



## imagine assembly

Valentino Dixon was wrongly convicted of a crime and was sent to prison for at least 39 years. During his time in prison, he tried to be the best possible prisoner, to be helpful and quiet. Even though he knew he shouldn't be there, he kept going, he knew he had to survive being wrongly imprisoned. "I had to take my willpower to a whole another level." [Radio 5live interview 11<sup>th</sup> June 2019]

Valentino had been in prison for 7 years and was finding it really difficult, when one day his uncle gave him this advice, "If you reclaim your talent, you can reclaim your life." This inspired Valentino to go back to drawing that he used to do when he was younger.

"I knew how to draw as a kid, but I had totally given it up. So after about the 7 year mark, something clicked. I just can't waste my life and I need to get started on something. So I started drawing and I never looked back since." [Radio 5live]

So Valentino would draw, he drew from six to ten hours every day, they were only allowed pencils but that was good because he liked to draw with pencils. He wrote this, "Some days I feel like giving up, it's true. I just want to turn nasty and bitter, but in a few hours, or maybe a few days, I'm reaching for the pencils again."

[<https://www.golfdigest.com/story/golf-saved-my-life-valentino-dixon>]

One day, the warden of the prison, who had seen Valentino's talent, asked him to draw from a photograph of the 12<sup>th</sup> hole of the Augusta golf course, which is a famous course in America. Valentino spent 15 hours doing this and the warden liked the finished picture. Whilst doing it, Valentino found that in drawing the golf course, something spoke to him, "For some reason my spirit is attuned to this game."

[<https://www.golfdigest.com/story/for-valentino-dixon-a-wrong-righted-murder-charge-vacated-by-court-after-serving-27-years-in-prison>]

Valentino had grown up in a big city and had never seen a golf course in his life, never picked up a club, but something about it sparked his imagination and creativity. "Something about the grass and the sky was rejuvenating... the look of a golf hole spoke to me. It seemed peaceful. I imagine playing it would be a lot like fishing."

[<https://www.golfdigest.com/story/golf-saved-my-life-valentino-dixon>]

Valentino began to draw pictures of golf courses, he got the pictures from a magazine called Golf Digest that another prisoner lent to him.

"I use a photograph as a starting point and then morph the image in my own way. Sometimes I'll find a tiny piece of reference material, like a tree on a stamp or mountains on a calendar, and then imagine my own golf course with it. I find the

challenge of integrating these visions very rewarding.”

[\[https://www.golfdigest.com/story/golf-saved-my-life-valentino-dixon\]](https://www.golfdigest.com/story/golf-saved-my-life-valentino-dixon)

After a while, he began reading the magazines and read a column called “Golf saved my life.” Valentino realised that golf was saving his life to, so he wrote to the magazine and the editor published his story along with some of his amazing pictures. As the editor, Max Adler, read the piece he realised that it wasn’t fair that Valentino was in prison, so he set about investigating what had happened. When the magazine published the article, other people became interested in his case and eventually three law students at university, researched what happened and showed clearly that Valentino was innocent. In September 2018, having spent 27 years in prison, Valentino was set free, he was at last an innocent man.

Valentino still continues to draw, to use his imagination to produce his artwork. He has met some famous golfers including Tiger Woods and has visited the world famous Augusta golf course, but still he continues to draw. “A lot of people are surprised that I see that I’m still drawing to this day, even though I’ve been released. A lot of times I get invites to go to some nice places but I would rather sit in the house and draw up to 10 hours a day, even now.” [Radio 5live]

His passion, his talent, his imagination and his perseverance kept Valentino going, and even in the toughest of places, it shone out and justice was eventually done.

### Thought

Close your eyes and think to yourself about your talents, focus on one of these questions and answer it quietly inside your head. What can you do with your talent to help people? What can you do with your imagination to help people?

### Alternative prayer

Dear God,

Thank you for giving us talents, for giving us things we can enjoy, to use our imaginations and express ourselves. Thank you for giving Valentino this gift and helping him even in the darkest times to keep on going and to get justice. Help us to use our imaginations to help people and make the world a better place.

Amen

### Song

I’m going to paint the perfect picture. Come and Praise 83