



CSOR

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

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Susan Walker, Editor
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P.O. Box 27051 Denver, CO 80227
www.csor-home.org

CHANCES OF CHANGE VIA THE COLORADO LEGISLATURE?

Year after year after year since I have been involved in “our” issues due to my son’s involvement in them as well as all of your involvement, I have also spent a ton of time at the Colorado Legislature. Has it been fun? Not really. Has it been informative? Sometimes. Most importantly, has it offered any realistic hope that things will EVER really change significantly for our population? I know that some of you continue to hire attorneys, write to legislators, send letters of concern to me and likely to others as well, regarding how much longer our men and women must live under the “overdone”, extreme, useless in many ways, laws that make it so challenging, if not impossible, to one day live somewhat normal lives.

I am thinking of a man who, like numerous others have done, moved to the Western Slope or somewhere, in the hopes of leaving the world of parole, probation, treatment, lack of available housing, and generally bad vibes related to “our” particular life with little interference from “the powers that be, far behind. One day, someone found out about his background, and his life of freedom to participate in a variety of activities and positive ventures as part of the town’s “normal population”, was suddenly disrupted. No longer could he volunteer in the town’s public service/volunteer activities, as if he was suddenly identified as a demon from hell who had descended into this community.

The good news is that as the memory of finding out this “terrible” information about this man receded somewhat, there was some normalcy that came back to this small town, and the man mentioned above has been allowed to return to certain town activities. Can you think of any other offenses that damn a person for the rest of his or her life? People with drug and alcohol challenges, as well as those who have physically offended against their fellow man (and woman), as well as those who have committed burglary, larceny etc., are much more able to leave their previous lives behind and move on to a more normal life.

"Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies." – Mother Teresa

My most recent trip to the Legislature here in Colorado was at the request of an incredible lawyer who asked me to testify against a bill whose goal was to increase the level of punishment for people, who frequently, if not usually, have intellectual challenges which causes them to attempt to gain the friendship of people by performing perhaps somewhat unusual acts in public, or in front of people who might respond with interest or even friendship to what they say or do. The District Attorneys who had “called” this gathering at the Legislature, wanted to increase the punishment against this group of people who sometimes seek friendship in inappropriate ways from a level 4 to a level 6 felony, thus making life for a group of folks who already have serious challenges when it comes to making friends and finding their place in society, even more difficult. I got to the Legislature around 12:30, was in the room ready to testify a little after one, hoping that this would not be one of those hours long debates that I have listened to for so many years. I can’t say for sure how many areas of the State of Colorado the D.A.’s (District Attorneys) came from, but there had to be at least four groups of four D.A.’s each from at least four areas of the State of Colorado, who took an extraordinary amount of time to express their wishes in terms of tougher laws affecting an already needy group of people.

By the time I finally got to testify, it was 4:30 or 5:00 p.m. in the afternoon/early evening, and shortly after my testimony, the Legislators, to no-ones surprise, sided with the D.A.s and increased the penalty for “crimes” committed by people who, if the truth were acknowledged, needed help themselves!

As former Senator Pete Lee said shortly before his retirement (or perhaps just after it), legislators want to keep their jobs, and they don’t do that by making decisions that go against the wishes of people in our society like District Attorneys. The fastest and easiest way for a Legislature to lose their job, is to vote to help people such as those of you who are reading this newsletter. It isn’t because none of them care – some of them really do care. They just know that their livelihood as a legislator will go out the window IF they vote to make life easier for our men and women. It is sad but true.

That is not to say that we haven’t had some meagre victories over the years that I have been doing this work. We have. We got these victories by “sneaking up” on those who have been constantly against any positive gains we wish to make for our population. The changes that we want will NOT happen based on our openness and honesty with the legislative body, for the most part. They don’t want to lose their jobs!



“IF YOU DON'T WANT A MAN UNHAPPY POLITICALLY, DON'T GIVE HIM TWO SIDES TO A QUESTION TO WORRY HIM; GIVE HIM ONE. BETTER YET, GIVE HIM NONE. LET HIM FORGET THERE IS SUCH A THING AS WAR. IF THE GOVERNMENT IS INEFFICIENT, TOP-HEAVY, AND TAX-MAD, BETTER IT BE ALL THOSE THAN THAT PEOPLE WORRY OVER IT. PEACE, MONTAG. GIVE THE PEOPLE CONTESTS THEY WIN BY REMEMBERING THE WORDS TO MORE POPULAR SONGS OR THE NAMES OF STATE CAPITALS OR HOW MUCH CORN IOWA GREW LAST YEAR. CRAM THEM FULL OF NONCOMBUSTIBLE DATA, CHOCK THEM SO DAMNED FULL OF 'FACTS' THEY FEEL STUFFED, BUT ABSOLUTELY 'BRILLIANT' WITH INFORMATION. THEN THEY'LL FEEL THEY'RE THINKING, THEY'LL GET A SENSE OF MOTION WITHOUT MOVING. AND THEY'LL BE HAPPY, BECAUSE FACTS OF THAT SORT DON'T CHANGE.”

— RAY BRADBURY, FAHRENHEIT 451

HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES

Housing continues to be a challenge for all of us who live under the laws relating to our particular offense. It is not just the laws, however, that makes it so difficult to find housing for our population.

It really has to do more with unnecessary fear than it has to do with the real truth of the situation.

I have some first rate experience at having men and women with our offense living at my house, and while we have our ups and downs occasionally regarding a variety of issues, there has never been anything done by one of our guys (men) living here (or women as well in the past), that has brought fear to our house or our community. There have been, to be honest, a couple of scares which happened because of things being decided by the Denver City Council that people believed could increase the presence of people with our offense in their neighborhoods. The “scare” calmed down quickly when I made the truth available to our area of Denver re: the fact that in all the years we had been doing this work – i.e. housing people with our offense, there had not been one wrong deed by any of the men or women living with us.

There continue to be challenges to a “peaceful” life for our folks when they get out. There is a man who has begun an organization which basically has been able to raise money via donations from people who are “out to get” our men and women. My daughter and her significant other have a home in Southeast Denver where they house men with our offense. One of the men coming home a few weeks ago was attacked by mercenaries from this organization who came up to this man and started shining lights in his eyes and screaming at him. This, of course, re-scared the people living next to my daughter – the police were called and everything eventually calmed down. Other landlords have also joined the “housing summit” and are successfully housing men coming out of DOC!!!



Democracy is buying a big house you can't afford with money you don't have to impress people you wish were dead. And, unlike communism, democracy does not mean having just one ineffective political party; it means having two ineffective political parties. — Johnny Carson

A MAN and WOMAN OF MANY TALENTS AND, OH THE THINGS THEY CAN MAKE HAPPEN!

A man who came out of CDOC some time ago has been working in a number of different areas. One of the areas he works in is the world of food delivery – I won't mention the name of the food company which he works. This man has been kind to help out people with left-over food that could not be sold to the general public – nothing wrong with it, just past prime status. He has been gracious to offer this food to folks with whom I am familiar, who don't always have all the food they need.

Another surprise finding regarding this particular man which he just shared with me recently, is that he has purchased a couple of properties in the Southeast Denver area, which at some time in the future, will be available to assist with our overall housing needs. Since this is not my project (wish it was), I can't go into details of any kind, except to say that at sometime in the not-too-distant future, we will have the opportunity to offer housing to a good number more people than what we currently can.

If any of you have money to spend, and want to do something creative and hopefully fun when you get out, get in touch with Rene Moroe, who a number of years after she got out of prison, was able to build her own small cabin in the mountain areas not too far from Blackhawk etc. Her Mom passed away and left her some money and Rene set out to create her own home in the mountains.

At first, there were really hard jobs to do that included figuring out the lay of the land that she wanted to build on, actually doing all of the measuring necessary to meet the needs of the nearby folks in charge of building projects for the area, actually creating her own road into the property, fulfilling all of the requirements of the folks in charge of that area, meeting her water requirement needs and so on. She and her dog Rainie (I think I spelled that right) continued the work to get it all done and cozy. There is, besides the small downstairs, a loft which provides a sleeping place for guests who may want to visit and see what Rene has done.

It can be a bit scary living in that area – there are bears, mountain lions etc. that feel that Rene's home is their home as well. Rene worries a lot about Rainie, her dog, and keeps a close eye on her to try to make sure her housemate is safe in a not so always safe environment!

One of the most interesting things about this amazing work that Rene did is that she has suffered through a variety of illnesses/physical challenges before and in the midst of the work that had to be done to build this home. One of her maladies was bad knees – can you imagine digging your own lines to the house after 15 or 16 years in DOC and a number of health problems after DOC. We have all heard about heroic women, in the old west and elsewhere – here is an example of one of our own women of whom we can be incredibly proud!!!

There is an old saying that goes something like this: "Where there is a will, there is a way"!

**"A determined will, grounded on a clear order of rank of values, coupled with organic strength of outlook, will also one day - despite all hindrances - enforce its realisation in all domains."
— Alfred Rosenberg, The Myth of the Twentieth Century**

MY STORY – FROM THE HEART JAMES MORREL

I was incarcerated in August 2002 for sexual assault on a child under 15, position of trust. In October 2021, I was blessed to be accepted to SOTMP, 19 years after incarceration and seven years after my PED/parole eligibility date.

My name is James Morrel. I survived CDOC and SOTMP. In August 2022, I was at AVCF participating in the Maintenance Group. After being full boarded by the Parole Board in May 2022, I was waiting for their decision. At the very end of August, I was moved to FCF on a Monday as there was no longer an active SOTMP Program at AVCF. The next day I was informed that I had been paroled. On September 14th, I graduated from “Incarceration to Parole!!!”

Twenty years in prison. That’s a very long time to wait for CDOC to help me out; I hate to be the bearer of bad news...CDOC will do nothing to get you out of prison. It is totally on your shoulders. After I realized this fact (in my reality) I began a journey to get ready for parole and do what was necessary to do to better myself and improve my situation. Here are some of the topics I chose to address: 1) build a support system; 2) identify my personal shortcomings and issues; 3) change my attitude; 4) learn to be accountable and to allow others to hold me accountable; stay out of trouble; and 5) construct a solid, viable parole plan.

I was a loner and secretive before incarceration. No friends, no close family, ostracized and abandoned, by MY own doing. I took a chance and made some friends in prison. Being a person who has committed a sexual assault crime, SOMB, SOTMP, and Parole expected me to have a sponsor and community support...I had none. At the suggestion of one of my new found friends, I began to write as many letters as I possibly could to people who would become possible contacts and resources. One day I received a compassionate, honest response that shared the ‘real deal’ of what I would be facing. Essentially, I received a letter from an angel. (We’ll talk more about angels later). I learned that every single person with whom I made contact became either a sponsor, support, resource, and/or contact. All of these were potentially valuable for parole. I found it was important to keep records of everyone you contact.

The most important task I undertook was to honestly look at my issues, insecurities, faults, negatives, and positives. To accomplish this, I asked friends, family, myself, and anyone I trusted to be honest with me. I must admit...I had a lot of work ahead of me. I found that I had some positives to enhance and improve. I read almost four hundred books. The topics ranged from self-help to educational topics I found interesting, offense specific issues, and some recreational readings. I found that I enjoyed the classics. I read as many books as possible. I documented each. I participated in behavioral health groups and classes. I read as many books as possible. Each was documented as I read them. I participated in Behavioral Health Groups and Classes. The ones I found beneficial were Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), Moral Reconciliation Therapy (MRT), and Prosocial Leadership Skills (PLS). I also learned the laws governing my sentence. SOLSA is the 1998 Sex Offender Lifetime Supervision Act. I obtained a copy of the SOMB (Sex Offender Management Board) Standards and Guidelines, and the CDOC AR’s. I found that knowledge is power, and when I felt I needed to address an issue I had a better understanding of what the rules are and whether I understood them. Unfortunately, most times I didn’t. When asking for a critique, I found and you may also find that people will be brutally honest. Sometimes they will be “hurtfully so”. I was cautioned not to over-personalize. I needed to learn not to be upset at the questions, and not to get upset at peoples’ responses to what I asked. When asking for a critique, people are frequently brutally honest. Sometimes honesty hurts! I know what my issues are, and many of those around me are aware of them as well! I created allies to help me address all of the issues I could. I am still working on improving the negatives and accentuating the positives.

It became clear that I had to change my attitude – after all, I was not and am not the victim here. No one including the State, the D.A., the judge, arresting police officer and detective and/or roommate put me in prison. I accomplished morphing my attitude by taking responsibility for my situation. I now understand that I committed a crime – the victims did not. I put myself in prison, not the system or anyone else. I alone am responsible (answerable for something within one’s power) for improvement and for getting myself paroled. Disclaimer time: I fully understand that not everyone convicted of a sexual offense is 100% guilty. Learning how to navigate this situation takes special skills and help – those are skills I do not have. To facilitate my attitude changes, I found that I needed to be held accountable and more importantly to allow others to hold me accountable. It takes practice to accept criticism as constructive and educational. Some people are good at offering criticism with respect and concern. I had to practice til both responsibility for my actions and accountability became second nature. I am not perfect at it yet!

It is important to stay out of trouble. This is easier said than done in a prison setting. In SOTMP treatment, criminological behavior (doing something against the law OR against good, common sense) is a major concern seriously scored on your SOTIPS evaluation. I found I had many temptations and opportunities to find trouble. To be honest, I did succumb to some temptations. I realized that I had to do my best to not participate in situations that would extend my stay in prison. I found friends and acquaintances who were like minded. I attempted to be respectful and non-judgmental. I did my time. I controlled who I let into my space. It was perfectly acceptable to establish boundaries. Those who respect me will honor my boundaries.

The most important document I wrote was to the Parole Board – an opportunity to present my parole worthiness. I highlighted attitude change, education, the books I read, employment and groups attended. I provided an extensive list of sponsor, supporters, resources and contacts. I was blessed with housing. I took full responsibility for thoughts, behaviors, and actions that led to my offense. I demonstrated empathy and victim impact. I was positive and accentuated accomplishments and possibilities. I explained my plan to create the best, safest, and most healthy life I could. I obtained as much documentation as possible to support my claims. My parole packet included several pages more than the single page provided. And I prayed!

Earlier I spoke of angels. Hashem (God) has put several angels in my life. The angel who has written to me was Susan Walker. Ms. Walker took the time to educate, listen, provide honest information, as well as a viable path to parole. She ended every letter with a blessing and told me to be safe and to stay out of trouble. Her belief in me transferred to me believing in me. She once told me I had a long road ahead of me and obstacles “the size of elephants” – my paraphrase!! She shared that the best way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time. So true!! I soon realized that I am not my crime. I am James Andrew Morrell Jr., and I am worthy of friend, love, respect, and a life worth living. Ms. Walker gave me that gift and I will be forever grateful. Perseverance is a major piece of “graduating” from CDOC!!!

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