Twitter Thread by Beth Shelburne

Beth Shelburne
@bshelburne

December 16, 2020 Ronald McKeithen walked out of prison after 37 years of incarceration. Watching this beautiful human experience freedom for the first time in his adult life has been nothing short of a miracle. Ron was sentenced to die in prison in 1984, when he was 22. 1/12



In the last 5 weeks he's experienced so many firsts. His first suit. First Zoom. His first welcome home party that friends, including me, threw for him when he was still pinching himself to make sure freedom was real. At 58, Ron now lives in the very first room of his own. 2/12



I first met Ron in 2014 and was shocked to learn his life without parole sentence was for a single convenience store robbery. Ron was 21 at the time & had 3 prior property crimes on his record, 2 from a single incident. Alabama's habitual offender law

mandated the sentence. 3/12



A dedicated public interest attorney, Carla Crowder with @AlaAppleseed argued that Ron's terminal sentence was cruel & unusual and a judge agreed. The victims in Ron's robbery supported his freedom and Jefferson County's DA, @VoteDannyCarr, did not object. 4/12



All these folks worked together to free Ron, but this is rare. Hundreds of men & women serving LWOP for robberies and burglaries have no way out. “I left too many people behind,” Ron said. “I’m not so special. There are other guys who would

do just as well as me out here.” 5/12

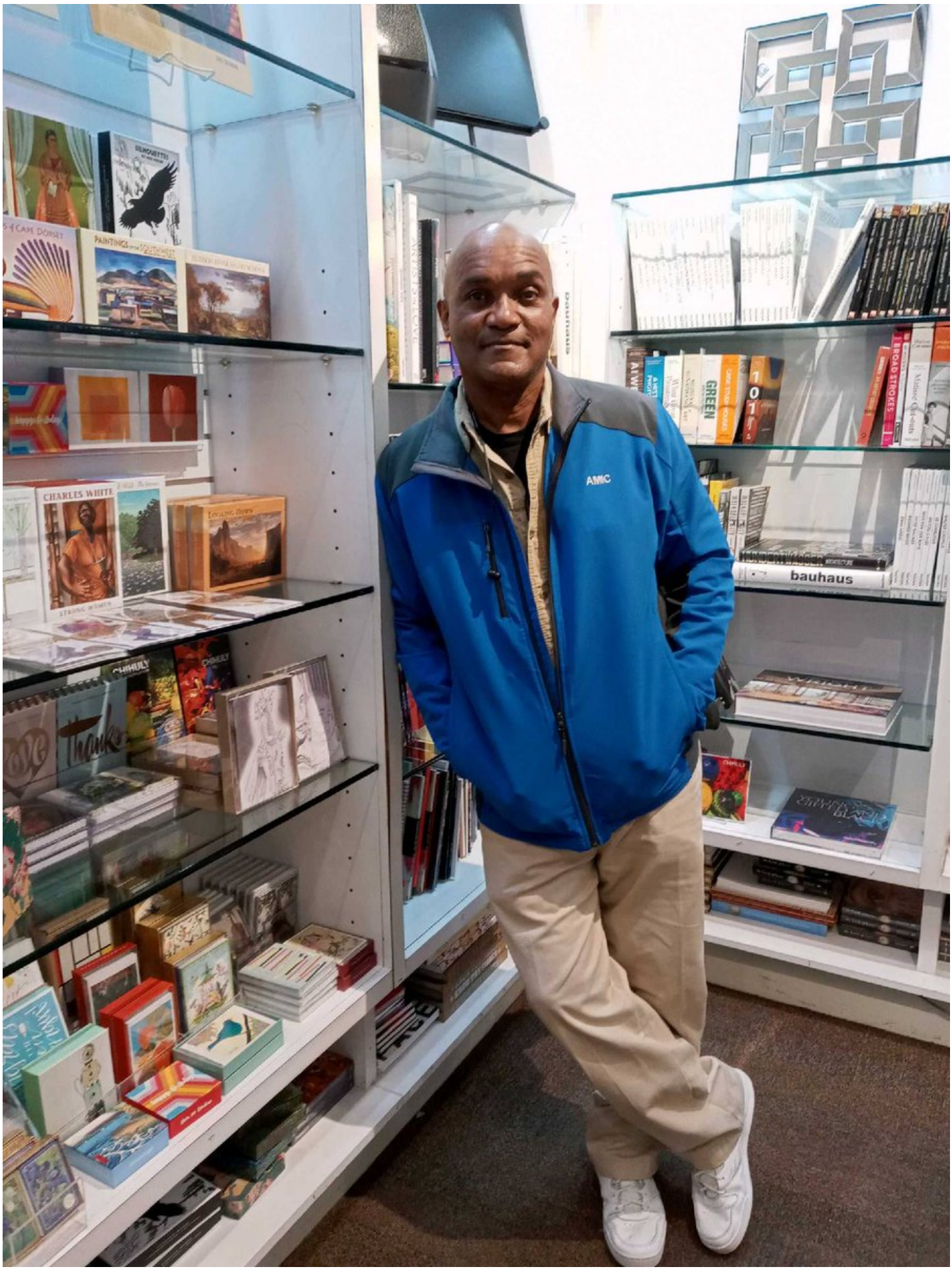


Ron hit the ground running. He’s opened a bank account, learned to use a smart phone, got an ID, shopped for groceries & attended his first NFL game. He’s living in a transitional home with support from @OffenderAlumni. "Every day I'm getting a new blessing," he told me. 6/12



Ron is considering a job as a nursing assistant, wants to expand his greeting card business and he’s already mentoring at-risk young men, something he dreamed of doing if he ever got out of prison. In short, a wonderful citizen and community

member that WE are lucky to know. 7/12



Every time I talk to Ron since he’s been out he’s bubbling with wonder. “I am happy helping people,” he said. “Everything feels exciting and beautiful. I don’t want to lose this childlike amazement of the world. But sometimes I ask myself, what did I do to deserve all this?” 8/12



Make no mistake, Ron is deserving. In prison he earned a GED, 2 trade school degrees & became a devoted student of meditation & art. He spent the last decade living in the honor dorm, tutoring others & working in the library. I wrote about him

here: 9/12
https://t.co/tg67ELJpP1

When an officer called Ron’s name to leave, the entire cell block broke out in cheers and applause. The guards wished him luck and Ron walked out with a box of belongings, laughing in the rain as we snapped pictures. They took almost 40 years but they didn’t steal his joy. 10/12



I can’t overstate how knowing Ron has changed me. I now question everything I thought I knew about our system. He is living proof that many remarkable Americans are buried alive. He inspires me to work on their behalf. I am happy he’s home

& I’m proud Ron is my friend. 11/12



To read more from Ron and to hear more about Appleseed’s ongoing fight for people trapped by death-in-prison sentences, visit their website and consider supporting their work. WELCOME HOME RON! ■■■12/12 https://t.co/WGs06SdSd6

To read about Ron's case and my writing about his life, here is the link that works!
https://t.co/uTkpBtdopO