

# Corrections worker keeps time for music

WRITTEN BY LEIGH LANDINI WRIGHT  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN WRIGHT

On stage as a musician with the Paducah Symphony Orchestra, Morgan Kinslow wears a tuxedo. But moments after putting his tuba back into the case, he sometimes quickly slips to the dressing room and emerges moments later with his badge and uniform.

Kinslow, 35, is a corrections officer on the midnight shift at the Kentucky State Penitentiary at Eddyville. On the exterior, the mental toughness of his career day seems like such a contradiction for a mild-mannered musician. But Kinslow sees things differently.

"There are a lot of similarities," he said. "They both take teamwork. If an orchestra doesn't perform as a team, it fails. If there's no teamwork at the prison, someone could get hurt."

"You've got to be on top of your game all the time at either place. There are no second chances. Neither place has a safety net."

Kinslow first picked up a trombone as a fifth-grader in Caldwell County and played in the marching band through middle and high school. He switched from trombone to tuba, both brass instruments that require a good sense of pitch, and he picked up on it quickly. Music made sense to him when he struggled with academics.

"As soon as school got out, I would pick up my horn and practice for three to four hours."

With his love of music, he assumed that he should pursue a career in music, but his passion didn't translate into a desire to teach music. He majored in music education at Murray State University, but he quit and stumbled as he tried to find a suitable career path.

"I couldn't find a job," he said, "not at McDonald's or anything." He heard that the Graves County Jail was hiring, but he didn't know anything about corrections.

"It turns out that I'm pretty good at it," Kinslow said. "I could always communicate with culturally different people. That makes a huge difference. You have to keep in the back of your mind that you're human. One mistake, one lapse of judgment, and you could be there."

Kinslow rose to supervisor during his four-year tenure, but a career in music knocked on his door again when he accepted a job in the repair shop at Music Zone. Kinslow happily spent his days surrounded by instruments, fixing them until the sounds resonated again. But when the store sold, he found himself again without a job and wondering what to do next.

"I was decent at corrections," he said.

When a job at the prison opened three years ago, he didn't think twice and moved his family from Paducah back to his native Caldwell County.

Kinslow said the job of a corrections officer is 98 percent mental and 2 percent physical. "The hardest

thing is finding the balance between being an officer and still being yourself," he said. "You're not going in and trying to be John Wayne."

Through all the career switching, music has been a constant in his life. He has played tuba for the Paducah Symphony Orchestra for 15 years. He tries to practice his horn a minimum of 30 minutes a day, but it's difficult to balance with his job and his return to school at Mid-Continent University, where he is studying for a bachelor's in psychology and counseling. Then add in that he and his wife, Rebecca, have two daughters, ages 6 and 1.

He has told several inmates at the prison about his musical habits outside work. And they've told him about their musical talents. "You would never know (about their music) unless you walk across the yard and hear them," he said. "Some are very talented musicians and artists. They have the time to cultivate that."

Kinslow maintains his corrections officer persona until he drives through the gate after each shift. His mind then turns to his passion. "Music is my playtime."

Earlier this winter, Kinslow flipped his truck after skidding on a patch of ice on a curvy road between the jail and his home. His mind immediately wandered to the condition of his tuba that he had stashed in his back seat. Three of his fellow officers saw the wreckage and stopped, and he asked one to check on his tuba.

"I don't allow anyone to touch my tuba, but he got the horn out of the car. He opened it up and said there was one dent on it."

It turns out that the dent was old, and Kinslow breathed a sigh of relief. The tuba's water key popped off, but it was unharmed.

"I was really lucky," he said. "What business do I have hauling around an expensive instrument?"

Have instrument, will travel.

Morgan Kinslow, a corrections officer at the Kentucky State Penitentiary, plays the tuba with the Paducah Symphony Orchestra. Kinslow and his wife have two daughters.

