

‘Drugs is always what has brought me back to prison’

**PRISON continued
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tion or even the second. This would be the third sentence she would serve at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville on drug-related charges. Coffee Creek houses all of the state’s female inmates.

“Drugs is always what has brought me back to prison,” she says.

Speaking from a drab prison conference room in early September, Linton, 43, is subdued and reflective. Tears slide down her face as she recalls certain events.

Linton pinpoints her trouble with the law and drug addiction starting after her husband, Ryan, was murdered at Niagara County Park near Santiam Pass in 2001.

“After he was murdered, I didn’t know how to deal with my grief so I used drugs and life never got better,” she says. “I took my kids to my mom’s in Grand Ronde and basically just stepped away and that’s what led to this.”

The next 20 years included a string of drug arrests and stints in county jail, then prison. Despite her intermittent incarceration, Linton did her best to remain a part of her children’s lives, who range in age from 25 to 14. She says they remain her motivation to do better.

“I’m pretty proud of them because they are all successful and I want them to be proud of me as well,” Linton says.

Currently, she’s enrolled in cosmetology school that the prison offers to inmates who meet the criteria for the program. When Linton is released, she hopes to open her own salon.

“I’m doing what I can so that I have something when I get out,” she says. “I have really made changes to my life.”

She video chats with her four



younger children, ages 14 to 17, every weekend. So far, they’ve been unable to visit in person due to COVID-19 restrictions and time constraints because they live in Prineville, which is an approximate three-hour drive away.

“I’d like to see them, but my daughter is the only one who drives and she has been pretty busy with school,” Linton says.

The 17-year-old will graduate high school in June 2023 and will also earn an associate degree as a certified nursing assistant that year. CNA training programs in Oregon must include at least 80 hours of classroom learning and 75 hours in a clinical setting, according to registerednursing.org.

While serving her sentence this time, Linton says she has been able to maintain a relatively close bond with her children.

“We were close before but we are way closer now,” she says. “Before, drug use really impacted my relationships because when I wasn’t

on the right path, my kids could tell. They weren’t stupid. Now, it’s amazing and I don’t know what I would do without them.”

Linton took parenting classes offered through the prison the second time she was incarcerated, but now puts all of her energy toward her schooling.

“My focus is my college class and doing well with that,” she says. “I’ll leave here with my license for hair, nail and eyelashes. This is the first time I have focused on me and not someone else.”

A typical day begins at 6:30 a.m. when she and other cosmetology students complete classwork and see clients at the prison’s cosmetology studio. After a lunch break, they repeat the routine until 3:30 p.m. Weekends are spent doing homework packets that the students receive every Thursday. In order to earn her cosmetology license, Linton must complete 1,800 hours of schooling.

“I have really learned a lot about myself this time,” she says. “I’m not always worrying about someone else. Now, I am working on myself.”

Linton says her methamphetamine addiction and returning to the same familiar lifestyle after she was released from prison or jail was the main reason she was unable to break the cycle of incarceration.

When living “on the outside,” Linton was able to have a relatively normal life at times, and worked as a housekeeper and veterinary

technician.

“I pretty much did meth continually for 20 years, but now I’ve been sober for 13 months,” she says. “If I would have gotten help for my grief over my husband’s death instead of turning to drugs, I would have been able to deal with it a lot better. That dragged me through the dirt for a long time.”

When asked what advice she would give to other Tribal member mothers who are struggling, Linton pauses, wipes her eyes, and says, “Don’t be afraid to ask for help and to get the help you need, especially when it comes to grief. It will mess you up for a long time if you don’t.”

During her incarceration, Linton’s counselor gave her an assignment: Every time she asked someone for help, she had to write down what the experience was like and how it made her feel.

“I’ve always kind of been on my own and drifted away from everyone for a long time,” she says. “I was really good at not asking for help.”

Linton says she is most excited about being back together with family after her release from prison in 2025.

“I can’t wait to see my kids and my two grandkids,” she says. “I also want to take classes at the Tribe and open up my own salon. It was a bit of a struggle going back to school and I would have never done it if I was out. This gives me a really good start.” ■

Tribal nonemergency text line

The Grand Ronde Tribal Police Department has a nonemergency text line at 541-921-2927.

“If you have a nonemergency situation or question, feel free to contact my officer via text through this line,” said Grand Ronde Tribal Police Chief Jake McKnight. “When one of my officers receives the text, they will call you back when they have time.”

McKnight said that emergency situations still require calling 911. For more information, contact McKnight at 503-879-1474. ■

Healing Circle

Where:
4445 SW Barbur Blvd,
Portland, OR 97239
Date: September 19
Time: 11 am

A WOMEN'S HEALING
CIRCLE FOR HEALING
MIND, BODY, AND SPIRIT
WE WILL MEET ONCE A
MONTH. A GROUP CIRCLE
TO CONNECT WITH EACH
OTHER AND OUR
TRADITIONAL PRACTICES.

*Good Medicine
Back to School Jam*

LOCATION: Basketball Court in Tribal Housing
DATE: Friday, September 16, 2022
TIME: 5-8pm

Come join us as we prepare for a new school year!
We will have singing, dancing, Indian Tacos, and goodies.
Bring your own lawn chairs and blankets.