



# RUN FOR HIS LIFE

*DISCUSSION AND EDUCATIONAL GUIDE*



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**WEGOTUSNOW** 

# Personal Reflection

By **Ebony Underwood**,  
Founder and CEO,  
*We Got Us Now*



The story of Pete Monsanto Jr. in *Run For His Life* brings personal joy to my heart. It is the story of Pete’s courage, strength, resiliency and love. Pete is a personal friend of mine. His journey in *Run For His Life* resonates deeply for me because it is symbolic of my own. A journey of hope, healing and freedom that only the power of love could endure. In June 2014, I produced a day-long photo shoot for a public awareness campaign about ending mandatory minimum sentencing. Featured in the advocacy campaign were music industry influencers, musical artists and executives. On that day, I was introduced to Pete Monsanto, Jr., an up-and-coming music industry photographer and influencer. Pete was fashionably dressed, humble and excited to share with me how happy he was to participate. He also privately shared with me that his father, like my father, had been incarcerated for decades in federal prison due to harsh sentencing laws. From that moment on, Pete and I remained tightly connected as friends by our shared experience.

As a social entrepreneur, content creator and Soros Justice Fellow, my interest in advocacy work was to help reform the

criminal-legal system. As a daughter with an incarcerated father, my purpose in this work was personal and pivotal. My research has led to several published articles in Mic, Huffington Post, Vibe, The Appeal and I co-authored the chapter, “About Us, For Us, With Us: Collaboration as a Key to Progress in Research, Practice & Policy” in the *2nd Edition Handbook on Children with Incarcerated Parents: Research, Policy, and Practice*. As a content creator, producer and inspiration for the Google-initiated digital campaign, Love Letters, I was invited to speak all across the United States, at universities, law schools, high schools and corporations. After almost every single event, I would meet a daughter and/or son who would say, “Thank you so much for your courage in sharing your story. My parent is incarcerated too.” In these moments, I began to recognize that not only has mass incarceration disproportionately affected the lives of so many Black American families, but that it was also a societal issue that has severely impacted millions of Americans from all walks of life.

In 2017, I founded **WE GOT US NOW** - a national nonprofit advocacy organization built by, led by and about children and young adults impacted by parental incarceration with a mission to ensure this historically marginalized population is uplifted, in community, and supported in advocacy efforts to reform the criminal-legal system. As part of our launch, WE GOT US NOW produced a live event hosted by Google to highlight the stories and experiences of daughters and sons impacted by parental incarceration. One of the first people that came to my mind was Pete. We selected Pete, as one of the featured panelists, to share his journey. After the event, Pete informed me that he felt passionate about the work of WE GOT US NOW. He was dedicated to supporting the organization since it provided what he believed had been missing for so long in his life, a safe and inclusive community of daughters and sons with the shared experience of an incarcerated parent. Shortly after, Pete told me that he was preparing to run the New York City Marathon. He made the decision he was going to run the marathon for his incarcerated father.

Pete Monsanto Sr. was sentenced to life in prison when his son, Pete Jr. was just 5 years old. With such a harsh sentence, Pete Sr. never had the opportunity to play football, basketball, or any sports for that matter, with his son. Nonetheless, Pete Sr. remained connected to his children and family through phone calls, letters and prison visits. These avenues of communication are how Pete Jr. formed a bond with his father and began to learn and get to know his Dad. What Pete learned is that running the prison track kept Pete Sr. healthy and focused on his children and family. That bit of insight shared amongst the incarcerated father to his son would change the trajectory of his son's life forever.

Pete Jr. concluded that prison would not stop the deep connection he yearned for with his dad and decided that he, too, would begin running. He trained and ran mini marathons. Then, he made the decision he would run the largest marathon in the world - the New York City Marathon. The annual marathon that courses through the five boroughs of the city that raised him and his father. He told his Dad, "I am running the New York City Marathon for you!" When Pete shared with me that he was taking on this huge feat, I was filled with so many emotions - excitement, sadness and joy - all at once. The excitement came from watching how Pete Jr. turned his pain into power. The sadness came from the fact that Pete Sr. may never see his son cross the finish line. The joy I felt came from knowing how cathartic it would be for Pete to finish the race and that his story would be an inspiration to so many sons and daughters in the WE GOT US NOW community and beyond who were searching for hope.



Pete Monsanto Jr. completed the New York City Marathon on November 4, 2018. His courage to run has not only healed him and reinvigorated the loving bond between him, his father and his family, but it has also turned into an inspirational documentary, *Run For His Life* featured on GQ SPORTS. Pete continues to advocate on behalf of children and young adults impacted by parental incarceration as an advisor to WE GOT US NOW. Pete's decision to *Run For His Life* has also roused the gift of freedom. On February 2, 2021, Pete Monsanto, Sr. was granted compassionate release after 34 years in federal prison.

Pete Jr. and his father







# Discussion Guide

Here is a discussion guide highlighting themes in the film, *Run For His Life*, to engage and encourage audiences to uplift the need to end mass incarceration. For over 30 years, mass incarceration in the U.S. has caused rippling effects that have devastated communities and families. The collateral consequences are the children with incarcerated parents who are the innocent bystanders of this experience. *Run For His Life* is the story of Pete Monsanto Jr. a son who has been impacted by the mass incarceration of his father for the majority of his life.

**Instructions:** Facilitators can pose the questions in a conversation for group discussion or breakout rooms.

1. How is Pete's family similar to or different from your family?
2. If you were going to tell a friend about *Run For His Life*, what would you say?
3. This film gently touches upon the important social justice issue of mass incarceration. How do you define social justice? Are there other social justice issues that you recognized in this story? How do these issues impact and influence the relationship between Pete and his father?
4. In the kitchen scene at the 4:26 mark in the film, *Run For His Life*, with Pete and his mother, she expressed to him that despite the challenges their family faced they still remained an intact and connected family. Are Pete's mother's words familiar to the problems you or someone you know face?
5. The stigma of parental incarceration is a challenging one for many children. Pete is extremely resilient. A common trait in most children who have experienced parental incarceration is resiliency. Do you know anyone who has endured having a parent incarcerated? If so, would you describe them as resilient? If yes, why? If not, is there anything you can do to support them?
6. Lots of emotions, such as sadness, joy and empathy, come up for people when viewing *Run For His Life*. Of the many feelings expressed in the film, which resonated the most with you?
7. What was your reaction to seeing Pete cross the finish line of the New York City Marathon? What was your reaction to hearing Pete say, "You don't give up?"
8. A month from now, what do you think you'll remember about *Run For His Life*?
9. In a word, how did *Run For His Life* make you feel? Did anything in *Run For His Life* surprise you? Was anything familiar?
10. What did you learn from *Run For His Life* that you wish everyone knew?



# Educational Guide

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Here are some facts, statistics, myths to engage youth within educational settings and help them understand why Pete Monsanto, Jr decided to *Run For His Life*. Below you'll find some facts around the film and this might be a format you can use for classroom activities around the issue.

**Instructions:** Facilitators can pose the multiple choice questions in a quiz format, written or verbal, or can use the facts and stats in a conversation in breakout rooms, or for group discussion.

**FACT:** Pete Monsanto Jr. was 5 years old when his father was incarcerated.

Q: How many children of incarcerated parents under the age of 18 have an incarcerated parent?

- 5 million
- 1.5 million
- 2.7 million

**STATS:** 2.7 million children in the US under the age of 18 currently have a parent incarcerated.

**FACT:** Pete Monsanto Sr. is a father who was sentenced in 1987 to life in a US federal prison due to extremely harsh sentencing laws that caused mass incarceration.

Q: \_\_\_\_\_ refers to the extreme imprisonment practices the US has implemented to lock up a vast population in federal and state prisons, as well as local jails.

- Collateral consequences
- Mass incarceration
- The First Step Act

**FACT:** **Mass incarceration** refers to the extreme imprisonment practices the US has implemented to lock up a vast population in federal and state prisons, as well as local jails.

Q: With \_\_\_ % of the world's population, the U.S. incarcerates more people than any other country.

- a. 30%
- b. 5%
- c. 15%

**STATS:** With **5%** of the world's population, the US incarcerates more people than any other country in the world.

Q: There are more than \_\_\_ million people incarcerated in the United States.

- a. 10
- b. 5
- c. 2

**STATS:** There are more than **2 million** people incarcerated in the United States.

**FACT:** Pete Monsanto Jr. was a young adult when he decided to publicly share about his father's incarceration.

Q: Children of incarcerated parents are a historically invisible population. Due to the trauma, stigma and \_\_\_\_\_ of parental incarceration, most children do not share that their parent is in prison or jail.

- a. fear
- b. shame
- c. joy

**STATS:** Children of incarcerated parents are a historically invisible population. Due to the trauma, stigma and **shame** of parental incarceration, most children do not share that their parent is in prison or jail.

Q: Which one is the myth?

- a. Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to end up incarcerated, like their parent(s).
- b. Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be resilient.
- c. Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be traumatized due to parental incarceration.

**MYTH:** Children of incarcerated parents are more likely to end up incarcerated, like their parent(s).

**FACT:** The notion that children whose parents are imprisoned are several times more likely than other children to be incarcerated when they become adults is widely accepted as fact in scholarly, political and bureaucratic circles. There is no solid evidence, however, to support this assertion and its continued use in policy arenas is highly questionable.

Q: WE GOT US NOW is a ...

- a. National nonprofit advocacy organization for medical supplies
- b. National nonprofit advocacy organization for children & young adults with incarcerated parents
- c. National nonprofit advocacy organization for cats and dogs

**FACT:** WE GOT US NOW is the first of its kind - a nonprofit (501c3) nonpartisan advocacy organization amplifying the issues children and young adults with incarcerated parents face due to mass incarceration. Built by, led by and about children and young adults impacted by parental incarceration, the mission of WE GOT US NOW is to engage, educate, elevate and empower this marginalized population of daughters and sons through the use of digital narratives, safe and inclusive spaces and advocacy campaigns to ensure their voices are at the forefront of criminal justice reform efforts.

Q: \_\_\_\_\_ children in the US have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives.

- a. 100 million children
- b. 1000 children
- c. 10 million children

**STATS:** 10 million children in the US have experienced parental incarceration at some point in their lives.



## Questions:

1. Mass incarceration has left millions of children, like Pete, silently suffering due to the loss of their parents to incarceration. Pete became an advocate and mentor with WE GOT US NOW to support other directly impacted daughters and sons. What can everyday people, like you and me, do to help bring greater awareness to families like Pete's and the WE GOT US NOW community?
2. Is it okay to love your parent when they make a mistake?
3. Do you know any children with incarcerated parents? What inspiring words can you share with them now that you've watched Pete's story?

## Resources:

### WE GOT US NOW

The first of its kind - WE GOT US NOW is a nonprofit (501c3) nonpartisan advocacy organization amplifying the issues children and young adults with incarcerated parents face due to mass incarceration. Built by, led by and about children and young adults impacted by parental incarceration, the mission of WE GOT US NOW is to engage, educate, elevate and empower this marginalized population of daughters and sons through the use of digital narratives, safe and inclusive spaces and advocacy campaigns to ensure their voices are at the forefront of criminal justice reform efforts that help to keep families connected, create fair sentencing and end mass incarceration.

[WeGotUsNow.org](http://WeGotUsNow.org)

### The Sentencing Project

The Sentencing Project is a Washington, D.C.-based research and advocacy center working for decarceration or to reduce the use of incarceration in the United States and to address racial disparities in the criminal justice system.

[SentencingProject.org](http://SentencingProject.org)

### Developing Despite Distance

Developing Despite Distance supports young men of color, ages 10-18, currently impacted by parental incarceration. Through consistent letter writing, their goal is to strengthen the parent-child relationship. Through group counseling, their goal is to empower young men to identify their emotions and create healthy coping strategies. They are committed to increasing awareness that youth with incarcerated parents exist while helping to reduce the stigma associated with parental incarceration.

[developingdespitedistance.org](http://developingdespitedistance.org)

### BOOKS

- *The Meaning of Life: A Case for Abolishing Life Sentences*
- *SLUGG: A Boy's Life in the Age of Mass Incarceration*
- *Handbook on Children with Incarcerated Parents*
- *Male vs. Man*
- *The New Jim Crow*

### PODCAST

[WE GOT US NOW podcast](#)

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