

BillyGarySteveMarty

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From the greater Boston area, you are listening to the MyTERN conversations brought to you by Tufts Education Reentry Network. These are stories of life during and after incarceration told by people who lived it and are working to overcome the odds.

00:21

Has anybody ever asked themselves? Am I crazy?

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I already know I am. So I don't even honestly, I'm not lying. I am. Like, I'm cooked. I really am.

00:39

Just things I might have done. Thoughts, situations, aggravations or things that I want to do, but I don't do it. Thoughts.

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Like I purposely don't hardly talk to anybody ever, because I don't want to share any of my thoughts or, incriminate myself or the craziness that goes on in my mind. Because I try to, you know, pretend that I'm normal, I guess. And it's easier to just avoid people, and you know, as much as you can.

01:27

So what's normal? What do we mean what it says, but you know,

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Not going to prison.

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But you know what, you can end up in prison, you'd be normal and end up in prison.

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But when you get out, you're not normal.

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Maybe the people outside aren't normal.

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I mean, it's it's what society thinks is normal. We do not fit in that category.

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I'm here with three fellow formerly incarcerated men in the greater Boston area, as they share in and support one man's taxing reentry journey. They discuss the effects of incarceration on mental health and the struggles of daily life after prison. These three men have chosen to remain anonymous, but their strength and character shine through as they come together so to support their classmate and friend. My name is Marty and I'm joining the conversation shortly after being released from prison after serving nearly 17 years.

02:39

For the last month, I've been going through it I officially went bankrupt. I owe probably like \$20,000 I think now I'm scraping up to pay for my car still. Last month, I couldn't make rent but I made sure I made rent. And it's having its effect. But it definitely has its effect because I don't know after a while you just start to say like what the fuck man every single day is something else something else is something else. And since I've been coming to this class, like a lot of people know a lot of people around me died. So now another girl died. She was stabbed to death by her boyfriend. They have a baby, the baby's two months old and I have to deal with this. She's from my projects to mom a couple of months before that another young girl got shot in the head and low by her boyfriend. Two months before that, and one of the little guys in my neighborhood got murdered in his front door. Then, just before that Ralph Boggs got murdered by his girlfriend she stabbed him to death and there's more like like every day seemed like that there's always something so mentally mentally, life is life is not as well as everybody thinks it is. You can smile every day but that doesn't mean that that smile is the actual factual is on what's really going on is just to tell people to leave you the fuck alone some time. And I know that we're all going through it but the thing with ours is a little bit different because a lot of us are institutionalized which is already a medical condition as itself and that fucks you up out here as well. And then like if you don't have family, like I really don't have family. I got a brother out here. I got one brother. He has two kids. And I got a mother but she's batshit batshit. So when it comes to like support for the mental health issues like family wise, or, you know, friendship wise, you kind of like, limit yourself, well, if you don't have the resources, then you limit yourself to who you can really talk to and what you can get out.

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Indirectly, what I hear this gentleman saying is that because of the employment and housing problems that us returning citizens face, we often have no choice but to return to the toxic environments that influenced our decisions that led to incarceration in the first place.

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So you can go talk to a doctor, and you can do all that shit too. But if life just doesn't give you a break, the mental health aspect is so fucking hard. And I know that, you know, I know. You know, I hadn't even had money to get to class. That's why I wasn't here last week. And I broke down and and that's the first time I cried in like, 21 years. So and I just, you know, some days, it's just like, the shit builds up, the shit builds up to work thing, you know, filed a million applications. And each and every single time I get that we're not going with you. And I've been saving the emails too, because I'm about to call up to places like listen, I've been applying for you guys for two and a half, three years. And you're still telling me no, what is it? Is it the record? Is that what's going on? So then that mentally starts to affect and starts to bother you. And then you're just like, I don't know with me I'm just like, they're just survival of the fittest out here. And I know a lot of people will say like, Oh, you've got so many resources. Now get

the fuck out of here with that, because you can't take care of me, I can only take care of myself. And I've been taking care of myself since I was eight years old. So it's been me since I was eight. I don't ask nobody for none. I don't want none. So mentally, that also takes effect too, because you're so used to fucking shunning all the hands that are trying to help you just like, No, I don't want it. I can do this by myself. And the only thing that's going to do is make me stronger. But at times, it's like, you know, sometimes you need to learn how to take that weight off his shoulders. I went to MassHealth. And I officially showed them my bank statements and all that. And they were like, Okay, you're officially broke. Now I was like, wow, I was officially broke six months ago. And they're like, Well, what, what do you do? And I said, I need a fucking therapist. That's what I need. And I told the lady just like that, she was like, he was like, yeah, like, I really need a therapist should out here is crazy. And she's like, Oh, okay. So I think I'm about to get another therapist and other psychologist and mental health. It can always be something, good or bad.

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You know, I actually know, the mother of the daughter who was killed also. And I've been through several funerals probably like five in the last 30 days. So it makes me question. Not doubt. But just question. You know what I mean. And one thing I could tell you, you're a survivor, you know what I mean, one thing about brothers that's been behind the wall, we know how to, we know how to make something out of nothing. You know, I'm saying so that's the edge that you have. And maybe all these jobs that you're applying for aren't for you. There's nothing you can't do. You can work on cars, you do love and you do a well, so not maybe need to take the time to work on what you'd like to do. And know that all this downtime, talk to your brother next to you to the right or whatever, and politic, you know what I mean? Because nine times out of 10 they share the same issues. I met some of my best friends from behind the wall that I relate to in I rock with more than my own family. You know what I mean so let's we just can't set certain standards to Okay. Sometimes things don't work out cause something else was meant for you. I mean, so it's like, but it do make me want to get crazy. You know what, when I used to just do this do that I had no stress. It wasn't affecting like the I'm trying to do the right thing, so it drives you crazy. You know what I mean? So any days off, you're welcome to come, come through, carry whatever, better for yourself. And you'll see results and I mean, because if you wait for the person next to it might never might never happen, you know? So like I said, there's nothing you can't do. And this is just trials and tribulations, this is part of your story. And I feel you're gonna be okay. You know what I mean.

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What about things like SSDI? Like, disabled where you say, how I can't work. I tried to

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Just the amount of time you did is a disability. Yeah. 100% I mean, so just that alone. Yeah, good. You know what I mean, and just because you could take advantage of it. It's there to help you. You don't have to live off it so on your couch and just watch TV or play PlayStation, but you can just use that. There's different grants different, there's so many different things you can take advantage of.

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This gentleman's optimistic spin is a reflection of the resilience of those that endured these experiences. Hollywood and the media have betrayed prison life as one particular thing. Differing stories and perspectives shared by these men are a reflection of the many different lived experiences and demonstrate the power of storytelling.

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I'm hoping to have work, but I'm not really you know, I'm not really to there's always ways to get you know, I'm saying there's, you know,

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Because trust me, like I get struck by that lightning too oh man take this do that and it's like I was you know that, you know, that's going to end. And you know, there ain't nothing like hearing the metal doors hit, are you fucking kidding me. I'm an idiot.

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When we come home from prison, in addition to the struggles of everyday life and reentry, there's always the temptation to fall back into the lifestyle of fast money. Personally, I serve time for robbing armored cars. And when I see them now, I know that the possibility of robbing it would put me in a much better financial situation. But I've also grown into a different person and I'm working to not fall back into that lifestyle and the consequences that come with it. Even though the jobs available for formerly incarcerated people can be physically and emotionally backbreaking. These gentlemen reflect that living a legitimate lifestyle comes with its own set of rewards.

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Sucks, because it seems like all the time that's something you know, it's not like when you when I was a kid, it was like, okay, free for all. You know what I'm saying? There was, you know, like, I just literally while I was in this classroom, got an email from this place, about a one bedroom apartment that's supposed to be Yeah, control rents. So the lady told me, she's like, 1440. I'm like, that's, that's beyond my means. I would I can't afford that.

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Control rent is usually factored into how much money you make. So like, you make 1000. And they take 25% of it, or 30.

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Yeah, I just told the lady No, because she was like, 14, four. And I was like, Yeah, I can't do that. I'm not even making fucking \$50 a week right now. You know what I'm saying?

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Is that a single bedroom?

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Yeah.

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But you know what, you really find someone else in the situation. If you have the room. They have a little whatever room.

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Yeah, I can't live with nobody.

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I mean, sometimes, you know,

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I know. But I just know I can't because I get I get into that thing. Like I started told you. I'm fucking burnt out in the head. I'm like, I wake up and I'm one day I'm like, Alright, cool, we'll good. The next day, I wake up like, nah, I can't do this man. Like, nah I can't be I feel confined again. That's just like working in like the fast food or restaurant or something like that. I feel prison fucking demolished that, in my mind for me, because it was such bad treatment inside of kitchens, that is just the trigger for me. You know, so that's why it's the only reason why I haven't applied for kitchen jobs yet, but I'm getting ready to apply for like, Dunkin Donuts or some shit like that something. And I know, I'm 10 times better than that. And that shit, it makes me mad, too. You know what I'm saying.

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But you can make a ton of money.

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But ton of money doing what serving people that coffee so they can come in and talk shit to you in the morning time. And then you jump over the counter and smash one of them.

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Like when I worked in restaurants. I hated it. And I felt like you every day, want to like people talk crazy. And you want to hit them in the head with a frying pan. But you don't want to go back to jail. And you don't want to be in the papers.

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No, you don't but that's why I stay away from you know, the, like kitchen work is really a bad trigger for me. Like I remember one time I was in Concord, I was working in the kitchen. And one of the CEOs he had just started there. And I had a visit for the first time in like nine years and uh he came out to the yard. He's like Ray, he was like, man, he was like I gotta visit for you. He was like, these guys are fucking not calling your name for what I don't know. And I'm like, I'm in the kitchen. He's like, Yeah, no, he's like, listen, just leave and go get ready for it. And after that, I quit the kitchen. I was like, fuck you and your kitchen. You know, I'm saying I haven't had a visit in nine years. And here it is. Somebody's here to see me and they've been waiting out there for an hour and a half and you just didn't feel like calling me. And visits are over in 15 minutes.

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And it takes time to get dressed and get transported to go down there. But it can always be worse. At least you have, there's nothing like having an opportunity. You still have the opportunity.

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That's why I put in for the dishwashing things too. So, you know, I don't mind washing dishes and things like that. But once again, it's all mental health because so much shit done fucked up so much shit in the head that, you know, it just makes a lot of things so difficult you know what I'm saying.

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There's always options you just gotta, because I sometimes I used to block myself from opportunity, like when I just be pissed off like ya know what fuck everybody fuck this fuck that I made more I can make money from my couch, I had to deal with this. But once you cross over to the other side and you see how easy it is and how the outsiders look at us as less than it's so simple. And when you start doing that, it's going to be so easy for you because you know, the ins and outs and how to move. It's just the business, the whole locking people up. It's a business, you know what I mean. So a lot of us burden ourselves, oh, we're convicts, we're this, felonies, whatever. But we just got caught up in the hype of their business, you know what I mean because anything that has to do, we don't just sell drugs, normal people sell drugs too you know what I mean we don't just kill people, normal people do too. But we're the ones that has that label on us and we wear it. Take the label off. Take the label off, I'm all set. I'm not going to sit here. Even the COs, there are COs, that be in jail upset with you because you smile every day they're going home miserable. And they've never been locked up but they're more miserable. You see how they fuck with you up and they're like this fucking miserable prick go home every day and wants to fuck with me over every time it comes to your cell. This is taken down or they took this like, why does this dude fuck with me? You know what I mean? So it's jus fire with fire man I saw. So no, I get it. Like I said, I'm here. And listen, I feel the same way because I'd be trying to have a daggone pack. I listen, I'm have everything go must go sale. And just do whatever.

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I've been at that point, like for the last month, I'm like, you know what? Fuck the world. I'm just about to disappear. Or some crazy like some, I don't know, some. I don't know what it is. But yeah, mental health really does. But it's something that you have to take care of.

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But it's even weird, when you talk to like a psychiatrist. I feel like they learn more from you than you do from them.

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I remember one psychiatrist I had, and she was like, oh, um, is it alright if I videotape this session? I'm like, uh, we're only three sessions in and she's like, Yeah, well, you know, a lot of things happen in your life. Because the same thing used to happen when I went there. I used to go there like, alright, such and such just got killed. Oh, and I was still going through the court system at that time, too. And that wasn't too long ago, I had just picked up a case. And my, my, my psychiatrist, he was like, he was more of a friend than anything it seemed like, but he was so like, they were so involved in what, you know, not physically, but mentally. They was just I was like a movie to them. You know what I'm saying? They

was like, tell us what happened today as somebody get killed over that. And I'm like, no, no, nothing happened like that today. But today was a very bad day. So that made me not even like going to him for a little bit. But then I met one lady. She was cool. And, till she asked to videotape me, and I was like, she was like, Oh, I just want my colleagues. I'm like, well, I understand that. But now I come in here to tell you like, shits bad. Like Nah, I'm not stable at the moment. No, I don't want you videotaping me nor sharing me what the fuck. I like them. But after that I was just like, you're making me feel like a monkey in a cage. Now. I'm here to talk to you and you want to fucking videotape me and well, that's not mentally that's not helping me. But yeah, anyway, let's go.

19:20

So I think as we talk about mental health, one of the one of the most effective resources for addressing the issue is therapy. But in order to get any real results, you have to trust your therapist enough to be open and vulnerable. And as this gentleman just explained, that can be hard to do because of the lifestyle that we've lived. We've been not we've been taught to not trust people. And until you can actually trust somebody that's hard to be vulnerable. So it's sort of a catch 22.

20:00

I think that, like, medication is like, like, I never took meds unless like on the street, and like stuff that I want, whatever, like, whatever, but from January until like June or July of this year, I pretty much was in the same mental place as you, but surrounded by my family, which is even worse, because I don't want to be around them like I want to be back in prison. Like, at least I know that they do count time at seven, maybe 7:05. And like, if I just want to not talk to anybody, I can close 11 and they just shut the door, I'm in there by myself, no one's going to talk to me. So I can just be quiet. And I don't have to entertain people or pretend to be normal again, or be elated to be out of prison.

21:02

Nobody wants to be back in prison. But, but we've become so accustomed to the daily regimen, that when we don't do what we had planned to do. Personally, situations like that give me anxiety. His point is that it's hard to transition from the strict daily regimen of prison, to the outside world. Where even when we have schedules, they don't always go as planned. When you're in prison, you can sit in your cell and not have to deal with people. You learn to survive on your own. And then when you come home and you've been gone for so long, people expect you to come home and relate and just be part of society again, without realizing the challenges that come with that. I think that's what he's trying to say there. And I relate to it.

21:49

And eventually after like months of my doctor primary care doctor, saying, you're exhibiting like, every symptom that you need, you know, you have like, anxiety, depression, pretty much everything is wrong with you mentally. He's like, just try like five milligrams for like a month. And if not just stop. And like within like two or three weeks, just like that, like 50 pound weight on each shoulder. Like was gone, pretty much.

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But But did you lose desires for other things when you did that, though? Because I was because because sometimes you get emotionless. You I mean, like you might just like,

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Like, I've had a very loose relationship with emotions my whole life anyways, so I don't really care about anybody or anything, but if it makes you it makes you have like feelings again, which I've never really had. And, and I don't want to take pills, like I hate taking the freakin pill every day. Yeah, but I do know, like, from working in the medical field, that like a lot of people feel better when they take medication like this. So then they, I feel better, I'm not going to take it anymore. And that's when like, something real bad happens. So I'm not going to take it forever. But I'm gonna take it right now. And I'm not gonna do drugs today. But I'm just gonna take this stupid friggin bill that I get from CVS and whatever. But life from like June or July until now has gotten like, you know, a million times better. And I don't know if they would ever prescribe you medicine, but you need to have a therapist first.

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Personally I'm scared of medication you know I'm saying I've seen like I've seen people on medication that and just from being in the joint and watching at Old Colony

24:02

The medline is always crazy

24:03

At Old Colony, I used to watch a dude count his squares every day for like, fucking seven years while I sit in that I'm like, No,

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That's like a OCD tick

24:13

But are you scared of the medication? Or are you scared that it's gonna make you

24:18

Scared of the medication.

24:20

Happy?

24:20

I'm scared. I'm scared of medication. I barely take aspirins. I just take aspirins now because I have to at the moment, my back but when it comes down to the other stuff, it's like nah, I sold drugs too long to want to do any type of drug. I don't you know, I don't want you tampering with my brain. My brain is already fucked up as much as it is and you might feel like you're fixing it, but you're gonna take away from something as well.

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Well, there's an imbalance and this will fix it. What's the worst that would happen? It would work?

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Nah, I'm not too sure about the medication part. Like I said, I'm scared of. I'm scared of it. I don't you know, it's took me a long time to like really open up to psychiatrists. And then, you know, like when I tell him that, like, Yeah, I'm probably PTSD and probably schizophrenia, but I'm not taking medication. Like, we'll figure it out. That's what it's always been like that. I'll just figure it out. You know what I'm saying?

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But there's small, there's small doses you can start with now, I'm not trying to promote it to you or anything like that. I mean, at this point, it's out of your control on how you've been feeling, You know what I mean, so maybe you denying it from the jump. You might be short and short yourself by not trying. I'm the same way when it comes to medication. You I mean, I don't believe and that's another stereotype that we have. So we've seen people doing drugs cracked out, cooked up. And it's like, what do you have to lose?

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A lot. I've seen too many people fall down off the medications. Yeah,

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No, but I'm saying, well, you know, you don't live you, you as a man, I know how you live. You never you never live your life off what the next person is doing. You know, I'm saying if it's for you, or if it's not for you, so I'm not, I'm not gonna say it could be medical, whatever, you can try something, meditation.

26:12

I think life just needs to get better. And not so hard.

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Life's what you, I mean, okay, what's the perfect life to

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Just being able to pay your bills and just being able to take care of yourself. Yes.

26:22

Does that seem impossible?

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At the moment? Yeah. You know, there's a lot of roadblocks that you have to there's a lot of obstacles, like I said, you know, you already know when you walk into that place, the first thing they do is they they get a hold of that record, and you get denied and denied at nine and after a while that should take effect when you like, god damn. It's like 14 jobs now I've been denied for. So I'm

26:44

Asking a question. I know it's the cold season right now. You like doing car detailing? Right? Do you have the equipment to do car t? So even if you go to marketplace, mobile call do mobile car mechanic? Hit me, you know, I mean, you got people going to call, you know,

27:00

Yeah, I know.

27:01

There's this there's zip cars in different places like that, where you can get a contract, go to the different sites of the car locations, and clean their cars.

27:09

But that still doesn't stop the other stresses of the world. I'm not too worried about it. I've never been broke. But this is the first time that I've never went back to the street. You know what I'm saying? I'm not I'm not going to. I'm not going to jump back into that. Again. I'm getting old, I don't want to, you know, I don't want to be running from house to house or have people coming to my house and I'm bagging up and I don't want to do none of that no more. Like, when I tell you I lived that life like I've been shot, stabbed, thrown off a bridge. Like my best friend was murdered behind drugs. They cut his throat in his car. Like that's just not the shit I just want to go through anymore. You know what I'm saying? Like, like, I I walked here today, because I only had five dollars. You know what I'm saying? So I just walked here, I got a car. I could have called somebody to pick me up because I lent her my vehicle. But I lent her my vehicle so the bank can't come and repossess my shit. I'm back one payment like I said, that's just another part of the mental health thing because then you got to think about this is on your mind like fuck, am I going to lose my you lose your vehicle, you lose your life, you know that right? Because my vehicle is my vehicle is my house. So I can lose my my room that I rent. I don't give a fuck about that. But if I lose my car, I lose everything. I've been here before you know what I'm saying? I know what to do. You know, I'm saying but again, it's not about work anything. It's just the mental health part of it because it just puts so much stress on top of stress on top of stress on top of the other shit that you got to deal with, which leads to the mental health aspect of it.

28:43

I agree with you because I've been I've been there too. I've been there too.

28:54

Thank you for listening to the MyTERN podcast. MyTERN is a community based university accredited program, providing education, mentorship, and career development support to and by those who have been directly impacted by the criminal justice system. MyTERN objective is to provide an opportunity for each participant to rediscover and reframe their skills, interests, responsibilities, and commitments. This podcast is created and produced in partnership with Tufts University Jonathan M. Tisch College of Civic Life, and the Bridging Differences Grant Program. Music brought to you by Elmer Pleitez. Learn more or support MyTERN at Tupit.org, Tupit.org.