

GIOVANNA: ITALY

Age: 27

Gender: Female

Country – City of birth: Italy - Milan

Crime: Homicide

Number of times in which you went to prison: one

Time from your last time in prison: arrested in 2004

Time from your last crime committed - I am now in the semi liberty regime

Would you say you were trying to give up crime, had given up crime or are still involved in crime?

I can say I have totally given up crime. I have no problem in staying far away from deviance because now, I perfectly know what I want for my life: a healthy life with good and positive people, surrounded by people in whom I can trust, if I need to do so. Crime doesn't make any sense or lead up to anything good. It dries people up, worsens fears and gives birth to useless egoisms.

Crime gives birth only to terrible loneliness and a lack of confidence; moreover it damages society, hence ourselves. There is the need to understand that human beings are social and collaborative so, the real self-achievement starts from the positive integration.

If not offending - Why did you want to stop offending? Was it a choice or something more gradual or both?

I committed only one crime in my life and I have no intention to re-offend. I wish I hadn't committed any crime in my life. When I committed the crime I was in a horrible situation from my personal point of view. I wasn't conscious of what was happening around me and I wasn't able to avoid the crime itself. Due to this hard and complicated situation, it was almost inevitable that I started thinking deeply about my life, when in prison, with the aim to start a positive personal growth. In this attempt to change, I have been supported by family, volunteers, and prelates working in prison. They all have helped me to compare my way of life with other positive role models and to decide to engage myself in a positive and important target such as a degree in graphic arts.

What has been your experience of giving up crime – positives and negatives? What makes it easy or hard?

My experience of desistance has been of course extremely positive because I'm achieving great personal and material satisfactions. I feel better when I think I'm doing something to compensate the society for what I have done with my mistakes. To become a better person means to give a sense to the pain I have suffered and caused. The willingness of people around me is very important for me because it makes me feel accepted instead of refused, rejected and marginalized. Their way of giving me chances without prejudice spurs myself to give the best I can, to not fail again.

What has changed in you or your life since you stopped offending? What has stayed the same?

I was arrested when I was 18. I have grown up in prison. I do not believe that changes in my personality are due to the prison experience or to the crime itself. I have been changed a lot, but this is normal when a young girl becomes a woman; it is what happens when adolescence gives way to adulthood. I can't say I have had a past characterized by criminality. As I said, I just ran into a horrible situation, much bigger than me, and I was a young girl at the time of the crime. Today, nothing is the same because I want my life to be different from when the facts happened and I'm working hard to achieve this outcome. I can't say how much of the "new" person I am today comes from my past experience and what might have been avoided for my past experience because I was in that phase in which everything normally changes in the life of the adolescent, when one is becoming mature.

What is your life is like now? What was it like before?

I'm serving a day release sentence and, as I said before, I am attending art classes at the University. This is very important for me because it lets me stay with intelligent people that are trying to build their lives in a normal way, according to social rules and their dreams. The biggest problem, today, for me is to come back to prison every night and be in contact with a very different world characterised by moral abuse, vulgarity, continuous screams and the impossibility to have the use of my life, even for bodily functions.

How do you see yourself as a person today?

I see myself as a person in constant growth, as someone who is travelling in the right direction, a better person who still has a long road to walk on.

How do you feel about your past/current offending?

I feel very ashamed about my past, I feel guilty for what I have done and I wish I could show to people that I am not the woman they describe, I am different from when the crime occurred and I am a positive person.

How if at all does your offending (now/in past) continue to influence your sense of self or the life you live today?

As I have said, my past is something I wish I could delete. When I think about the crime I feel bad and two different kinds of feelings occupy my mind: from one side I feel guilty and from the other side I hope to have the chance to pay back to society by showing everybody that I am a new person and a better one. I need this redemption because I am aware of who I am today and I can't think about me still linked to something bad, dirty and cruel.

What was your experience of prison/punishment and/or justice support services and their role in supporting or hindering desistance - perhaps they made no impact either way but we would be interested to learn more about how and why they exerted whatever impact they did.

My experience has been tragic as it is for everyone who experiences the prison. I have suffered a lot and I'm still suffering. I couldn't rely on social services and I didn't feel they really care about me and my situation. For my part, I can say that the prison can count only on volunteers. If I hadn't met volunteers I wouldn't be the person I am today. Social services are the main obstacles to freedom for prisoners, because their senseless bureaucracy makes everything harder and lengthen the time to start a new life.

Today I can attend the University only because my High school professor asked the director to allow me to take a degree, supporting this request by saying that it would be very important for my life, my re-socialization and my future life. I have been in prison for nine years and I've met a social worker in prison less than ten times.