this podcast from my one room in a boarding house. This microphone, I use cost. I think \$30 a couple years ago, I use a laptop that I think is like eight years old. You know, I pay \$15 for hosting. I don't have but, you know, at the end of the day, I'm still getting, you know, to talk to a lot of the people who are writing the critical books in this area, or doing the work like or people with their sleeves rolled up in actually making change in states like Ohio and I'm connecting with legislators and I'm and I'm talking to national leaders, and you can do that too. We all can do that. If you're a family member of someone who's incarcerated. I can't tell you how many people I have met who are doing incredible work all over the country as a family member. The whole point of this project is not just to talk about radically reimagining America's criminal justice system. It is to change America's criminal justice system for the better. And the way we do that is by all working together, all connecting, all becoming a B Corp nation. That is the real goal of this thing. And so I really hope that we all connect, you know, find me on social media, find me, you know, if you have questions about what I'm doing, or if you have things you're doing that you want to share with me, find me on social media, find me on our website, leave comments, do whatever you got to do, let's get together and build this thing. So wherever you are, and Wherever I am, we can take what's working in we know all over this country and we can push legislators and we can connect to each other so that we have more of a chance to be persuasive with legislators and when they don't want to cooperate. We just start doing it ourselves. Like what Brandon is doing. Let's make this happen let's create this nation. That's all I got for today. As always, you can find the show notes or leave us a comment at [Dconservationnation.com](http://Dconservationnation.com). If you want to support the podcast directly, you can do so from [Tran.com/slash/onpiratesatellite](http://Tran.com/slash/onpiratesatellite). That's all one word. You can also support us by leaving a five star review from iTunes or

like us on Stitcher or Spotify. Thanks so much for listening to the incarceration nation podcast. I also again want to give a special thanks to Thomas and to Brandon this I can't tell you how much this interview is inspiring me. See you next time.