



There’s nothing romantic about prison. But here’s a FAMM story that’s undeniably romantic. It’s about what happens when fierce advocacy, Fantasy Football, 35 birthday cards, and a second chance come together ...

It was the summer of 1992. Shaneva was 14, Jeffery, 15. They lived in the same neighborhood in Chicago, and one day, Jeffery worked up the courage to approach her.

“I saw her and her cousin going to the candy store,” he explains. “So I called out to them, loud and obnoxious, ‘Hey, hey!’”

The rest, as Shaneva says, is history. Now they are married – Shaneva and Jeffery McReynolds.

“Every day that summer, and I do mean every day, at the same time, he came around that corner,” Shaneva says. “It was just when the sun was going down, and my aunt and uncle would never let us leave the front porch. He would spend the whole rest of the evening with me, until my aunt and uncle ran him off.” They talked about everything – his passion for baseball, her



passion for volleyball, their families, the group that Jeffery danced with, “House-O-Matics.” He brought her “Love is…” comics that he clipped from newspapers.

But a few short months later, Shaneva’s family moved to Alaska where her father was stationed. “Leaving was probably the hardest thing that could’ve happened to me, because I lost him,” Shaneva says.

That’s when things began to fall apart for Jeffery. As he puts it, “I turned 16, and the streets took over.” When he was 27, he was sentenced to more than 19 years in prison for his role in a drug conspiracy.

As the years passed, Shaneva married, got her MBA, and built a highly successful career in the defense contracting world while raising three daughters. Sadly, her then-husband was murdered 13 years ago.

Then in 2014, Jeffery’s sister reached out to Shaneva and told her that Jeffery was incarcerated and would like to hear from her.

“All those years, I carried Jeffery in my spirit, because he was such an amazing young guy,” Shaneva says. “The time we had that summer, it was just beautiful. And when I learned he was incarcerated, the first thing I said was, ‘My Jeffery?’”

“So, I sent him a letter. And he wrote me back, and he put pictures in there. And he was gorgeous. But he wasn’t little Jeffery anymore.” They nurtured their relationship through email and snail mail; he sent her “Love is…” comics, just as he’d done two decades before, and on her 35th birthday, he mailed 35 separate cards. “I could barely open the mailbox,” Shaneva says.





Finally, she went to visit. “I was all the way down in Alabama. I never had been to Minnesota. Got a room, and flew up there, and went to see him for the very first time in 22 years.

“My plan was only to stay two days. Over the two days of the visit, the conversation did not stop. Then my last day, I went in there and I said, ‘I’m going to come back tomorrow. I’m going to change my flight.’ That night I set up in the hotel and I started researching his case. And when I went back to see him that third day, I said, ‘How do we get you out of here?’ And he started telling me all the work he was doing inside. I said, ‘I’m going to come see you every month until you’re out of here.’ Now, as far as I knew, he had another 12 years left. And I committed to coming to see him every 30 days until he was gone. And I did just that.”

Meanwhile, Jeffery stay focused on staying positive and growing. “Trust me, prison is a bad place, hands down. But you’ve got to humble yourself and focus. It’s two days to prison: the day you go in, and the day you walk out. And I just prayed every day, and stayed focused and did legal work. I worked hard at my job there. And I helped a lot of guys. My thing was, if I can help the next person to move forward, I won. That made my sentence lighter, because it made me see there’s no such thing as a lost cause.”

One day, Jeffery surprised Shaneva during a visit with a marriage proposal, and months later they tied the knot at the prison after wading through miles of red tape.

The whole time, Shaneva’s advocacy was in high gear. She went back to graduate school to pursue a doctorate in law & public policy administration, and she focused her written work on the stories of people going through what Jeffery was. “The research led me to so much, and you learn quickly that you’re not alone, that organizations like FAMM are out here fighting with you.”



1100 H Street NW, Suite 1000 • Washington, D.C. 20005



(202) 822-6700



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Jeffery was finally released in June 2015. “He could have come out of there brushing his teeth with his hairbrush, and brushing his hair with his toothbrush, but he didn’t,” Shaneva says. “He came out with a college degree, and still fighting for people left behind.

Together they are dedicated to strengthening their family and are more devoted than ever to reform – especially when it comes to returning citizens. When they hear of someone recently released and living in Chicago, they share their knowledge, connections, and resources – even their kitchen table, welcoming in for a hot meal people who are bewildered and struggling. They connect people with all kinds of jobs, and they coach people in starting their own businesses.

“When I watch some of these guys hold a cell phone, it almost makes me cry. For some of them, coming back is harder even than it is doing the time. We talk them off the cliff at times. Because if you can’t find a job, you don’t have money, this world moves so fast, sometimes they want to give up.”

In September 2021, Shaneva and Jeffery came to Washington, D.C., to join FAMM in meeting with members of Congress about pending justice reform legislation. The experience left them, Shaneva says, “mad and deflated, because we saw firsthand how hard lobbying is, but also driven. The upside is that it just makes us want to fight harder.”

That means ramping up their advocacy, getting smart about both local and national issues, and inspiring others to join the fight. Recently, Shaneva started working with FAMM as a consultant, and she’s thrilled to wear the FAMM hat in her advocacy.

And that love story of theirs? It’s still going strong. They don’t take a single day for granted, enjoying each other and making up for 22 lost years. “Jeffery is a good man. I’m lucky to have him back. July 31 we celebrated seven years of marriage!”



