

Chronicle Profile

Former Prisoner Put Time To Good Use

By Edward Hill Jr.
Staff Writer

At the ripe age of 22, Matthew Davis had nearly everything going his way. He was a student in college, he was married and he held a comfortable job.

But life sometimes has a way of being unkind to us, and Davis became a victim of life's unpredictability.

It all began, Davis said, with a business deal that fell through. He was then forced to drop out of school. And finally, his marriage broke up, leaving him disillusioned.

"I was so confused and disoriented over my personal life that I got involved in the drug scene," Davis confessed. "One thing led to another and then I robbed a bank."

Davis was convicted and sentenced to 15 years at Atlanta Federal Penitentiary. In reflecting on the experience of being incarcerated, Davis surprisingly sees it as a blessing.

"At the sentencing, the judge told me that he hated doing it because of my strong family ties (his father is a minister) and by virtue of the fact that I had shown that I was a responsible person," said Davis. "But he said it was the law and he had no other choice."

"Many people would have been depressed but it was actually one of the best things that could have happened to me. I needed time to get my life together

and think things out. Being in prison afforded me that opportunity."

Davis spent his time in prison taking college courses in psychology, sociology, art and music through a prison college program. He learned to play the piano as well as read and write music.

He eventually obtained a bachelor's degree in political science from Mercer College and also played

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-- Matthew Davis

and sang in gospel bands. Despite such judicious use of his time, however, Davis conceded that prison life was no picnic.

"Basically, life in the institution is a wild and perverted one," he said emphatically. "I would say that a majority of the people who are there use their time to sharpen their skills on the things that got them there in the first place."

"I was trying to utilize my time as much as I could.

That's why I started taking courses and getting involved in music and things that would stimulate me and prepare me for the outside world."

Because of his industriousness during his prison stay, Davis was paroled after only two years, something he feels borders on the unbelievable.

"Normally when you get 15 years, you have to do at least five," he said. "But because of my family support and the positive things I did while I was incarcerated, I was able to get out sooner."

Although he had prepared himself for the outside world, Davis said it still took him two years to adjust once he was released. He said his biggest adjustment was avoiding the temptation of getting involved with the same people he associated with before his incarceration.

Now that he said he is over the "adjustment period," Davis said he is trying to chart a positive course in life. He has enrolled at Winston-Salem State University, where he will pursue a degree in computer science. He is also composing music.

But the activity that is of greatest interest to Davis is his involvement with Freedom Road Association, a newly formed organization designed to help youthful offenders through the penal system.

"It is my feeling that society should take more of a responsibility when 16- or 17-year-olds get their first offense," said Davis, who has two sons of his own.

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Matthew Davis made good use of his time in prison. Incarcerated in Atlanta Federal Penitentiary for a bank robbery conviction, Davis earned his B.A. degree and also learned to play the piano and read and compose music (photo by James Parker).



Detroit City Council Erma Henderson waves to the crowds from high atop her perch aboard the Budweiser Clydesdale wagon. Mrs. Henderson rode atop the famous hitch during Detroit's recent nationally televised Thanksgiving Day parade through downtown.

NCNW Hosts Christmas Party

On Wednesday, Dec. 22, the National Council of Negro Women, Winston-Salem Section, hosted a Christmas Cheer party for families in the community. This event was held at the

Masonic Temple on 14th Street.

The Council distributed bags of groceries, clothes and refreshments. The children selected a toy of their choice. Family

members were made very happy, knowing that someone really cared.

This is an annual event which the National Council of Negro Women sponsors. Ms. Mabel Johnson is

chairperson and Dr. Manderline Scales is president of the Council.

The regular Council meeting will be held at 7 p.m., Jan. 11, at Shiloh Baptist Church.

Baker Returns From Deployment

Navy data systems technician 2nd Class Michael S. Baker, son of Anne C. Baker of Winston-Salem, has returned from a deployment to the Mediterranean Sea.

Baker is a crewmember aboard the amphibious assault ship USS Guam, homeported in Norfolk, Va.

During the six-month deployment, the ship operated as the flagship of Mediterranean Amphibious Ready Group 2-82, which landed the U.S. Marine contingent of the multinational peacekeeping force in Lebanon. The ship participated in the successful evacuations of American citizens and PLO members

from Beirut. The ship's aircraft were used extensively for shuttle diplomacy missions between Tal Aviv and Beirut.

The Guam crewmembers were presented the Navy Unit Commendation by the Commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Robert Barrow for their participation in the peacekeeping efforts.

American dignitaries such as Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger and Special U.S. Envoy Philip Habib were aboard the ship for briefings on Beirut proceedings.

The Guam is 602 feet long and carries a crew of 609, with accommodations for an additional 1,700 combat ready troops.

Club News

Along The Garden Path Club Holds Meeting

The Along the Garden Path Garden Club held its December dinner meeting at Club Les Arbes with Mrs. Evelyn Thompson as hostess.

A brief devotional period included Scripture reading, prayer of St. Francis of Assisi, and Christmas songs led by the hostess, with Mrs. Elsie Foy at the piano.

Mrs. Avey Nelle McDaniel was welcomed as a new member by the club President Mrs. E.S. Banner. A

report of Holiday House Tour tickets was made.

Each member received a 1983 calendar and the "Talk and Tattler Newsletter" was distributed to subscribers.

Dr. G.A. Hall gave the blessing and a delicious dinner was enjoyed by all. After dinner members enjoyed games, exchanging gifts and greeting cards.

Other members present at the meeting were: Mrs. Roberta Cook, Mrs. Em-

maline Goodwin, Mrs. Verla Grier, Mrs. Creola Foote, Mrs. Louise Hamilton, Mrs. Julia Johnson, Mrs. Eunice Long, Dr. Lillian Lewis, Mrs. Meta McClennon, Mrs. Catherine McLean, Mrs. Ruth Shoaf, Mrs.

Eliza Williams and Mrs. Savilla Wilson.

Visitors at the meeting included Mrs. Elsie Foy, Mrs. Inez Simms and Dr. G.A. Hall.

The Christmas spirit with Along the Garden Path had already begun.

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Left to right: Edith Williams, Babette Scales and Vicki Thomas. (Photo by James Thomas)

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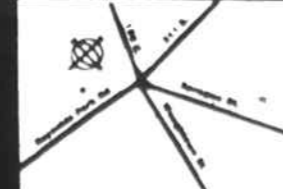
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