



# CSOR

*Though I have fallen,  
I will rise. - Micah 7:8*

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## STAYING THE COURSE – I've been inside; now how do I stay on the outside? Susan Walker

After years in prison, when the faint light of hope starts to glimmer, and there is a possibility that you may be getting out soon, that's all you can think about! The dreams of freedom, seeing family and friends, re-establishing a bit of independence – all these and more are awaiting your embrace once the prison door opens.

When I was Director of Admissions at Colorado Christian University, it was my pleasure to welcome a young Alaskan couple from the Kotzebue area (reachable only by snowmobile or plane), to school in Denver. Being from a tiny Alaskan village in the wild, they had never shopped at a mainland grocery store before. In fact, they caught and killed the majority of their meals.

As I went with them to King Soopers, I could see the awe and even terror in their eyes as they wandered through aisles and aisles of thousands of items. The “store” where they shopped in their isolated town was small, and items were in boxes or crates on pallets dropped off by boats. What a shock! As I listen to men talk about their experiences and impressions first days out of prison, it feels very much like how this couple must have felt coming from an isolated Alaskan village. Shut off from the rest of the world, many less options for living from day to day, and unfamiliar with the latest conveniences such as cell phones and e-mail, having to apply on-line for jobs, no phone booths on street corners – culture shock hits hard.

For men who are in prison for a sexual offense, the outside world is an even tougher place than it is for others. Much of the world has bought the picture portrayed on media news that all with this offense are sexually violent predators, and are not capable of rehabilitation or deserving of acceptance by their sister and fellow human beings.

If you were sentenced indeterminately (under the Lifetime Act), you most likely had treatment through the SOTMP inside of CDOC. If you were sentenced determinately (with a set number of years and an MRD), you are not as likely to have had treatment on the inside, although it is happening more than it used to. While treatment may seem like a “sticky wicket” while you are in the middle of it, it gives you a massive advantage in terms of meeting requirements and responsibilities on the outside. As if cell phones and computers weren't enough in terms of things you need to adjust to and learn about, you will also be expected to meet the directives of your parole officer, and the contract requirements of your treatment provider.

If you had treatment inside, there are words you will already be familiar with, like “denial”, “relapse”, “minimization”, “victim stance” etc. (some of these words seem to be fading away, as they have not been shown to be predictors of recidivism; however, some therapists

*Start by doing what's  
necessary, then do  
what's possible, and  
suddenly you are  
doing the impossible.*

*St. Francis of Assisi*

still use them). You know that right off the boat, you can't have pictures of your children if they are under 18; in fact, you can't have pictures of children at all if they are under 18!

While these privileges may come later after time in outside treatment and under supervision, therapists and supervising officers expect to be part of your journey through appropriate utilization of things like pictures of and relationships with people under 18 and many other life decisions/choices.

Until your CST (Community Supervision Team) feels comfortable with your ability to make good decisions and with your commitment to the use of the good "tools" you continue to learn about, there are to be no secrets. Decisions are made in a team fashion and not individually when you first get out.

Below are some of the recent reasons men have gone back to prison:

1. Having pictures of their children.
2. Having pictures of underage children
3. Using social media such as Facebook etc.
4. Keeping secrets (making decisions about life activities and who to associate with on their own (without consulting the CST)
5. Using alcohol and/or drugs (as evidenced by UA's etc.)
6. Being somewhere other than where they should be (as evidenced by ankle bracelet, tracking etc.)
7. Breaking treatment contracts and failing to follow supervision directives.
8. Dating underage women or dating a significant other without checking in with the CST.
9. Having/using weapons (could be a hammer by the door or a more conventional weapon).
10. Inappropriate association(s). You should always check with your supervising officer and therapist before beginning a relationship.
11. Denial. While denial is not shown to be a predictor of recidivism, telling the truth about what happened when you committed your offense is the best thing to do. The definition of denial and time allowed for people to move past denial has expanded in the new Standards and Guidelines of the SOMB. It is not appropriate to be pushed by your therapist or parole officer to admit details of police and other reports that did not happen.



Your commitment before you leave prison to live a life that does not include making poor decisions about the above listed and other issues, holds the momentum to help carry you forward in your life on the outside instead of backward to more time on the inside!

### What is the Polygraph?

What is the polygraph? Is it a lie detector? Is it a truth finder? Does it deter repeat offenses? Are people made anxious/frantic by it? Does it cost an arm and a leg? Is it loved? Or is it hated? Does it cause the disclosure of real or imaginary victims? What does it really prove? Anything? Does it make therapists and supervising officers feel better? Should it be used as an independent judge regarding who is fully disclosing and who is not, or if it is going to be used, should it be used in conjunction with lots of assessment tools?

The debate about the polygraph goes on. Several of us sit on the SOMB's Polygraph Re-Write Committee where it feels as if some of the decisions have already been made as to how it is going to be utilized. Examples of bias present in the discussion we have had so far include statements like the following:

- "We are not getting rid of the polygraph" (statement by prominent committee member while the Best Practice Committee was meeting to determine recommendations to the Polygraph Re-write Committee). This should be based on valid and reliable research, not on someone's opinion.
- "Benefits of polygraph testing include improved decision making, deterrence of problem behavior and access to information that might otherwise not be obtained. The two articles that were found by the SOMB Staff Researcher in

support of the deterrence statement do not make the case for the polygraph being a deterrent (small sample size of 21 finished one of the studies).

- “You cannot put down a whole profession (polygrapher) by suggesting that they are in it for the money.” When I asked a prominent polygrapher if business were to suffer due to the suggestions from Best Practice that people have varying frequency and duration of polygraph testing based on risk would polygraphers stick around, without hesitation he said no.

Many Legislators are not pleased regarding the amount of money that is spent each year for polygraph testing. However, the law and order faction of the Colorado Legislature is set on telling the public that they are safe as long as we continue to polygraph, register, restrict residency, and enforce lifetime parole and probation on those who have committed a sexual offense, no matter their risk level. The cost to the State of Colorado to try to create the illusion that the public is safe is astronomical.

If any other offenders, let’s say DUI offenders, were forced to do years of mandatory treatment and parole or probation, the State could not stand up under the weight of the cost. It is true that with longer required periods of treatment, more people might stay sober and not re-offend with another DUI, but treating all criminal populations to this kind of attention, oversight, incarceration and treatment would easily break the State in a very short time. These folks are also highly likely to do significant harm to another human being.



Despite the fact that Colorado has perhaps the toughest system in the country for those with a sexual offense, recidivism rates are similar to those in states that have no prison treatment, less dependence on the polygraph, and much shorter treatment stints on the outside. It is good that awareness is growing that the polygraph should not be utilized in isolation to terminate someone from treatment, to revoke someone from parole etc., but the moral, ethical and cost issues related to using it at all beg a closer and more serious look.

### Grieving an SOMB Provider

Grieving an SOMB Provider (therapist, evaluator and/or polygrapher) has been challenging with previous Standards and Guidelines (S & G’s). They were, before the current re-write, based on old literature, and long term, dug in, religiously held beliefs. It was a challenge to find anything in the Standards and Guidelines in the past that you could hang a grievance on. Parole and Probation Officers cannot be grieved as they are not under the purview of the S & G’s. They each have their own complaint system, with parole under the Department of Corrections, and probation under Judicial.

While portions of the new S & G’s are still in the process of being re-written and have not been voted on by the Board, the more positive tone of the Guidelines at the front of the document (i.e. “Offenders are capable of change” rather than “there is no known cure for sexual offending”), and a better attempt to employ up-to-date literature and evidence-based approaches, paves the way for an enhanced chance to file a grievance for which there will be a finding against the provider.

Another positive regarding this re-write is that the new sections are shown along with it the parts on which work is still being done, and are clearly identified as new language. While it may make reading the document a bit choppy, including the new parts as work continues on the old parts, gives a decisively better picture of the improvements, and does not delay the client from filing a grievance on the sections approved by the Board.

There is, according to SOMB Staff, a new and clearer version of how to submit a complaint coming. Currently, there is no way to prepare a complaint on line, so they are hand-written. This is supposed to change. The challenge, of course, for people incarcerated, is that they can’t get on-line anyway, and for clients newly released, computers are not allowed immediately. This makes it hard not only to type the complaint document, but to gain access to the S & G’s at all. With new methods for monitoring computers and other devices, and a recognition by CDOC, Parole, Probation and the SOMB that little can be

accomplished in today's world without access to phones, computers etc., attempts are being made to improve access for those inside CDOC (tablets and e-mail may soon be available), and to enhance opportunities for utilization of these items on the outside as well, without posing a danger to the community.

It seems appropriate that at least one copy of the S & G's should be available in each CDOC facility library, and that clients who don't have convenient access to the S & G's on the inside or the outside should be able to get them through the mail from the SOMB. If someone wants to write a grievance, it is my observation that the Adult Standards Coordinator at the SOMB, is most willing to make the materials available that are needed for its preparation. It is also appropriate to contact me at CSOR, P.O. Box 27051, Denver, Co. 80227 if you need additional assistance securing what you need to make the complaint.

The new S & G's recognize that sometimes clients have a reason to complain against one of their providers, and the format provides that opportunity. They also set the bar higher for therapists, polygraphers and evaluators in terms of providing "empathic" treatment services that are less likely to present the need for grievances to be written!



**"Can't you file a grievance like everyone else?"**

### Hoping to Say Good-bye to the SVP Designation

With the birth of the Adam Walsh Act (AWA), Colorado's Legislature required the SOMB to come up with an assessment instrument to identify Sexually Violent Predators (exactly what that means has never been clear). Now that the Act no longer requires such an instrument or designation, we have done some initial work to attempt to get rid of this harmful and misleading label.

Unfortunately, the work that we have done through the SOMB to move forward with tier-based registration and replacing the SVP with what would be tier 3 of that registration scheme has not been picked up and carried to any kind of fruition by the Legislature. The SOMB has suggested that it may be time to get rid of our "one size fits all" (my words) registration approach, and look more carefully at what the registry really should be doing and thus what it should look like. The registry, unfortunately, is like many other approaches and tools used with those who have committed a sexual offense – it has little Best Practice/Research Literature behind it in terms of showing it to be a deterrent to sexual recidivism. Other fallacious approaches include abuse, misuse and overuse of the polygraph, and residency restrictions. Many would like to see the registry go away; some think it should stay only as a tool that assists law enforcement with awareness regarding higher risk persons who may be more likely to re-offend.

Because the Legislature has not yet dealt with this issue, and in the meantime until they do, it has become necessary to create another SVP assessment instrument. The SOMB group and others who contributed to the first instrument in the late 1990's created an instrument that identified nothing, according to a member of that group. He stated that everyone involved in the creation of that first instrument knew it "identified nothing" (this was shared with me three years ago at a revocation hearing in Park County by another person who came to testify on behalf of the person being revoked, who was also part of the original SVP creation group). A later version of the instrument was criticized by the Outside Evaluators who reviewed the SOTMP and SOMB Programs in 2013 and 2014, and again found significant problems with this later instrument.

Kim English from the Division of Criminal Justice(DCJ) and back on the SOMB after a long absence (also author of the Containment Model), was called in to create a new SVP Assessment to fill the gap until the Legislature chooses to deal with the SVP Statute. It is very disappointing that we must spend time again redoing an assessment that has hurt and wrongly designated so many because of faulty design. Those perhaps most hurt by this instrument are women and the developmentally/intellectually disabled, who have been forced to be assessed for the SVP, but as populations, have never been normed for the assessment. The SOMB recently put information in the Standards urging caution in the use of the instrument with these populations. Hopefully it is on its way out. It is even sadder that the SVP nomenclature was just utilized in a worthy bill sponsored by the CCJRC, because it could be and because it fit with the bill's purpose. While it needs to be quickly redone or preferably replaced, it can be used by CCJRC as it fits with the mission of their bill and is already in Statute. It is frustrating that if and when the Legislature does deal with this issue, we will have to fix even more bills that mention the "already in the law" SVP, even though we don't have to include it anymore.

Perhaps next year we can push harder for a change in our registration approach and in the current designation process for higher risk persons who have committed a sexual offense, so that we are not forced to work on yet another SVP instrument down the road.

### KUDOS TO THE COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS (CDOC)

The CDOC is not an organization I ever thought I would be involved with, but life sometimes brings surprises our way. They aren't always pleasant surprises, but frequently they serve to assist in bringing changes to peoples' lives that make the rest of their lives more intensely worthwhile. My son met God in prison in a way he might never have met Him on the outside.

It is important to say thank you to the Department of Corrections for their willingness to recognize that based on the advice of research experts, the SOTMP needed to change. The first report came as the result of the 2013 Outside Evaluators' Report, mandated and paid for by the Joint Budget Committee of the Colorado Legislature. The CDOC responded to the report's message with a commendable amount of grace, and moved forward to make the program more evidence based, and more in tune with Risk, Need and Responsivity (RNR). Risk assessment, as shown in years of RNR Research, should be central to evaluating a person's needed level of treatment. RNR in a nutshell: The RNR Model indicates Risk Principle, (treatment proportionate to degree of risk that an offender presents); Need Principle (target treatment at offender characteristics which contribute to their risk); and, Responsivity Principle (treatment delivered in a sensitive way that honors the client's learning style etc.).

The latest report came from the Colorado State Auditors' Office. I wasn't able to be present at the Legislature that day, but from what I heard, the report found more work for the Department to do. It was suggested that they upgrade their computer system, improve risk assessment practices by more frequently identifying those persons most at risk to re-offend, including people with determinate sentences who need treatment before leaving prison, and moving people through the program more quickly in order to save dollars being spent on lengthy sexual offense incarcerations.

Again, CDOC was on task, and came up with creative ways to make the program work in a more evidence-based/RNR focused way. More programs exist now that are focused on treating people according to risk than there have been in the past. There are still a lot of people waiting for treatment, but I am amazed as I go through my newsletter mailing list to see how many people are out on parole. The Department has also greatly improved its re-entry system, and while there will always be room for more improvement, I see people at re-entry being assisted with getting their cell phones going, people being supplied with clothing, warm coats etc.

There are some who may suggest that this article gives CDOC too much credit, but it seems appropriate to point out some clear areas where positive change has taken place. Thank you to those at CDOC who have worked hard to make the change happen. We hope for continued improvements. The Department continues to struggle with staffing issues, but streamlining the program may assist in addressing this issue.

The Lifetime Act, and not the Colorado Department of Corrections, has caused much of the havoc and error that has existed in the treatment and supervisory monitoring of those with a sexual offense both inside and outside of prison. We must continue to work to rid the State of Colorado of a poorly designed and implemented program that was created because people used what they arbitrarily picked as the worst of the worst sexual offenses to characterize all people who have committed a sexual offense. Evidence clearly shows that risk is not based on the offense, but on the individual risk factors, needs and responsivity present in each person. Now that we have adopted RNR, it is important to notice that RNR does not fit with the Lifetime!

*Life is 10% of what happens to me and 90% of how I react to it. Charles Swindoll.*

### NEWS TIDBITS

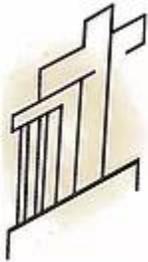
- There were surprise visitors at the SOMB Standards and Guidelines Polygraph Re-write Meeting Friday the 28th of April! A team of four, led by Tony Kovaleski of Channel 7 walked in with a camera, and took pictures of much of the meeting. Several of us have been contacted since the meeting to share our thoughts on the use of the polygraph, and its cost both to the State of Colorado and to the men who are required to take it.



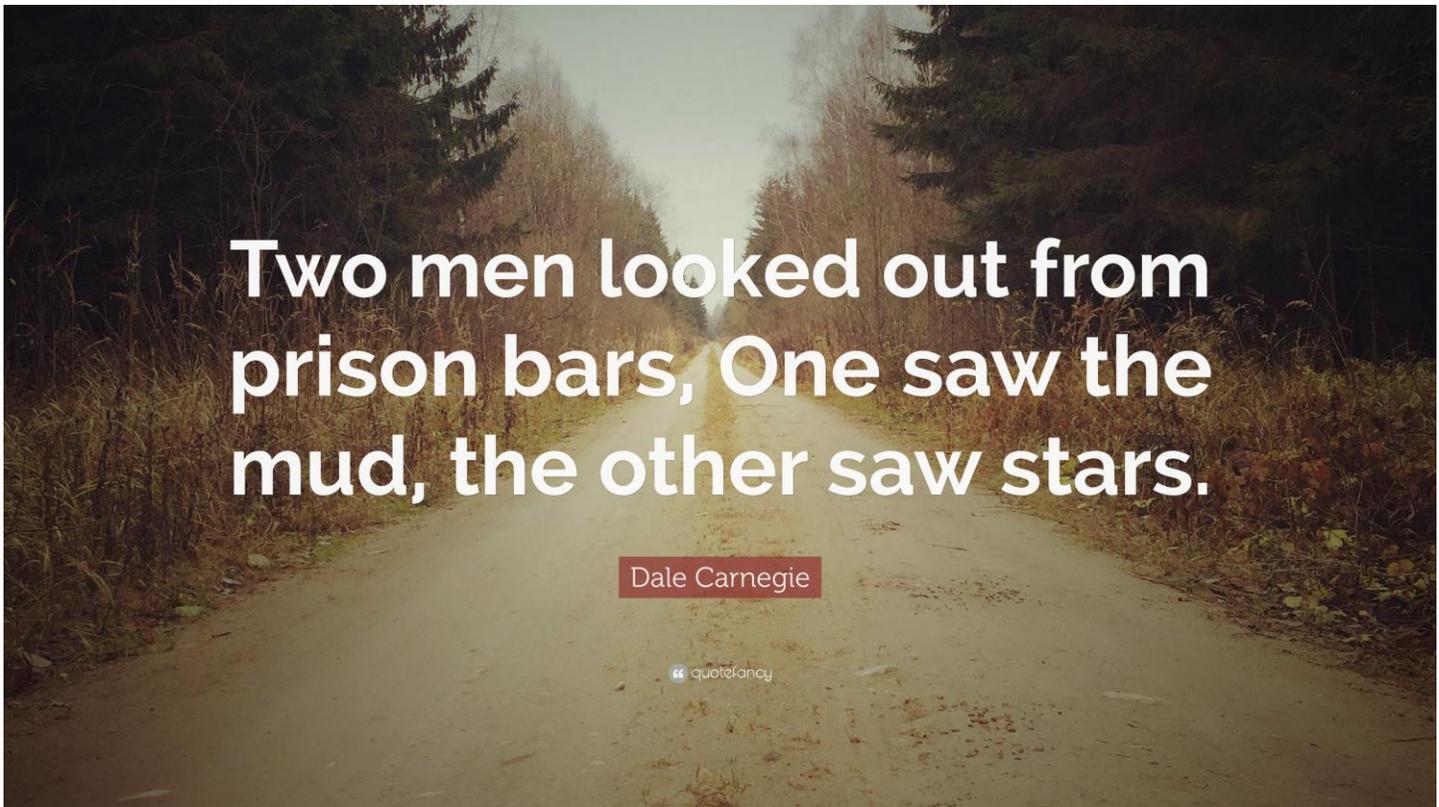


- Since the publication of the last newsletter, I spilled a diet coke in my previous computer! My colleague D.S. was able to recover many documents, but not the newsletter mailing list. I am having to re-create the list. Hopefully I will not miss anyone, but my guess is that I will. If you see the newsletter starting to come in to your facility, and you usually get one but didn't this time, please let me know and I will get you back on the list.

- RSOL (Reform Sex Offender Laws) has changed its name. It is now NARSOL (National Association for Rational Sex Offense Laws). I continue in my role as Regional Coordinator for the Western States and some of the Central states as well (we are minus one Regional Coordinator, so the three of us that are left are splitting up the Central area of the U.S.). It has been great fun to see most states in our region acquire a Contact Person, and in a couple of cases to be able to establish an Affiliate Group.



- For those of you who are not aware, my son Mark has established a non-profit called The Cell Church. As part of the mission of his organization, some men currently at two prisons in Colorado (Buena Vista and AVCF) are able to participate in a seminary level Bible Study Course from TUMI (The Urban Ministry Institute). The course prepares men for ministry in urban settings once they leave prison. Courses are taught by volunteers, and materials for each module are supplied by The Cell Church through the generous gifts of Cell Church donors. The Cell Church also publishes Christian art, writings and music. For more information, you can write to Mark at: Mark Walker, The Cell Church, P.O. Box 351913, Westminster, Co. 80035.



*A little kingdom I possess, where thoughts and feelings dwell; And very hard the task I find of governing it well."  
Louisa May Alcott*

Disclaimer: Opinions expressed in this newsletter are CSOR's. Any concerns about overall content may be sent to: [Susancwalker1@gmail.com](mailto:Susancwalker1@gmail.com).