

**Cellblocks to Mountaintops**  
**Video Episode 04: Turning Points**  
**Transcript**

**TEXT:**

**Associated Press: Corvallis -**

Teen sentenced to 2 life terms in couple's deaths -  
The judge tacks on another 23 years for other charges.

**Sterling Cunio:** Even after I was sentenced, I still didn't start to think about or connect to what I'd done, for like 10 years, and then I got a letter. My victim's nephew he asked me, why did you kill my uncle? And I sit down to write him back, and I couldn't answer the question. I wasn't going to tell him a lie. And up to that point, I had lied about why I committed the carjacking, and I had told multiple lies to multiple people. Embellishing this tough thug image or whatever but I wasn't going to tell him any bullshit, and I couldn't answer that letter. I'll start writing something it was like an excuse. I was trying to articulate my pain as if it was somehow a justification. That started making me think more about them. Why did I do this?

**Sterling Cunio:** It wasn't until I read *Sophie's Choice*, about a mother who went through the Holocaust and she had two children. She was made to choose which one would live and which one would die. I put the book down. I was I was just distraught. Like I was infuriated, I remember thinking, what kind of monster would make a parent choose between their children? I'd become good at disconnecting, but I couldn't disconnect from all of these emotions. And then I started thinking, I'm responsible for parents having to bury their children. It was a huge turning point for me, but at the time it was hell. Because then I started making connections to everything. I realized that for nearly 12 years I had brought pain or some type of difficulty to everybody's life that I'd encountered.

**Cheryl Cunio**

**Sterling's Wife:**

At the time I met him, I didn't know that I was coming into his life when he was in turmoil. He was going through a lot of emotions. He was in and out of the hole for different reasons. He did tell me that he had contemplated suicide in the past, and I thought that was like way before we met. I didn't realize it was super recent.

**Sterling Cunio:** I finally connected to the pain that I had caused so many others. I felt evil. I'm going to hell anyway. I might as well just end it. I remember thinking that if I wrote people these letters and I told them that I was sorry, maybe they would believe me if it was my last act. And my wife, hers was the last letter that I was writing. That was the letter for me, when it clicked like this is going to hurt this person. One of only a few people who saw any value in who I was at that time.

**Cheryl McKinley:** Maybe a year or so after things really calmed down. He stopped going to the hole, he was talking more to people, he was being more creative, he started writing.

**Sterling Cunio:** Cheryl. It became okay to be vulnerable, and I had to get to a point to where I was okay with being vulnerable before I could really start to look at some of my own pain, some of my own feelings. She was the first person that I began telling the truth to about a lot of things. It set me on a path to start taking an honest assessment of who I was and the things that I'd done. And it set me in motion to try and figure out how to answer for that.

