

Please read some of the responses to the presentation I gave at St. Bonaventure.

Gerald Balone's talk was really inspiring. I definitely had some preconceived notions about him, but the more I listened to him, the more I realized that people really can change. He has completely changed his life, and aspires to help others. >From his story it is easy to see that through perseverance you can do anything.

Going into class today I already had it in my head that I wouldn't feel sorry for Mr. Balone. After hearing him speak in both my classes back to back my views have completely changed. I was actually extremely happy for Mr. Balone and how far he has come in his life. I think that he ought to be speaking in prisons to prisoners advising them to do as he did. I respect Mr. Balone for coming and speaking to us and I respect his response to Dean Coppola's question about dealing with the comments. Mr. Balone gives me hope for others and I truly hope that others are able to achieve what he has.

It was so different to hear Gerry's first-hand account rather than reading about it. His story was really compelling and by the end I couldn't help but feeling happy for him. He honestly totally turned his life around, it is clear that he is not at all the same angry person he was when he committed the murders. It is so easy to assume that everyone who commits murder is a "bad" person, but really Gerry was just in a bad place at the time. The remorse he felt was obvious, it just goes to show that any one person is capable of committing murder. Gerry even helped to remind us that we shouldn't take our freedom for granted. A simple kitchen appliance brought him so much happiness. It made me happy just to see him so happy and loving his life. Gerry allowed me to place not only a face on who/what we have talked about in class but he also helped to personalize it with his particular situation and circumstances. I'm happy that Gerry is happy. He really is a great speaker and very moving.

Even for me, it was a life changing experience. I had always felt like

people who committed horrible crimes should be punished to the fullest extent. Well, I realized today that I had been a participant in a repetitious cycle of revenge with this philosophy or viewpoint. There is chance for hope and atonement even from the most unlikely sources. We are all human beings and sharing one world together. I really support his cause, and I hope he can help, for the better, the thousands if not millions of at-risk children. With the world seemingly getting worse, especially with the latest incidents of tragic mass shootings, reformers like Mr. Balone could be a new hope for many.

Although I did say these many good things, it's still very difficult to put aside the fact that he did kill three people. But I do not feel it is my place or anyone's to judge whether he has been redeemed for his actions or not. He is doing more good than even someone like myself could do. As a member of society, he will continually be labeled just as the rest of us are except with more severity.

One thing that I took away from Gerald Balone's talk was his sincerity. He mentioned repeatedly that he was working to atone his actions, but he seemed very aware of the fact that he would never be done with his work. Like a recovering alcoholic is never a "recovered" alcoholic, Balone will always be atoning for his crime. He said that he is serving a life sentence because he will never be not guilty for killing those people and he understands that his freedom is conditional. Another thing that he mentioned was that he was hoping to get back into all of the prisons that he "grew up in" to speak to inmates about his experience. I found the word choice striking. People don't normally think of prison being a place to grow up in, but I guess that really is true for some people, especially those that are incarcerated at such a young age.

Gerald definitely opened up a new door for me. I didn't think I would understand someone who is a convicted murderer, but it was easy not to have anger towards him. I agree with Bree that he talked with sincerity. He was very calm and I could tell he was proud of himself for how far he's come. He made me realize to really appreciate the

small things in life. I agree with him that the way someone is raised can have an effect on their behavior. He grew up with nothing and no one and I think that has made him a stronger person today.

I think he has done a great job by redeeming himself. Not only by working in a rehab, and giving talks to students, but by the fact he realized he wants to live his life to the fullest. He doesn't want to sit around and wait for things to happen. It was impressive to hear all he has accomplished since he has been out of prison, and I respect him for wanting to make a change in his life. He's learning to live with what he did, and is learning from his mistakes which is something we can all take away.

I went into this with a lot of preconceived notions; after hearing Gerald talk I feel completely differently. He was so genuine and seemed to be so full of life. I am so glad he came and spoke, I honestly feel like he has completely changed my opinions about those who have been in prison. I guess it was just a lack of exposure...It is sad that 37 years of his life are gone but he seems to be getting the most out of life now and encouraging all those around him to do the same. Other former inmates should look to Jerry for his advice because he seems to be on the right path.

I felt like he related to the class so well and connected with each and every person through his sincerity and how down to earth he was. He has been to hell and back basically and it really is amazing to see how a person can flip their world upside down by taking a step back and thinking about life. The way he decided to devote his life going around, telling people his inspirational story, so they realize people do change and you can turn over a new leaf in life if you make the effort to do so. I really enjoyed everything he had to say and I believe I have a better outlook on prison life and the mindset of a prisoner after hearing Gerry speak.

His presentation was amazing. And it was really genuine. Essentially doing a 180 in life, he went from two drastic lifestyles and the fact that he was capable of successfully changing who he was is

really cool. The work he does now is perfect too because he can easily relate to people our age.

Jerry presented one of the most riveting talks that I've heard in years! He made me realize that the power of prayer, through the message of the Gospel, is constantly at work in each one of us... For me, Jerry repositioned the story of the Prodigal Son—always returning to the Father's love—no what the sin. What a beautiful life story Jerry presented! He challenged each one of us to LOVE each other, no matter what the cost. Wow. I remain riveted, Bree, riveted. Thank you for the treasured opportunity, today. Thank you. --Bro. B.

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