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Wronged Man Tells His Story

'Be Fair,' Former Boxer Tells Audience At BC

Posted: September 15, 2011

By EMILY SHARRER

HARRISONBURG — For the 26 years that Dewey Bozella was serving time in Sing Sing Prison in New York for the murder of a 92-year-old woman — a crime he didn't commit — he asked God, "Why?"



Dewey Bozella speaks about his experiences during a talk at Bridgewater College's Cole Hall on Wednesday night. He served 26 years in prison before being cleared of murder charges. (Photo by Justin Falls / DNR)

"I said, 'God, what did I do so bad that I deserve 20 years to life?'" he told a packed auditorium at Bridgewater College on Wednesday night.

For refusing to admit guilt, Bozella never received parole, although he had several hearings throughout his incarceration.

Bozella, who received the Arthur Ashe Courage Award at the 2011 ESPY Awards, was acquitted of all charges in 2009 when more evidence became available in his case.

"The first thing I did was get up there and cry," said Bozella, 52.

His talk Wednesday was part of Bridgewater's Constitution Day activities and was sponsored by the W. Harold Row Endowed Lecture Series.

Forgiveness

Bozella was only 18 in 1977 when he was suspected of murdering a woman in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., after she returned home from playing bingo.

Six years went by before Bozella, then an amateur boxer, was convicted of the murder.

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As he battled drugs and alcohol, tried to cope with his mother getting beaten to death by his father, and as he was denied his release from prison at parole hearing after parole hearing, Bozella said he felt God testing him.

One of his biggest tests came in the early '90s, when the man who murdered one of Bozella's brothers entered Sing Sing.

He knew what God was saying to him.

"Now, you see what you're going to do, let me see how much you've really changed, there's your test."

All the inmates were watching as Bozella pulled the man aside and asked him why he had murdered his brother.

"He said, 'I was 15, I can't find no excuse,'" Bozella said. "I put my hand out and I said, 'I forgive you.' ... That was my test of adversity."

A Free Man

In 2009, with the help of the Innocence Project, an organization dedicated to freeing the wrongfully imprisoned, Bozella's conviction was overturned.

While in prison, he earned a bachelor's degree from Mercy College and a master's from New York Theological Seminary.

Now a free man, he has been teaching boxing to youth and dreams of owning his own gym.

"When I came in, I wasn't expecting that emotional connection," said Michael Reuschling, a 21-year-old senior minoring in criminal justice at BC. "It shows our legal system is somewhat unfair at times. ... It just makes me [more] aware."

At the end of his hour-long talk, Bozella left the audience with a final piece of advice.

"Whatever you do in your life, be fair," he said. "Never let fear determine who you are, never let where you come from determine where you are going."

Contact Emily Sharrer at 574-6286 or esharrer@dnronline.com

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1. RE: Wronged Man Tells His Story

September 15, 2011 @ 6:41am

Wow!! What a truly inspirational story!!! Thank you Mr. Bozella for sharing!!

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