



***Ndume Olatushani – Artist
Biography
February 28-April 15, 2014***

Mr. Ndume Olatushani was wrongly convicted for first degree murder in 1985 and spent twenty-eight years in maximum security prisons. Twenty years were spent on death row that was later overturned and sentenced to life in prison. His life's story is one of human resilience and most importantly, it shows how art changed his life.

Ndume is the seventh of eleven children from St. Louis, Missouri. He was a high school dropout and dabbled in petty crime before his arrest for murder at the age of 24 in 1984. In the 1980's, he changed his name from Erskine Johnson to Ndume Olatushani, which is Swahili for masculinity and unifier. He took control of his life rather than letting the experience control him.

It wasn't until he had reached rock bottom after hearing that his mother, Florence, and 8 year old niece were killed in a car accident that Ndume started to draw and paint, two years into his imprisonment. He taught himself to paint. Art allowed him to exist in a state of harmony and tranquility although physically locked up.

Ndume also became an avid reader while in prison. He completed his GED and coursework in paralegal where he worked while in prison.

He met someone who believed in his innocence and assisted with his release. Attorney Anne-Marie Moyes, and later his wife, contacted a New York firm to work pro bono to get Ndume exonerated. His death sentence was overturned in 1998, but it took 6 more years to be moved off death row. He was released from the Shelby County Jail on December, 2012.

He now works full-time for the Children's Defense Fund to ensure a level playing field for children. Their motto is: Leave No Child Behind.