

Katrina Bridges
Windam
LD 178

My name is Katrina Bridges when I was 19 in late August 2000, I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy 4 months later in early January 2001 I was arrested for murder just days before my 20th birthday, for the death of my boyfriend. In January 2002 days before my 21st birthday, I was sentenced to 47 years in prison. This meant I would watch my son grow up while I was incarcerated, and I would basically grow up incarcerated in prison and not know what life on the outside meant. I was a kid that loved my son, rode horses, loved my rodeo dog, and found herself behind bars for a very long time.

Since being here I have tried to do anything and everything, I can do to make my time useful there have been bumps in the road along the way, but I have managed to rise above them and keep my head above the water. I facilitated A program called Alternatives to Violence for 15 years and it changed my life and gave me a relationship with the outside facilitators that I adored and looked forward to each and every weekend I shared with them. I took "Impact of Crime on Victims" and listened to some of the victims of the women that have been incarcerated here in the past speak about how they carried anger for a while but saw the other side of the table too and saw that our families were also victims. That class made a huge impact on my life and proved to me that NO crime is victimless!

I have been involved in numerous programs learning to train dogs for people with disabilities. The first program I was in was called N.E.A.D.S. it was the start of a new way of life for me. Sister Pauline was the most amazing woman I have met and will ever have the pleasure of knowing. I am saddened to know that has passed and I will never be able to tell her how much she changed my life by allowing me to train my first service dog, Zoe. After that I was able to be involved in training a few dogs for My Wonderful Dog for Elsa Larsen, she showed me what it was like to give independence to someone that otherwise wouldn't have it. Then we had the chance to socialize puppies from kill shelters down south that were very sick, scared, and some very needy. I was also involved in the pilot program to train K-9 working dogs, teaching them to bite do sleeve work and seek smells.

This all led me on my life journey; I found a place where I could take a course and I began school. In 2015 I received my Veterinary Assistant Certificate, I was so happy and proud of myself, I made payments every month in a few years I paid the bill and completed it on my own. It was the first thing in my life I had accomplished on my own, I was hungry for more, and I was able to finally find a course that spoke to me. In 2021 I received my Canine Specialist Certificate, and in November 2022 I Graduated from my Master Grooming Program. I did all of this through the mail writing my professors and mailing in my homework and tests and paying for my schooling each month because at the time the prison did not offer any programs that could further my passion for dog training or the Veterinary services field.

I have been incarcerated for 22 plus years and I finished an Entrepreneurship Pathways Course through Washington County Community College "my home county college" I dream of opening a business in Washington County to help Veterans and people that need Service dogs to give them stability and/or assistance to give them their independence I want to train emotional support dogs also. I want to be a productive member of the community and Parole will allow me to do that. I am currently enrolled in the Mental Health Rehabilitation Technician-C Program at Washington County Community College and will be finishing that in August.

I ask you to please consider everything not just what I have accomplished. But what the men and women that are here beside me have also. I have taken an MIT Coding class to learn how to build websites and successfully built one, to make people aware of Helicopter Roundups that are harming the Wild Horse population and am working on one for the business that I will be opening. I finished an MIT Non-Violent Communication Philosophy class "with MIT students" that I never would have thought possible before, and I am currently taking MIT Philosophy of Love, I never thought I would have been able to tell people I am an MIT student. I'm in the Master Gardening Program so I can do the Women's Center garden for the second year in a row.

Right now, I'm working roughly 250 hours a week, I would work more if I could, but I can't with my school load. I get \$150.00 a month for a paycheck, and I pay a \$30.00 a month college payment, which I am hoping to finish paying if a few months. While I am learning how to manage my money and learning life skills, I wish I was making a living while doing so. With Parole, it would be a life changer for me and my mother who has been living by herself for about 10 years and struggling to make ends meet. My drive to work 250 hours a month will carry over to the outside and I want to give back to my community in ways I never knew I could before.

Parole will open doors for not only me but the women and men that have been forgotten behind these walls to prove that we can be upstanding members of the community. Please give me a chance to show that I can make my dreams a reality and I can support my family. Bringing Parole back to Maine will Give me a chance to show my worth and that what happened 20-plus years ago is not who I am today, it was the person I was that did a horrible

thing, and I am deeply sorry. I can never change it and I can never take it back. I can honor the person's life that was lost, and I can live every day making sure he is never forgotten. Thank You for your time today.