

Episode 11:  
James and the Perfect Burger: Redemption With A Side of Fries  
(4/6/2018)

<b>Segment</b>	<b>Who</b>	<b>Copy</b>
Intro	James Purifoy	"I was committed that I wasn't coming back, I wanted the things that I set forth in the penitentiary to dictate my freedom upon being released. So I was educated upon being released, and I had in my heart that...and it was more to me to going back to the penitentiary."
		INTRO MUSIC
Podcast Overview	Andy Levine	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major career changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act.</p> <p>Today's story takes us to Rockford, Illinois, a city of about 150,000 people in Northern Illinois. We'll meet a successful entrepreneur and hometown hero named James Purifoy. He has built an incredible "burger joint" named Fifteenth and Chris that has the most creative and delicious hamburgers that you've ever tasted. Every day a line starts forming an hour before he opens his doors. Yes, people love James' burgers.</p> <p>But his story starts back in 1994 when James took a wrong turn and at the age of 19 was convicted of aggravated assault for shooting a rival gang member in Rockford. And he spent the next ten years of his life in prison.</p> <p>Here's James Purifoy's story...</p>

	Andy	And I appreciate your being willing to talk about this, I know it's not easy.
	James	I will talk about anything.
	Andy	So James...It's my understanding that when you were 19, you ended up going to prison. Talk about that.
	James	At that point in my life, I was into the urban street activities, I was involved in the gangs, I was involved in drugs, I was involved in like that whole makeup of the things that happened in the inner city. People shot at me, I shot back at people, my bullets landed...I was charged with...for aggravated batteries with a firearm, ultimately I was found guilty of the charges that I committed, and they sentenced me to 21-and-a-half years in the penitentiary.
	Andy	That's pretty tough at 19 years old
	James	It was very tough.
	Andy	How did your mom react?
	James	I know that she was ashamed. She tried to do the best she could. No mother wants to lose a son, and no mother wants to come home to a different household than how she left. So, I know it was very difficult for her.
	Andy	So at 19 years old, James Purifoy entered the famed Joliet Correctional Center.
	James	You walk into Joliet prison, and I remember this. there's a sign up that says, "Do the time, don't let the time do you." If you're in there, like take advantage of the tools that they might have available, take advantage of the time that you might have with yourself to change what could ultimately happen in your future.
	Andy	What were some of the things that you took advantage of?
	James	The education, the educational program, because I never thought about going to college. You know, I was really into the streets, I never thought that I...I didn't never think that I'll live past 25.
	Andy	You studied culinary arts while you were in?
	James	I studied auto mechanics, I studied culinary arts, I did some...what would you call it? Like some building maintenance and some...like some industrial work and auto stuff right there.

	Andy	But you gravitated towards the culinary side of things?
	James	I gravitated to the culinary side of things. My mom, my granny, a lot of people in my family, like they always cook, they always like done things in the kitchen that I was always inspired by to find out, like I always wanted to know what makes a cake rise, I always wanted to know what makes tough beef soft, tender, so to speak.
	Andy	James eventually rose up to head chef within the prison.
	James	You got like 2,800 individuals at each institution, and that's officers and inmates, and everything that you're cooking for. I was always inspired by baking aspect, before I moved into meats and burgers. Burgers is something that I love, but...
	Andy	Everyone loves burgers.
	James	Everyone loves burgers, but baking is like the most intriguing thing in the world, from an angel food cake to a chiffon cake, to just a plain old...to just a plain old flat sheet baked cake brownies, like the rise of it, the mechanics of it, like how you incorporate air into the angel food or chiffon, and how you do this and how...you know, like I was just intrigued by that whole thing right there.
	Andy	So, I wanna switch gears. So at the age of 29 you're released from prison. Was there a clear path of what you wanted to do after you left prison?
	James	No, no, because you're a felon. You know you're walking back into society, and you're a felon. It's easy to have dreams and admirations, but right now you're dealing with the livelihood and the reality that you're a felon. And whatever you might wanna do, you might not have the opportunity to go do. You got to put yourself into a situation where you're able to come home and to survive.
	Andy	But he knew one thing...he wasn't coming back to prison.
	James	I was committed that I wasn't coming back, I wanted the things that I set forth in the penitentiary to dictate my freedom upon being released. So I was educated upon being released, and I had in my heart that...and it was more to me to going back to the penitentiary.

	Andy	He took a series of cleaning and custodial jobs. And he took classes at a local community college. Eventually James started his own trucking business. But his heart was still in cooking. And he kept passing a broken down old storefront on the corner of Fifteen and Christina where he used to go for ice cream as a kid.
	James	I rode past this building like a hundred times before I actually even considered it. I mean, you got to go back to the thought of even opening up a restaurant. I knew the trucking wasn't...it wasn't gonna last for me, and I wanted to sit back and find out what can I do? What can I do, and what I'm qualified to do. We're talking about burgers, I love burgers. I know a good burger when I see a burger, and I know how to cook a good burger because it stops me from going to all the restaurants that we don't got to bring up just to get a good burger, I just stay home and cook it myself.
	Andy	So that idea started festering in your head, maybe I could make a go of this, start my own place?
	James	So now I'm tuned in that I want to open up a burger joint, now where, is the question. And I'm riding past this spot that I used to come to as a kid. I mean, I used to walk here, I used to ride my bike here, my family used to take me down here, we used to eat ice cream from here, we supported this business, all the local business around here, and then I said, that's it.
	Andy	And this place had been shut down for a long time?
	James	Over 20 years.
	Andy	He raised about \$60,000 on his own. And he got a government loan for an additional \$60,000. And he bought the building and began renovations. And in October of 2014 he opened up Fifteenth and Chris. And the place has been a hit over since...
	Andy	It's a very creative menu, this is not like a typical burger joint, you've got some really interesting stuff on there. What's your best-selling menu item, and what do people really seem to enjoy or gravitate towards?
	James	They gravitate to everything. You know, it's like my menu is centered around days of the week, and you got something that you can do every day. Like the Mackaveli is my largest-selling burger.
	Andy	This is a burger inspired by rap artist Tupac Shakur who studied Nicolo Machiavelli's book "The Prince" while in prison. He recorded his final album under the alias Makaveli.

	Andy	What's in a Makaveli?
	James	You got your seasoned beef patty, it's Fifteenth & Chris seasoned, and you got cheddar cheese, you got bacon, you got mayo, barbecue sauce. My barbecue sauce is homemade, so there's a teeter right there, and it's topped with beer-battered onion rings, and that right there, when everybody got a whiff of that, it went crazy. So that was kind of like my Big Mac.
	Andy	Then there's the Mona Lisa that includes Gouda cheese, with shrimp, calamari and grilled onions and the PB&J with nutty Asian slaw, crispy wontons and red jalapeno pepper jelly. It's not your typical fare.  Fifteenth and Chris is drawing visitors for all around the area and even nearby states. And that's good news for John Groh who runs the Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.
	John Groh	The restaurant absolutely helps us when we're trying to differentiate ourselves. When we're telling stories about our community, one thing that we have been doing for years is trying to go beyond the place, but tell the story of the people behind the place.  And, you know, James and 15th & Chris absolutely go hand in hand with that strategy and that approach. You know, not only is it a great restaurant that creates great community, when people come together to eat their awesome food, but James has a great story that he's willing to share, and he's doing great things in the neighborhood and in our community.
	Andy	Has your success surprised you at all? You know, you've really...you invested a lot of your own money and you took a big risk, and it's worked.
	James	I'm surprised. The biggest thing that surprises me is the community support. Because you know, like a kid like me, you go to the penitentiary, and I've done some bad things, like me and some...like I shot some people, you know?  The city embraced me when I came back, and I came back and like they showed me that it's worth it.  Life is great. I love my family, I love all my kids, I love my wife, she's very instrumental in...
	Andy	She works in the business?
	James	Yup, she works with me, and she helps it grow. So we come...you know, we come together and make it all beautiful.

	Andy	John Groh of the Rockford Area CVB echoed James' sentiments.
	John	One of the things, here in Rockford, that we know to be true is that this is a real place, it's very authentic. We try to tell our story, as a region, in compelling ways, and I don't think we shy away from the tough stuff, so the fact that James has a redemption story is important. It's not about who he was, but about who he is and what he's doing, and I think that really personifies who we are as a community.
	Andy	<p>If you find yourself within 50 miles of Rockford, Illinois, I suggest you drive on over to the corner of Fifteenth and Christina. James will be behind the counter. Order the Mackavelli or one of his other amazing creations on a bun.</p> <p>You'll make some new friends in line and enjoy one of the best burgers of your life.</p>

		OUTGOING MUSIC
Thank-You and Show Credits	Andy	<p>Of course, we want to thank James Purifoy for being an open book and telling his prison-to-entrepreneur success story. It's a very different second act than anything we've covered so far.</p> <p>And we want to thank John Groh and his team at the Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau for connecting us with James.</p> <p>If you like what you are hearing, we hope you'll sign up as a "Second Act Advocate" and tell your own social media following about the podcast. Just go to our website, <a href="http://SecondActStories.org">SecondActStories.org</a>, and click on "Spread the word" in the upper right-hand corner of the screen.</p> <p>We hope you'll keep listening. A new "Second Act Story" is just around the corner.</p>