

From the Editors

This is the first new issue of EuroVista to be freely available online. As anticipated in earlier editorials, from now on whole issues and/or individual articles may be downloaded without charge from the *EuroVista* website (<http://www.euro-vista.org/>). This includes those back issues that before only were available on the website behind a paywall. We are grateful to the CEP, that has made this possible. The main reason for this change is to make the journal more easily accessible and therefore, we hope and expect, much more widely read. Do please tell all your friends and colleagues the good news!

And what a start we have for this new formula! This issue has been compiled and edited by a member of our Editorial Board, Dr Beth Weaver, University of Strathclyde, Scotland. As she writes in her introduction, we believe this to be the first journal ever to devote an entire issue to contributions made by people who have desisted from offending, some of whom may indeed describe themselves as in a continuing process of desistance.

People who have committed crimes have usually been treated as subjects of research and sometimes even as its objects, but their own voice has not often been easy to hear. This issue, by contrast, includes writings by people from a large number of countries who set out a diverse range of accounts of and reflections on their own experiences. About the only thing they all have in common is that they have been convicted of offences and are now or have been on a journey towards ways of living in which offending has no place. As these papers eloquently demonstrate, people move away from crime by finding motives and purposes and by drawing on their personal qualities and talents. Our contributors are much more than ex-offenders and, like anybody else, should not for all time be defined in terms of past actions that they are trying to put behind them.

When Dr. Weaver first approached us with the idea for this issue, we were very excited. What she has achieved in bringing this collection together has exceeded all our expectations. In her own Introduction, she thanks the many people who have made this possible, but it is our privilege to offer our warm thanks to her. It was she who had the original idea, many of the contacts, the commitment and the skill to make it all happen. We as editors, and indeed all involved in *EuroVista* are proud to be associated with this project.

Rob Canton

Gerhard Ploeg

THE REALITIES OF CRIME, PUNISHMENT AND DESISTANCE: FIRST HAND PERSPECTIVES

Beth Weaver, School of Applied Social Sciences, University of Strathclyde

Introduction

This is the first open access issue of *EuroVista* and the first European academic and professional journal in which those persons who are more often than not the *subject* of academic study and professional practice are themselves the *principal contributors* to this special issue. It is something of a coincidence that the open accessibility of this journal occurs at this time but it is also fortuitous because it is hoped that the content of these stories will resonate with a wider readership than academic and professional journals characteristically do. Indeed, we hope that while this issue will be of interest to academics, policy-makers and penal practitioners, these narratives might also be used as a focus of discussion between teachers and students and between practitioners and service users as well as engender public interest in and deliberation on the issues and insights the authors illuminate.

The principal focus of this special issue is on the realities of crime, punishment and desistance articulated from the experiential perspective of 38 different people from diverse social, geographical and cultural perspectives. To set the scene for what follows, this preface to these contributions provides a brief overview of the existing empirical and theoretical context prior to elaborating the rationale underpinning this special issue and the methods through which it came together.

Empirical and theoretical context

While the term ‘desistance’ refers to cessation of offending, studies of desistance focus on the process by which people come to cease offending behaviour and sustain that cessation of offending behaviour. Explanations as to how and why people give up crime variously emphasise the significance of advancing age and maturation; life transitions and the social relations and structural enablements associated with them (i.e. in terms of the influence of shifting social relationships or participation in employment); changing motivations and subjective perceptions of the self and others and concomitant changes in personal and social

identity. However, there is considerable disagreement about the relative contributions of these different internal, interpersonal and external factors in the desistance process with different theories proposing that one or other is of particular significance – often at a given time, or in a given situation. Other desistance studies have sought to identify the temporal sequence through which changes at the level of personal cognition or self-identity and self-concept occur, and how they might precede or coincide with changes in social bonds (LeBel *et al.* 2008). Moreover, when the nuances of different people's life stories or personal narratives are elaborated, the common elements of the desistance process can be very differently experienced and constituted, depending on the socio-structural, cultural and spiritual positions that people occupy and move through as they negotiate their personal and social lives. Nonetheless, notwithstanding differences in experiences within and across the diverse populations of people who desist, and differences in the breadth, depth, emphasis and scope of empirical enquiries and theoretical explanations of desistance, it is generally acknowledged that the process of desistance is an outcome of an interaction between individual choices, social relations and wider structural and societal processes and practices.

Uggen *et al.* (2004), for example, show how age-graded role transitions across socio-economic, familial and civic domains relate to identity shifts over the life course. However, the reduced citizenship status and the enduring stigma and discrimination (both interpersonal and institutional) that people experience as a consequence of their involvement in the criminal justice system, means that their rights, capacities and opportunities to fully participate in these domains are greatly reduced. These status deficits can undermine people's commitment to conformity and create new obstacles to desistance, social integration and the assumption of pro-social roles. Among other effects, these obstacles represent a major problem because of the important role of social recognition (or lack thereof) (Barry 2006) or societal reaction in supporting (or undermining) new self-conceptions and the reinforcement of pro-social identities (Maruna and Farrall 2004). While, on the one hand, recognising and engaging positively and respectfully with people's individual life experiences or personal narratives is important, it is equally important that we acknowledge and challenge the myriad forms of oppression that devalue certain identities and lifestyles while overvaluing others.

Rationale

The voice of the people with convictions - or at least data from people with convictions - has been integral to desistance research, less so in the strand of it that derives from “criminal careers research” (heavily influenced by rational choice theory), more so in the strand influenced by narrative theory, which requires detailed attention to people’s life experiences. More commonly, however, their words are fragmented, lifted out of context, and trimmed to support particular criminological theories or policy initiatives in ways that undermine the idea of taking their perspectives seriously, of understanding or respecting the person who lives the life and speaks the words.

The relative neglect of properly rounded ‘[ex]offender’ perspectives in the desistance literature is not only disappointing but somewhat unexpected. Indeed, narrative, life (hi)story or (auto)biographical method has had a respected place in criminology, particularly in the USA (Bennet 1981), with whole books being based around one person’s account of their involvement in crime (see for example *The Jack Roller* by Clifford Shaw (1930); *The Professional Thief* by Edwin Sutherland (1937); and Klockar (1974) *The Professional Fence*), some of which were studies of desistance *avant la lettre*. Despite the belated discovery of (auto)biographical method by British sociologists of deviance in the 1970s, the more widely read accounts of offenders’ lives by Tony Parker (Soothill 1999), and some influential prisoner autobiographies (McVicar 1974; Boyle 1977), such literature has since become more marginal in criminology. This mostly reflects its perceived lack of fit with the conventions of scientific method, the belief that because individual subjective accounts lack validity, reliability and generalisability they have nothing of comparable worth to recommend them to academics and policy-makers (Stake 1978; Goodey 2000; Maruna and Matravers 2007). However, the institutional dismissal of this literature may reflect something altogether different, and although there is a long tradition of “prisoner autobiographies” contributing to debate on penal reform (Nellis 2012), Garland (1992:419 cited in Morgan 1999:329), is right to suggest that offenders’ voices have also been subordinated in the ‘criminological monologue’, not so much for what they lack methodologically, but because of their potential threat to expert (or even common-sense) discourses:

‘ ... if only they were allowed to speak [offenders] might challenge some of the certainties with which we divide the world into normal and abnormal, right and wrong’ (Garland 1992:419).

The silencing, dismissal and marginalization or conversely amplification, prioritization and valorization of voices based on social location or identity is not a phenomenon peculiar to criminology. Issues surrounding voice, legitimacy, authority, authenticity, representativeness and interpretation have long been discussed - not least in the context of identity politics wherein 'the problem of speaking for others' (Alcoff 1991) and, relatedly, the complexity of what it means to speak for oneself, or even for 'us' – from within a group - is the subject of considerable debate (see for example Alcoff 1991).

In this collection of first-hand accounts we are not prioritising or valorising one voice or 'group' of voices over another as a means of shedding light on the realities of desistance (see relatedly Weaver and Weaver 2013), nor is our concern with issues of generalisability or with who is speaking for whom. Rather, our intention is to create a context or space in which speaking and being heard are made available to those whose voices continue to occupy a marginal place in academic and professional spaces and, in so doing, to create the kinds of conditions that make listening possible (Alcoff 1991). So, in taking [ex]offender perspectives seriously, as an outcome of our desire to better understand the person who lives the life and speaks the words, this special issue of *EuroVista* presents the narratives of 38 men and women from around the world whose linking feature and narrative focus is their experience of crime, punishment and desistance.

Method

Through our professional and personal networks (see acknowledgements), we solicited contributions from people who are either in the process of desisting and/or who have desisted, to recount their experience of giving up crime in their own words and style. We had no specific pre-existing criteria for our contributors who include men and women of different ages from Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, England, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Scotland, Slovakia, Spain, the USA and Wales. There are distinct variations in literary style, narrative voice and structural form across the accounts; some accounts have been translated into English, others have been written in English as a second language, others have been co-authored and produced as a biography after an in-depth conversation with the original contributor or produced and presented as an interview. Some contributors have written from prison or from the perspective of community supervision while others reflect on a journey that began many years ago. What they all share is a desire to tell their story in their own words. It was our desire to listen to their stories in whatever way

they wanted to tell them that both provided the impetus and guided us in putting this special issue together.

We had no pre-existing sense of what people's accounts should contain and as the stories speak for themselves (even if their impact may have wider effects) we also make no effort to impose or assume any sort of thematic or theoretical connection between them such that would indicate any degree of order or intentional sequencing of accounts in this issue. Indeed, the myriad of similarities and differences that unite and distinguish the narratives in this collection defy the imposition of a prescribed route through them. Nor do we seek to analytically refract them through the lens of our social location and all that that implies. However, at the conclusion of this issue, I reflect on the effects and impacts these stories have had on me and the meanings they hold for me as a listener. After all, it is in the act of speaking and in the art of listening that meaning is co-created in terms of 'what is emphasised, noticed and how it is understood' which will be differently experienced by each of us, affected as it is by the location of both speaker and hearer (Alcoff 1991:12-13).

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JUDGEMENT ROOM

Steven Duncan: Bristol, England

You don't really know me...see you only really know what you hear, read and believe you see. But what you know about me...don't define me, so you don't...really know me.

My past is not a reflection of my presence in essence I exist in spiritual consistency...which has to be felt and not seen to be perceived properly, so if you are looking at me through the perception of your eyes then you won't really see me. All flesh just festers in illusion and perfection comes alive at the point of death. And that's not my experiences, that's just my fantasy, my hope, my theory. My guess for the best of the rest of life expectancy. So if you really wanna try me, I say step into my Judgement Room.

Welcome to this Judgement where there's barely room for two. But just leave your ego and your pride outside and allow the commonality of your mind to slide in. Just glide in and gleefully spare some time and take a seat for me and make yourselves at home, but be prepared to become as un-relaxed and uncomfortable as possible as we get philosophical about what it really means to be a human being living with iniquity.

So first let me apologise for my inadequacies, my insularity, the informality of an invitation to this unfurnished property 'cos' you'll see there's no mirrors on the wall so you're bound to fall short of your own reflection. So as a gesture to your guest, I'll objectively give you the opportunity to start with me, or better still, take the liberty of illuminating every nook and cranny, all the shit, the nitty gritty that life's given me and, if at the end, empathy still defies you...then you can throw your ten pence worth in as a tip for my hospitality and I'll say 'Welcome to the Judgement Room'.

You can judge me by the pigmentation of my skin but that was God given, driven down through my ancestors into my next of kin. So I say let's start again and I say 'Welcome to this Judgement Room'.

So you can judge me by my personality but the reality is...none of us are infallible. My morality is breakable and interchangeable dependent upon my circumstances and who I'm trying to impress. 'Cos' sometimes we dress up our best! So don't judge me by my clothes 'cos' I didn't make 'em. Whilst they might speak for my hygiene, they're really just a front to cover me, tailor made to suit my liabilities. 'Cos' I'm not brave enough to show you my balls. See my mouth's really big but my courage is comparatively small. We're all able and capable of wearing disguises. What I'm really trying to say is in the naked sense of this world, vulnerability is not a designer label.

You can judge me by my speech, my character, swagger, way that I walk but more fool you 'cos' even parrots can talk. So I'll never tell you to walk a mile in my shoes. I'll just say 'Welcome to the Judgement Room'. Welcome to my history, the struggle, the difficulty to find my rightful place in society! Welcome to the fundamental injustice that makes it impossible for a guy like me to gain employability. The convictions that have outcast me. This blackness that continues to darken my serenity.

Welcome to the ignorance of those in a professional capacity. All the voices of hierarchy that cry for change yet remain estranged to the concept and they say how and when will this great war be won and I say not until, not until we begin to rethink the bill. The constitution of this institution or trial and retribution. Not until we begin to refine and redefine the definition of desistance. The long arm of the law that won't let go. The rehabilitation of an offender that goes on forever. The disclosure of a closed chapter that imposes limitations on my future. But my life's worth more than a label on a piece of paper. Society keeps sticking this stigma on my assessments. This unsatisfactory CRB¹ can't rehabilitate back from this barbaric mentality that keeps me prisoner to my past. See I'm free from the jails but I still see the bars. Intelligence, surveillance, babysat in supervision. Forced on to courses to bring about an action of remorse when it has to come of my own accord. Its then multiplied and magnified by the self-fulfilling prophecy of the labels you bestow on me. Junkie, Ex-offender, Service user, Thief! 'Cos' I don't care how many text books you read or degrees you receive. I'm telling you we are what we believe and we don't need academics to tell our story! Neither does our self pity need sympathy. We welcome the treatment programmes and the therapy. What I really need is the chance to become an acceptable, responsible, productive member of

¹ CRB refers to a criminal records check undertaken by prospective employers in the UK

my community. A voice that can be heard. A voice that can speak for its own self. The guilt, the shame, the remorse, it's made me feel worthless. Surely my solution lies behind re-evaluated self-esteem and re-directed purpose. I'll grow when I'm ready! Just help me plant the seed, 'cos' hope is the drug that every offender needs. A new identity indentation. A source of inspiration! So show me examples of the people that succeeded, so I too can believe that I'm valued and needed.

Like a soldier with vigorous valour to confront this war. The elders taught me I had to find a cause worth dying for. So now I've found a calling connected to a cause, a cause that uses metaphor to expose the flaws in our criminal injustice system.

I'm motivated and driven to have my karma reversed and my judgement forgiven. To preserve with self-worth and observe and wonder why I've been preserved! There's only one reason a guy like me survives. It must be to touch the hearts of those who still feel doomed. I'm trying to pay my dues and I say 'Welcome to my Judgement Room'.

A SENSE OF MEANING

Rein Gerritsen: The Netherlands

After I left prison for the last time in November 1987, I felt devastated, deeply in shock, without exactly knowing what caused this sense of devastation. It just felt horrible as if I had lost all sense of meaning. Nothing made sense anymore. What was the purpose of a ‘traffic light’ again? I couldn’t tell, so pretty soon after my release I was hit by a car, because I was ‘jay-walking’ (an equally meaningless concept). Why were all these people moving and running around on the streets? That didn’t make sense. Didn’t they know that you have to create as little fuss as possible and be as inconspicuous as you can be? Why did my girlfriend insist on me talking to her? Didn’t she know that talking was a sign of weakness? And why was my probation officer creating such a stir, trying to hammer it into my head that the appointment date ‘next Tuesday, 14.00 o’clock sharp’ was of the utmost importance. I could tell, with some effort to think clearly, that this particular time meant something special for her, but to me it was just all *flatus vocis*². Time had stopped making sense after two-and-a-half years in prison, among them one year in mental hospital and three months of solitary confinement. I was used to living from one event to the next, such as getting the next meal or next whiff of fresh air. But who was I?

Gradually, after several months had passed, it dawned upon me that my turmoil must have had something to do with the feeling that ‘the normal world’ I had re-entered was not, by any means, as common as I previously conceived it to be when I was still a youngster. What had happened to the world as I used to know it?

Sensible questions perhaps, but then I stopped thinking about these matters. I neither had the time, nor the means or the opportunity to give these questions the time they deserved in answering.

Twenty-five years later. I’m – it’s safe to say so, I think, - a respectable philosopher of science, specialised in 19th century physics and classical American pragmatism. Moreover,

² Meaning ‘the breath of voice’ – it was just words with no real meaning (Ed comment)

I'm blessed with two lovely children (a boy age six and a daughter age four) and we find ourselves in the presence of a loving wife and caring mother. Besides that I love playing guitar, I collect Gibson guitars and I dabble in the history of evolution theory. For a living I write books, translate books, give lectures, organise seminars and I have the occasional odd job on the side, such as working as a postman.

Until fairly recently I never dreamt of giving the subject matter of prisons and my role as an ex-convict a second glance after my final release from prison. I considered it for the best not to talk about it and gave the matter no further thought. Life after prison went on, and somehow I managed to stay out of jail, and I took my academic degrees, but I couldn't even explicate to myself how I accomplished this feat. To me, Wittgenstein hit the nail right on the spot when he wrote: 'The solution of the problem of life is seen in the vanishing of this problem. (Is not this the reason why men to whom after long doubting the sense of life became clear, could not then say wherein this sense consisted?)' And the same observation held true for 'the problem of life in prison', as far as I was concerned. Indeed, I didn't even realise how extraordinary my achievement really was: an ex-convict with no record of recidivism? That is a scarce commodity in the Netherlands, so I learned. But an ex-convict with academic degrees? You must be pulling my leg! 'There must be a handful of those, but they are either doing time again or they are dead, and now we have a real live one in the flesh?' At least, that is what a lot of people told me after I made my appearance on national television, soon after I published my book on William James in 2004.

But some five to six years ago another event triggered me to spend a lot of my thinking time on the problems of prison, its relation to criminal law, the legitimating of the state, and the public opinion about criminality. What happened was that a colleague of mine asked me if I was willing to sign a petition on behalf of the Dutch nurse Lucia de Berk. This woman was sentenced to life imprisonment for the alleged murder of seven infants and the alleged attempted murder of three other children in the hospital she was working. A meticulous study of her case file by my colleague and, in particular, the way the court treated empirical data that could be read as exculpatory evidence, showed that she couldn't have committed these murders. (In fact, there were no instances of murders to begin with, save the sad fact that

terminally sick children do die). So, together with 499 other scientists, among them a Nobel Prize laureate, I signed the petition demanding a re-opening of her case.³

All of a sudden it became clear to me that one can apply the analytical tools of the philosophy of science to the pressing problems of criminal justice, and what this showed – rather shockingly – is that our criminal courts and even our Supreme Judges haven't the foggiest idea how to interpret the data of the (experimental) empirical sciences. What is worse, most of them don't even care.⁴ And further studies of the particulars of other life long sentences in the Netherlands revealed that in a dark number of cases the conviction was 'unsafe', not 'sound' by any standard of argumentation. We have baptised these kinds of studies, henceforth, as 'forensic philosophy'.

On a more personal level the case of Lucia de Berk aroused uncanny feelings. I started thinking: well, I know how it feels to be behind prison bars for several years as someone who was found guilty of an armed bank robbery, the illegal possession of fire arms, fencing and car theft,⁵ but I can't even start to imagine how prison life must feel for someone who is doing time, in the full awareness that she is innocent. The words 'hell on earth' don't even remotely describe the torment they must be going through. And what is more, their ordeal doesn't end there. I see this in the case of Lucia. Although she is fully rehabilitated and exonerated by the Supreme Court, her stay in prison has taken its toll (she suffered from a stroke, shortly before her release, without getting proper medical treatment) and, according to the public opinion, 'where there is smoke, there has to be a fire'. So a lot of people, among them expert witnesses, still see and treat her as 'the Angel of Death', as she was nick-named. It is impossible for her to live a normal life, as if, by the power of some unwritten rule, the punishment still continues.

Becoming increasingly aware of some striking similarities between the case of Lucia and my own - her description of her life in prison and the social pressure afterwards – I started out

³ <http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/lucia/>. This unfortunate woman was finally released from prison in 2010, thanks to the efforts of the stubborn philosopher of science Ton Derksen.

⁴ Compare this, for instance, with the role that empirical data played in the criminal justice system in the United States in the transition period from 1972 to 1975 (i.e., the *Brown v. Board of Education* case/*Furman v. Georgia* and the final result in the *Gregg v. Georgia* case).

⁵ As a first-offender, I was sentenced to six years imprisonment for these felonies, but in 1986 I received a partial pardon from the Queen.

reading everything I could lay my hands upon if only it had something to do with criminal law, criminology and punishment. Gradually I came to agree with Craig Haney when he wrote in *Reforming Punishment*: 'Most prisoners must negotiate the tensions between their pre-prison identity, the person who they appear to be in prison, and, finally, the one they actually become. Many are unable to successfully manage these profoundly complicated identity shifts' (2006: 170). To wit, Wittgenstein was at least partially wrong when he said, in general, that the problems of life simply vanish. Perhaps it does for certain people, but not for others, not for those who, like myself, know how profoundly a stay in prison can change their character, their perceptions of themselves and their worldview. And perhaps Wittgenstein was right if he meant that the riddle of life knows no rational solution, but then, it would still be possible to give a qualitative account of certain key events. And besides that, by now I think that the solution to the problem of life (in prison) is certainly not an individualistic or solipsistic affair. There is more at stake. I may think, as I have done, that there is no need for a re-negotiation between the shifts in identity I experienced, and I may be even unaware of the tensions underlying these shifts, but my wife thinks otherwise. She knows how to interpret the subtle changes in my posture (the rise of the hairs in my neck) as I watch the news and hear some meatball talking a lot of gibberish about conditions in Dutch prisons; she is accurately aware of the habit I acquired in prison of smoking my cigarettes only for a third part and hide the rest of the fags in my clothes and on my body. She also knows that I have the inveterate habit of, when somebody touches me suddenly, 'strike first, then ask'. Somehow, life in prison settled down in my marrow.

So I decided on writing a book about my pre-prison identity as a kind of therapeutic exercise in the style of a non-fiction novel. *Knock-out*, which appeared in 2009, is in fact a book about how I, the prodigal son of a very affluent mother, ended up in prison. This book was not intended as an attempt to justify my wrongdoings in the past, far from it, but was merely a testimony that under certain conditions, such as the sudden violent death of people you love, it is possible to change, almost over-night, from a law-abiding citizen into a callous, morally degenerated fighting machine.

I will not write about my time in prison and about the person I was in that environment. It makes no sense to do so, because the time I spent in prison is, at best, fuzzy in my recollection, and, at worst, a total blur in my memory without so much as an understandable chronology, thanks to a psychosis I underwent when staying behind bars. Only some mental

pictures stand out more clearly. To be more precise, as soon as I cling to such a picture, get a grasp of it, it seems as if I'm getting sucked into the mayhem of the situation again, and before long, all memories blend into a big, buzzing, blooming confusion. There is one thing I can tell for sure about 'doing time', and that is, to paraphrase the delicious Oscar Wilde, 'there is one thing worse than a long-stretched period of solitary confinement, and that is the company of prison guards.'⁶

My next book *13 Accidents*, published in the autumn of 2012, contains the story about the struggle between the person who I was and the person whom I wanted to be.

Shortly after I took my final exams and graduated from university in 1993, I learned the hard way that employers are not that keen to employ someone with a criminal record. Even in my own field of expertise it was impossible to obtain a teaching job at the university and neither could I enrol for a PhD student position, though I earlier received a research grant and had worked for four years as an assistant Philosophy of Language and Philosophy of Science. Never mind, I thought, I will make ends meet. I took a job as a construction worker, then as a truck driver, as a butcher, as an orderly in hospital. I cleaned up industrial waste in Germany, and, finally, I ended up as a printer. In the meantime I kept publishing articles on the history of physics in several Dutch newspapers and magazines.

And now, with hindsight, I see that I made two related mistakes. First, thanks to my earlier unwillingness to take the problem of life in prison and what happened afterwards seriously, I overlooked that fact that all ex-convicts are confronted, sooner or later, with the problem of 'civil death'. For instance, shortly after my arrest, all my possessions, notably my bike, were confiscated by the state without a release of liability for the instalments I still had to pay and without giving me the opportunity to settle these debts, because 'dead' men, i.e., prisoners, are disqualified from conducting business affairs. So after my release I had considerable, even huge debts, consisting in court costs, fees, fines, tax deficiencies, the rent on the instalments, paybacks on my study financing, and so on. And like so many ex-convicts, I never opened my mail. The problem grew bigger and bigger. And the visits of bailiffs grew more frequent, if they knew about my whereabouts.

⁶ I have been told, and I have no reason to doubt the sincerity of the person who told me, that the conditions in prison are much better these days than they were before. That person, notably a former prison warden himself, also knows that there are no two prisons alike, and that even a seemingly unambiguous concept like 'solitary confinement' means something quite different from this prison to the next.

The second mistake I made was that I, in an attempt to even the score, took up a second job as a bouncer and bodyguard, next to my day job as a printer or construction worker. I did this for twelve years. And though the money was good, I didn't notice that I immersed myself in violent surroundings again. I had become an addict to the pain game, to a great extent impervious to the physical and mental injuries I inflicted upon others and myself. At a certain point I noticed that I was hitting the bottle on Tuesday evening in anticipation on what would happen on Friday evening, not so much because I was fearful of the situation ahead but because the whole caboodle filled with me a deep disgust. This was plainly absurd, the more so because I didn't like booze (at that time). This wasn't the person I wanted to be: a standoffish character, bad to the bone, sporadically extremely violent, overwhelmed by meaning-blindness, and without so much as a scruffy dog to keep him company. This, too, wasn't the guy I had known before I was caught up in criminal activities: this chap, though a bit naïve was a likeable fellow, a kind of mellow-yellow, not particularly a good son, but surely a good friend and brother, and bequeathed with a great sense of justice. But what had happened to my sense of justice? Did I still believe in William James's words: 'The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it'? I couldn't tell, but I gazed into the abyss and the abyss stared back at me. A sense of horror vacui made me shiver. All of a sudden I knew what Edvard Munch's *Scream* was all about.

On the same day I decided to quit my job as a bouncer, it happened to coincide with my fortieth birthday. I put a gun into my mouth. A slight squeeze of the trigger and it all would be over, just another life bereft of meaning down the drain. A strange thing happened. I got an erection. How peculiar. In spite of the wishes of its rightful owner, my body, apparently, followed its own logic. Could it perchance be, I started wondering, that the act of taking my own life, is not so much directed against my own existence as such, but against the morphology of the life I'm living now? But I can have as many as thousands of different possible morphologies, as I had learned from reading Herman Hesse and Charles Bukowski. So, why not work at building a new life? Why not work on restoring that sense of justice I felt when I was much younger, but this time without the boyish naiveté that accompanied it then? It is true, I didn't have the faith anymore, as I used to have, in a criminal justice system that sends people to prison for punishment, not as punishment, but this condition, at least, aroused the spark of moral indignation. And that's a good starting point. And if I didn't succeed, I could always kill myself later, because a life without meaning is not a life worth living.

To do so required the labour of going through a process of mourning therapy. I had to make sense of the deaths of my mother, my brother and lots of guys – my unnamed friends – that belonged to the criminal family I used to be part of. A sense of survival guilt also played a significant role: they were all dead and I was the sole survivor. Why me? I should have died back then, in that car, together with my mother and brother.

Mourning therapy was the most horrific of times I had ever experienced. The therapy made me realise that, for the better part of my life, I had longed for death, always playing with fire, completely indifferent to what would happen to me. Gloomy periods, depressions, bordering on the brink of a psychosis again and violent outbursts slowly made way for the genuine feelings that lied beneath the masquerade of the bogeyman. Anger? Yes, but a sense of loss too. Grief? Yes, but also a real acknowledgement of who those people were. And a host of other feelings came to the surface, finally leading up to the simple assessment: 'it's okay'. We, the dead people and I, have made up and settled our differences. Now, how about my relation with the still living people?

Shortly afterwards I met my present wife.

So, if someone was to ask me: 'Did you desist from crime?' I honestly had to answer him or her: 'You tell me, please.' I never undertook any serious effort on my part to refrain from crime, though the exertion of getting some mourning therapy indirectly resulted in staying away from potentially dangerous situations. But to me, my former engagement in criminal activities had not so much to do with personal enrichment or, for that matter, with just staying alive, as with a deep-seated death wish, a lack of meaning, a loss of transcendence. Since I have regained that feeling of making sense, I have no need, and neither the gusto, for living a life of crime. The credit for actively desisting from crime, of the effort to maintain the process of 'going legit', must be duly awarded to those people who, in spite of the hardships they face, keep on the straight track, in the full knowledge that they have to pay the piper. Their abstinence from crime comes at a steep prize, i.e. the loss of friends who didn't succeed, the mistrust they'll meet, stigmatization, starting out with less than zero, and so forth. Hence, I can't but feel the deepest respect for an ex-addict who desists.

A note of warning is in its place here, too. First, I mistrust the picture of the sinner-turning-saint, as if it were necessary to live a life full of hideous crimes first to become a truly remarkable and noteworthy holy man. Such a relation of necessity can't be established, since outside the realm of logic and maths, all is contingent. Life itself is a raw string of contingencies, interspersed with flashes of meaningful events by our own doings. Thus, though I can understand the need of 'saints' to rationalise their shifts in identity, to make sense of their former selves, one does best not to take such a rationalization too seriously. It is really offending to the run-of-the-mill kind of guy who deals with the contingencies of life in his own way, without ever breaking the law. Moreover, the image of the sinner-turning-saint presupposes a criterion, tainted by blasphemy, for distinguishing between 'this life is more meaningful than that'. Only God knows. And then we are faced with a perhaps unanswerable question. If one reads Augustine's *Confessions* and *Civitate Dei*, for instance, then one may ask: did he create more havoc and do more harm in his former life as an offender than in his later life as a church father?

Secondly, and philosophically more important, and then I'll end this discussion though there is, of course, much more to say about the subject. Desistance from crime is a good thing, I trust, though not necessarily so, because it is, in more than one significant way, dependent upon the matter of civil disobedience versus uncivil obedience. Is it a good thing to abstain from crime – taken as something punishable by criminal law – when, by that same token, that law itself is morally repugnant? And this discussion, of course, is closely related to 'the rage to punish' that has overtaken, so it seems to be, all clear thought in our civilised societies. After all, if desistance is taken to mean 'being well-adapted to the legal constraints that society imposes on its citizens', then what does desistance boil down to in a society that has gone astray? It would turn 'desistance' into a matter of mere convention, and I think there is more to it than that.

OLGA: (RUSSIA)⁷

I was born in 1953 in the town. My parents had a higher education. Dad taught at the university. My Mum was a chemist-analyst but she committed suicide when I was seven years old. Before that my Mum and Dad got divorced, but I do not think divorce was a reason for that, because for a long time they hid this from me. That is to say, I found out about it when I was probably in Year 9.

I was in Year 1 when my Mum was still alive and we lived with her grandma, but my Dad lived with his parents. I was about 13-14 years old when we started to live together - me, step-mother, father and granddad with grandma. But my step-mother is such a hard person; the more time passes the more I do not love her. All the girls try on dresses, you know? My [step]Mother's dresses. And I remember, that I tried some on, and she got so furious, and she said to me: "Don't you dare to touch my things, you are disgusting!" So many years passed by, but there are things which until now... I cannot even recollect calmly because when you rewind the film you start to understand a lot in life, you know?! I'm old now but it is still so painful. Isn't that strange? Though it shouldn't be like that by now. Painful.

You know, all this was simply accumulating in me ... I felt so bad at home. Though, probably from the outside everything seemed normal. Yes, they controlled me no end, and rummaged through my diaries. Yes I kept them. In Year 9, my first love turned up. We kissed on the staircase. Father was looking for me. I came home and received a slap in the face, although nobody ever touched me, for me this slap was well-deserved. I understand that they were worried sick over me there although at that time you do not realize that. Most likely it was a spur to run away from my step-mother. So I left. Then my father wired to my grandma and grandma brought me back. Mum's grandma. So they started then to control me so tightly. You know, the more they control, the more you want to do things.

School Years

I don't know why I wasn't interested in studies. That is to say I was only interested in maths; with maths everything was alright. And literature, but with literature what? If I managed to

⁷ She has served 14 prison sentences for thefts (pick pocketing).

read something before we started to study it at school, then I've read it. All my life I still read avidly and very good literature too but I read nothing from the school syllabus. Then, everything had to be considered from the point of view of the proletariat's victory. Absurd! Nobody could push me to enter the Komsomol⁸. Everybody was in Komsomol. I couldn't explain to myself "why I wasn't" it was just "no and that is that". I don't know why. I really enjoyed being a Pioneer. I liked to collect papers for recycling etc. But all children like things like this. The Komsomol was different. I felt it was something false. My father said to me: "You are crazy, you need to enter the university". You see you are put on the blacklist if you are not the member of the Komsomol. Afterwards, unpleasant things started to happen to me. You know the feeling when you are kind of at home but feel homeless? Do you feel the same? Yes?

Escapes

I was about 16 or 17 when I started to run away from home. Why was I expelled from school? Well I failed my PE, then I did something else – I cannot remember what. Finally, a couple of times I brought to my school a magazine CINEMODE. I took it from my father's library and there were topless photos in it – hard porn for those times. Boys took photos of them and started to sell them around – it was the beginnings of a small business. What else? The final straw was the questionnaire from Komsomol. There was such a question: "What do you like to watch on television and listen on radio?" I cannot remember what I said about the TV, but about radio - I wrote that "I like to listen to BBC and Voice of America" – I was just showing off, being blasé.

After Year 10, I went to evening school. The company was great! I started to drink there and to swear. Now I understand why I started to run away; why I had my first sexual experience. If you don't get enough love at home you look for some emotional substitutions. Something like that – but it was so complicated because, my God, what good you can find on the street?! But even against this background it seemed to me that the criminal world had more solidarity. Well I was 16 – the biggest fool. And my father started to send me into the lunatic asylums on a regular basis. Three times I was sent there. You know the psychiatric hospital is much more frightening than the prison. So you see what sort of brave tin soldier am I!

⁸ Komosol was the Youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union [Ed comment].

I'm homeless from 1972

I deliberately took the warrant to the doss-house, because I have a homeless status, can you imagine, from 1972!? It is understood that I don't live on the rubbish heaps but I do not have my own place and finally I wanted to confirm my status quo. I tried to find out how to do it from the solicitors but it is so confusing. That's why I took the warrant to the doss-house. What else can they give me?

Between prison terms I managed to gather some documents. You have to have one confirming your address. My last confirmed residence was in 1972 – my father's flat. In the past it used to be that if you got a prison sentence then you lost your right to live at your registered address. To restore all this is very difficult. And if your relatives do not support you on that then it is impossible. In 1995 there were a huge number of people in prisons due to sentence Number 209 – for being a tramp and sponging⁹.

Nobody wants to give you work while you don't have a confirmed address, but how can you get a place to live if you do not work?! They used to give us warrants to some drunken villages where the city dweller of course would never go. You can shoot me dead but I would never go to the village. I know and understand nothing about it. I have never even been on an excursion to the countryside. I'm scared of the life in the village more than one in the prison. I think I would never survive there.

Leaving the prison all of us were qualified as electric sewing machine operators. By the way we all were quite skilled and this occupation was quite in demand in those days. Once I had such an opportunity. I received an assignment to the 'town', to the clothes factory. I was very pleased to go there with my child. Almost five years I managed to stay there. I've tried to get normal life back, and I arranged a marriage of convenience because I couldn't bear to raise

⁹ To be homeless or of no fixed abode was a criminal offence resulting in the region of two years imprisonment. Long term unemployment was also outlawed yet the legal precondition for regular employment was propiska. Indeed, propiska was the precondition for access to most civil rights and social benefits such as employment, access to housing, medical insurance, education, unemployment benefit, ration card, voting rights and so on. Until 1995 Article 60 concerned non-voluntary absences caused by hospitalisation and criminal convictions. A person sentenced to six months or more was automatically considered to be of no fixed abode and if an individual owned their own property they were deprived of it. Formerly incarcerated persons who lived with their families had propiska cancelled and it was up to their family to decide whether or not to re-register the individual post sentence. Number 209 refers to begging or conducting other 'parasitic' way of living.

my little boy in the constantly drunken women hostel. I had different ideas and plans. But there was a glitch and I got another sentence for four years. And then another glitch. Now I'm free again and got a warrant to the doss-house. So in 1972 they kicked me out of my flat and that's it. Only in 1995 the Constitutional Court decided that this was unlawful, that people who were sentenced to prison were losing their homes. It is quite ironical that nobody in 23 years gave a toss about it?! Naturally during all these years I turned into the declassed element. How could I find out about this court decision in 1995? Nobody came to me and told me about it. I was homeless from 1972.

The State

And how do I have to live now? I have to go to the doss-house, really from one prison to another one, although I still could work somewhere. I could live normally. I would love to slap their faces with this piece of paper.

This means that I will be homeless for another ten years. Do you get it? Try to loaf about, steal from time to time, create problems for other people and then we put you back in prison and you will be in the place you belong. Do you understand what they offer? Their offer is to put me on the waiting list together with the others seeking social security but to get this I have to live somehow for another ten years! Do you understand that this is just another countless piece of paper?! I had one already in 1980. I just got out of the prison, my baby was in the children's home and the director of this home saw how much the children love me because I love them a lot. As soon as I used to come in the whole group of them was shouting 'Mum, mum came' and every day I used to bring them something tasty. Anyway this director saw how good I am with the children and she offered me a job and a place to live. Well when I came the next day she was very sad, she couldn't get a permission to give me a residential status as it was prohibited due to the Olympic Games. Then all the homeless were kicked out of Moscow and nearby towns. Sometimes I lose all my spiritual strength but I never confuse the state with its people.

To respect the law?

I am always amazed and think how on earth it could be? From day one, as soon you are arrested, everything about you is violated, everything that is possible and impossible, and at the same time they want you to respect their law!

Work

Well I had a dream when I was in prison. I'm very good at making children's clothing. So you know what I would like to do?! To repair clothes, because it is always paid well and I really like to do it. To repair a zip or to shorten trousers would take me a maximum of 20 minutes but I could earn 150-200 roubles. And then slowly-slowly I could make the children's clothes, because I love it and I know how to do it. I don't mean just simply sewing new ones, but I could design them and make them from all the recycled material. I would take such a pleasure in this. But I cannot imagine how could I achieve this? At the same time I know there is a demand for such work.

My partner

I have a friend; she and I have been together for 22 years. She was really not a criminal person before. But at one moment she broke down and 'sat on the needle'¹⁰. I started to use drugs as well. I was freed in 1994 and got a shock because when I went to prison it was communism and when I was freed I got lost. Simply got lost. Drugs. Opiates.

Levelling of Personality

This green [prison] uniform is a levelling of personality. It is so simple. In order to change the person's life, to make him understand why he was put in prison, he is given all that time in prison to think about it. That's why I always used to tell to the girls to use the opportunity and learn how to sew. Why? Because the sewing machine is the only place where one can be left alone. When you know how to sew, nobody bothers you. You sit by the sewing machine, do your business and think. The wiser girls always listened to my advice. They used this time to think - why were they there, what went wrong, what could be changed and so on. But, in order to make people to start to think about it they need to realize that they have their own identity. But imagine how hard it is if from day one in prison everything is done to crush your personality.

It is so strange that they all think that if you've been to prison then you do not care about your child, where you live, whether you need to wash or with whom you sleep. It really doesn't help ex-prisoners. Do you know what drives me mad? They ask me in the court: "Are you

¹⁰ Started using drugs [Ed comment]

ashamed?” I say: “I’m not ashamed, because you do not give me any options”. They say: “but there is a centre for social adaptation”. I agree: “Great, it is for six months isn’t it?! What will I do afterwards, how can I earn money if I’m a pensioner?!” They say: “Every person has to take care of himself” I say – it means, translating it to a normal human language – we can’t be bothered about you, your place is in prison, go on commit something quickly and go to prison where you belong’. But I try to survive on a minimum, of course I could steal as much as I need and I’m not scared of the prison.

Now, you know, I just try not to break down again, my nerves are so weak. How many years can the state humiliate me? Just because I was a fool and I ran away from my bitchy step-mother when I was 17? I’m 55 now but they still peck me and dare to ask – if I’m ashamed, and they get surprised why I’m not ashamed but vexed.

Son

I feel quite comfortable around him, though he is a very complicated person. He had such a harsh life experience, my poor boy. He was also homeless until 29 years of age. Of course he didn’t sleep on the rubbish heaps, but he had moments in his life when he slept even in internet coffee-shops. Do you understand? They ought to give him a flat but instead they just kicked him out of the children’s home and that’s it. So when he got tuberculosis he plucked up his courage and went to the city administration to demand a flat. You know everything depends on people working there – the secretary of the head of the administration was a first-class woman. My son briefly described to her his situation and she has done the rest. She took his life so close to her heart.

Drugs

I only took drugs with the girls I used to pickpocket with. I do not know the statistics, but in our colony most of the people are drug users. They are convicted for ‘accidental’ theft or the most common sentence nowadays is ‘the distribution of drugs’. These people are not really criminal. It is criminal when someone sells drugs for profit but does not use the drugs himself. But these people are drug users themselves so they just sell in order to get a dose for themselves – the more they sell the larger is their dose. Look I’m a drug user myself, when I’m drugged I cure myself – it is the same as when you are ill and they sell you medicine in the pharmacy to make you better. So I have no evil intention because I sell you a medicine. All these people are doing these terrible long term sentences – 8-10 years, is it normal?

After Release

Do you know how difficult is it? I got out with the desire to work, stay clean and so on. Then you go and count these kopecks, and, these bastards, sometimes even this minimum pension can't last for long. Do you know how difficult it is not to confuse this filthy apparatus and the people who give you grief? I can be very honest but do you know how much humiliation there is in hunger and wandering? If I didn't have that lawyer, which they hired for me, I would break down again and start to pickpocket. I wouldn't have had any other options because I would have no hope, no support.

About Sociologists

You know I have something to ask you. When you talk to us – what is it for you - exotic or something else?! Sometimes I think that you do harm to us by creating an illusion that someone cares about us; that there is hope. Then again we meet these bastards, representatives of the state, do you know how unbearable it is? I mean if I didn't meet you in the first place it wouldn't be so painful. I do not want to steal not because I do not know how but because I really do not want to do it. It is against my principles today. And if I have to start to steal again I have to crush myself over again.

I'm still standing. But I have felt so awful, I have been so close to suicide. I review my life like I would watch a movie; some events have become so vivid, so painful. Over time I started to recollect more and all this together is like a snow ball... Shit basically!

When I tell my story, everything is boiling in me. I carry on living and every time I try to manage the past. Every time in a new way. Shit. Remember I told you I've met a woman from human rights, first-class woman by the way, it is because she works in human rights.

About Motherland

I'm a marginal person, and of course it is a bitchy country. But can you imagine, even if sometimes I cannot stand the state, I love my Motherland. Honestly! It is unexplainable! Do you understand? Abramovich buys Chelsea, but my country cannot help me. How can one understand who is good who is evil in this country?

I am a Normal Person

I am really an absolutely normal person. At least I know when I do bad and when I do good. I can shout about my rights but all the same I know my life, everything about myself, when I was right or wrong. Do you understand? I cannot imagine how I might let down one person yet it takes so much will power to carry on and not to break down.

THIS IS WHO I AM¹¹

Allan Weaver: Scotland

In no particular order, I am a Criminal Justice Social Work Team Manager in Scotland; I am also an ex-offender and former prisoner; I am also a son, a father, a grandfather, a husband, a brother, a friend and colleague. In what follows, I intend to offer an experiential view of my own pathway to desistance and in so doing I will discuss what led me into an early life of crime; what this lifestyle entailed; that whole process of becoming an ex-offender and the realities of trying to move away from this lifestyle.

I am now 52 and I was born and raised in a seaside town in Ayrshire, the third youngest in a family of six children. Due to the loss of traditional employment industries in the 1970s, the town has never really recovered economically and has remained a rather desolate town with numerous social problems and large pockets of deprivation, crime and unemployment which essentially formed the backdrop for my childhood. My father was bricklayer to trade although he was an in and out of work over the years. My mother stayed home and took care of all of us. It wasn't a loveless environment; my mother smothered me with love and she was always there for me and my brothers and sisters. I also had a good loving relationship with my siblings although I never felt close to my father. Our relationship was a very distant one. He was raised in a very macho, aggressive, male orientated environment and in many respects this was passed down to me from an early age. This was not particularly unusual in this era and in this area it must be said. Most males and adult males in the west of Scotland tended to inherit and share this same macho culture. In fact, an elderly uncle would often take me out to the back garden and teach me how to fight 'like a man' when I was just six years old. Despite this aspect of my upbringing and socialisation, I considered my childhood to be relatively normal until the age of 12 and this was when I first witnessed my father beating my mother in an uncontrollable, brutal drunken rage. Even at that early age, this proved to be a major turning point in my life. My father's violence or the threat of his

¹¹ This article was previously published as part of the article Weaver, A and Weaver, B (2013) Autobiography, empirical research and critical theory in desistance: a view from the inside out. *Probation Journal* 60(3): 259-277. It is reprinted here with the kind permission of the editors of the Probation Journal

violence cast a long shadow over the family home. In many ways I lost part of my childhood and I became quite a resentful and bitter child.

As the violence in the home intensified it affected my family in different ways but despite my young age at the time, I seemed to adopt that main protective role towards my mother. I wouldn't let her out of my sight at times. I insisted on being directly by her side when my father was due in from the pub. I could never settle at school knowing she was home alone. Yet at that age, I couldn't do anything to actually prevent the violence and I always remember feeling an incredible sense of failure, as if somehow I was continuously letting my mother down. It was around this period of early adolescence that I progressed from what could be described as sporadic acts of offending and/or anti-social behaviour in the community, to more sustained and serious incidents of offending behaviour which included vandalism, housebreaking, assault and just general mayhem in my own community. By the age of 15 I was what could be termed a classic prolific or persistent offender.

To understand why I was propelled into such a sustained and troublesome lifestyle there are a number of factors which must be considered. Due to the turmoil in the family home and each one's individual coping strategies, I was being left to my own devices for long periods of time. I was, by then, opting out of school, rebelling and truanting with no particular questions asked of me. I suspect that the teachers, who appeared to have no specific interest in the source of my dysfunctional behaviour, were just glad to see the back of me. I was also becoming more involved and reliant on like-minded friends and as a result of this we quickly formed into an informal street gang, creating our own subculture within our neighbourhood. It must be equally recognised however, that this lifestyle also provided me, and my friends, with a sense of belonging. It gave us an identity and a status that we would not have got anywhere else. I also learned during this period that violence was an effective form of communication. It certainly made people listen, and it made them sit up and take notice of me. I wasn't alone in this; many young men from traditional, deprived, working class communities in the west of Scotland where I grew up embraced this distinct macho culture and admired and celebrated the 'hard man'. Indeed, aggression and violence remain an expressive means of communication for many young men who lack any form of power or status or indeed other resources.

And so, I hung out with this gang from early adolescence and I emerged as a persistent and increasingly violent young offender, and these behaviours and this lifestyle shaped and largely defined my life for the following twelve years or so. It should also be noted perhaps that throughout this period of my life and even during the initial stages of my offending, I was well known within the system. I hadn't slipped through any kind of net. For example, I was well known to the police. The police had attended my house on a number of occasions due to my father's violence. My teachers at school were well aware that I was a dysfunctional and troubled child in many ways. I even had a Social Worker and attended Children's Hearings on a regular basis. So was this, on reflection, a gap in provision? I don't know but certainly there was a gap somewhere – maybe in communication, maybe in understanding, maybe, even, in interest. I think it is also important to say at this stage that I did not enjoy my offending lifestyle. In fact, for the most part I hated it. I hated the way it made me feel about myself and since mid-adolescence I felt increasingly trapped and I felt as if I had no way out. So much of the violence I was involved in was down to fear and the fact that I felt I had no alternative way of dealing with things at the time. This life basically meant that I was excluded from most of the activities that other young people were taking for granted. Admittedly, I was committing offences on a regular basis and, yes, violent offences, but I lived a life where I was also a victim of repeated violence and sometimes from so called professional people. In addition to this, however, and perhaps more painful in a lot of ways, most decent people just didn't want to know me at the time.

When discussing my past, people often wonder and sometimes question the role of my parents in my offending behaviour as a child. Well I think it's safe to say that my father never had any influence over me, or, at least, not in a constructive sense. When I was young, my mother, as I indicated earlier, became quite reliant on me emotionally, financially on occasion and certainly for protection, which despite my best efforts I generally failed to safeguard. Although my mother's love and commitment to me was unquestionable, my mother had her own troubles to deal with. She was a broken woman who struggled to feed her six children at times. She was downtrodden and battered on a regular basis. She couldn't cope with her own life, let alone influence mine.

Due to my continued involvement in offending behaviour and being deemed 'outwith parental control' I was sent to an approved school at the age of 15, which essentially heralded the beginning of my journey through the juvenile and adult penal system culminating in a

three year sentence in Glasgow's notorious Barlinnie Prison. Over the years I really struggled to cope with these places. For me they were certainly not the flagship of reform they claimed to be with the emphasis being predominantly focused on control and containment. Likewise, these facilities, and in particular the approved schools and young offenders institutions, were plagued by bullying, aggression, intimidation and violence which is hardly the environment in which to promote change and rehabilitation. Moreover, I was removed from my community, from education, from friends and family and processed through a number of these places, only to be returned to the exact same problems, fears and battles that I had left behind. I still remember vividly getting off the train on my way back from various periods of custody and my mates would be standing at the train station to welcome me home, laden down with bags of alcohol and tales of recent offending exploits. Absolutely nothing ever changed and the cycle continued unabated.

So what *did* change for me? How did I manage to overcome the barriers and eventually break the cycle of offending? Stopping offending for me was related to a number of factors. Like most offenders moving on from this lifestyle, it was a process and it was at times a long, lonely and difficult process. It wasn't - and rarely is - a sudden event.

For me there were two significant relationships which in different ways gave me hope, determination and the courage to change. Firstly, when I was aged 22, I met an older guy in prison who was nearing the end of a life sentence. He was previously involved in organised crime and had credibility in my eyes. During our time together he spoke about earlier beliefs, values and experiences that all conspired to result in his life sentence. More importantly, perhaps, he also spoke about the stark realities of crime and his 'wasted life' and he basically gave me a framework to examine the futility and destruction of my own offending behaviour and the effects this was having on my life and the people who cared about me. Given his past experiences, no-one else would have held so much sway over me in the same manner. Indeed, this was my first experience of a positive male role model; a convicted murderer.

The second relationship came in to play when I was released from the same prison sentence and involved the social worker I had had since childhood. On reflection, her value for me wasn't necessarily in her profession, but her personality. She was a lovely, caring individual who believed firmly in the concept of change and rehabilitation and she never lost sight of me during all those years of bedlam. She was also both supportive and respectful to my mother,

which of course meant a lot to me. While I was still on Parole Licence, my social worker got me involved as voluntary group-worker in a programme for young offenders. Working with these children was difficult and demanding but totally energising and it gave me an overwhelming feeling of self-worth and self-respect. It also reinforced to me at the time that this was a career I wanted to pursue. It also proved to me for the first time perhaps that not everyone saw me as just being an offender or ex-offender. In my social worker's case she was willing to give me a chance and knew that I had much more to offer, long before I could see it.

In addition to this I was beginning to find regular employment on building sites, which of course added to the feeling of purpose and self-worth and I was beginning to feel that I had some sort of place in the world. Of particular significance for me in the change process during this period was the birth of my first son Paul, followed the next year by the birth of my second, Allan. With this brought a steely determination that my sons would not experience the upbringing I had experienced as a child. In many ways I had to hit the ground running in terms of fatherhood. I had to learn it as I went and I had to learn it fast. I knew I had to break that cycle of offending for my own two sons. I had to break that intergenerational pattern of the hyper masculine, hard drinking abusive father. I did; both of my sons are law-abiding young men we have always had a strong loving relationship. Paul is a residential child-care worker and Allan is a social work student.

Despite my initiation into fatherhood, many of my old friends and indeed my brother were still actively involved in offending behaviour and violence due to an ongoing feud with a notorious family in the town with whom we had once been friends. Necessarily, there was an increasing expectation on me to become involved. However, committed to change, I no longer had the will or indeed the heart for this lifestyle. I had commitments and purpose in life and I no longer wanted to be part of this. As a response to this chaos, this threat to the new me, I moved to London, England with my wife and sons where we remained for several years. London at the time afforded me a degree of anonymity as well as regular and well paid employment. It let me relax and embrace fully the concept of fatherhood and these factors combined allowed me to nurture and develop this change in my identity.

Due to a family bereavement we decided to return to my home town after four years, albeit with some degree of trepidation. However, life there had continued without me. The

particular troubles I had left behind some years earlier had long been replaced with several other destructive conflicts. Many of my mates had not changed and were forced to make way for the younger guys in the town; they had since drifted into lives characterised by tenuous relationships, heavy drinking, sporadic work and occasional trouble.

With the recession in the construction industry biting hard in the early 1990s I decided to return to school in a local secondary school to complete my education. I was into my thirties at this time and this entailed attending classes at school with 4th and 5th year pupils. As the only adult in the class and one with a large battle scar emblazoned down my face, I felt torturously out of place. For the first month I really struggled to adapt to this environment, feeling awkward, embarrassed and painfully out of place. I was also conscious of the fact that the first and only other exam I had sat was when I was in prison. As a result I was always worried about being ousted and escorted from class in the event that any Police checks were undertaken, given my extensive history of offending. With a dogged determination however, I stuck with it and grew to really enjoy the academic challenge.

Having gained the necessary academic qualifications, I applied for and was accepted to university where I gained a BA in social work. On completion of my study I was employed as Criminal Justice Social Worker where I have worked for the last 18 years and I have been a Team Manager for the last 11. I also went on to complete my MSc in Criminal Justice and obtained a Practice Award in Advanced Criminal Justice Studies. I am also a qualified Practice Teacher and have supported a number of students through their placements. In 2008 I had my autobiography published '*So You Think You Know Me?*' and recently I played the narrator and protagonist in the documentary film '*The Road From Crime*¹²'.

My own process of change was long, lonely and at times extremely difficult. Yet, in some respects, I am still held accountable for my offending behaviour. At times I am still identified as the person I was and the reputation I had over 30 years ago and this evokes mixed emotions in me which sit sometimes comfortably, sometimes less so. Through my offending lifestyle I have caused some people great pain, and for that I will always feel remorse. Simultaneously however, I do not and cannot regret that particular period of my life. If I did this would unravel the multiple identities I embody and, after all, this is who I am.

¹² The Road From Crime can be viewed at: <http://vimeo.com/43658591>

This ongoing journey of reconciliation with my former self and the law abiding husband, father, grandfather and social work manager I now am, has made me who I am today.

LUIS FERNÁNDEZ URDIALES: SPAIN

My name is Luis Fernández Urdiales. I was born 58 years ago in Barcelona, I am Catalán and a supporter of Barcelona FC. I have always been arrested for theft and robbery. I have had four major sentences but I have been arrested for several more. I have already served prison sentences of 20 months, one of two years, one of 14 years and now I am finishing one of 14 years. Nowadays, I am doing a bakery course while I am in third degree¹³. I have only got eight more months of this sentence to serve.

In my opinion there are three types of delinquents. First there is the kind of delinquent that does it because they are sick: drug addicts, alcoholics, game addicts, etc. The second kind are those ones that like to have a good life, good clothes, the latest gadgets in the market, good food...and finally “the ones that are fucking fed up”, people that don’t have anything to survive on or live in a decent way and who the system doesn’t care about; people who don’t receive any kind of help from the system or the government. In these cases, these people don’t care about the system and they commit crimes.

I have always committed crimes when my personal situation has been chaotic and I didn’t have any other sort of way out. Normally I have been working all the time. The proof is that I have 18 years of contributions to the National Social System. But the thing is I was losing my job and I saw that they were going to evict me from my house, leaving me and my family (wife and three kids) on the street without any food. On top of that the government thought that I didn’t take care of my family, but how I was to suppose do it if I didn’t have the money or resources? I didn’t have any kind of help.

I don’t consider myself to be a delinquent. Simply that for economic reasons I have had to do it. Steal or die of hunger - me and my family. Always before I committed a crime I have tried to do the right thing, I have exhausted all possibilities. In the end it wasn’t a dilemma because

¹³ In Spain, there are three degrees, grades or categories of prisoner status. The third degree regime denotes an open regime [Ed comment]

I didn't have any other option. If you have two options you can choose, but if you only have one, you definitely can't. In the end, it was the system that pushed me to commit crimes.

I have managed to reintegrate with my family and friends. The rest haven't done anything to help me. The support of my family has been essential. It is very important to know that they are there for you, to see them on [prison] visits even if it's cold or hot out there. If it wasn't for my family I wouldn't have been as strong as I am now. I probably wouldn't have my head and mind clear enough. They don't like what I have done, but they understand that when I did it, it was for a reason.

Two or three friends have also helped me; they have been instrumental when I have to leave the jail. That is a crucial moment because you don't have any support after you have been in prison, and then after a month and a half, or two, and you need a bed, breakfast, food, shower and clean clothes – in these moments, when I have opened the fridge and seen that there was nothing in it, not even milk or eggs for me and my family, I have felt tempted again. But I have been strong because I have some people helping. I have been managing but that it is not the solution, because these people (friends) can help me for one month, but not *every* month. They simply don't have enough for everybody. They don't have the capacity to help for longer!

People that are *supposed* to help don't help. Actually it seems that they don't like that I get help from others. In fact, I think that the system would like to see me commit crimes again.

First of all, the system doesn't give you financial assistance or family support of any kind, even knowing the effort that it takes to give up crime. For example, a person that goes to jail because he/she steals to survive, then he/she serves time in prison and goes out. When he/she goes out of prison nobody gives them money to live on. In that moment what is this person to do? He/she needs to sleep, eat, dress, etc. Imagine that this person finds a job on the first day out. But in any job they don't pay you on the first day; usually they pay you the last day of the month. So in that month out of the jail and working, what does he/she do to live? Live from the air that he/she can breathe? This is not a minor problem. There are a lot of people that leave jail but they cannot get a month's wages. People need to eat. The system should

give you tools, recommendations and something to survive on for a month - even if this is not a sum of money to spend. There should be ways to reintegrate a person into the system.

The penitentiary system doesn't seek to reintegrate a person in the system, really. They really want to burn you, mark you and squeeze you. They made me suffer, me and my family. They mark you if you like to obtain a permit to gain third degree or parole.

One of the big problems in prison is the favoritism. Two people in the same situation...one yes and the other no. There is a penitentiary regulation. I don't understand why, if I qualify, they don't give me the things that are fair, that are right. It is in the law!! Why do they give it to someone else because he has a certain name and they don't give it to me? Was it because he had status, power and a bank account?

In the penitentiary regulation it is very clear how you can obtain third degree and parole. One of the conditions is that you previously had had those benefits. If you don't do what they want you to do or tell you to do, then you don't have benefits. I don't understand why they try to change me. I am asking that they help me to change my life if it is twisted, but don't try to change the criteria with regard to the allocation of benefits! Sometimes they force you to accept things that go against moral and good behaviour. For example, in some courses they force you to pray even if you don't believe or they force you to attend an alcoholic and drugs program even if you don't consume either of those. My problem is that when I am out of jail, around day 20 of release, I don't have anything to eat or anything to feed my family. The prison officer forces you to do these courses and if you decide not to do it they invent anything to deny you permit.

Another problem is the requirements they ask of you. I do not understand how they have been demanding employment as a criteria to get third degree or parole in a country with five million unemployed. Well, they don't require it of all of the prisoners, in that there is also favoritism. Another similar joke is when the Judge sentences you to civil liability. On the one hand you cannot derive any penitentiary benefits or parole until you have paid and on the other hand, you cannot pay if you don't go out to work to get money to pay your fine.

Besides prison workers don't do their job in a good way. It is true that prisons are overcrowded, but it is their fault because they don't do their job in a good way. For example I

had a problem and I asked to see the teacher, the lawyer or anyone. It took them over ten months to call back so now I don't have a problem...I have five!!!

You can see abuses every day. A judge should come and make a sentence. This is well known. For a reason, the criminal code and prison rules exist. But dogs don't bite each other. One day I can protect you and the other you protect me - that's their deal. At least now this is going to be known and heard outside, even if it is through this journal.

I have to recognize that there are honest people too. Not everyone is like that. There are some that come to work but they have to face those who refuse to change. These few people find that they have to fight against their own co-workers. And of course that creates conflict and many times the good people have to change and keep quiet or they face being fired. Others have had to resign from the job in order to keep their values because they cannot fight against the prison rules - even if they are unfair. They came to work cleanly but they didn't allow them so they had to quit. Luckily there are still a few of these good people working and thanks to them we (the prisoners) don't create riots and do bad things. Those are the ones that make you think of not doing silly things. Between all the dirt and rot some flowers still grow.

At the end of the day, the prison system is a business. Do you know a car mechanic that doesn't want cars to break down? Or a cobbler that doesn't want shoes to fix? If the prison officers and the system wanted to eradicate violence, they could. It would be cheaper! According to the government, each prisoner costs 90 Euros to maintain per day. For a parolee or third degree prisoner - they don't give them anything, not even a quarter of that money. After 11 years and four months of behaving, of making sacrifices, with goals in mind: do my time, get a job and enjoy my family and reintegrate into society...the prison officers haven't helped me at all. Everything that I have achieved, I have done it through my own efforts, through my own family's sacrifices and through the help of one or two friends. If it weren't for these people I would be lost, everything would be lost. Still anyone can explode at any time, because people inside here are fed up of the injustice and abuse.

That could be fixed by people who are honest with themselves. The Penal Code and laws are the same for everybody, even for those who commit abuses. No one is exempt from the law.

What is happening? Is that I have to detain these people? Do I have to apply the law by my hand? Because if I have to I'm not going to pick a book.

ATSUSHI: JAPAN

My name is Atsushi. I am a 29 year old Japanese man.

I was detained in a young offenders' institution (approved school) at the age of 16.

I will start with the story before my detention.

I was brought up in a rather wealthy family. I had both parents and grandparents and I also had an older sister.

We were not a poor family and had enough money at home.

However, I had been shoplifting and stealing money from my parents.

I was bored and not satisfied with my life.

At around 11 years old, I started to dislike the maths class.

I had attended and worked hard at the maths class until that time.

However, I started not paying attention to the class when the class became too difficult for me.

Then inevitably, I was not able to follow classes after I went to junior high school.

I gradually got to hanging out with friends who did not want to study.

At the beginning, my mother scolded me and the teachers reprimanded me.

Still, I did not want to go back to being an ordinary pupil.

I wanted to stand out.

I was not good enough to stand out academically.

I was not good at any sports either.

I did not know what to do.

Then, I thought that it could be a good idea to be a member of a teenage gang, which might attract attention.

I gradually turned into a delinquent.

I did not go to school but played with friends in the town.

I also quit the junior baseball team I was learning to play with.

At the age of 14, I began committing violence and extortion, and started using drugs.

I stopped going to school.

For me, the company of these idle friends and playing with them were more enjoyable than going to school.

My life had started coming off the ordinary course.

But, my thought was: “It is fun right now, but if I continue living in this way, where does my life end up?”

I felt insecure and anxious.

After graduating from junior high school, I was admitted to high school.

However, I dropped out from high school after three months.

Then, I joined a group of biker gangs.

It was because I felt insecure without belonging to something.

I did not like loneliness.

With the biker gangs, I repeatedly mobbed and robbed people.

For operating as a biker gang, we had to pay “protection money” to Yakuza [Japanese mafia] every month.

I robbed people for the necessary money using violence.

I used violence towards many people.

I even started to feel pleasure by hitting people.

I had lost the normal feeling.

I was arrested by police at the age of 16.

It was on extortion charges.

I was detained and sent to a young offenders’ institution.

Now, I will write about the life at the young offenders’ institution (approved school).

The young offenders’ institution to which I was sent had neither outer walls nor iron bars on the windows.

It had an open atmosphere like Scandinavian prisons.

Young offenders’ institutions in Japan normally have tall outer walls, locked rooms, and surveillance cameras.

However, the place where I was detained did not have them.

It was a very comfortable environment.

The instructors were all good people.

I realised that there were also such good adults.

However, I could not accept the reality at the beginning; therefore I was not able to conduct my life decently.

One day, I was given the following words by an instructor:

“You cannot change your personality easily, but you can change your behaviour.”

Only slightly yet, but I was changed from the next day.

Then, I did my best.

When I was given a role, I worked hard.

I enjoyed being praised by the instructors.

At the approved school, I regretted my past acts for the first time in my life.

I thought that I wanted to change my life for the first time.

And I set an objective at the approved school.

I decided to go to high school once again.

I spent five months at the approved school.

Soon after leaving the approved school, I left the group of biker gangs at once.

Usually when a gang member leaves the group, he will be forced to pay a large sum of money, and get beaten up.

But I was lucky. They did not demand anything.

After leaving the approved school, I kept a distance from my old friends.

This was because I was concerned that I might commit a crime again if I hung around with the old friends again.

However, I became lonely.

I had a family, but it was painful that I did not have any friends.

Nevertheless, I had hopes.

I believed that I would make friends when I went to high school.

I enrolled in high school.

However, I was often truanting from school.

This was because I became lonely again.

I had no friends at school.

It was because I felt those pupils were a different kind of people to me.

I was a delinquent boy, and there were always delinquent companions around me.

But, the people who were in the classroom were decent and ordinary pupils.

I was not able to talk with them.

I built walls around me.

I was always alone in the classroom.

Then I dropped out of high school again.

I was lonely.

I was not changed from the old days.

However, I knew that the current situation was not good for me.

Then, I came across many good people one after the other.

They were slightly older than me and I felt they were like my older brothers.

They invested a lot of their time on me.

They spent a lot of time playing with me.

They gave me a lot of knowledge.

Even when I betrayed them many times, they did not abandon me.

They gave me a lot of affection.

With those acquaintances, I was able to find hope in the future.

I became able to envisage a good image for my future.

I hoped to become a man like them in the future.

I thought I could never play the villain again.

I strongly believed that I wanted to live as an ordinary man.

I firmly made up my mind to graduate from high school by all means.

I was admitted to high school once again. It was when I was 19 years old.

This time, I was able to do my best.

I went to school every day without being late.

I was also able to make good friends.

I spent a lot of time with good classmates.

I really enjoyed every day.

I became strongly aware that:

If you could change yourself, the people around you would also change.

Things would change hugely depending upon yourself.

Your life would be determined by yourself.

I really changed.

I have done the tenth grade four times in my life.

And I graduated from high school at the age of 22.

I had a dream to become a school teacher.

It was because I wanted to tell young people that “you can change your future.”

I was admitted to university.

I studied a lot; ten hours or more every day.

Life like this continued for two years.

I was awarded a teaching licence by the university.

And now I work at a small private school.

There are children with many problems coming to this school.

I am working eagerly for those children.

In May 2009, I joined a group called “The Second Chance” in Japan.

It is a mutual self-help group among graduates of approved schools.

“The Second Chance” is modelled after the mutual self-help group “KRIS” for ex-inmates of prisons in Sweden.

“The Second Chance” has currently 100 members.

Our objective is to prevent youth crime.

Our activities include giving lectures at the young offenders institutions and schools, and playing with youths.

We get together regularly and have many meetings.

I did not have any typical circumstances and conditions for becoming involved in crime.

I have a family with love. I also had friends. My family was not poor.

I was a criminal with luxurious circumstances.

But I received a lot of love from strangers. Really a lot.

Now, I would like to return a favour to society.

I would like to use the best out of my negative experiences and strongly desire to help young people.

And I would like to spend the rest of my life in that way so that I can say at the end of my life that it was a positive life.

I cannot change my past, but I strongly believe that I can change my future.

I would like to live earnestly from now on.

Thanks

Atsushi

FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT: A PROBATION OFFICERS JOURNEY

Adam: England

My story begins with my father, a Caribbean migrant who came to Britain the 1950's, he became a British soldier and later an engineer. My father was known as a man not to mess around with, and taught me at a young age to 'take no shit' and hit back as hard as possible. Growing up, my two older brothers and I generally had a lack of discipline outside of the home and were probably seen locally as a law unto ourselves. I had no problem with lying, fighting or stealing, and had a persuasion towards setting fire to things. I recall a number of fights at school, including once where I fought off two older boys with a broken bottle when I was about aged ten, and how my father was far from angry when he found out what I had done. We mainly lived in various parts of London mainly, in locations neither affluent nor impoverished. Due to our family moving around I attended three different schools prior to the age of 11, which I think affected my social skills and ability to form relationships.

By the time I reached secondary school I had an emerging problem with anger and a growing disrespect for authority. The bullies avoided me because of this, my "mad dad" and my then role model of an oldest brother, a high school drop-out and a suspected drug dealer, who was fast on his way to a lifelong addiction with crack-cocaine. My life was still relatively normal, but slowly the importance of gaining an education tended to come in the way of mixing with friends who were generally involved in truancy, stealing, vandalism or drugs. We hung around on some of the most notorious housing estates on our side of London, where good was bad and bad was good. By the time I left school I had graduated in urban survival and was loosely affiliated to various groups of individuals, what probably could be described as gangs. Unfortunately, the writing was on the wall, and in the early 1990's at age 16, I was convicted for Grievous Bodily Harm with Intent and sent to prison, a significant occurrence in early my life. The offence was an avoidable and regrettable attack on another man, co-ordinated and led by my oldest brother who subsequently went on the run for many years to avoid prosecution. Up until the point of sentence I never actually realised how serious my offending had been, or how serious the consequences could be.

I recall my first journey to a Young Offenders Institution in the police 'sweat box', I was tearful and worried about what would happen to me in prison. Three weeks later I was back at Court and although I hoped and prayed that I would not return to prison, I was sentenced to twelve months custody. This time I had a different feeling on the way to prison. I was officially a criminal and would just have to get on with it. There was no possibility for rehabilitation in placing me in such an environment, and although prison was a punishment it didn't reduce or increase my propensity for criminality either. However, I did find quite a few of the prison officers helpful and generally inclined to have a chat and a laugh, particularly those that worked in the gym and encouraged good physical health. I met a lot of people I knew from the streets, including an older friend who worked in the prison grounds and helped me to start a business selling cigarettes and tobacco to prisoners on my wing. This created problems in itself and due to being involved in the bullying of those that couldn't pay their debts, I was punished with a period in segregation and then moved to another prison. I kept my head down this time around and I spent a lot of my time working in the kitchen, reading and reflecting on my life and the avoidable events that had preceded my current situation. All I really learnt from the whole experience was that I could hold my own in the harshest of environments I'd probably ever live in, where I made friends amongst murderers, robbers, drug smugglers, gang members and terrorists, to name a few. From what I witnessed, this was not the same experience for all prisoners, as there were those that were intimidated, abused and beaten due having physical or mental weakness, for falling foul of certain individuals that were better avoided, or for being 'grasses' or suspected sex offenders.

After being released I was very bitter that I had destroyed my life chances and found myself far behind my friends of a similar age. I attended two or three appointments with the local Youth Offending Team (YOT) which ensured I had accommodation and secured me a place on a vocational course which I soon dropped out of, but they offered little in terms of support, guidance or encouraging ambition. The next few years were a blur and I became increasingly confident in my belief that I had no future. Looking back, I was living on the fringe of society, and in large cities like London this is where the various fraternities and underworlds fester and collide. I still counted drop-outs, thieves, fraudsters, drug users, drug dealers and other drop-outs amongst my friends, and I was still loosely affiliated to various gangs, all of whom which I socialised with on a regular basis, although I rarely engaged in offending behaviour. It's not surprising that being stopped and searched by the police was a regular occurrence, usually with a degree of intimidation or roughing-up thrown in for good measure,

and occasionally arrested and later released without charge. Although I was not happy with my life I had no inclination to change as I honestly did not believe I could, mainly because I felt I was nothing more than an ex-prisoner with a few meaningless qualifications. There were times I believed that I could do better and make something of my life. I just didn't know how I was going to do it or who could help me. I doubt anyone really chooses to live that way, and in my case I felt I was a victim of circumstance with the belief I had no power to change my situation and so I just sat back and got on with it.

So what changed me? When I was in my late teens I was the victim of a stabbing and that started the ball of change rolling. My attacker was a man who retaliated with a knife after I stopped him from accosting and abusing a woman, which was a situation I came across by chance on my way home one evening. As I lay in the hospital bed I wondered what people would have said about me if the knife had been a few fatal millimetres in the other direction. My wanting those close to me to be able to genuinely say good things about me is what prompted my change. I started by cutting off nearly everyone I knew and every place I visited. It wasn't easy and I constantly questioned if I was doing the right thing, but I knew it was necessary to become a better person and find a purpose in life. Thankfully I had a few people that helped me keep focused, some which I am still in contact with today. This included a childhood friend who knocked at my door one day after over five years living abroad; an old school classmate who by chance happened to be on my university course; a neighbour that had such a positive perspective on life, despite his influential reputation and connection to the Jamaican underworld; and a former prisoner who was on his way to becoming a successful businessman and community leader; and most importantly my father, who became a steadfast source of support and I learned to listen to his advice.

On trying to find employment I found it wasn't as hard as I thought, and while I put myself through college, I held down jobs ranging from cleaning to local factories. In the mid 1990's I entered University and I had a firm belief that this opportunity would open up my future. At some point during this period I decided I wanted to help people to stop offending and to improve their life chances and quality of life, because I knew it was possible. Along with my own progress, I kept in mind the stories of my first YOT Officer and my first University lecturer who had both previously been in prison; which was proof that I could achieve something too. I graduated with my first degree in the late 1990's which was my first real achievement, and other educational achievements followed. However, it was not plain

sailing and I recall my upset when a social services agency retracted a job offer because of my criminal record and on another occasion after being rejected for a social work course, and also following the hundreds of job applications that just seemed to disappear after posting. I didn't give up hope and after my mother found an advert for a charity in need of volunteers, I began mentoring youths and providing resettlement support to prisoners. This led to employment as a hostel support worker with another agency and in the early 2000's I joined the probation service and trained as a probation officer, which is where I've been ever since.

Like many, I have travelled a long, lonely and difficult journey, and at times I feel I am still held accountable for my past that took place a lifetime ago. I think I'd like to become a teacher, social worker or lecturer in criminal justice, and although I don't know whether my criminal record will allow it, these are still further goals I will pursue. Professionally and personally, I have found there are factors preventing the way forward in terms of the successful rehabilitation of offenders, including the labels of 'ex-offender' and 'ex-prisoner' that discriminates and precludes many from prominent positions, and cruelly follows even the most reformed of citizens to their graves. I accept this reality and although I do not know where my future will lead, I am just happy to have come this far. I have never referred to myself as an 'ex-offender' as the negative connotations are too damaging and it is not how I view myself. I have generally hidden my past from my friends, colleagues and all that I meet, as I don't want to be pitied, vilified or treated with contempt for something I did as a child, over 20 years ago. As with many others, I was only an offender only at the point of committing the offending act, and thereafter I stepped through the gate of rehabilitation and change that was open to me. Unfortunately, not everybody will agree with this, but I know that my journey is the proof that past behaviour is not always the best predictor of future behaviour. I believe that successful rehabilitation requires more focus on positive accounts from those that have turned their lives around, alongside their assistance in devising strategies for change, because how else are rehabilitation workers, justice professionals and academics to understand how people that do wrong do right. I believe that alongside the professional knowledge base, it is important for criminal justice workers to understand the reality of the lived experiences that offenders go through and what it's like to live on the other side of the probation desk or prison door.

It is only because of making the decision to change many years ago that I can now be proud of the achievements I have made. This includes the qualifications I thought I'd never have,

BA (Hons) Sociology, BA (Hons) Criminal Justice, and MA Criminology. I have been a mentor, a resettlement worker, a hostel support worker, and with probation I am qualified and an experienced probation officer, I've trained probation staff and I've managed probation teams. I believe I have been successful and committed in working with offenders as a result of my training, knowledge and experience, but also due to my experiences in being in the system and then stepping far away from it. On becoming a probation officer a very elderly and dear family friend took me aside and told me to never be ashamed of my past as it is a part of my identity, and to be proud of the progress I have made and the person I have become. I wholly regret many of the decisions I made in my teenage years, but I learned a long time ago that I cannot turn back time and so must keep looking forward rather than back. Now in my late thirties, and a husband and a father, I look at my children as the fruits of my progress and I am thankful I can be a positive and law-abiding role model to them too.

TO THINK OUTWARDS

Sándor Nagy: Hungary

Co-authored and translated by Dora Szegő

I was born in 1973 in a Hungarian town, close to the capital. We moved to the capital when I was seven. My parents benefited from being there. I have four younger brothers and, at that time, big families were provided with social housing. We lived in a densely populated neighbourhood in the downtown area. I am so sorry that my parents lost that flat! It was a golden age there for children! We hung around a lot with our classmates in the neighbourhood. That was a very pleasant part of my life. If I think about it from a social perspective, me and my brothers moved from there into a slum area at the outskirts. People are pushed out there, and children start running riot. You are in a desert, a big block of flats and nothing else. There is a watercourse, near a chemical factory. It smelt like shit; I wouldn't call it water. What are you doing there? Entertaining yourself. You know what kids are like. Madness. That's the coolest thing. It was indeed different from the downtown, that's what I feel if I look back. The people were different. It's the same as if you go to a rich or a working class area of the capital. It is the selection of the society. And we left the good place at that time. I was not yet a wild boy at the age of 14 but the direction I was heading in at that time was clear. My friends were the maddest kids and I too followed that path. Then I went to a vocational school to learn to become a painter. I enjoyed that. I finished at the age of 17 and I was working for a year but I stopped enjoying it. I already had some wild stuff going on and I confronted the law. I committed some small offences by breaking into cars, but I was lucky, I always came through without a scandal.

My mother managed to get me into the army immediately after I turned 18. I don't blame my parents for getting me on this pathway. My life circumstances were not such that I was predestined to cheat, steal and rob to make a living. My mother bought me clothes, my father gave me pocket money; I had everything. And, you see, it worked for my four brothers. It didn't work for me. If I think back and check all of my class mates from elementary school, there are a maximum of five who didn't have any involvement with the police. Imagine! I think it has to do with the social system in some way. I think there is a fundamental flaw in

the system that causes this. I mean, I don't want you to misunderstand me. I don't want to put responsibility on the system for leading me into crime. It would be false because people have a free will. If they want to go they go, if they want to stay they stay. But a youngster has an easily influenced character, which is not yet worked out or developed. He wants to belong to the gang and he wants to be respected for being tough. The system is part of the problem but I wouldn't consider it only as the sole cause, because it works like that among youngsters and it will work like that for a long time. But it is still strange that everybody that went off course lived in that environment. So many people went to juvenile prison from there. After I left the army, I immediately moved out from home to live with my girlfriend. I thought I am a grown up and I'll manage my own life. We moved to the downtown area and lived there for about three years, while I worked on housing reconstructions.

Maybe I was about twenty when I met those people who later influenced my life. At that time we committed various scams. We founded fake companies whose role was to buy various products via money transfer and then 'forget' to actually pay for them. We then sold the product to third parties. We tried to buy anything which could be bought via a money transfer arrangement. There were the three of us. Back in the day this method was quite widespread, and there were a number of groups who dealt in this trickery. Sadly, many companies were victims of this scam. I had to search and dig in the industry a bit to be seen as a competent person while scamming. I made shit loads of money then. With one action I earned as much as my father did in three months. Well we did this for quite a long time. We were the kings of the night, everywhere. We went to bars and drank too much - not just some shots, but a whole bottle of whisky or more; the waiters and the showgirls used to greet us in the coolest discos. Everybody was "eating out of our hands" and it was really good. How cool I am, I thought "how I rule - the world is mine!" I thought about an honest life and a normal job and so on... – bullshit – don't you know what life really is? – Ultimately, I got busted. In the end I was sentenced to three years and eight months, and I also had an ongoing case in Miskolc. The trials for my cases in Budapest were done separately. After six and a half months I was released, temporarily, and my reaction to this was that I'm never going to go back to jail ever again for sure! Now the twist came. On this point I really was in the wrong. At that time I should have gone back and got the jail over for good but I was really in love and I thought if I don't escape from it, I'm going to die. I should have not done this. Now I see this from an entirely different perspective. I didn't go back to jail. I lived my life but it was quite hard since I was illegally at large. I did some work here and there, but I was

paranoid I had fake papers and all. I lived like this for five years before they eventually caught me.

After five years of constantly being on the run one gets into such a nervous and physical state which is barely sufferable. I was only a shadow of myself. I tried to work in a pizzeria and then a bakery but I never stayed longer than a year because when I felt they started to know too much about me, I moved on. I had a girlfriend who did this throughout the whole period with me, from the beginning right through to when I returned from the army. She was with me throughout but we could not move on with our relationship. We wanted a family, but how in those circumstances? I was a wanted man. I could not legitimately marry her and establish a family.

Then it came to me that I would have to earn a lot of money, approximately 8-10 million Forints would do to start over. You can't really get this amount of money unless you take it from someone else – someone who owns it and you know about it. And I had information about somebody who had this amount. You can get the information if you know the right people. So what did I do? Well I stole a car in order to do it ... I knew the man drove a car to pay his taxes – over five million in cash in a case at a time. I'd never done that before so I had absolutely no experience since I'd always tried to gain the money by misleading and manipulating people, taking the money out of their pockets and I was successful at that. But this ...?

I bumped his car with the stolen one, and he got out from his car, then I shoved him and took the case which was on the seat. The attorney qualified this as a robbery. It was the strictest or highest category and I had to do ten years imprisonment, period. Only an hour passed before they caught me and they beat me up quite well. I wish I hadn't lived to experience this scene, but it was so. It happened and guess what my first thought was when the policemen took me out of the car: "I'll get ten years for this". At the court on the first instance I got another seven and a half years on top of the outstanding three years and eight months. They excluded me from any possibility of conditional release. Finally with the other two instances I got ten years and nine months. I thought it's too much.

I could have experienced these possibilities otherwise; I could have decided differently, one way or another. Go into the jail, not go into the jail ... decide, what direction do you want to take, what are your goals ... and how serious are you? The possibility to choose the wrong

way lies everywhere as does the opportunity to hide from yourself, to create a fictional world for yourself in order to ignore what's happening to you in the real one; many people choose this - a world which is so narrowed that it turns them into the living dead. They are capable of executing their physical needs, but besides this, they forget to really exist.

Maybe it was a turning point for me to say, well, no! Ok, I will spend a lot of time in prison, I won't be young when I get out because I'll spend my most important and productive years in jail; the period when one stabilizes the future. This will influence my whole life because I will never catch up with that ten years. Nevertheless, I'll do it as a man. This is a decision. Maybe these are banalities but it's not like that.

I got through these years at the beginning. I knew ten years was so much time it can crack anyone both mentally and physically. I meant to look after myself very carefully. I'd do anything to be a worthy man when I get out. For my family – I didn't want to burden them with extra duties because I had become a wreck, a junkie, or turned to alcohol. Then, I might go out and come back for something and have to do those things over again like before. My family packed and came and loved and accepted me. They absolutely did it and I could not look into the mirror again if I did this to them again. Not just with them, but I couldn't find peace with myself either. One must decide what he/she wants. Most people don't even think about what is that they want. I thought it over and I feel I made the right decision. There was a part in my life when I made loads of bad ones, only bad ones because it was easier.

What was very important was that I wanted a normal life for myself after jail. And I knew if I didn't behave normally in jail and start to rebuild my life after jail, I wouldn't be capable of doing it. This helped me get through my time, that I knew I would have a normal life and everything will be ok.

In Balassagyarmat I met a former classmate of mine who had committed a bank robbery and was serving his fourteen years for it. We had a school class reunion - many of my mates were there. 'So, Sanyi, how many years do you have?' 'Ten years'. 'Come on, you'll fit in the team!' It was like this, 'Not too few, we'll accept you, come on!' And then I joined them, it was like a sub-system, and I really fitted in with that group. It was great luck that everything was set, you know. I didn't have to climb my way up the system, fight for my place, you just come, you have a spot, a good cell, a good team, you choose who you want to be with. You

get information about the guards, who you have to fear, who is manageable. You instantly get the whole system as a package, which is a great advance and you don't have to experience it for months in order to know how to get along, to know how it all works. Actually, when I got into this core, I was among the most dangerous according to the security code, in the "four" category. Everybody, I knew was there; we were the bad guys in the prison.

So I was in that group but I realized I could not move forward from here. Not forward, rather inside. And they made their little hassles. I served ten years in prison with only one disciplinary sheet. Everyone knew me. I didn't have any blatant cases.

And then I realised that I had to really choose the right people around myself, that's a very important decision - and it doesn't matter if you're pals or not. If he cannot be on the same journey as you, you have to make these sacrifices. Very sorry, we can't go in the same direction. We helped each other if needed, helped each other to move on; but there were some who were not capable of helping or who could not be helped. Then I had to move on. I couldn't help much more because I never forgot that I'm always alone in prison. It doesn't matter who I have befriended, because I can only count on myself. It gives me a great steer. I can always measure my own limits, knowing the borders of what I'm capable of. You get to know this there, like a school of life thing – that you can realize your own borders and can learn how to act in various situations, and how to address them.

There were mobile phones in the prison. I had one and kept it all along during my sentence. They could never catch me with it though. I think they knew, but never acted on it. I didn't use it for bad reasons, like preparing a crime or to organize something; it helped me rather a lot; basically, to communicate with my family and it was worth anything to talk with them without being controlled, seen or overheard by the guards.

And then, after two years passed, I called my girlfriend who helped me while I was on the run; saying "Hi, I'm here". She asked me how I was and I replied that my trial was going to be on the 13th September. Ah, she replied: "on 24th September I'm getting married". "Oh", I said, "well, congratulations". And then, "I ... listen, it doesn't matter". I felt bad but we had a great conversation. And from then we talked every day. I went to the trial and she was there, waiting for me. She came. We were talking. I had my cuffs on, and she sneaked under them. These are seemingly small things but then, you must realize how bad it feels to be torn

apart from your loved ones ... there is no such money that can substitute this! There are some who can live with this and can make the sacrifice for money; sacrifice freedom, sacrifice the family, family peace, their wife and children for financial endeavours but that's a stupid person. It is stupid because human relations count the most in my opinion; family, friends, and such. You deprive yourself of these by committing such crimes and for me this is the big restraint. This significance of this I realized at that very moment. I experienced this and I was very conscious that what I did was very wrong and that I had been on the wrong path for that past ten or more years.

I realized that this relationship was never to be. She was married, she gave birth to a child, and so on but from that point we kept on communicating. She always visited me, every two-three months at visiting time. She lived this double life. She never stopped visiting; we continued to communicate with each other for the rest of my sentence. Sometimes we fought. I knew I could never expect anything of her and I was rather grateful that she came and didn't turn her back on me. She could have done that as well. Her marriage was totally her thing; I will always thank her for those hours every two to three months.

It's always the things outside the prison which are complicated. The inside – well, that's just it. What happens? One day passes another; I work, I eat, I sleep. Nothing special. Things outside – those are hard, when, for instance, something happens at home. When you know you should be there; when someone is experiencing something bad and you know you should be there with that person and you can't. These things are very bad and rip you apart. You have to accept that you're here and they're there and life goes on without you. Things are going on without you as if you were dead. The only difference is – you can talk on the phone. But you have no influence on the outside. You really have to learn this - what to expect from others and what not to expect.

I knew for example how my mother suffered because I was in prison. I knew my girlfriend was really alone; the man she loved didn't stand by her. I know they had at least as hard a time as I did. I have to admit that. But they never showed me this; they only showed their support. Without the support of my family I could never have done anything. That's your base. That should be the base for you to deal with your troubles; a place you can go to anytime, whatever problem you have, and they will help. I had this. They didn't complain, rather encouraged, empowered me – every one of them. We didn't have to talk about this. I

knew my mother had sleepless nights, my girlfriend cried on the phone on her way home from visits. There were signs which indicated these. But I owe a lot to them – that I didn't have to dwell on this; they dealt with it.

You have to realize at a point that “Hey man, nobody pointed a gun at you to go and do what you did. Wake up!” I interpreted it this way and it worked for me: “you deserve it thanks to yourself”. Don't mope around and don't do shit! Let's get on with things and things will turn out alright somehow! And it did.

As I survived one year after the other in prison, I absolutely focussed on the goal. I saw the next day in my mind and the day after and the day after. And it was all planned. I always had goals to achieve ... and I reached them. I fought for two years to acquire a workplace in the prison. And I got it. Two more years I fought to get a better job. I kept on sewing damn gloves until then! It got better and better. Finally I managed to get the best job: painter in the prison manufacturers. An artist came to the prison in 2007 to lead the renovation of the old chapel. I was chosen for managing the painting work of the prisoners. It was a hard, but worthy job, I enjoyed it. We even did some fresco paintings, where the artist recognized that I have skilful hands. I called him after I was released and he helped me obtain some seasonal jobs out of the prison as well.

The best thing was getting to the chance to go on temporary release, because after that I could count in months instead of years. I thought it would be so wonderful to go home for Easter – and I did, then I had five days off in August. Then a kind of systematic order of temporary releases was established. Imprisonment became like a hard job from which I could go for a holiday. This was the greatest power - I didn't care what happened in the prison and how things went inside. After that I started to think outwards. How am I going to succeed with my girlfriend? And what about a job? What can I do? Listen, I was released on December 16th 2009 and I was employed on the 17th, by someone from the prison. He was released earlier. People say there is no friendship in prison - but the exception proves the rule, and we are still good friends. When I got out, he helped me out. I started to work with him as a gas repairman.

I opened up new roads; the old tracks didn't function anymore. Everything, except for the family, had collapsed; almost nothing remained from it. Absolutely, I can tell you that

everybody disappeared around me. Only one friend followed me through this period of my life. He is a kind of person who walks with you until the end. I would get the maximum of a 'hello' on the street from the fellows with whom I once did everything together with. They all disappeared forever. In such an extremity you find out who is important, who needs you, who you need and who you don't. Things come pretty much apart. I am not angry with anyone; it is understandable that they turned away. This was my life that was unfolding and they did not need this story – there is nothing wrong with this. It is not a big deal. I tried to keep in touch for a while, writing letters, but I got no answer. Then I gave it up. But after release, when some of them came back I thought - if they have disappeared for ten years, why would I need them now?

In the same way that I could thank myself for getting imprisoned, I could also thank myself for reaching and realising all those things within the prison as well. If I haven't done things the way I did, those doors would not have opened to me. The luck factor was the prison governor, who was ready to see that some people are able change. This was fortunate: being in the right place at the right time. There are prisons where the inmates don't even know the name of the director. Here - he knows all the 400 inmates by name! But, on the other hand, it was good for the prison that I was there, because I fixed up so many things that other people maybe couldn't. The director knew that he could count on this kid, because this kid "works damn hard for us". You have to deserve their trust. It is bloody difficult in a prison to make the personnel trust you without becoming a snitch but I think it is not impossible. Of course, you will always remain a prisoner for them but still, we are human beings and we can behave humanely towards each other.

It took ten years from my life but when I was released all those experiences lost their importance in a few days. It became zero - just as it is. The uniform, the line-up - who cares? The whole thing vanishes. Man is a strange machine. You remember only the positive experiences from that time. Yet I'd never go back. For a year? Not even for a day! Never.

What has changed compared with the self I was before being imprisoned? I became much sager. I do things more soberly. This 'bang my head against the wall' mentality disappeared. I consider situations three or four times before I make any decisions. That's it. And I have become relaxed. Ok, sometimes I am hot-tempered, but I was always like that. I have to tell you that this still happens. I am a grumpy, nervous person god damn it! But my basic nature

is much calmer. And one, even more important thing I gained: persistency and determination. I can also be much happier about small things. Prison teaches you how to appreciate small things: you are so happy with two cookies. Today I don't eat bread but cookies! You learn to value anything. Tiny things.

If I would say I haven't learned anything there I would lie. This should be the meaning of prison: to teach you. I was taught in a sense because I was open to learn and mostly, I tried to train myself. I wanted this change to happen. I knew that I was on the wrong track and I wanted to move from that track. No correctional officers counselled me during the ten years: "let's talk about yourself!" or "How are you doing?" They don't have time for this. I never experienced such a trusting relationship with anyone but it was not necessary. You are inside of a system and I think you have to find the solution as to how to become, or at least approach, the person you would like to be, or you should be, from inside yourself.

I helped many people in the prison, just by showing them an alternative: "Come on! Let's see, things can work like this". I illuminated their own opportunities: "Listen, you have chances in the prison, let's take them. You don't have to do anything else - just behave normally and complete your tasks, your work. This is a place where you can count on a result, although you have to wait a long time for it. And when your time comes, you could ask for a reward. The staff won't say go to hell – they will check to see what opportunities there are". Many of the fellows did it. I helped a few people to stay on the beaten track. I was a kind of pioneer. It was not usual that someone with such a long sentence is granted temporary release.

I am not sure that I could ever sit down face-to-face with the victim. I couldn't look at his eyes because I would be ashamed. Ok, I am accountable for myself. I am accountable to my family - because they love me. I am not accountable to him. He is a stranger. For him, whatever I do, however things turned out since then, it doesn't matter. I hurt him. On the other hand I didn't hurt him physically, but maybe these things influenced him physically. I mean in terms of his existence. Maybe his firm went bankrupt because of the money I took away. So I hurt him in this sense. I am not sure that I could account for him. It is just enough for me to reckon with myself.

A FEW YEARS IN PRISON WOULD DO ANYONE GOOD

Michel Spekkers: The Netherlands

Words: Bouke Sonnega

Michel Spekkers (age 28) has dark hair and dark eyes. He's polite, kindhearted but he also comes across as cautious. When he talks about his past, the year he spent in an American prison and the road that led him there, his eyes shoot restlessly across the room. Now, he's quite a prominent person in the public life of the city of Breda, The Netherlands. As an ex-city council member for the Socialist Party, people know who he is. The road to here has been long, and he's probably not even halfway to where he wants to be - even if he doesn't know where that may be. His is a story about fraud, prison and trying to find a place in the world.

As always, things started going wrong at quite a young age. His parents got divorced when Michel was seven years old.

"I was young and, basically, very uncertain and afraid", says Michel when asked about what got him into fraud. "As all things do, it started with small, relatively innocent things, white lies. I wanted people to like me and the people I hung around slowly started moving up the wrong path. It all went slow, only in hindsight am I able to pinpoint certain events and things as pivotal. I didn't notice it at the time."

He left home when he was sixteen years old. "It was sudden, not carefully planned at all. I had a row and I just decided to leave." After a period of leading a nomad-like existence in The Netherlands, he settled in the town of Petten, where he decided to start an internet-based shop. "I was always fumbling around making websites and I decided to make a living out of it. That's when it really went wrong, it was a fraudulent business. I didn't always send people the goods they paid for - just enough so I could slip through. The people who worked for me then didn't know they were involved in swindling. They thought they were working for an honest business."

It was only a matter of time before things went wrong. After the police raided the place, Michel fled to Heerlen, a city at the other end of The Netherlands. “I tried to make things right there, but it was already too late. Several Dutch crime TV shows were already hunting me, my name was out there. So I decided to flee the country.” The ‘flight’ started with a trip to the Dominican Republic. His intention, then, was to take a holiday. Take his mind off things before going back and face the consequences back in home. “But when I got back here things were already too far down the road. I knew then I couldn’t fix things from here.”

He went to Mexico and made his way from place to place with the help of a false press-pass and a handy cam he had bought. He pretended to work for a Dutch television show. “In hindsight I think Mexico really made me look different upon the world. The people there, they’re just different. They are kind, they let you in their homes, they feed you and they are, in general, welcoming people. It was an eye-opener in a way. This is also how things can be done.”

Then came a choice that in his own words “might have been the only big mistake”. He decided to go to America. There, he began to forge cheques. “It’s a method of payment that is largely out of use in Holland, but is still very much alive in America. And it was also a relatively easy way to make money. I tried to only pry on the rich, because I knew they had insurance. The downside was that I couldn’t live in the same place for more than a few weeks because that was the time the authorities needed to figure out what was going on.”

This could, of course, only last for so long. After he got caught, he spent twenty-one months in two different American prisons. “Prison changes you. It’s a very violent and scary atmosphere, especially in America. We slept with fifty-eight people in one hall. Ninety percent of the inmates are a member of some gang. In jail, people judge you based on what you have done. It’s a universe of its own.”

Prison life changed Michel in ways that are still noticeable and visible today. Not in the least for himself. “It really toughens you. I’m not easily scared anymore. Your moral framework gets, to some point, rearranged. You accept more from other people. I won’t back down from conflicts that I probably would have run far away from when I was younger.” “But that’s not all. There’s also a huge impact on your personal life. I was never the easiest person to make

good friends, and that's only gotten more difficult. Intimacy, sex, that all became incredibly difficult for me."

In the year 2006, more than two years after Michel left for Mexico, he's back on Dutch soil. Much to his own surprise, he isn't arrested straight away. He's free to go and, frankly, scared to death. "It's one of the few moments in my life that I've been utterly scared. There was so much uncertainty here, back home. You have to know that inside, you know everyone. Everyone looks the same, you know what they did, what gang or group they are in. At Schiphol, there were just thousands of people, all different, all unknown. I didn't 'know' anyone. It was terrible."

It was only a short time before he got arrested in Holland again, for the frauds he committed here. "I did time in America, but things in Holland were still unresolved. So when word got around that I came back, it was only a matter of time." Another few months in prison, he came out bankrupt, under strict supervision of a financial executor. And free, for the first time in almost three years.

"I immediately knew I wanted to do something meaningful with my life. This might sound sappy, but I've always held on to my principles. I started by teaching young children and students about the dangers of a life in crime and the seemingly easy and wrong way that it is. But I wanted to do more. I moved to Breda in 2007 to study here, because that seemed like the logical thing to do. A new start with a diploma that just seemed right at the time. It wasn't. The distance between me, the other students and the university was just too great."

So he went on to other things. He founded his own company, Conexq, to continue giving information to students about crime.

In 2008 he won a prize with a website he constructed. Jijendeoverheid.nl [youandtheauthorities] was founded with the idea of closing the gap between the government and its people. "Often, people can't find the proper official authorities if they want to get anything from the government. The website helped to close that gap; to guide people, and make the authorities more accessible for everyone. That's still one of the biggest problems in our governmental system."

He became active for the Socialist Party (SP) in Breda. After setting up a local youth division called Rood (Red), things went fast. A year later he found himself occupying a seat for the SP in the city council. A position he would occupy for more than two years. “I really wanted to help, to be a force for good. That position seemed like a perfect way to do that. I could help people from there, on both small and very large scales. I became a spokesman for the local squatting-group, too. That’s still one of the issues most close to my heart. There are people who’re getting evicted every day. Low-cost social housing is being demolished to make room for expensive apartments every day. And the original residents are left in the cold.”

“That’s also where Kickstart came from. I really wanted to make a statement that you don’t need a lot of money or expensive real estate to make something good happen.” Kickstart, Michel’s current project, is based around young entrepreneurs. In old office buildings, shops and other empty property, young businesses get a chance to develop themselves. It’s, as the name suggests, meant as a kickstart. “We can rent those empty properties very cheaply, because nothing would be done with them anyway. So we can rent them out for very little money. So we can really give young people and new businesses a chance to develop that’s not only cheap, but also relatively risk-free. If it fails, there are no damages or contracts.”

Two things spring to mind when reading about his projects. They are all aimed at the community and there is quite a lot of them in a short time span. That’s because, after all these years, Michel is still searching for his place in the world. “I don’t believe in the system as it is now. Everything here, and in all of the Western world revolves around money. Around capital and, especially now, it’s ruining people’s lives. I don’t believe in that system. I never have and I never will, and my experiences in prison have only strengthened that belief. Ultimately, the problem is not the capital, but what it does to people. Everyone is programmed to think about their own problems, their own needs. It can be an extremely lonely existence here, especially if you don’t fit the image. People get lonely, and people don’t care.”

“Ultimately, I don’t think I’ll stay. There’s still a big part of me that wants to move back to Mexico, or South-America. People there have a way of living their life that’s far closer to what I’m looking for. No-one will die of hunger in Mexico if there’s anyone who has food to share. It’s just another world.”

NATHAN THOMAS: WINNIPEG, MANITOBA, CANADA

My name is Nathan Thomas. I am thirty two years of age and was born and raised in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. In my early teen years, at the age of eleven, I started a life of crime and the joining of gangs. It was here that I searched for my belonging, that fatherly figure, respect, love, care, compassion, that eager to be noticed. My childhood was spent with my grandmother who to this day taught me a lot. It was her love and respect that remains today, that has made me into the man I am today. My grandmother was a beautiful and caring woman who ran her own store and always talked about success, my future, and that someday I would make something of me. I carried that for years, at times it was lost. When I was eleven years old, she passed away tragically, during the worst possible time, Christmas. It was devastating for me and my dear sister. I was forced to move back with my mother to the city of Winnipeg. My birth mother at a young age had me and my sister; she couldn't take care of us so that is the reason we were forced to move to our reservation, Norway house, to live with our grandma. The move back was a big change for my sister and I, we had become so accustomed to our surroundings in Norway house. Particularly, the change in atmosphere and the new parents. I call them new parents because I carried a lot of hate for my mother for abandoning us. She had no clue the inner rage and sadness we carried. We came back to Winnipeg with all that frustration, rage, hate, confusion, sadness, anger, and we took it out on her and our stepfather. He was no help; he was an alcoholic with a chip on his shoulder. His idea of love was to make us put boxing gloves on and box with him; he always had to prove something to us. That played a major role in my leaving the house and searching the streets of Winnipeg for a home; I found that with gangs and living an unhealthy life.

At the age of twelve I was arrested for the first time. I was charged with numerous auto theft offenses. Twenty one to be exact. It was my first charge and I remember to this day, I was set up by my own mother. She called me to come home and when I got home there were two detectives waiting for me because the night before I was involved in a high speed chase for which one of my friends was caught and he ratted me out. It was the excitement, the respect I got the next few days afterwards from friends that I felt loved, cared for, and respected. They would say Nate show me how to steal cars, crazy guy, a lot of things that made me feel good about what I was doing. Little did I know that it was to just manipulate me into doing a lot

more crime, because it was the older guys making these comments. At the age of 15, I was introduced to cocaine. It was the first time we started to work in drug dens or shooting galleries. The things I have witnessed and done in these places haunt me till this day. Now, I would not like to go into great detail but these houses were horrific, my own people selling their souls, their bodies for that next high. I was taking away children's food and diapers and their parents with the evil we were selling. From the age of fifteen to twenty six I sold drugs. I was an independent drug dealer and I was good at it. Me and my friends made a lot of money – like, I mean, a lot. By the time I was 21 I had already owned three to four cars, I had apartments and people on the road twenty four hours a day driving and selling our evil. It was at that age that I started to see the greed, envy, jealousy, the evil in what I was doing. I've lost many friends to murder; to friends doing life, to a lot doing really stiff penitentiary sentences. It was the loss of my best friend; he was shot seven times and set up by one of our so called friends. The whole cause of that – money; he is gone today because of our greed, our drive to want to be the biggest drug dealer on the block. From all the money that exchanged my hands to this day I have nothing to show for it but heartache and regret. Me, the man I am today, is a true believer in that everything happens for a reason; there is a reason I went through all that I did. I've been involved in a lot of things that I am not proud of but that have shaped me into who I am today. I've been to the penitentiary, I've seen it all, and I have done it all. It is my mistakes that I vowed to never make again, I set goals for myself, plans, and today I am achieving those goals through education, self-motivation, using the skills I always had and turning them into something positive. Taking my passion and pursuing the professional culinary arts field has led to my goals and dreams. I have found something I love and am extremely good at. I've been told by many instructors I am a natural in the kitchen. It feels good to hear compliments like 'Nathan you should open an aboriginal restaurant, set yourself apart from others and do what you love and have a passion for'. So it is the reason I am enrolled in business administration and to date being here I have won numerous awards - bursary awards - that are able to help me in my financial state. People always ask me why I am enrolled in business. I say, "well how am I supposed to own and run my own business if I don't have the experience"; that being said I have a lot of experience. I have run businesses since I was 16. Just not legal.

How I got out of that lifestyle

- I set goals for myself
- I had to lose and turn my back on any friends I had as a child
- Took what I saw and did and forgave myself
- Attended A.A
- FOUND MY CULTURE AND ROLE AS A YOUNG ABORIGINAL MAN
- Self-respect
- I forgave my mother and all those who hurt me
- Followed my dreams of cooking and obtained a two year diploma in culinary arts
- I am currently enrolled in a two year business program at red river to soon open up Winnipeg's first aboriginal restaurant

The main reason today that I am alive and here is mainly because of realizing and knowing that the life of crime gets you nowhere but a prison sentence or death. My culture also saved my life; I am a sun dancer who now lives a holistic lifestyle drug free, alcohol free. I will tell you a story of my first sun dance. I was told by a mentor of mine that we would be going to a camp for the day. When we got to the grounds it was a sight, an experience, the sound of the drum, that feeling of love that I have been searching for my whole life. I cannot really to this day describe what I felt being witness and first time experience of what our people have been doing for hundreds of years. It was phenomenal. That weekend truly was the start of a new life, and to this day I thank the man that brought me to that sun dance. For the first time in my life I felt home, it was home to me. My wife who always stood by my side through thick and thin are major reasons as well why I'm writing this. She is a real inspiration to our family; she really is a blessing to me and our family. I love her so much and am so grateful for her love and care for me, and the believing in me. Everyone no matter what, where you're from has the potential to get out. A majority of us have a CHOICE, IT ALL COMES DOWN TO CHOICE. I DON'T CARE WHO YOU ARE, OR WHAT YOU HAVE DONE, we all have a choice. We can choose to either continue that life or we can get out. Believe me the hardest thing I ever had to do was give up my friends who I have known all my life but I chose that for myself and my family. And it has been the best thing I ever could have done for my children, because I have broken that circle of pain, it stops with me.

Also there needs to be more support for gang members getting out of prison, there needs to be an exit strategy. I always talk about an AA for gangs, call it gangs anonymous. Gang members I know have thought about it one way or another of how to get out. Is this life for me? Am I doing the right thing? We all have natural talents, we are all here for a reason, and they just need direction. I believe that some sort of program like gangs anonymous that is partly done with the help of ex-gang members can be a true help to those who want out. We understand all that they are going through. Not just gang members but society as a whole, individuals living unhealthily and in the life of crime. Everything is about routine, they just need to be shown that there is different routine, that they are believed in and they can be trusted. I am a young aboriginal man who really wants to help and there are many of us that will help one another in the ability of helping others just like us.

THE MYSTERY

Rev. Hank Dixon: Chaplain, Manitoba, Canada

When it comes to change, or in our present discussion desistance, why do some individuals find their path of transformation via faith while others travel a different road? As one who has been transformed by a faith journey and now works in the prison system as a chaplain it is a question that has intrigued me for some time.

When I gave talks regarding my own journey I would always begin with the opening line, “my earliest memories of life on this earth were filled with anger and confusion; anger that I didn’t understand and confusion about not finding a place to fit in the world around me. My personal descent into crime was never fuelled by some need for quick easy money. Drugs were a wonderful escape from reality and crime became a way of burning off the anger. Although many of my earlier years were caught up in very minor offences such as break and enters and theft I always seemed to evade the law, except for my drug possession offences. As my drug use increased, I moved to harder drugs. Speed (methamphetamine) became my drug of choice. Not much of a surprise for an evolving adrenaline junky.

The crime also became more intense and it was not long before I found myself along with a partner going on a crime spree that included extortion, kidnapping and finally a murder. It was the murder that produced a stab of conscience. One of the only lucid moments in my dark, destructive path occurred when I refused to be the trigger man. We broke into a place, only to discover there was someone at home. That was not in our original plan. My partner told me to kill him. I refused; sadly not on moral grounds but on principle. Our victim had done nothing to us and I saw no reason to shoot him. My partner felt differently and put a bullet in his head.

Arrest was not long in coming. Two months later I found myself facing a second degree murder charge. From my perspective life was over as I sat in a 6’ x 8’ cell facing life in prison. In Canada you can be found guilty of second degree murder if circumstances warrant and in my situation the court found me guilty. At 19 I was on the verge of committing

suicide. As I contemplated an end to my short, miserable, destructive life, a spiritual awakening began to occur and through a series of dramatic events I became a Christian.

I have always deeply appreciated Starr Daily's words of wisdom. He was a hardened criminal from the mid twentieth century who wrote about his experience of coming to faith in prison long before it was fashionable to do so. In the opening lines of his book *Release* (1942) these thoughts can be found:

"I cannot explain the mystery of it. I only know that it was an inner experience of some sort, a huge and different experience. Many men and women have sat down with me to offer their explanations. They've spoken with what seemed authority. Yet in the sober reflective hour that followed I've wondered. I've wondered if such wisdom as they possessed was not as foolishness to God."

Starr Daily goes on to describe his journey, one that had numerous struggles and personal insights. Some of which would be a stretch to fit into an orthodox template of the Christian journey. Perhaps that is why I continue to be drawn to his work. Mine has not been an orthodox journey either. Occasionally filled with experiences that were deeply mysterious, moving, transforming both within and without.

Nine years into my prison journey I was released to the community with a burning desire to serve. I completed a Bachelor of Arts degree, then a Master of Divinity degree. The transformation from criminal to pastor was not one I completed solo. In fact it was one that could only have taken shape through the encouragement and support of some very special people. They not only walked with me on the path but also spoke into the greater community when questions of credibility arose about allowing a man such as me to carry the blessing of the Church in ministry.

I began my ministry journey in a small rural pastorate caring for three small churches. For six years Linda (my wife) and I enjoyed a tough but rewarding work. By 1998 the call to go back inside was growing louder in my heart. So in the fall of 1999 I started work as a chaplain in Atlantic Institution, a Maximum security federal facility. I worked for four years in the max, eight and half years in a medium security facility and am presently working in a minimum security facility.

In 2008 I began work on a Doctor of Ministry degree which I hope to complete by 2013. I have designed an online course for training prison chaplains through the Salvation Army College here in Winnipeg and also do a yearly training with new chaplains entering our federal prison system.

The road has not always been easy. You don't serve time in violent environments without some residual effect. Occasionally the ghosts of the past have come back to haunt me, especially as I worked through riots and suicides with both inmates and staff. One of the surprises for me has been the acceptance I have experienced. It of course took time to build credibility. And there is the occasional staff or inmate who just can't get their head wrapped around the fact that a lifer and a clergyman can be one and the same. For many though it is a doorway to talk about issues they simply would never share with anyone else. It does make a difference engaging someone in conversation who has been there.

So why do some find a path through faith and others not? I received an interesting answer to that question. When I transferred to the medium security facility I met someone whom I had served time with many years ago. He too had found a path to transformation but he declared loudly that faith was not part of his journey. His earlier experiences with the Church had left deep scars. We enjoyed a good friendship as he worked with a number of men in the Institution nearing release.

One day we were walking through the prison and I joked with him that perhaps God was a great deal closer to him than he knew. He stopped in mid stride, looked at me with a serious expression and responded, "You know the work I do. I do it because it is my way of getting things right with the guy up there". We shook hands as I replied, "I know what you mean". From time to time I have reflected on that conversation and the words of a banner that hung in one of the prison chapels I frequented, "Invoked or not God will be present".

Over my 13 years as a chaplain I have spoken with many men. Some come to deal with their conscience. Some come looking for a quick religious fix. I don't supply one. Others arrive declaring that they are not religious at all but seek my help because "I have been there." In these situations and many others, as I have journeyed with men who declare faith and those who don't, the truth carried on the banner in that prison chapel has echoed through their lives.

Starr Daily's words concerning the mystery of change have kept me humble not only about my own transformation but also that of others. As Jesus so aptly put it, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1). As I have journeyed with individuals I have discovered that sometimes those who claim faith as their agent of change give little evidence of it. And those who claim no faith in their path of transformation offer up a life filled with the actions of the deeply faithful.

We can spend much time trying to dissect the process of change. Many have and others continue to do so providing us with invaluable insights for those who are still struggling on the road of transformation and those who would help them. However, a word of caution is in order in this pursuit to unlock the process of change. It is found in the words of Starr Daily that I shared earlier, "I cannot explain the mystery of it. I only know that it was an inner experience of some sort, a huge and different experience". There is a mystery to dramatic transformational change. There is, whether we want to admit it or not, a spark of the divine, a mysterious moving of the Holy touching our lives.

MY STORY

Gareth Williams: Wales

I was born in a little mining village named Ynyshir in the Rhondda Valley, South Wales. Before I was born, Mum and Dad had twin girls, Johann and Louise. Louise was born with medical problems and died when she was only a couple of months old. I then came along. My Dad was the youngest of four boys and my Mum had a brother. My grandmother, my Mum's Mum suffered with mental health issues, so my Mum's life growing up was difficult. My Dad's was quite normal.

I can remember growing up that Mum was in and out of hospital on a regular basis with mental health problems. My Dad spent many nights alone and he started to drink to ease the pain. I suppose when you see your brothers leading good lives and yours seems to be falling apart, that must be very painful for any man or woman.

By the time I was twelve years old, my Dad had gone bankrupt on a big construction business leaving thousands of pounds worth of debt. This was when things in the family took a turn for the worse. I have tried to understand what took place next but this was when Mum took her own life. I was twelve; Johann was 14. Dad sold the house and we moved onto a local authority council estate. This was when I started to totally rebel against society.

Family life was in total chaos so I searched for the answer on the streets, and with the streets comes gangs and drugs. It started off with stealing fags off the mantelpiece and pinching money out of Dad's pocket, to breaking into cars for radio cassette players, to stealing cars and bikes and then eventually breaking into houses. I can remember at one point being so persistently hunted by the police that they closed three miles of the valley off and drafted in police from many surrounding areas to search for me. I was known as 'The Whippet' and I was constantly on the run.

At the age of thirteen, I was eventually caught and I was put in care. At this point, Johann was in care because life at home had become so hard. I was sent to various different care homes but I would always run away and go back to the Rhondda. It was at this time that I met

a girl by the name of Helen. She was not on the streets. She lived with her parents. At night, the police would be racing around the town looking for me and all the while I would be under Helen's bed being fed pizzas and milky coffee. I love milky coffee.

At the age of fifteen, the care system could no longer control me so I ended up in prison for a few months. I was the youngest in prison and I thought I was the man but behind my door at night I would cry like a baby for my Mum and promised God if he gave me a chance, I would change.

One of many chances was to come and I was taken into a house for children with dysfunctional backgrounds. My sister was now out of care by this time and had a flat of her own so she asked me to move in, along with Helen. My Dad was back on the scene so I thought great! We can all move on in life. I was so wrong. Within three months of going home, my sister was diagnosed with Leukaemia. Watching her lose weight from fourteen stone down to six stone in a matter of months broke me. I thought she would get well with all the treatment she was getting but sadly she died eighteen months later. She was nineteen and I was seventeen. At this point, the lowest of my life, my Dad moved into a flat on his own and I turned back to the streets again – searching for something. I was totally lost and hurting. This was when I was introduced to dope, Cannabis. I thought I had found the answer to life's problems. In fact, I thought I could take over the world with my David Bowie albums and my chillum [Cannabis]. I thought I am going to live forever; me, and Ziggy and the Spiders From Mars. Oh boy! Was I about to crash back to earth with a bang? Family and people said that dope will lead to harder drugs but being young and naïve, I thought – no way, mate, not me – but I was wrong.

For the next ten years, I was in and out of prison for theft, burglary, drugs and violence. I had gone from smoking Cannabis to an Amphetamine and Valium infused thug. I was constantly breaking the law and I was a jealous partner and everyone seemed to have something that I longed for. All my self-worth had gone. This resulted in me being violent towards Helen and I could see that the very thing that had destroyed my family was now destroying Helen and me. I was totally lost.

At this point, Helen and I were living in an abandoned church. Despite all the pain I was causing Helen, she refused to go home and leave me. She was always there. Rumour had it

that there was a man looking for me from the local church. His name was James Williams – a pastor from America. He wanted to talk to me. On the 22nd June 1997, I entered the church and that night I was told there was a way out from the heartache and the pain. It was God and the way to him was through Jesus Christ. I gave my life to Jesus that night but I was not prepared to give up everything, like the drugs for example.

Four months after giving my life to Jesus, Helen got pregnant and I accused her of having an affair. On 5th November 1997, I threatened her and beat her. I was sentenced to three years in prison. I had made yet another terrible mistake due to my drugs and violence. As a result of this my son was put onto the social service records and on release I was told to stay away. If I could sort myself out, stay clean and away from crime, I would be able to see him in a year. Having lost my family and now my own family and feeling all alone, I couldn't do what was asked of me. I turned to the only thing I knew which was drugs. Again, over the next ten years, I was put into prison for violence towards Helen yet again and I had lost all my friends and family. I moved out of my village and lived on the streets of Pontypridd, South Wales. At this time I was addicted to heroin and cocaine and I would take these drugs and wander for days searching for an answer, which soon turned into months, then years. I would sleep in sheds and empty houses and eat out of bins from various supermarkets. I had lost my looks, my home, my clothing, my self-respect, my family. The list was endless. In my heart I cried out to God and 'Why, Lord, Why?' I would look up into the night sky and say 'If you can hear me, if you're real, hear my cry'. Looking back, God was moving.

At this time, the lowest of my life, I was put on probation for theft and possession of heroin and my probation officer, Natalie Bevan was a strong believing Christian and she had faith in me. I went to see Natalie one day and she said 'Come on Gareth. You can do this'. She put an arm around me and the dams broke. I had not had human contact in years and Natalie gave me hope. She believed in me. She mentioned Teen Challenge to me and I went for an interview in March 2010. I will never forget the day I walked into Teen Challenge. I saw men from all over the UK. No smoking, no drinking, no taking drugs – everything I had looked for an answer in. Yet these guys had something I wanted. I felt the presence of God that day. I felt love.

Whilst waiting for a place at Teen Challenge, I had a dispute with my Dad's neighbour, which resulted in me cutting him with a knife. I was charged and put on remand on my

birthday. I was looking at a possible life sentence. What comes to my mind is the book by David Williamson, the founder of Teen Challenge – ‘The Cross and the Switchblade’. On the 22nd June 2010, I went to court and the charges were dropped to ‘Actual Bodily Harm’ on the condition that I attended Teen Challenge as I originally intended. I believe since I gave my life to God in 1997, he has not let me go and he has been paving the way for where I am today. Jesus forgave a criminal on a cross. That gave me hope. The first person into heaven with Jesus was a crook. Praise the Lord.

By the time I was at Teen Challenge for six months, I was learning to forgive myself and to forgive others. When the love was stripped from my family, I intended by God’s power and healing to replace it, also to my own little family. I hoped to attend the school of ministry of Teen Challenge and learn more about God and myself and share it wherever possible with people who need faith, hope, and love – love being the greatest commandment in the Bible.

So what happened next? I went on to finish the Teen Challenge programme and complete the fourteen studies ie anger and personal rights; growing through failure; love and accepting myself; personal relationships with others and so on. These studies helped me to get to the root of issues of unforgiveness, drug addiction and healing in my life. I came to realise that giving up the drugs was the easy bit. The battle was facing up to the giants – the reasons why I took drugs in the first place. Also the big question is – what will I do with my time that drugs doesn’t play such a big part of my lifestyle? Teen Challenge gave me work skills also and helped me to manage my time through involvement in sport, by going for meals, for long walks and reading and it helped to springboard me into my future.

After spending years on the streets caught up in addiction and crime, never seeing a way out, I now had a plan and a purpose. I travelled to Romania with Teen Challenge and spoke to people on the streets where nine out of ten addicts are dying of HIV or AIDS, where there is no National Health Service, and men and women are living in the sewers of the city trying to keep warm. We fed these people and prayed with these people. Twelve addicts went out to Teen Challenge, Romania and gave these people hope. It is truly amazing when I look back in hindsight and see I was once like these people. I thank God for the opportunity to do this and for so much more and I would like to thank Teen Challenge Romania for allowing me to support them and for their welcome and their love and for their ongoing work on the streets.

After leaving Teen Challenge in March 2012, I moved into a lovely two bedroom house in Ammanford, West Wales. I entered college to study for my NVQ Level Two in Health and Social Care and joined an organisation called Turning Point. This organisation helps people with life controlling problems get housing, doctors, dentists and prescriptions, and puts on activities such as art class, dog walking, football tournaments and fishing and so on. It helps people to build confidence, to help them get CVs, to attend college and then eventually, access employment. It also gives people the opportunity to train to become a mentor – someone who has broken the cycle and wants to support other hurting people. It gives you a chance to go through a training course and obtain qualifications in mentoring and in substance misuse.

Since June 2010, when I arrived at Teen Challenge, I have grown from strength to strength. Let me tell you some of the amazing things that have taken place in my life. In June 2012, I was invited to the Welsh Assembly in Cardiff to talk about social issues and mentoring. It was an event put on by the probation service and they asked me to speak as a success story. Probation has played such a big part in my life and was directly involved with the change that took place in my life. So here I was at the Welsh assembly, talking to cabinet ministers about my life. Let me tell you, the only time I went to Cardiff was in the back of a Reliance van on my way to jail, or to get drugs – so to find myself in the Welsh Assembly was totally bizarre, but it just felt right in the most strange way.

A few weeks later, there was a celebration being held at the Swalec Centre in Cardiff. It is an event which is held once a year to honour probation officers around the country for the good works and achievements they have done in districts and communities for that year. Winning probation officers and teams are then awarded certificates for their works. I was asked to attend this event and be the person to hand out the awards. Quite odd really when the only thing I was handed in the past was breaches or further orders to do: return to prison, do not collect £200 – what an honour!

At this time I would like to tell you where I am and what I am doing. I am now taking driving lessons and I am looking to pass my test in the next month, travel around Wales talking to people on the streets and help them in accessing drug rehabilitation around the country and getting support with housing and benefits. I am a friend to the friendless. I am building bridges with my Dad and we now go fishing together and have meals together. We now have

a father and son relationship. My Dad is so proud to have his son returned to him; he is forever thankful. I don't see my son at the moment. I am waiting for the right opportunity to talk. Until then I am sure he will hear about the good things his Dad is doing. Also, I have come to realise that the way to my son is not through the courts but through his mother who has been there for him for fourteen years. Words will never express how thankful and grateful I am to Helen. She is an angel – but I will prove my love not by words but by actions. I have since met a beautiful partner and we plan to marry next year¹⁴. For twelve years I suffered with Hepatitis C. In July 2012 I got the all clear. Statistics show that only 15-20% of people can clear this virus themselves and I am one of those people. I have also been offered employment with Wales Probation Trust as a Probation Support Officer – amazing really considering I was an addict three years ago – like the song by John Newton, Amazing Grace, once found, never lost.

So this leaves me with giving thanks. I would like to thank Teen Challenge for their love and support. This would never have happened without you. I would like to thank Turning Point for the organisation they are and for all their support – keep up the good work! I would like to thank the probation service for their support – and continuing support. I would like to thank Beth Weaver for the opportunity to share my story. I would like to thank Natalie Bevan, my probation officer through all of this, who believed in me always and for never giving up on me – thanks Nat. Mostly I would like to thank one man, because without him this would never have happened. I would like to thank Jesus Christ for his love and for dying for me and for making all this possible.

If you're reading this story, my message is simple. Never give up hope. What has been done for me can be done for you. Stay strong and God bless you all. In closing, then, I would like to say that three year ago I was an addict, living on the streets, with no hope and no future, thinking I would never find an answer to life's problems. Today I don't smoke, drink or take drugs and I have not just found an answer to life's problems but I am being equipped to help find answers for broken men and women to live drug free, independent lives. Again, thanks to all those involved for making this possible. God bless you all.

¹⁴ Gareth has got married since writing this.

STEVE COLBY: ENGLAND

My name is Steve Colby and I attend Hertford Probation weekly along with having weekly drug tests and visits from the police. I am 23 years old and was born in Stevenage. My parents split up when I was in infant school. I have one brother, one sister and a step family from my dad's side. I lived with my mum until I was eight years old. I was physically abused by my mum. I was subject to beatings most days or before I was going to bed. I was physically scarred by this and have marks on my back. I was then moved to my Dad's while I was at junior school and was there until I turned 17. During that time I started to commit offences such as shoplifting and criminal damage.

During my teenage years, I spent a lot of time hanging around the streets of Stevenage or St. Alban's. I quickly became addicted to cocaine and hung around with older men at one point. I stayed at a hostel but I was thrown out for drug dealing.

I spent time living in the YMCA hostel in Welwyn but this ended up with me going back to jail and I had an unhappy relationship with someone who didn't support me and encouraged me to commit crime so she could have money for cannabis and her child. Finally removing the bad people from my life is the step forward I really needed but I chose not to at that time. My Dad took me shoplifting and at times encouraged my behaviour and even bought stolen goods from me and my friends.

After my Dad remarried I went to live with my Auntie, but my Uncle was an alcoholic so this did not offer me a stable home life. I first went to jail for six months for shoplifting and burglary offences. During this time my Auntie came and visited me. I was very scared and upset being there.

I left prison and I was out for around two months, and then I was returned to prison for four months for robbery. This time my outlook was different and prison life was easy and I knew people in there, and I found the prison routine an easy way to live. I have been to prison seven times since the age of 18 and during my time at Woodhill, I was attacked by another inmate and received a broken nose. In prison, I learnt new ways to commit crime and came out a lot more criminally minded. Having a buzzer in your cell was like having your own

personal butler and I never once missed being out, because life in jail always made me more money once I was released putting the things I learnt into practice. I found my prison experience easy and it was like being at a holiday camp. I didn't worry about paying bills or having to find somewhere to live. In prison everything is given to you and I never found it boring as there was always something going on or someone to talk to. Most of my circle of so-called friends were in prison.

Since 2012 my life has taken a big turn and I haven't committed a crime since the middle of 2011, but I was convicted of an attempted burglary in January 2012. After the court case I volunteered to have a buddi-tag which is a new system put in place by Hertfordshire police, and is a 24 hour tag that is GPRS¹⁵ and knows where I am at all times. I now work closely with a Police officer who visits regularly to see how I am getting on. My life seems to be changing each week and I've even got myself a few temporary jobs. I've had enough of committing crimes and I do feel appalled at some of the crimes I have committed and I feel sorry for what I did to certain people by making them a victim of my crime. I do feel that some of the things that I have done could have been prevented.

I have received massive support from my Probation Officer and the Police via the buddi-tag. My new girlfriend has made a big impact in my new outlook and always supports me, even through the tough days and I had a baby on the way, which also made me want to change but sadly we lost the baby and my girlfriend had a miscarriage. It was a tough time and there was a point when I didn't think I'd keep on the straight and narrow, but with my girlfriend and my Probation Officer, I kept out of trouble. I have stopped talking to certain friends and this has helped me focus and not be tempted to go back to crime

I was a heavy cannabis user and the past four months I have cut down considerably and even received two negative drug tests. There has been down sides and I regularly have mood swings and I do find it hard having no money, and I was better off when I was committing crimes. I always had money and I felt life was so much easier. I didn't care about anyone around me. Now I can at least have a quieter life and not be harassed by the local police. There are days when I could easily go out and to commit crime, but my life has taken a big turn and I would never turn back now as I have come so far.

¹⁵ A General Packet Radio Service. Denotes a form of electronic monitoring [Ed comment]

There are a few reasons why I turned to crime in the first place. I always wanted new things such as the latest phone or a new pair of trainers. I also had a drug addiction and because I could commit crime I always had money. I would do as I pleased. Not having a close family unit didn't help and I have tried to build a relationship with my mum, but this failed and I won't be contacting her again anytime soon. My dad had helped me out the past few months and we talk regularly on the phone and that is all. I have my own family now and I can do this myself with the support of Probation and my girlfriend. I am looking for fulltime work and support myself the right way.

THE FUTURE IS CHANGING

Raymond Lunn: England

Sitting in a prison cell pondering the future wondering what path lies ahead following release from prison, creates moments of reflection and clarity that begin to define the inception of change. It is during those moments an individual can create changes. Those changes are subtle and fickle existing in neurons travelling through the synapses of the mind, looking for somewhere to take shape, as quickly as they occur they can also disappear. It was in 1991/2 during a three year prison sentence for attempted robbery that change occurred within me - sadly it took another four years for the neurons of change to take shape and bear the ultimate fruit of desistance from crime to be fully realised and achieved.

I was lucky to have a great job while serving the prison sentence; I became an education orderly, cleaning the education block and making filtered coffee (my first addiction to coffee) for staff in the education unit at the Moorlands Young Offenders Institution managed by Doncaster College and their staff. It was not long before a relationship with the teaching staff and in particular a prison officer, Miss Roope, who was in charge of the education block, began to have an impact on me. The staff and prison officer questioned why I was a criminal; they saw in me a level of intelligence that seemed to suggest I was a bigger fool than most to be choosing a criminal life and career. This was my second prison sentence (and not my last) and fourth time in prison. At that time I had been involved in crime seriously for around seven years. I was then 18 years old.

Whenever possible I involved myself in courses within the education block - cognitive courses, anger management and any other courses that would give my parole application some evidence of rehabilitation, remorse and change, to tick the boxes essential for consideration. I had always been an eager participant within the prison and would fully immerse myself in whatever courses I endeavoured. It was during these endeavours that staff probably saw something in me, or it was during our often comical and argumentative in-depth discussions with staff during the breaks while drinking their filtered coffee! They not only recognised something I did not see, they instilled confidence to test this 'intelligence' – I

embarked on getting my first GCSE qualification (English Language) – I left school during my first prison sentence in 1989 and never attempted any qualifications before or after, until my incarceration in Moorlands.

All my assignments other than the oral examination were done in my prison cell. It was these moments in time and place that something began to change; I began to believe in something that had somehow eluded me previously - self-belief. I even wrote to Mensa to test my intelligence even though I could not pay for the test. They kindly obliged and sent me the test free of charge. When the results arrived back from Mensa, I did not expect to be a genius, but did not expect the result that was delivered either – I was in the top twelve per cent of the population, 88 percentile, above average level of intelligence according to Mensa's analysis of the test. Wow, I wasn't 'thick' – I became the Scarecrow from the Wizard of Oz (1939) near the end of the film "I do have a brain".

My days and nights sat in the prison cell were now filled with different aspirations and dreams to what had existed before. Before, I thought of how I was to try and manipulate the parole application for early release and thought about the crimes that were going to be achieved with new friends I had made while in prison upon release. I began to think about what I had done in the past, where the future was heading, the victims of my crimes - their heartache and pain and my own family's heartache and pain. I also thought about the pain of being an offender, the exclusion from the 'straight' life, and my lost youth. A moment in a prison cell can last a long time especially when they are mostly heart wrenching and painful thoughts behind a locked door with bars in the window. The moments were also mixed with hope and a growing self-belief - change was happening, subtly and profoundly within me.

The efforts I had made really did bear fruit – firstly, awarded with my first of many qualifications I now possess, English Language GCSE grade C, and English Language oral GCSE grade one, and a commendation from the AQA exam board. Secondly the parole application was successful; I gained an early release of twelve months. I was released early by a full year. It is worth noting that my personal prison officer read the application before submitting it to the parole board and said he would "eat his hat" if I did not get parole. The practise of writing for an English Language GCSE obviously brought other benefits. For the first time in my life the value of education was clear to see, this was a valuable lesson in

itself. Who can put a price on twelve months of freedom? The price for my freedom was an English Language GCSE and someone noticing something I had not.

I was released in the summer of 1992 after 14 months of incarceration out of a potential imprisonment of 36 months. As part of the parole application I promised to seek out more education after release. That promise was kept and I enrolled into Park Lane College for a BTEC course in Business and Finance. Sadly, after at least five successful months of college which were marked by continuous distinctions for assignments, I left and did not complete the course. I left after an incident on the bus home from a field trip at the Gatehead shopping complex. A boy from my class was being bullied by some youths at the back of the bus who had been drinking. I asked them to stop, they continued. I lost my cool and hit one of them knocking some teeth out. This caused some issues and I no longer felt comfortable at college. Not long after I was caught committing an offence of burglary of a social club – I remember the pressures of money, the lack of it been the reason for going back to crime. I was still on parole licence and was recalled to prison consequently sent back to Moorlands YOI and I remember the shame of meeting the education staff and Miss Roope again. When I was sentenced I was given a non-custodial and allowed to be released without completing the original prison sentence recalled back to prison for - I had been given another chance and I wasted that chance that was given to me. The next three years became the second most prolific and most serious period of my criminal career. It is difficult to describe the seriousness of this period, but it was the first time I became part of a team, a gang if you must, but a gang does not best describe what the team did. In 1995 I was eventually caught and imprisoned for handling stolen goods. The nine month prison sentence was not like the previous prison sentence, no courses or education – now I was 22 years of age and heading for a long life behind bars.

However, I remembered what had been wasted in 1992 - the self-belief to create a new life, an educated future, and other people's faith and belief. Coincidentally, I'm writing this article on my nephew's 17th birthday – September the 10th, it is also my anniversary; the day I swore to myself in a prison cell in Armley Prison that I would never go back to a life of crime because my family had a new member. I was released in January 1996 aged 23 – it is 17 years since I was last in prison or in trouble with the justice system in the UK. Seventeen years to the day since I had chosen to desist from a criminal life. The day of deciding to stop offending would not have been possible without those days sat in a cell in Moorlands in

1991/92 working on those GCSE assignments that gained me my first ever qualification. Without the people who helped create a self-belief, without those moments of reflection and pain, I do not believe desistance would have been possible three years later. Another important component for planting seeds for change was my Probation Officer, Mike Fielding, who sadly never found out about the impact of the seeds he planted within me. All I can say about Mike is this, he was not a friend in the sense of how we think of friendship. We had a mutual, respecting relationship. I always felt equal in his company, he never told me what to do, only what was possible. Maybe it was Mike who taught me to believe in others believing in me, and that is why I trusted those that assisted in my development for change. The truth is - desistance from crime did not begin when I decided to stop offending; it started years earlier with the birth of self-belief and a lust for learning including the adoption of change - it was in 1991 when the future was changed for me. It was my relationship with others that brought me to a place in my mind that change could happen.

Addendum

I wish I could express to you that that is the end of the story and my life continued *happily ever after* - unfortunately, this is not the case and is only part of the story. My life after 1996 produced amazing successes in terms of employment, education, travelling and experiences. For eight years I was a successful business development manager, sales person and account manager - the only reason this was possible was for the fact that I had lied to my employers that I had no previous convictions. The reality is, I have a non-spent conviction for life as part of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 punitive conditions, because of the three year prison sentence in 1991 – I am considered ‘un-rehabilitated’ in the eyes of UK law. I began to challenge this and began disclosing the un-spent conviction for attempted robbery with an imitation firearm in 2003. I spent two years unemployed until I began an access course and won a place at university. In 2009 I graduated from the University of Leeds with a 2.1 Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in Sociology and Social Policy. Ever since I have been unemployed. Desistance can begin to be created in a moment, and likewise be broken in a similar moment. Thankfully I’m still holding on in poverty and in recent years following graduation from university in despair and homelessness - but only just.

FRANTIŠEK DOBROTA: SLOVAKIA

Co-authors:

Mgr. Katarína Čavojská; PhD, Pavol Kopinec, PhD

General Information:

Age: 41

Gender: Male

Country of Origin/Residence: Slovakia

Offence types: Violent criminal activity, thefts and robberies

Number of convictions: Seven convictions

Experience of Punishment: Sentenced three times (imprisonment one and a half years for an attempted assault with serious injury, two years for theft, 12 years for another violent crime)

Time since last conviction: 18 years

Time since last offence: 18 years

Personal Experience

Firstly, there were family reasons, then an attempted assault with serious injury. Later in prison, I got familiar with people there who I kept seeing even after I left the prison. Together we started a new criminal path, with actions which were not related to my first crime including for example, theft and robbery. I was prosecuted seven times and sentenced three times.

My first sentence was related to an assault with serious injury. After that followed imprisonment for theft for a short period - two years. This time the number of years in prison was increased by the time remitted from the first period of imprisonment. Then came two quiet periods – six months and then a whole year without me being involved in any criminal activity. Last time I was released on 10th April 2006 at 10.21 am. They were supposed to let me go at 10.00 am but for some reason they kept me waiting longer.

As time passed I realised that not even the first crime was worth the sentence. I just wanted to avenge my mother, who had already been dead for some time. The revenge did not bring anything, apart from that I started another chapter in my life, the worst one, when a person

comes back and is outside the 'normal' circle. Only then do you realise how your previous actions have affected your subsequent life ... But I'm telling you, when I was released the first time, my intentions were not to repeat it again. It was more like foolishness. After my first prison sentence, I realized how well it all went – because they remitted half of the sentence. I kept telling myself how easily it passed – if anything happens, it's not such a big deal to get out of it, but I was not careful enough.

After my release in 2006, for sure a person can't live life how he wants or live the way he imagined. Just be honest, how many times can you solve things by getting involved in a quarrel or by involvement in conflict, but me ... I have to back off. I can't fight with people, because then I'm facing much more serious charges. I've learned how to control myself and step away from conflicts. It's a question of choice, my choice. And where there's a will, there's a way – circumstances even favour you sometimes. In my opinion, it is important to support people freshly released from prison. Nobody was interested or is interested in me. I served 15 years all together, from when I was 18 years old until I was 36. In that time, I'd only spent a year outside. Try to imagine being released after such a period of time and all you get in your hands is 70 Euro. What do you do with that? You can't rent any accommodation for it, or anything. And in my situation, when I left prison, my parents had already passed away and I was not mentioned in their will. You have absolutely no chance and it's always about the people who stand by you. Who give you a helping hand when needed? It doesn't need to be only about the material stuff, all you need is a place to lay your head or some basic things. For sure, some support and somebody behind you that's important.

Who supported you?

For me it's 50/50. My family always stood by me – they offered me the greatest support. By family, I mean my brothers who never turned away from me. And then I was lucky with employers, which are the other 50 per cent. I was hired by one man as a worker on a building site and since then I have had my job. It's been over six years now. The first six months after my last release were like this – I have a cousin in France. I was supposed to be released on Monday after twelve years, and in the weeks before that I started making plans. Twelve years is a long time so I started to imagine what was going to happen. One week before that time, I got a letter from my cousin in France, offering me a job. No language skills were needed. So I was released on Monday, and the next Friday I was on my way to France. And then I went

back to Slovakia – back to my girlfriend. My cousin is in the French Foreign Legion, so he is very strict. After a time, when I broke up with my girlfriend he did not want to hire me again – that's how he was trained in the Foreign Legion. He explained to me that this is how things are and I had my chance, but only once. It helped me a lot that he took me on as I already had two criminal convictions. And then Lipsic (the former Minister of Justice) started with the nonsense (three strikes and you're out rule). For me that means that I can't have any fight, even if it's just a small scuffle, nothing serious, not even a slap. I would be arrested and get a special trial for it. So all I can do is back off.

Where did you encounter problems?

Many people work to have a decent living. If somebody has been sentenced, it's difficult. I don't know how to put it. Nobody would employ me if I said in interview how much time I have spent in jail. Once you have done a crime, you are punished, you are imprisoned, but that's not everything, that's not the end. Your punishment lasts until the end of your life. Even if you could erase it from all those databases, people already know, and have it in their mind and will always find a way not to employ such a person. On the other hand I'm lucky. My boss knows everything about me. But again, it's unofficial employment. He does not employ people. If we go on a construction site, and everything has to match all reports, he splits the time between us, or I work for some number of hours. I am taking state benefits but it doesn't suit me at all. Even though I have worked since I was 15, the time spent in prison does not count. The law changed recently, so I have only a few years in active employment. These things do not work in this country. People are working unofficially because they have to. Even if you get 400 Euro and some food stamps, it's absolutely not enough to feed your family. So the choice is to get an unofficial job, earn some 1000 Euro – and even that is not enough and you can't live to a high standard on that.

During release - how was it?

I think that at that time there were the counsellors. We once had a talk together. But there was nothing else, no support at all. I mean, what is missing is that there should be some organisation, communities for people released from prison. Not to be pushed into something, but more like being advised and having the information needed, when leaving jail and if something happens you may look for support here and there. They will give you a lot of advice on how to do the paperwork related to health or social insurance, that you need to go there and do this and that, but to get other information apart from this wasn't on their list.

Were they working with you in prison, preparing you for your return to normal life?

No, there was no such interest.

You mentioned Mr. Kuf (a priest running a shelter for ex-offenders) – how did you meet him? Did he help you somehow?

Well, he was visiting (the prison) as part of a project focused on our study for final exams, for example for our group. He was also giving out information and talking to us about the possibility that we could find shelter and support over at his place after being released. It was the only thing I can think of. I could have gone over there. He gave us some hope, that if we didn't have anything (to eat) or we didn't know how to go further he would be there for us. He also set some conditions. I won't forget them. You cannot drink, you have to work, and there are some limitations for example once a week you have to go to a mass. I think for a person, who wants to be grateful for this help, it's only fair to obey and be grateful for stuff like this. It's such a little thing you can give him back. I never visited him. Once I was passing by on a trip. I thought about visiting that place but in the end I did not go.

What does it mean to you not to be active in a criminal activity? Pros and Cons?

I don't know, I never thought about myself as a criminal. I was not showing off too much, and in general I feel like an honest and good person. I know that I helped more people than hurt them. But when you hurt somebody, then you are thinking who and when you going to meet. So it is also shame and conscience. And even if I had some crime money, I always preferred to get rid of it. It weighed heavily on my mind. I was not happy with it. I could not sleep and it wasn't a good feeling at all. For me it's difficult to commit crime. It's easier to live honestly. And I can tell you that I had moments thinking about revenge. I caused the pain and I paid for it, but they hurt me many times, too. Even in prison some people hurt me – and those are the moments when you think of revenge once you're out there. It's not worth it now; it's a long time ago. The thing that affected me the most was the graduation certificate. Many people took it, also the group I was with. It was said that the reason for doing it is not to fall lower after you're released from prison and so you have at least some chance to have a decent life. So it has changed the way of my thinking. Now I even laugh when I remember those "revenge" thoughts.

What has changed in your life and in you personally?

I should say that there should be somebody who would observe how I was and how I am now. It has definitely changed me. I'm not so free minded as before. I'm intense. Even though everything works now, it's still unstable.

Did you enrol in some kind of supporting programmes?

We haven't had such things. But it would be a great thing if something like this works somewhere. Even if it helps just one person, it's worth it. No, nobody addressed me with anything like this. It's also about having such a network. Like Orange¹⁶. They keep calling their client every month and offering new offers. Something like this should exist also for us. To know about those people and who is interested will do it. I have moments when I don't need it, but sometimes I'd like to have something like it. It's like abstinence. I think that people with influence (politicians) should realize that once a "deinstitutionalized" person goes back to normal life, they should have some basic support to handle it. I don't mean being pampered, just some basic support instruments, because, if you want somebody to avoid committing crime, you don't let him sink or swim alone. They should be more interested what's going on, what's happening to those people. If not, then everyone is surprised. There are so many people who would never commit a crime again, but they just don't have a choice. Many times it's just an act of desperation.

¹⁶ Mobile phone network [ed comment]

JAN SMREK: SLOVAKIA

Co-authors: Mgr. Lenka Suchá; PhDr. Pavol Kopinec, PhD

General Information:

Age: 41

Gender: Male

Country of Origin / Residence: Slovakia

Offence types: Economic criminal activity

Number of convictions: One conviction

Experience of Punishment: Sentenced on one occasion (three and a half years in custody on remand, one and a half years defer of sentence and eight years in imprisonment, second grade of security)

Time since last conviction: two years

Time since last offence: twelve years

Personal Experience

I did not consciously start offending; I was sucked into it at the beginning of my business career. My future business partner approached me to start a business with him. He said that everything would be managed by him and I would administer what was needed within the company. Later on it became a criminal activity. The criminal activity stopped a long time ago. It ended when they took me into custody, but we had already stopped the criminal activity some time before that.

I was aware of the fact that a crime was being committed; I just wanted to close my eyes to it. Then my business partner disappeared and it was too much for me. There was absolutely nobody who would have been able to manage the organization he had created. All the suppliers, buyers and so on disappeared. There were no contacts left, so the criminal activities we had been running did not continue under my control. Unfortunately, until that moment my own conscience was not bothering me as I closed my eyes to everything that was happening in the company.

Later on a certain group of people, who stood behind my partner, tried to make me continue. By that time, an investigation had already begun and everything broke down, so the group didn't exert too much pressure on me to continue with these activities and they (the group) looked for different ways.

No one in my neighbourhood knew that we committed crime. I didn't want anyone to get involved, and thus no one was able to support me in stopping it.

For me it was easy to stop committing the crime, because I made no profit from it. What was hard was to get out of it, to survive, because there operated this group of people who murdered business executives and witnesses. It was difficult when you know the position to stay away from this group, to try to avoid them, not to listen to their promises and not to be lured out somewhere.

I did not think that "staying involved" would have some benefit for me; because it had no benefits for me, I had no profit from it, it was quite easy to stop and it didn't make sense to continue. My partner was murdered (probably he was, some people say not, some investigators argue that yes, he was and I think he was murdered), so all the links were cut-off. For some time this group continued, just from persistence in crime, but then when someone blabbed out and when the police started to investigate, then the group began to step away from it too. There was strong pressure from the police and the police activity caused the crime to stop. Personally, I waited for and lived through that, that it has to come, the police must come and take us and the punishment will follow, too. Until this moment, I just tried to survive and live. I felt very relieved when we stopped criminal activities. It was the first time I felt so good. I tried to trade legally for a while until we were taken into custody. Actually, I was successful with the business.

When I received the sentence, then everything changed, everything became apparent (that I had closed my eyes to things) and I was marked down as an accomplice. My family did find out, my wife, friends, acquaintances, strangers and so on, because the case was publicized. I was divorced after I was released - but the marriage broke down while I was sitting in jail. I had nothing left, just some friends remained, friends and acquaintances who did not turn away from me. I now have no problem saying to this circle where I was, why I was there and what I was doing. My story can no longer scare anybody, either.

During my time in jail I went through something like an inner purification. I had enough time to think about myself, what I had committed, what had led me to do it and how weak I had been. About the moments I should have stayed firm but retreated. I think I've changed a lot and for the better, and if not, then at least I know what my weaknesses are.

I started with this business, not only because I wanted security for my family, but because it involved my personal ambition to achieve something, to prove to myself and maybe to others that I can achieve something. Now, I don't have this ambition anymore, I don't need to prove anything to myself and I am so much happier with what I have now. Although, recently I have wanted to win the lottery!

I see myself as humbler and more mature. I have more grey hair and I assume that grey hair is bringing some life wisdom, as we say. Behind me is experience which it was not necessary to have, but from which I took a lesson in life. Otherwise, I am satisfied. My relationship with my parents is much better than before; they are supporting me a lot (that was what I missed before). So after all, in some ways it was a positive experience, too.

What happened has still not been forgotten, so for sure it still influences me. I need to pay the cost of the arrest, every month I need to think about that again. In the future if I started a business again, I would definitely do it only by myself. Probably, I will not trust other people anymore. Even when I think about it now I feel still very gullible. I believe that we all are born small, unstained as a clean sheet and this must stay somewhere inside of us forever. Every person is basically good, but just makes mistakes.

I was in detention for three and a half years, which is different from prison as in detention there is a lack of supporting services. Although, there is a teacher, he is too busy all the time. In detention you can't do anything, you can't study, nothing. The place where I served my sentence I sometimes missed something like this, because people who are locked up there for a couple of years could manage to complete some education programmes before probation. There was a barber course on which I enrolled. A computer course, I enrolled on that too, but the course was at such a basic level, that people only learned how to switch the computer on and off. No additional tuition using the internet, which could be useful in job searching after their release.

You could go and talk to the teacher every time over there and they are willing to help you, explain things for example about how to manage your visits, how to get to the phone, what the claims are about ... but they have a lot of additional work and very little time. For example I wasn't able to go for walk outside, because they didn't have enough time to manage them, to play football, walking. I was there for six months but I went out for a walk only three times. Of course there are opportunities to have different free time activities – knowledge quizzes, competitions, programmes on how to work with anger, but only once a month. If you had a job or duties you were not able to join them. Mostly, it was only written on paper that there was something going on. All of this was run by internal teachers. Recently, I saw on TV that somebody graduated, or is studying a university course for three years, but those are only the easily rehabilitated groups with security level one. They can commute to schools outside the prison. This is way too limited for people in second and third correctional groups. People from second and third groups can be educated only inside the prison and have only limited options, even though they may be equally or more intelligent people. You just need some kind of “window of hope”. You can't earn anything just by sewing shoes.

When they released me, I left prison with only what my family had sent to me and that was all I had in my bank account (and the fare to travel home). I was actually punished twice. (Three and a half years in custody, then Appeal Court and a further period of imprisonment). I wasn't able to have a normal life between these two periods. Life had brought me to other circumstances and I needed to feed myself, too. The uncertainty about when they would take me to prison again, telling my employer the truth, that I don't know when I will leave the job, when I may leave my employer in the lurch because I have to start a period of imprisonment.

These are things that should be taken into account during the counselling sessions with a psychologist. I should have been told about and warned about this before my release. And again, after I was released I got only 20 Euro for my trip home. I didn't get anything else, no support phone number. They didn't care what would happen to me, if I would be homeless on the street. I think this should work in a different way, to get some paper with contacts in place to arrange where to stay in the area of your permanent residence. To cut a long story short, to provide something which can help people released from prison to manage their life and to get through the period when a person is looking for a job so you do not need to start criminal activities again. If he had tried hard to change, he has taken lessons from his life but then got 20 Euro to live on, he will steal again. And most importantly, if the family don't support you, and in many cases it's like that, then many people are soon back in jail, because their families don't have adequate resources to support them.

NABILL, AKA NAB: ENGLAND, UK

This is a short story of my life and where, what I suffer from, took me until I found out what was wrong with me many years later. I was brought up in a home with my Mum who was a loving caring mother who did the best she could, and a hard working father who did the best he knew. There will be a few things that I find irrelevant to write as I would like to describe as best I can my disease of addiction and keep this simple and straight forward.

As a young boy, I remember never really listening much and always doing what I wanted to do. This attitude I took to primary, then secondary school. I was always being told off for not listening and misbehaving. I *was* always staring out of the classroom window thinking of how I'd be better off out there than here in school, day dreaming and fantasising. I was, from an early age, irritable, restless, discontent and never really felt fulfilled in anything I did. I can only describe it as empty inside and never at ease. I'd be very good at telling you and showing everyone I was ok, but from within myself I know now I was never really satisfied in much I did. I was good at art and found that was because it took me away from my reality, drawing all sorts and using my imagination was wonderful. It took me from the here and now, and also away for a moment from how I felt then. I started to shoplift and sell products at school and found this new and exciting, and the getting away with it was actually giving me a buzz and also a sense of meaning and purpose, to supply others with their wants and be needed. I suppose I could say making me more liked than most.

This progressed, combined with the bunking off school, the smoking, and the first substance I took to get me out of my head at the age of eleven – lighter gas. When I say to get out of my head, I mean because I was always in my head. My thinking was not normal. It was delusional and it always got me in trouble and continued to for years to come. The drinking and girls, the being known for being naughty, and the character I became, I thought – this is great! I loved it. It was fun but I never could see the harm and destruction that I started to cause as it went on and also the lie I was living. I was lost. The drugs grew from cocaine, clubbing, drinking, girls and fun, to getting caught and known by the police by 16 years of age. I recently found a drug agency appointment booklet that tells me I had a problem then, and was already seeking help. But what I know now is I suffer from mental blank spots forgetting how bad things are, how they have become and how I hurt those who love me

dearly. I forget how powerless I am over the first substance I take and where I end up and what I end up doing.

As my existence went on and my disease of addiction, in all aspects of the word, progressed, my consequences got worse. I couldn't hold a job. I couldn't stop using and I couldn't even get honest with myself. I was living a lie and became many different characters and felt I wore many masks, never really knowing who I really was or what I really liked. I was lost and only 19 years old by then. My girlfriend then, who I thought I loved, fell pregnant and I was over the moon. This was it. Time to be a Dad and be responsible. Time to put down, by now, the ecstasy, the cocaine and drink, the gambling and crime, the affairs, the dishonesty and become a loving partner and father who my baby deserves. Time to get a job and keep it. Time to stop getting in trouble with the police, courts, probation, and authorities. Time to grow up and be responsible. I swear I was wholeheartedly telling the truth. As my baby was born in 1992, as I held her in my arms when she came out, and as I felt the love and joy many experience from the beautiful moment, as I gazed at her and felt overwhelmed with happiness and pride, I believed that that was it. This time I am not going to use anymore, this is it. Leaving the hospital on the way to celebrate, I all of a sudden thought it would make sense to get some heroin for the last time, as I didn't even know by now I had a habit after trying it regularly to come down off cocaine after clubbing and dabbling with it during weekdays. I was in trouble, then the insanity and powerlessness was on me, believing I'll just get one – that's all.

As my illness progressed to more drugs daily, more crimes and shoplifting to feed my habit, more depression, my partner was getting worn out, resentful and uncommunicative, and my daughter's safety was at harm from the madness I was living and bringing home - also to my Mum's house and basically everyone who had anything to do with me. This had become where my using took me and others with me too; a place of hardship, struggles, unhappiness and fear. Speaking of fear, I now know I was still that frightened little boy at school that would do anything to be liked, anything to be wanted and feel needed. Anything to please you and also get gratification and affirmation, even though I was doing wrong. I felt worthless and lonely inside. I believe my spirit was lost and needed to feel part of a group or something, to feel worth something and hopefully all would be OK, but it never lasted. Not the drugs, the relationships, the comfort of being needed and being loved, my daughter and the love I have for her – all not enough to fill me inside. How scared I was being and feeling

like this. 'HELP' I was screaming inside, and my thinking and thought process saying 'don't tell them, keep this to yourself, they will judge you' and so on. Totally lost and in a dark place of isolation and despair, my appointments with probation from early on, like I said, lead me to drug agencies, support workers, to basically try and help. I was still trying but still with the delusion that I can cut down my drugs. I can swap substances. I can do it weekends. I can change where I'm living and I can change the people, places, and the things that made me use. With support from these different associations, I can do this. No, I might add, it never worked. It became worse than ever. I was in my twenties and now going through detoxes abroad and swearing that this is it. I've had enough. No more. As soon as I'd land, the thought enters my head to stop off and just get a bit. It says to me, 'you wouldn't get a habit from just a bit. It's not like you are going to do it again and again like before, you know better now...' This is how it speaks to me in my own voice!! I forget the pain and the sleepless nights of agony, the consequences and the promises to myself and my loved ones and all those who I try to make believe that I have had enough and will never use again. In a very short time after that thought, then the act of using due to that thought and my powerlessness over it, I am back in it, and worse than ever, every time it happens. The same as after every time I get out of prison – 'just get a bit, a treat, you have done so well' – that's what it tells me. Insanity in every aspect of my unreasonable thinking. I can take this problem with me everywhere as it is only me, with support, who can fix this – as I found out later on.

I hope I have explained a little bit about who I was and what I became. In 2008, May 13th, I was transferred to an open prison from HMP Wood Hill. In this open prison, there were meetings called NA and CA (Narcotics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous). They were an hour and a half, and consisted of drug addicts trying to get clean, supporting each other. First they do a few readings and then someone shares their experience of what it was like, how it became, and how it is now. This was an amazing experience for someone like me who thought I was the only one who thought and felt like I did. They were inmates of all walks of life and addictions. Many were lifers and many weren't but, surprisingly, all were so honest about their thinking, their fears and their illnesses. I felt at home for the first time in my life. This, for some reason, I knew just might work for me. They said there were twelve steps and I needed a sponsor to guide me through them. I agreed to myself that this I am willing to do, once I was out of prison, as I only had a few weeks left. At the gates, I was waiting for my discharge grant and looking forward to seeing everyone when I got home; with the hope of these new found friends and meetings, I felt hopeful that it was going to be OK. As I headed

to the train station and got on board, that thinking once again started to corrupt me – ‘get some on the way home, no-one will know’ etc., etc., etc. and I’m off. Powerless and hopeless as ever, once again I let myself and everyone around me down again. So the same insanity again, ending up, this time, in more dangerous situations and dramas. To top it off, suicide seemed very appealing. I thought I couldn’t take it anymore. I had had enough. Whilst on probation and a drug rehabilitation requirement, I found meetings in the evening to go to. By now things had started to change. I felt there was a way out and for the first time, I worked hard towards changing and becoming that member of society and the community I always wanted to be. Normal, hard working, have kids, a job I like, a woman I love, a home, DIY, holidays, savings, cars, fun and laughs, happy times and joys – basically doing life. But most of all, being able to sleep peacefully, to like myself, to know my value, to be content and not to obsess about getting high off crack, heroin, prescription drugs, drink – whatever. Amazingly the thought does not even enter my head. The support of my probation officer, my drug worker and others, and me getting totally honest and reaching out for the help and taking a course of action called the twelve step programme, has helped me achieve this and more. Please believe me when I say I am the chronic addict and very much so of the hopeless variety. When I pick up the first one, not the last one, that is the problem and it’s what I do in between my last relapse, and until my next - if I don’t continue to practice today.

Since coming into recovery three and a half years ago, I have come off probation and PPO list after years being on it. I have passed exams, and done courses and achieved certificates in many things; I have won achievement awards, learnt new things and done different jobs. I have become experienced in a few different careers if I choose to do them and I have a life I could only have dreamed of when I was stuck in active addiction. I also had nothing going on spiritually and mentally and I felt dead for many years but today my thinking is clear and my spirit is free. What a wonderful feeling that is. I will end this with some sadness. I suffer as a father who lost his baby girl, Amira, while in recovery – not even a year clean. I miss her so much and always wonder what would have been as I see other kids her age now, and what they do. Father’s day I spend at her grave and most Sundays and Mothers days – so this is in memory of my baby girl and I hope someone might read this and find hope and a way out from under, if they relate to it or not. I am the father though who I always wanted to be to my two step children and a loving partner and person as best I can to all. When my baby died, something inside me, a part of me, died too and whilst this traumatic time happened – and many others that I won’t go into all with great impact – I did not run, I did not use or even

want to, or think about picking up a drink or drug to relieve my suffering and pain. How amazing. That is what I call only something I could have dreamed about before as I would use on anything, absolutely anything. But not today thank you. Due to the twelve step programme, support, and being grateful and helping where I can, I am free. Thank you. My name is Nab.

ANON: IRELAND

I grew up in a happy family in rural Ireland and had what I would call a normal upbringing. I suppose my offending started at the typical age of 15 with the usual smoking cannabis and drinking. At the time my parents were breaking up and we moved from where I grew up, a rural place, to a new rural location in Ireland. I quickly started hanging out with a group of older boys and started experimenting with acid, speed and ecstasy. Ecstasy led on to smoking heroin and my offending quickly escalated from simple theft, or whatever, led to free drugs, to more organised crimes.

I was arrested at the age of 16 for possession of cannabis. After my mother's house was raided for stolen property I decided to join an older friend who was on the run in England. Within a week living in England I was selling crack and heroin. I did not realise I was addicted until a friend diagnosed my "flu" as withdrawal from heroin.

My offending rates went through the roof and I am ashamed to say that I was involved in more crimes than I was detected for. These offences were mainly driving offences although some were for minor drug possession. After a three month sentence in a young offender Institute in Shropshire for disqualified driving and going through a particularly bad "cold turkey" or withdrawal from drugs, I was placed on a methadone maintenance programme, a pharmaceutical treatment to support a reduction in drug use. HMP offered no detoxification programme, so I decided to go home to Ireland. So arriving home, I gained employment on a building site pouring concrete and, living in Dublin, work was easy to get during the "Celtic Tiger". During this period of economic growth in Ireland there was an associated building boom and employment was easily obtained, either through friends, agencies or simply asking around at building sites. I drank and smoked hash but went to work every day. As I was not using heroin there was not any offending. I was working and earned enough to pay my rent and live well. Most of the people I was friends with through work drank and smoked hash and I stayed away from those old friends who were using harder drugs. It was a period of about three years between coming home to Ireland, gaining employment and experiencing a life changing event which was the loss of my grandfather. He had been a father figure to me and I had always hid the realities of my life from him as I did not want to disappoint him.

After my Granddad died in 2003 I began smoking heroin again which helped numb the pain I felt and started “working” for the older boys I had grew up with. By “working” I mean buying, selling or transporting drugs around the country.

This quickly grew to the point that we came under surveillance from the National Drugs Unit, and I was eventually arrested with over £600,000 worth of cannabis. I was subsequently charged under 15A Legislation which carries a (presumptive minimum) sentence of ten years for sale or supply of drugs valued over 13,000 Euro. My court case lasted two years, during which time I tried two treatment centres, to no avail. Looking back I suppose the reason that they did not work was that I was doing it for the wrong reasons. Neither family, friends, girlfriends nor a court of law were strong enough reasons for me to successfully desist from using drugs. My offending rates declined as I was awaiting the court case but my drug use continued, although at a much lower level due in part to finances and also to family intervention, such as greater monitoring of my whereabouts.

In 2003 I was sentenced to six years with two suspended. Within one month of being in Mountjoy prison my cell mate, who was a friend before prison, was stabbed to death. This was truly life changing as within 20 minutes of his death I heard prison guards laughing, I don't know what was being laughed at, but it made me realise that within the Irish prison system, life truly is cheap. Around this time I started to reconsider what was important to me and re-evaluate the direction my life was taking.

After this event I started going to the school in prison, partly to briefly avoid activities on the prison landings and partly to engage in conversations that did not involve criminal activity, and after gentle persuasion from a teacher I completed my Leaving Certificate which I had previously failed. I have to admit I got a buzz from passing what I never thought I could and went on to do whatever various courses were available in prison. I suppose this was in part a thirst for knowledge as well as testing my own ability to pass exams, write essays and so on. Something I thought I would never be able to do. As my release date approached a genuine teacher suggested that I may be able to go to University. I was released in September 2006 and within ten days I was sitting in a leading University, enrolled in an access programme. I tried a variety of subjects and graduated with a 2.1. My circle of friends slowly changed and instead of discussing criminal activity, essays and exams became the dominant topic. I had less in common with old friends and talk about drugs and crime became boring to me. Nearly

all my new friends were met through University and I found I had a lot in common with people from very different walks of life.

I got a job working on a market stall on Sundays in order to have some cash. I also won the Bank of Ireland Scholarship which helped me a lot, from paying household bills to simply having enough to live on without having to resort to criminal activity. With a friend I met in University, we went on to do a degree in Social Science in Maynooth. The three years there passed quickly and I made a lot of friends from different backgrounds. I never hide my background and although some people may have judged me I was just happy to be passing essays and exams. I decided from the beginning that if I was going to complete University I was going to do it without having to lie about my past. If I told the truth then the past could not come back to haunt me. Looking back I always kept myself busy and kept away from people or situations that may have lead to trouble. I guess this was critical in me succeeding in my efforts and as they say the devil makes work for idle hands.

I was under a three year supervision order and had constant contact with the probation service. These meetings were useless as it was simply a box ticking exercise. I could have been carrying out contract killings and no one would have known. No help was offered by the way of advice regarding studying or financial assistance. Some of my friends are social workers, so I now am aware that the case load of probation staff prevents meaningful contact. I find it is now prudent not to disclose my criminal convictions in all situations as discrimination by the State due to criminal record is difficult enough to deal with, without the added stigma of the criminal label in society. In Ireland someone with a criminal record cannot obtain work in the civil service. So a social worker was simply not an option, although I feel I would have had a lot of experience which would have proved beneficial. The conviction also meant that I had to choose courses that did not have placements that I could not have obtained Police clearance for. A career in Law was also never an option. It makes me laugh that in Ireland a conviction means you will not be employed by Government but a conviction means that you can still be elected to Government, where would someone with a criminal past do the most damage?

I also have to mention that the help of my best friend, my mum, allowed me stay away from a life of crime. Constant encouragement, assistance and unconditional love made me even more determined to succeed in finishing the degree and make her proud. As time passed I had less

and less contact with old friends, this was partly as we had less in common but also I was sick of the drug lifestyle. I developed a website with a friend and we are gradually developing a sustainable business; this process is still ongoing.

After completing the degree, I applied and was accepted for a postgraduate course in teaching. I was not interested in teaching children but loved interacting with other determined adults, in particular prisoners. Due to my conviction I had difficulty in obtaining placement to get experience teaching. An education centre which deals with ex offenders, and which I had attended previously, accepted me to do my teacher training. I also volunteered to give talks about my experience to young offenders and also in schools. I did this partly to remind myself where I came from, partly to give something back and partly in an effort to help someone from not having to go through the events which I had experienced. A wise man once told me to say yes to everything and then when established I could pick and choose. To date this has not happened but I am still hopeful. At a time of massive unemployment there are few job opportunities and I remain optimistic about getting a job which I enjoy thoroughly. It was towards the end of my teacher training that I became involved with penal reform. After giving a talk in the Dáil, (Irish Parliament) about the upcoming spent convictions and the implications of having a criminal conviction, I was invited to join the board of directors of the Irish Penal Reform Trust. My role consists of advising about issues relating to prison life and attempting to change prison life on a practical level. Sometimes issues which may seem unimportant can have a massive effect on the daily lives of prisoners. There are also huge issues relating to the successful reintegration of prisoners. It is taking some time to find my own voice in relation to these issues but I am confident that in time change can be effected.

I thoroughly enjoy this as it gives me the chance to give something back and also see how a pressure group achieves its aims. I have finished a Masters in Criminology, which I have enjoyed as the class was made up of probation workers, detectives, social workers and prison staff. Lots of different perspectives and viewpoints made class discussion very interesting. I have been able to offer a perspective which differs from that of a social worker, detective or someone who works with offenders. It also has enhanced my own self esteem as I realise that I have the ability to be part of informed discussion and that my own experience is as valuable to that of anyone else. I guess I have gone from being a serial offender to a serial course offender. I have more letters after my name now than I have in it, although I am not really

academic. Sometimes I miss the thrill that I guess I got from criminal activity but I have replaced this with activities that also give me a thrill but in a productive manner. I do not miss the looking over my shoulder and all the hassle that was my life previously.

A lot of old friends are now dead, both natural and unnatural causes, some are in prison or living abroad unable to come home due to criminal activity. In contrast I now vote, have a television licence, and live a different life from the one I used to. I do any teaching hours I get offered, which are quite few, but I remain hopeful. It is not easy in the current economic climate but rarely does the thought enter my head to go back to my old way of living. I have met some amazing people and am lucky to have genuine friends, of all ages and all walks of life. At 34 years of age, I am no longer the constant cause of worry to my mum that I once was and believe that she is proud of me and what I have achieved. I would love to do more in the way of mentoring former prisoners as I believe that sharing my story can assist others change their life trajectory.

I should also mention how much I relate to the process of desistance as this change did not happen overnight. I am grateful for the opportunities, experience and people who have helped me, through advice and encouragement.

Post Script

I am happy to report that I am now employed as a Sociology teacher in an adult education centre which specifically deals with former prisoners. As part of my job I also provide peer support and study skills to former prisoners who have embarked on education courses, from FETAC courses, to University Access course and onto Degree courses. I wake up every morning, grateful to have a fantastic job, which I simply love doing, give something back to people who can benefit from my experiences and also receive a decent wage in the process. Life is good.

DARA: IRELAND

I am a 39 year old male from the midlands of Ireland. My background is middle class and affluent. My siblings are all high achievers in their various professions. I was well educated but was not particularly academic. I have always been interested in outdoor pursuits and I play the classical trumpet up to level six and piano to level eight. My career background is in catering. I trained as a chef in London. I moved to Germany in 1997.

In Germany, I ran a very successful pub and restaurant. I was in a relationship for seven years. My son, now 13, was born there and still lives there. I made a lot of money. I had, by any standards, an enviable lifestyle. I had a beautiful apartment and friends. I drove a nice car. Then I discovered cocaine and with incredible rapidity my life spiralled out of control. I became addicted to it very quickly. It suited my lifestyle. The catering trade is a high energy business and cocaine matched it. It is a drug that comes with a lifestyle of glossy consumerism that I found very attractive.

After I returned from Germany I was still addicted to cocaine; still under the illusion that I could live the same lifestyle as before without having the money to support it. Aside from the immediate material gains that a criminal act like burglary gives you there is also an undeniable adrenalin rush in carrying out a criminal act. Like everything else in my life I became addicted to that. I was arrested for burglary in 2009. Once I left prison I entered rehab. I felt that I had got my life back in order, but I then began to use legal highs from head shops and again my life spiralled out of my control. Once again I entered rehab and this time, with the exception of some alcohol related 'slips' I have managed to get my life back in order.

There is more than one reason why I decided to stop offending. One was simple fear. In the last years of my time on the continent I encountered some truly terrifying people in the drug world. I was lucky to have escaped from it because there was a very real possibility that I could have been killed.

Also, prison is a truly horrifying place and I have no desire to go back there. In there I felt isolated by my background as much as anything else. I managed to survive it and to be left alone because of my own physical fitness and strength and the fact that I was able to write letters for other inmates. There may be people who accept stretches in prison as an acceptable risk in their life as a 'career criminal', but I suspect that they are rarer than popular mythology would have you imagine.

Another reason was, of course, that I had finally isolated myself from my family who had had enough of my behaviour and decided to let me stew in it rather than bail me out. I can only imagine how difficult a decision that was for my parents to make. I don't believe for a moment that it was taken lightly, or out of anger. It was a hard earned life lesson and I am grateful for it. In the years since then I have managed to rebuild a very strong relationship with my parents, one based, this time, on mutual respect.

My son was also another reason for me to stop what was a ridiculously reckless and damaging lifestyle. These days I have a very good relationship with him. As he gets older and more aware I want him to have a father that he respects as well as loves.

Another thing that has helped me enormously in turning away from criminality was my experience with the probation services. I felt that I had entered into a contract with them which I was and am reluctant to break for any short term gain that an act of criminality would provide. With the probation services I felt that I was treated with respect and fairness, as a human being, rather than a 'case'. It was made very clear to me what was expected from me and I began to feel that it was possible to turn my life around. It helped that my probation officer and I come from similar backgrounds, so we understand each other; that we share qualities of aspiration. I feel I don't want to disappoint someone who has treated me with the utmost professionalism and respect. All through the process, I have had the strong impression that I am not merely being passed through the system. I am very clear about what is expected from me and I have found that my past failures, while obviously acknowledged, given the nature of the relationship, are not held against me as I move on in my life. We continue to have a very good relationship and share a very good rapport. Should I fail at this point in the process of putting my life back in order I feel that I will have failed someone who has invested their time and professionalism into me as a person.

I've been an addict all my life. Cocaine, alcohol, amphetamines, 'Head Shop' highs etc are really only the physical manifestations of a personality trait. These days my addiction manifests itself in a fitness regime and an unswerving discipline. I can't do anything else. I don't actually know what would happen to me if I let this self imposed discipline slip. It may not be the ideal regime, but it is the only one I know.

I set high but achievable goals for myself and the only way I can achieve them is by living a life of extreme discipline and order. I have very little money; every cent is counted and accounted for. I eat carefully, and well, but frugally. My house is cold because I cannot afford to heat it properly. I cycle home (62 kilometres) every weekend. I intend when my current college course is finished to pursue a career in outdoor adventure sports and set up a business between Ireland and Germany, using the language and business skills I already possess and the new skills I intend to acquire.

I train rigorously every day. I rise at five in the morning, jog for ten kilometres, and then I cycle 16 km to my college. After college I go to the swimming pool and gym where I swim for at least an hour and do a gym workout for at least an hour, after this I cycle another 16 km home. Once home I cook, then study and retire at about 10.30 in the evening.

It is only by continuing this regime, by having every minute of the day accounted for, to have purpose and goals, can I keep myself from a life of chaos and anarchy. I have had some 'slips', as AA refers to them, and the results have been frightening enough for me to be determined not to have another.

CATHY: ENGLAND

My name is Cathy and I would like to share with you my experience of being on probation for two years and offending in my late forties to early fifties. I had never offended before that and there was never going to be a light at the end of the tunnel.

I left the Crown Court in a complete daze and while that daze stayed with me for a good while. I was so relieved that I had not gone to prison. I could not wait to get home to my two children and just cuddle them and never let them go. They were the most important thing in my life and I had now been a single Mum for a few years, and I had worked hard to bring them up to be social and caring teenagers.

When I left the court I was given a name and date to go and see the probation office and the probation officer, whose name was Chris. I was absolutely distraught and suffered panic attacks and depression for a few years and as the offence was mostly committed by my ex-husband who had disappeared off the face of the earth, I felt like I was so alone in my head and I was very bitter and angry about him. I had all different emotions and I had no way of channelling them anywhere so I suffered in silence; I did not think I would make it one foot in front of the other. I was shaking and crying, however she made me feel that by the time I left the office, things didn't seem so bad but I knew I had a long, long way to go and would I survive it? The ups and downs carried on and it was a hell of a long road.

In the coming weeks, Chris had talked to me about a Women's Centre that was due to be opening very soon. So women like me could go there and sort a lot of problems out. However, at first I had to attend a women's programme at the probation office, which was very daunting, but one of the most insightful women's courses I have attended. There were four of us. They were a very small group and the facilitators were absolutely fantastic. However, yes, the ups and downs carried on, but every time I went to the programme, I came out feeling a little more human.

I finished the course, well the four of us did, and we were presented with certificates and a presentation. Again the nerves took over, because I still had no faith in my self-confidence,

self esteem, the ups and downs and worries of everyday life. Then I went with my probation officer to a new women's centre where I was allocated a support worker, Jayne and I know that without these people, would I have given up? I began to attend my probation sessions there. My support worker gave me so many insights to financial debts and so on, and how we would deal with it all and how I would make it to that light at the end of the tunnel. I attended anything I could, all different courses, including *The Power to Change*, *Stress and Anxiety Management* and *The Freedom Programme*. These are all courses that help you to gain your confidence back, self esteem – slowly may be, but personally I think that's the best way as we all know part of the rehabilitation has to come from us and keeping strong is not easy.

My group also practised tai-chi, street dance – which was fun. However I had my one-to-one with my probation officer and the courses were the best I had ever attended. Let's face it, when you go to probation, you see your officer, then week after week, the same conversation, then leave and back into your routine. I thank God for these women's programmes and, yes, you do have to be ready to take it all in. However, I can assure you that anyone out there is not going to feel strong enough at times going down that road. It's not without its problems as crimes are committed all the time and people will reoffend as their patterns and the stresses and strains of everyday life is enough to drive anyone barmy.

I can only speak for myself and I was in a fairly abusive marriage for a long time. I have my ups and downs and I am on the road and I can see that light at the end of the tunnel. Yes, there are days when I have no money and I have my ups and downs like anybody in society. However, I just cannot thank enough Chris, Jayne and people I met on my courses. My children who are now 17 and 15 have just taken all their exams so I must have done something right! However, I am still working on my self-esteem to be proud of myself of what I have achieved along the way, and will carry on doing so. I would like to say that the Women's centres are the pathway to success, even though sometimes I think 'I'm 53. Where is my life going?' But for the first time in my life, I know where I want to be and what I want to achieve and I could also go on forever. When I see women go to centres and not give it a chance, because they have panic attacks and depression, they cannot walk through that door, I just want to round them all up and tell them my story. It is obvious we get the strength from somewhere and most of it comes from dedicated people who have also had experiences in life and want to better this world by not thinking that crime is just about petty little things, that

rehabilitation is the key, and also men I believe have places to go to. It's down to yourself, I believe, and the right time. Thank you for reading my journey.

STEPHEN WACKETT: ENGLAND

My name is Stephen Lennon Wackett, I'm 42, white, male, British born. I've been offending since the age of about 13 or 14. Mainly assaults and drugs and have served time in prison. A few years ago I wanted to stop re-offending and try to live a normal life but kept slipping up and making silly mistakes, because of my temper. I felt that I was embarrassing my two teenage children, when they would see me in the local papers for this and that. It was when I picked up my daughter from school that I heard a couple of kids taking the mick out of her about me beating someone else up in the shops; she looked embarrassed and so was I. That really hurt. The slip ups would happen because of drink and drugs so I dealt with them issues first.

In March 2011, I was convicted of assault again and lucky for me I received a four month suspended sentence and was placed under the supervision of Hertfordshire Probation service. I attended A.R.T (Aggression Replacement Training) sessions once a week group sessions, studying 'moral dilemmas' and 'skill streaming' for 18 weeks. I didn't know what to expect but kept an open mind. Straight away I started learning about what goes on in your body and the anger sequence what gets you more wound up and how to calm yourself down. It was an eye opener for me personally. It taught me how to get out of difficult situations and not put myself in them in the first place, understanding other people's feelings. It gave me the confidence I didn't have before. I now recognise the triggers and cues, external and internal. I'm able to cope better in certain situations and think about my actions and others. The skill streaming sessions have been a major learning curve for me and now I feel that my life can be different as long as I continue to practice and recognise the triggers and cues.

I've managed to use these skills on a number of occasions now and have been surprised with the results. I know when I'm getting angry and recognise the triggers so quick that I'm able to stop the red mist descending and flying off the handle and doing something I'm going to regret. Before I would let my internal demons take over and tell me to lash out - don't take no crap. But now I'm not letting them in anymore. I've got the control back and it's up to me to remember what I've been taught and to practice it.

March 2011 was my last conviction and I haven't offended since. I would like to think that I have stopped. I'm hopeful. The group sessions have had a major impact in me stopping offending and my children as well. I'm trying hard to find a job at the moment, which isn't easy at this time. So the temptation of easy money sometimes enters my mind (internal demons) but I think about the consequences and what I'm going to lose (which I've never done before), the contact of my kids, my flat.

My lifestyle has changed dramatically this last year. I have more time for family and my new hobby – carp fishing. I don't know why but I feel like a weight has been lifted off me in a strange kind of way. I can't explain it. The thing that has changed the most is my way of thinking and that is down to Diane Williams and Rose Graham (the tutors), can't thank them enough. The future looks better than it has ever before and I'm confident I won't offend again. I show a lot of empathy towards people, something I've never done before as well. So let's hope things have changed. Thanks again to Rose and Diane.

ANTON: CZECH REPUBLIC

The offender, who is at this time under the supervision of a probation officer, was conditionally released from prison; he had spent two years there. The probation period of the conditional release was set by the court at five years; he was conditionally released without the imposition of any obligations or restrictions. The interview with the probation officer and the offender took place in 2012, ie, in the third year of the probation period.

Age: 29

Sex: male

Nationality: Czech

Crime for which he was last convicted: bodily harm by negligence – traffic accident; contempt of court – repeatedly driving a vehicle without a driving licence; production and distribution of narcotic and psychotropic substances and poisons

Total number of convictions: four

Experience with alternative sentences: conditional sentence, community service sentence of 220 hours (served), another community service sentence of 300 hours (commenced, but while serving it, the sentence was terminated because of a combined sentence and the offender was sentenced to imprisonment)

Last conviction: 2008 (four years ago), entered prison in 2007

Time since last crime committed: five years

In the following account, the probation officer, who is working with the offender on parole, noted the offender's opinions, experiences and stances and added her commentary and observations:

For what reason did you commit crimes in the past?

It started with a traffic accident when I was 21. It was a bit of bad luck – I was passing and hit a cyclist, who was just turning toward me. I was driving at 50 km/h, in other words, within the speed limit. However, there was a solid line, and if you're passing, you will cross it. Nothing really happened, which is why I only got a conditional discharge. I was driving home from work and wasn't under the influence of drugs.

How did you try to change your life after your first conviction?

In fact, no change occurred at that time at all. I was attending university, but at the weekends I was already taking methamphetamines. Sometimes I even helped out; when someone needed drugs I got some for them. I mainly drove people where they needed to go, a taxi driver of sorts (I got money for it). When I realised they would take away my driver's licence, I didn't know what to do. So I sort of got caught up in it all, especially in distributing drugs. I couldn't buy "it" anymore (I had no cash), so I learned to cook drugs.

Did you try to "fight" it, find a reason not to do it?

I didn't fight it. I didn't try to make money dealing drugs; rather, I cooked drugs, mainly for myself and sometimes for friends. The classic "a small amount for my own needs," and I thought there wouldn't be any problem with that, although in the end there was. I wasn't thinking about the consequences because I was certain there couldn't be a problem with such a small amount. What's more, I knew two people who were also making drugs, but a lot more than I was. Compared to them, I was small fry.

When you look back today, what was it that caused you to change?

What was important was the "sobering up", the two to three months I spent in prison. That is if you don't get in with the wrong group. I decided that I wasn't that stupid to take drugs in prison as well. There were hints that I should take something to someone, but I said no. Once I sobered up, I started reading a lot (that's classic me). I mostly read sci-fi. Somehow I realised that technology was moving forward quickly and I was doing nothing – I had quit school, and the two years before getting into prison I had been taking drugs. I realised as quickly as in the first month of entering prison that I didn't want to end up back there again. I spent a lot of time "immersed" in books. I handed out food three times a day and in the meantime I was reading. Books always helped me, since childhood. In prison, I had something to fall back on, because reading, acquiring information, was always something that fulfilled me. I could go back in time. I could escape into my own world, which helped me "survive" prison.

Was desistance your choice?

It was my choice. I realised that things turned out quite well – I was sentenced to only two years unconditionally. I knew that I could survive, but if I did it again, I would not be able to

“start up” my life again. I believe that prison give me a chance to stop and think about my life. My situation at the time had only two possible outcomes: prison or an institution. Since 2006, I had in fact been expecting to end up in prison, and so there was neither the strength nor a reason to stop. It was clear that I would end up there – so it was not worth it for me to stop sooner. So repression helped me a lot (as the turning point came in prison).

Who or what supported you in your resolve to stop?

The resolve to stop, or rather to not start again ... I thought a lot about my parents. When I was in prison, they took very good care of me: they visited me regularly, were kind to me, and supported me. My father supported me a lot in my university studies (appreciated the fact that I was studying), which I started while I was in prison. I knew I couldn't do that to them again; I didn't want to disappoint them. I managed to finish my studies with honours after I was released from prison. I received my Bachelor's degree. I'm signing up for school next week, and in two years I'll be an engineer.

What helped you and what stood in your way at first when you made your decision to desist from crime?

My parents were supportive of me, and I was studying and wanted to achieve something (to make up for lost time). Nothing stood in my way: immediately after returning home from prison, I got back together with my “old” friends from childhood. I did not keep in touch with people who used drugs. I changed my group of friends. Now I'm much happier. I have given myself new goals, one of which is to become a programmer. Before entering prison, I didn't think that way. I am now much better at setting goals – this is above all work, the relationship with my parents, my studies, and I'm also in a relationship. My girlfriend and I have been living for some time together, and I'm happy. Actually, I don't want to lose it. We've planned a future: when we're going to go on our first holiday, when we are going to pay off the mortgage, when we are going to have our first child. First and foremost, my girlfriend has to finish her studies, and so do I. Now my work is giving me a lot of satisfaction; it's a job I really want to do. The difference between then and now is that then I used to take drugs. I found that I enjoyed cooking drugs – I enjoyed chemistry since grade school and I felt fulfilled. Even the police said that I cooked very high quality meth. Now I know how to apply my abilities in a better way. I also feel better about it.

What factors influenced you (helped you to make your decision) to desist from crime?

Repression influenced me the most ... Even the positive. I feel better and look better. I don't have to be ashamed. I believe I am a different person – better. I've also filled out, because when you do meth, you don't eat ... Outside of repression, it's mainly the social factors. I don't feel like an outcast, because when I was under the influence, I was ashamed to go outside, and when I did, I only looked down. Now I don't have to be ashamed; actually, no one has to be ashamed of me, especially my girlfriend. In the past, my relationships were only shallow and frivolous without a future and from the same environment (drug users).

How do you assess your experience with desistance?

I believe that I would have gotten there (desisting from crime) one day, but I think prison was a shortcut. My experience in prison was nothing pleasant, but it was survivable. I was in two prisons: the first was nothing much, but the second was much better. The staff were better, the environment was nicer and, most importantly, I began to study. I even felt support. The worst was the limitation of my personal freedom. What motivated me was that if I behaved well and fulfilled my duties, I could go on an outing outside the prison. I was also often saying to myself that I must avoid any disciplinary punishment, or else they would not release me at "half-time" [once half the sentence was served]. From the very onset I wanted to be released at half-time. It was the most important thing to me. Everything I did was subject to this plan.

What changed in your life when you decided to desist from crime?

I made my decision when I was still in prison. After I was released, it was difficult. I had to catch up what I missed when I was in prison and when I was using drugs. If I hadn't "dropped out" for those five years, I would have been much further ahead than I am now. I'm sure I can catch up though.

What hasn't changed?

I like cars, but I can't drive anymore (I'm still prohibited from driving). I could request to have my driving licence returned conditionally, but I don't want to. Mainly for the reason that I'm not a slow driver. I'm afraid that as long as I'm on parole, I could again have problems. I also need adrenalin. Now I try to find it in sports especially: mountain biking in dangerous terrain, skiing and snowboarding. Before I only had drugs and fast cars, so a lot has changed

in fact. Love for my parents and sister has stayed with me, and vice-versa. My sister often reproaches me for being in prison.

How do you see yourself today?

I see myself as a normal person; I perceive myself as younger. I feel successful especially in that I have a job I like – it's my hobby. I suppose that other people who didn't know me before might see me as successful. I see myself as bad-weather friend, a guy you can count on, someone who has practically no bad habits – other than cigarettes (I smoke, but less). I think my girlfriend is happy, as is my family, and actually my friends, too.

How does your criminal past affect the way you see yourself?

I don't take it too tragically. It would bother me very much if anyone found out about my criminal past at work. I am ashamed of it and I'm especially worried that I'd lose my job. I don't know how my bosses would react. But I also believe that my colleagues know me well and would not be bothered by it.

What are your experiences with alternative sentences?

Since the beginning I ruminated that if I was released, it would be under supervision. At first it bothered me that I had to keep bringing in some kind of confirmation that I was paying off my debts and that I was looking for a stable job. Nevertheless, supervision as such doesn't bother me. Above all, it's better to be outside than in prison. I was worried from the very moment I was released that I would be sent back if I made a small mistake. I still think so. I am well aware that I am on parole, and that is "holding me back". I just had an experience where my friend went four-wheeling off-road, and although I really wanted to go, I didn't – I was afraid of having problems. I feel that I am on parole and I am paying more attention to the rules. What most helped me change my life was my effort to improve, focus on what I like, to find a meaning to my life. I know that once I finish my current studies, I will go on to study something else. I've already chosen a faculty. Find a direction in my life. The fact that I had somewhere to go, where to live and something to eat, helped me a lot. Without my parents, it would be much more difficult.

Probation officer's commentary:

Author: Jitka Merinska, probation officer, Probation and Mediation Service of The Czech Republic

The client first attended consultations with me in intervals of one per month. He was motivated to cooperate. The fact that he was supported by his parents (food, housing) was of great importance. The fact that he used to be a drug user was the subject of our discussions since the very first consultations. I introduced a rule into our probation plan that he was to undergo urine tests for the presence of narcotic and psychotropic substances and poisons. All of the conducted tests have come back negative.

At first, the client could not find work under a proper employment contract: he wanted to work in the field that he had studied. In cooperation with the employment office, he was placed in a special programme – he worked only under an agreement to complete a job. His wage, however, was quite low, which is why his parents supported him, and this support was very important. During consultations, I motivated the client to find a stable job with a higher income and in the field that he had studied, which he managed to do in the end. The Client was also paying off his debt, which arose in connection with his first offence – a traffic accident. He managed to pay it off in full, also thanks to his parents' financial contribution.

At this time, my assessment of the client's situation is that it is stabilised. His current relationship, which began while he was still in prison, has also contributed significantly to this. His girlfriend has never been a drug user, has never been part of a high-risk environment, which the client was well acquainted with connection with his criminal drug use, and had her own goals in life. It is apparent that the client changed his circle of friends and left the drug user environment also thanks to the relationship with his girlfriend.

My work with the client also went well chiefly because he was afraid of repression; he set new life goals and priorities himself. He found a way to be fulfilled at work and in his personal life. He has managed to fulfil the plans and expectations that he had while in prison. I also assess as positive the fact that the client did not wish to disappoint his parents, who had supported him substantially while in prison and learned to believe in him again. This was a certain motivation for the client to lead a proper life and integrate himself back into society.

ANGELO: ITALY

Age: 39

Gender: Male

Country – City of birth: Italy - Brescia

Crime: Drug trafficking

Number of times in which you went to prison: four

Time from your last time in prison: one year

Time from your last crime committed: six years

What is biggest problem you have had to face in trying to give up crime?

Money is the first difficulty I encounter when I try to stay far away from crime. I have always committed crime for money, sometimes because I thought that to have money was the way to be a valid and important person. Of course I was wrong and I didn't give the right weight to values.

If you have committed more than one crime: it has been for your personal choice? Would you have preferred not to commit them? And now, what does prevent you from committing others?

Of course I would have preferred not to have committed crimes but yes, they have been my choice, my solution to find money. If I have to think to a way to stay far from crime I imagine a job, any job, that can let me earn a big amount of money.

If you have given up crime, why you did it? Was it a choice or a personal growth that took time? And what or who helped you to give up crime?

I think you could give up crime only if you decide to do so. You can't just expect that life conditions or people you know that brought you to crime change on their own. You need to think about what you want for yourself, what kind of person you want to be in your life. Then, you can decide if you are ready to face difficulties and hard times to start changing your life.

Of course, society could do much more than in fact it does to help former prisoners to stay away from crime. First of all it could try not to have prejudice when we are looking for a job, because without a job there is no chance to give up crime. I think I have given up with crime after a personal growth that has passed through many difficulties, but I can't say "I will never commit a crime again" because I do not know if I will be in the right conditions to change my life once and for all. The outside society with its prejudice doesn't help you to be re-integrated in a social context; you will be forever an ex-prisoner.

If you have stayed far away from crime for a while and then you started again doing some unlawful acts, it happened for the same reason you faced the first time or something changed?

I have been sentenced more than one time because I have always faced the same problems and I have always had the same reasons to break the law: I was always looking for money, huge amounts of money that could give me a wonderful life.

What helped you to stay away from crime or, on the other hand, made it hard to give up crime?

Normally, people like me are a problem because, like me, they want money, so when we are together we can't be of any help to each other by trying to persuade the one who wants to do something wrong not to break the law. My friends, for example, were with me whenever I committed crimes and they agree with me about the importance of having a lot of money in our hands to live in a better way.

People that live their life with a normal salary, that don't waste their money on everything they decide they want, that are not slaves to appearance or to the wrong values, can help me a lot. They taught me that a man can live with 1000 euro, without committing any crimes, and appear richer than he in fact is. These kinds of people help you to feel foolish when you believe that your happiness is directly proportional to the amount of money you own for yourself.

What was your experience of giving up crime? Positive or negative? What makes it easy or difficult?

Incarceration has been completely useless for me in traveling the distance from crime. I have had no chance to work for a long time and no re-educational treatment while in prison so I

can say that I have only accumulated aggression, anger, and frustration linked to the feeling that I need to retrieve the time I have lost.

What has changed in your life from when you committed crimes? And what has remained the same?

Nothing tangible has changed from when I committed crimes. The only thing that has changed is that you don't have money to spend to acquire everything you like; your standards of living are lower than before and you have to get used to new perspectives. Moreover, the eyes through which you look at your life are different you must start believing that you are a valid man even if you don't have money. You can't buy friendship with gifts and you can't have the respect of other people. Or, better, you have to learn that there exists a different form of respect that isn't founded on what you own, on how much money you have, and this is not easy for people that have spent almost their whole life thinking that money means everything. I am lucky because nothing has changed in my life after giving up crime: I still have my family, my girlfriend and my daughter, but I don't have money anymore.

How is your life now? And how was your life before?

My life before the crime was very rich. I had everything I thought I needed and the same went for my daughters, my ex-wife and my girlfriend. I could offer them a respectable life. Today I have to count on my family because I don't earn enough money for me and my beloved daughters. What I have in my mind is the strong need to find a job that assures me a good salary, more than 1000 euro, at least, because with less than this money you absolutely can't live. I'm not looking for something excessive. I just need a good position. Everything I do today is oriented to the achievement of this outcome.

How do you see yourself now?

As I get older I feel better and better. With regard to my crimes, I have no regrets, no remorse. The law on drugs trafficking is like the Prohibition and for me, to push drugs is just a matter of money, as with every other trade.

How do you feel in regard of your past crimes?

I feel good with myself, because I know I did them for money, because I needed money. Everything else that you can see in the movies, arms and gunfights, don't apply to me. It was just money and merchandise, nothing more than this for me. I don't feel ashamed at all for

what I have done. If I had been a politician I would of course have stolen money in another way. If I had been a lawyer I would have earned money at my clients' expense. The aim is the same, even if the law doesn't allow you to do this.

How was your prison experience? Did you feel supported by social services? Have they helped you to give up with crime and to re-build a new life?

For my part, the penitentiary system is not useful at all. The prison itself doesn't teach you anything. Only volunteers have helped me, not the social services and only my conviction is helping me in my resettlement process.

FROM A HYPERACTIVE CRIMINAL TO A TAXPAYER

John: Norway

John (40) was a criminal in Oslo, Norway. A hyperactive one, by his own account. "I must have cost the insurance companies 25,000 Euro a week, I had to sink so deep that I found a real reason to stop being a criminal." Today, John is a volunteer at the 'Activities After Imprisonment Network' (ORCN), part of Oslo Red Cross, where he is helping others find the right way forward. "I am now working for the community, an ordinary citizen with a station wagon and a bank loan. I had no idea I would ever become such a man."

Criminal acts: theft, drug trafficking, fraud, car thefts and driving under the influence

Seriousness: Verdicts from 30 days to three years

Last prison sentence: Released in 2004

No more crimes: After he was last arrested in 2003

Why did you choose to stop being a criminal?

Bad conscience on behalf of myself. Others were not important to me at that time, so I had no bad conscience on behalf of anyone else. I understood I was gliding as far down as possible. My own rock bottom, so to say. Researchers have focused on where the turning point is. Some say you have to be face down on the basement floor first. And I agree!

Was the change due to your own choice, or did it happen gradually? Or both?

Both. I have battled myself many times. Tried often, but not intensely enough or in the right way. A trained eye can see easily if an effort will succeed or fail. I think most people bite off more than they can chew too fast.

Did you enjoy being a criminal? Was it something in particular that made you change your assessment of yourself?

I thoroughly enjoyed being a criminal. By and by I grew secure in my role as a clever gangster. I felt I deserved this role since I never diluted any drugs, never stole from friends, be it money, drugs or women. And I never squealed on anyone.

I had to find an answer to one particular question. Why can I not be a criminal? What is a really important reason to stop? Important for me. You may think of arguments like children, family and conscience as good reasons. Or the problems that arise when one becomes a drug abuser and criminal. Those arguments were not applicable. I could solve all problems by taking drugs. I was of the opinion that I never had any problems, others had them. Family and friends had distanced themselves from me a long time ago anyway. The only reasons to end were to do with myself. Myself alone.

What or whom supported you and what or whom made problems for you as you were about to stop being a criminal?

A prison guard who did more than he was supposed to according to the rules of conduct. He saw me and followed me when I changed to different blocks and when I was out in society between my times in prison. Bad old friends made problems. All on my phone list, all in my neighbourhood. They wanted me to join them in buying and selling. All of them expect people who take charge of themselves to stumble back into crime again. It's only a question of time. And there are many coincidences. Not being in the wrong place at the wrong time is one of those. When I took charge of myself, I was very carefully reducing the odds of failure to a minimum. I was thinking action leads to consequences, which was a new concept to me.

Have your attitudes changed over time?

They have changed. Education. Being given responsibilities and trust in education, in the family and so on. I have been vigilant about doing things – activities that gave me tasks and a role to play. Becoming a trainer for the ORCN football team, starting education and such.

I was dead certain I had finished using drugs. Crime was not that easy to get away from. I turned into a criminal long before I started using drugs. I went up and down streets with a prison guard to practice not scanning cars, locks and so on. I also had social training. I exercised with the intent of no longer being ashamed about my past. I trained at apologizing when I felt the urge to do that. I also had a problem with some people owing me money. I

called them to say they need not think of me any longer. That was to finish the attitude that cash and other stuff were important.

How and why were the people and things important in your process?

It was very evident to me that I needed help. They helped me especially with answers to questions about ending my bad habits and how to end them.

What would you say are the most important arguments for and against ending a criminal career?

It isn't normal. A criminal is on the outside of society. You think you are a free man, that you can do anything you want. But at last you understand that it is not true. But then you don't know about the other world. You don't know about the bonuses in an ordinary life. To be able to enjoy time with your children, managing a job. Knowing that you get paid next month because you have a job. All this is unimportant when you're outside society, when you are a criminal.

Previously, I would have chosen ten grammes of amphetamine rather than 1500 Euro at any time. A hundred times out of a hundred, definitely. Always I wanted the short-term profits or gains before anything else.

There still are things to do with a criminal life that are fascinating and that I miss, even if I don't want such things back in my life. The brotherhood. The people you meet on their way into or out of prison. Us versus them. Never lose face, never squeal. The jargon, the codes that those on the inside of society never will understand. Some of this is great fun. But, you would still be in prison all the time, having paranoia, rotten teeth and being drunk or drugged.

Even though I now have many reasons for no longer being a criminal, it is very difficult when you are in the centre of that world. The change must come from within and the criminal himself has to understand it himself. It can take many laps and many years. It is important not to lose faith in the one who needs help. I try to do all I can to have people take some education. Whoever is not under the influence and not too disorganized can manage that. It gives you a settled life, and is a way of taking one step at a time, different from going directly

into a job. I wouldn't have managed going straight into a full job. The process of building a crime free foundation takes time.

How is your life now? How do you see yourself, and what are the most important differences compared to your past?

I am now always very active all the time. Planning is now very important for me, I need to fill my time with activities, and keep the trust and responsibilities I have been given in my current environment. The Red Cross have made it possible for me to be a resource for others, and being a volunteer there, has given me more than I would previously have thought possible. To get rid of me, they would have to remove me by force, I never want to end being part of the project. I saw myself as unique before, because of what I was doing. Now I know I am special because of what I am being. I am still concerned with not ending up in situations that could give me trouble. But now trouble is less dangerous than before. I am glad I have come through.

GIOVANNA: ITALY

Age: 27

Gender: Female

Country – City of birth: Italy - Milan

Crime: Homicide

Number of times in which you went to prison: one

Time from your last time in prison: arrested in 2004

Time from your last crime committed - I am now in the semi liberty regime

Would you say you were trying to give up crime, had given up crime or are still involved in crime?

I can say I have totally given up crime. I have no problem in staying far away from deviance because now, I perfectly know what I want for my life: a healthy life with good and positive people, surrounded by people in whom I can trust, if I need to do so. Crime doesn't make any sense or lead up to anything good. It dries people up, worsens fears and gives birth to useless egoisms.

Crime gives birth only to terrible loneliness and a lack of confidence; moreover it damages society, hence ourselves. There is the need to understand that human beings are social and collaborative so, the real self- achievement starts from the positive integration.

If not offending - Why did you want to stop offending? Was it a choice or something more gradual or both?

I committed only one crime in my life and I have no intention to re-offend. I wish I hadn't committed any crime in my life. When I committed the crime I was in a horrible situation from my personal point of view. I wasn't conscious of what was happening around me and I wasn't able to avoid the crime itself. Due to this hard and complicated situation, it was almost inevitable that I started thinking deeply about my life, when in prison, with the aim to start a positive personal growth. In this attempt to change, I have been supported by family, volunteers, and prelates working in prison. They all have helped me to compare my way of

life with other positive role models and to decide to engage myself in a positive and important target such as a degree in graphic arts.

What has been your experience of giving up crime – positives and negatives? What makes it easy or hard?

My experience of desistance has been of course extremely positive because I'm achieving great personal and material satisfactions. I feel better when I think I'm doing something to compensate the society for what I have done with my mistakes. To become a better person means to give a sense to the pain I have suffered and caused. The willingness of people around me is very important for me because it makes me feel accepted instead of refused, rejected and marginalized. Their way of giving me chances without prejudice spurs myself to give the best I can, to not fail again.

What has changed in you or your life since you stopped offending? What has stayed the same?

I was arrested when I was 18. I have grown up in prison. I do not believe that changes in my personality are due to the prison experience or to the crime itself. I have been changed a lot, but this is normal when a young girl becomes a woman; it is what happens when adolescence gives way to adulthood. I can't say I have had a past characterized by criminality. As I said, I just ran into a horrible situation, much bigger than me, and I was a young girl at the time of the crime. Today, nothing is the same because I want my life to be different from when the facts happened and I'm working hard to achieve this outcome. I can't say how much of the "new" person I am today comes from my past experience and what might have been avoided for my past experience because I was in that phase in which everything normally changes in the life of the adolescent, when one is becoming mature.

What is your life is like now? What was it like before?

I'm serving a day release sentence and, as I said before, I am attending art classes at the University. This is very important for me because it lets me stay with intelligent people that are trying to build their lives in a normal way, according to social rules and their dreams. The biggest problem, today, for me is to come back to prison every night and be in contact with a very different world characterised by moral abuse, vulgarity, continuous screams and the impossibility to have the use of my life, even for bodily functions.

How do you see yourself as a person today?

I see myself as a person in constant growth, as someone who is travelling in the right direction, a better person who still has a long road to walk on.

How do you feel about your past/current offending?

I feel very ashamed about my past, I feel guilty for what I have done and I wish I could show to people that I am not the woman they describe, I am different from when the crime occurred and I am a positive person.

How if at all does your offending (now/in past) continue to influence your sense of self or the life you live today?

As I have said, my past is something I wish I could delete. When I think about the crime I feel bad and two different kinds of feelings occupy my mind: from one side I feel guilty and from the other side I hope to have the chance to pay back to society by showing everybody that I am a new person and a better one. I need this redemption because I am aware of who I am today and I can't think about me still linked to something bad, dirty and cruel.

What was your experience of prison/punishment and/or justice support services and their role in supporting or hindering desistance - perhaps they made no impact either way but we would be interested to learn more about how and why they exerted whatever impact they did.

My experience has been tragic as it is for everyone who experiences the prison. I have suffered a lot and I'm still suffering. I couldn't rely on social services and I didn't feel they really care about me and my situation. For my part, I can say that the prison can count only on volunteers. If I hadn't met volunteers I wouldn't be the person I am today. Social services are the main obstacles to freedom for prisoners, because their senseless bureaucracy makes everything harder and lengthen the time to start a new life.

Today I can attend the University only because my High school professor asked the director to allow me to take a degree, supporting this request by saying that it would be very important for my life, my re-socialization and my future life. I have been in prison for nine years and I've met a social worker in prison less than ten times.

KVETKA MÚDRA: SLOVAKIA

Co-authors: Mgr. Kristína Baťová, PhD; PhDr. Pavol Kopinec, PhD

General Information:

Age: 28

Gender: Female

Nationality: Slovak

Country of Origin/Residence: Slovakia

Offence types: Stealing

Number of convictions: three convictions (two in Slovakia, one in Austria)

Experience of Punishment: Currently meeting with probation officer every three months

Time since last conviction: one year

Time since last offence: five years

Personal Experience:

Why did you start offending?

I was 22. For two years I did things which were wrong; small criminal activities. One time I stole chocolate and the same day that I was released from custody I stole two cosmetic items, for which I was sentenced to six months imprisonment. The last thing I did and served time for (and it was postponed) was an Adidas set for 180 Euro, so for such misdemeanours I was in jail. I was sentenced to eleven months, but I served eight months and they sent me home conditionally. I'm sure they could have managed a different type of punishment, because since that time a lot changed and I had four years suspension, but in Slovakia it is so. Somebody didn't go to jail for a million Euro fraud. Somebody like me I met people who haven't had anything to put in their mouth and they were in jail for it. They stole only for their personal need, so they had something to eat and for that they got two to three years, because it was repeated activity. Will this country think about how to provide some work for them? No, that's not even in their mind.

I was in Austria for two months and I didn't do anything over there, but in Austria it is so, that if you are an accomplice to a crime you are convicted as one who commits an offence. After an investigation they released us. I was only held in custody, not sentenced. Today I

marvel at what is happening outside. For nothing, for my stupidity, I served time. I was without money, I didn't talk to my Mum at that time and I served time for two cosmetic items. I had a condition that time, and the same judge who decided my case with the chocolate, was surprised that I was in court again (for stealing from the drugstore). It was on the same day, so he sentenced me to six months. I wasn't stealing regularly - no, but I was stealing, unfortunately. I had the sentence suspended for three and a half years, because I had a baby. I lived a normal life. I was in Hungary when the police searched for me that time. What happened was that they sent me a letter from the court to a different address, where I had no longer been living for more than three years. They issued a European arrest warrant for me and after that they caught me in Hungary. All bad things have something good about them and I probably would not have been sighted until now and would need to sleep with that. Could no longer happen to me. So, when the police caught me, I got a legally valid suspension. It is all behind me now. Although, I have to report to probation regularly, for example, when I went to Croatia last time.

Would you say you were trying to give up crime, had given up crime or are still involved in crime?

I finished, I am living a normal life now.

Why did you want to stop offending? Was it a choice or something more gradual or both?

I was bored, that's why I did it. I went to the shop and so on. They were not important things and I stole them just like that.

Who or what supported or obstructed you in the process of giving up crime? If desisting for a while, were the same supports or obstacles you encountered in the early stages of giving up crime the same supports or obstacles that made it easy or hard to sustain desistance over time? Explain.

I was young and silly, now it only makes me smile. I am 28 and it's different now. I have a daughter and my husband. That's different. My daughter lifts me up. My husband and my daughter. I have really everything that I need and my husband is good to me too. It was only one period of my life, which lasted for two years. Now I am buying goods for myself.

It feels like I never did it, but the criminal record is a problem. Nowadays, employers want to see your criminal records. My current employer didn't want it. I am a cashier and he is

satisfied with my work and everything is OK. People have a problem finding a job, even people with a university degree. It seems to me that after two years they erase the record, but I am not sure about that. I am not very sensitive to that now as I have a job. If I didn't have the job it would be worse, but it doesn't bother me for now. I am sure that I will be able to find a job also without that paper. There are jobs where the criminal records check is not required such as domestic jobs in kitchens, some part time jobs and so on.

In what ways are/were these factors or people particularly helpful or significant or problematic?

I am not meeting people I knew before. Not anymore. On the one hand I don't have time and on the other hand I have forgotten all of them. When I have free time I am with my child. My former boyfriend was like that, it was a total disaster. He is still in that, he will never learn from it. I am working twelve hours a day, so when I come home I fall into bed. Grandma is with my little child. She's my husband's Mum. I can say I have the best mother in law in the world.

What has changed in you or your life since you stopped offending? What has stayed the same?

Everything has changed. It's hard to explain how. I have a child; that is what changed. I did not commit criminal activity all the time. Now I have a stable life, maybe way too much, a stereotypical or ordinary life, but I like it. It's better than associating with such people as before. I am very happy with my child; she is my everything. When she went to kindergarten for the first time I was really worried whether they would know how to care for her, but now it's good.

What is your life is like now? What was it like before?

It was not good with my Mum, but I don't want to talk about that. We are not in touch either and she owes me a lot of money. I had contact with her when I was pregnant, to smooth things over with her, but she will never change. There is also my brother and she hasn't seen him for eleven years. Is that a mother? In general, it's her fault how I ended up before, because when your mother is interested in you and you have somewhere to live you will not commit any crimes. Down with it. I have my life, she has hers and she can live how she wants. I don't want to have anything together with her anymore. I haven't seen her for over a year. Also, my mother in law doesn't want me to see her. She is not even calling me to ask

how my little girl is doing. She should be ashamed of how she behaves. My Mum found a boyfriend and she has been living with him and his daughter for 17 years. My father has a new wife and I am meeting my siblings.

How do you see yourself as a person today?

Good. I am happy with myself and that's also important in my life.

How if at all does your offending (now/in past) continue to influence your sense of self or the life you live today?

No. It's a thing which happened in the past.

What was your experience of prison/punishment and/or justice support services and their role in supporting or hindering desistance - perhaps they made no impact either way but we would be interested to learn more about how and why they exerted whatever impact they did.

It is really bad. It's not working well. Catastrophe. No matter how good a sentenced person is, they treat him/her as an animal. I can't even describe it. And the food ... Once a month you have a visit, they take all your clothes and you are all very much equal in front of them. The conditions are poor, they just don't care. They will put you in a cell with a person with syphilis and a bad rash. They don't care about it ... If you say something it's wrong. Terrible conditions, handling you as a rag or some dog. It's not helping anybody with anything. If this should help you, you can be positive that it will not. You need to help yourself if you want to finish with crime. They will not help you, or teach you anything. If somebody wants to continue with crime he/she will, even if they've been in jail for ten years. It's good for nothing. Maybe it would help somebody who got scared of it and didn't want to be there anymore, but the recidivists, they will do it again and again.

There are teachers who asked me, when I went for a conditional dismissal, where I wanted to go. They saw through me. Every day I got letters from my family and I had a visit every month. They just needed to know how I was behaving.

My experience with justice: I don't want even to talk about that. When they make it so, that people have the means to buy something to eat, then it will be better and not by imprisoning people for such things as for example me. The jails are completely full. Those people who are

really bad and committing crimes everyday are enjoying freedom and those people who are stealing baked rolls, because they are hungry and don't have anything to eat, are put in jail for nearly two years. There is no real justice in Slovakia. The law needs to be rewritten. Giving community service rather than punishing people in jail would be preferable. Unfortunately, we are not able to change it and the government is not willing to change it. It will be even worse and it's going really downhill.

My involvement with supporting services was ordered by the court, otherwise I would not know. It's only about that, that I will fulfil the order. I am already running my life, so I don't need it really. I was searching for a job, so that I can spend more time with my child, so I talked to them. They also visited me in my flat. But I think the services could definitely be good for somebody who doesn't know how to fit back into life. Employment, housing, counselling, but if somebody doesn't want to, there are no services which can help them.

IVO: FRENCH NATIONAL RESIDENT IN BELGIUM

I am Ivo, born in 1965, I live in Belgium but I have the French nationality. This is my life story.

My mother loved to have children, but she couldn't raise them properly. She had 13 children, the juvenile court decided to send seven of us to different juvenile institutions because of our problematic upbringing.

I stayed in this institution until I was 15. I was a difficult child (problems at school, fighting...). After a while, the institution gave me the choice of going back to home or going to another institution. I chose the first option but it turned out to be a bad decision. Although my mother (and stepdad) promised I could finish school, they sent me to an abattoir to work there. I stayed there for two weeks. My mother was not happy with my decision to quit work. My mother hit me and I ran away. The police caught me, said they would bring me home, but I did not want to go home. I was sent to the juvenile court and there they decided to send me to a youth care organization in Antwerp.

I stayed there from 1979 until 1984. Meanwhile I worked in a Chinese restaurant. In 1984, I ran away with an English friend from the youth care organization. We had some friends from other institutions and they gave us hints to earn money fast: car thefts but also gay bashing, stealing from gays, gay prostitution, especially older gay people. I needed money to survive: with my savings (from the job in the restaurant) and money from illegal activities, I rented a room in Antwerp. I preferred a legal income, but sometimes only an illegal income proved possible.

In 1984 I met a man, also gay, who wanted to take care of me. He had his own business (pub, party room and sandwich bar). I worked there for four years. I still lived in the room I rented in 1984. But that man bought a bigger apartment and he suggested that I move into this apartment - for free. In the meantime, I met some new people (from nightlife) who offered me a new job: catering services.

In 1988 I was reunited with my English friend (from the second institution) and we decided to go to Cannes. We had the intention to stay there for a longer period so we decided to look

for a job. We found jobs as bartenders but my job was in Cannes and his in Saint Tropez. So we were separated from each other. I became homesick and after four or five months I decided to return to Belgium (Antwerp).

In Antwerp however, I had to start from scratch. I lived with a friend and there I met people who used drugs (cocaine and cannabis). This was the first time I personally came in touch with drugs. In that period I wasn't a frequent user, I used cannabis from time to time. I did not have a job, so I resumed my prostitution activities.

In 1988-1991, working as a prostitute, I met an older man. A rich man. He owned a big business and he opted to start a pub in the prostitution quarter of Antwerp. He trusted me and gave me money to start up this business. Suddenly I had a large amount of money; I did not invest this money in the new business but instead I bought furniture for my apartment. I frequently visited coffee shops to buy cannabis. Someone told the older man that I used cannabis so he decided to stop the sexual and professional relationship with me. I kept the money.

In 1991 I met another person. He was a Dutchman and had his own chip shop. He was a lot younger than me. I still lived in my apartment but started a relationship with this man. After some weeks I decided move in with him. We were together for four years. We travelled a lot, it was a good relationship.

After the break up, in 1995, I rediscovered cocaine. I did it once, but it lasted until 2004 (free-basing cocaine). I also committed crimes: again gay bashing, but also thefts, fraud, dealing. I committed those crimes especially to finance my drug use. The police caught me several times. As a consequence I had a lot of detention sentences: in total I served more than seven months of detention. It was a very harsh period, especially mentally. I became a criminal because I had no other option. I was a good person in comparison to other people (I did not use violence when committing thefts). Between 1995 and 2004, I also started a relationship with a problematic heroin user. I especially used cocaine, but due to him I also started using heroin. I used it – at first - as a tranquilizer for cocaine, but I became dependent on heroin which caused a lot of problems (health-, but also work- and housing related). I lost everything due to my heroin use.

In 2004 I decided to go to the Free Clinic, a treatment centre in Antwerp. I started substitution and psychosocial treatment. They helped me with administrative tasks (social allowance) and I regained perspective. I started voluntary work. My friend's dependence was getting worse, he committed more crimes and he ended up in prison. As a consequence I had no contact with him anymore, I was lonesome and I started thinking: about my situation, my life and my future. In 2007 I had fully recovered.

I wanted to recover earlier, but my friend did not want to recover I saw a lot of terrible things during my drug and criminal life. Especially the last years, when I was a problematic drug user. I was homeless, I lost everything. Because they offered me a perspective (allowance but especially the voluntary work) I progressed and I recovered. Later, there was a vacancy as "hands-on" expert in Free-Clinic. That period I had recovered for some months from methadone and drugs. They hired me and I still work as counselor and hands-on expert for Free Clinic.

My life goes well. You need chances, but you also need to take them to abandon your criminal lifestyle. You need support from people who believe in you, care-workers, but also non-drug using friends. Sometimes I still smoke cannabis, in the evening, after my job. But I will never become a problematic user anymore. I don't want to and I will never get tempted to commit any more crimes.

I am responsible for my past but my parents also carry responsibility because if I would have had a better youth, I would not have ended up in that situation. However, I do not regret my past. I learned from it and I try to share this knowledge as a counselor. Even problematic users need a chance to reintegration. Some will never recover, but they need the option for a better quality of life.

A LIFE THAT HAS TAUGHT ME A LOT

Klara: The Netherlands

My name is Klara, I am 46 years old, I have been married for 25 years and I have two sons. We led a life in the world of swingers, where one meets many people who are on the same wavelength. A lot has changed – in a positive way – because our family became imprisoned. It was tough though, because your family is ripped apart. The prosecutor wanted 15 years for me, but the sentence turned out to be ten. I have spent six of those in prison and I am in the last one before my release on license now, spending it at the Exodus house in order to get things in order again. I have done time for the most serious offence possible, accessory to murder, and I am not proud of that. Unfortunately, my children also got involved. They are also on their way to being released now, and they are on the right track. They are being helped by monitored accommodation until they find a place of their own. My husband will have to remain in prison for some time and by the end of 2014 he will be transferred to a closed clinic for mandatory psychiatric treatment, so there is a lot in store for us before we are finished with this.

The crime should of course never have been committed, for everyone has the right to live, even though everything turns out different from how you wanted it to be. From one moment to another, you may find yourself in a situation that you have not asked for, and then you see your whole life change. You need to be careful then not to crack up completely, something I have seen many people do in prison. What kept me going is that I set myself a goal, something that I am very fond of and fight very hard for in order to make things right again. But it takes another way of life than before and you should not put your rose-tinted glasses on and believe that everything will be OK again anyway, because then you are dreaming.

During my time in prison I thought we had a lot of friends and acquaintances, but that wasn't true. I always say that you should not judge people too soon because you don't know the whole story about how they got into prison. Most people call us criminals, but I sometimes ask them, what is a criminal to you, actually they don't exist. You end up in a situation, no matter what it is, where something went wrong in your life. Sometimes you relapse because people look down on you – something you didn't ask for. And anyway, managers as well as street bums are in prison so who is "a criminal" then? Well that is how it has been described

in law and people have accepted that. The most difficult thing about being in prison is that you are constantly thinking about how you will be able to do it differently afterwards and how people will react to you. Like, for me it will be hard to find work because you always have to tell them what your situation is and that tends to make people wonder. I am finding out now how hard life outside is after almost six years inside a prison. Luckily, I get help from Exodus, and the chance to see my children and my husband so we can bond again, but it is still a very long way before we get to the finish line. My life has changed completely, in prison I have had the opportunity to study and work, which gave me some sort of feeling of leading a normal life. Right now my life is on hold for a while but I will need to get on with it again before long. I have a nice job now as a volunteer at a home for the elderly. It is really good, and people don't ask about stuff but take you as you are and accept your ability to help. My one dream – which I hope will come true some time – is to have a nice perfume shop. But you can be a normal family on one day and the next everything falls apart. However, the best thing is that we always have kept on supporting each other, by telephone and a visit every now and then, and what also helped is to keep on believing in the Lord, who supports you every minute of the day. This is my story and I hope that it will help you somewhat in your future, so that you or others will not have to experience these bad things.

PENAL POLICY: BEYOND THE SOUNDBITES, SOCIAL METAPHORS AND PUBLIC MISPERCEPTIONS

Bernadette Olson Jessie: Associate Professor, Indiana University Southeast, USA

Introduction

In 2004, I was charged with one count of ‘making a false statement to a federal officer’. In my mind, I was ‘protecting a friend’, in the government’s opinion, I was ‘obstructing justice’. At the time of my crime, I was 38 years old and was about to complete my PhD. I had just accepted a full-time tenure track teaching position. As a non violent, first-time offender, I was originally sentenced to six months at a work camp, but when that facility was damaged in a hurricane, I was subsequently designated to the Federal Correctional Institute (FCI) in Tallahassee, Florida. I served my time and was released in May 2005. Following my release, I spent five years on supervised probation. Other than this charge, I have no criminal record. There were many tearful nights when I was certain I would never teach again. I am forever indebted to the Convict Criminology Group for believing in me, for being the catalyst to my professional re-entry, and for providing me with much-needed friendship and support.

In writing articles such as this, the difficulty for me is in knowing how best to discuss my journey through the system, as well as the ever-evolving and enduring impact of decisions I made years ago. The depth of my embarrassment seems limitless, and the hold this experience has on my conscience seems unbearable. I feel compelled to disclose the painful experiences of my family and my friends, the losses I have felt and the indignities I have been subjected to, and my own feelings of violation and the nightmares that continue today. I hope that I can somehow contribute to the scholarly discourse on prison policy with a look inside the hidden and convoluted world of government sanctioned punishment, through the eyes of a woman who lived through it, and all those women who continue to live it.

Time has changed how I perceive and interpret my experiences at FCI Tallahassee, and though it’s been over seven years since my release, the memories remain clear and vivid. There are times I am struck by a particular smell, or a sound, or even a random face in a crowd. I am often able to tuck these thoughts away in a mental and emotional compartment that allows me to function in my day-to-day life. It does not take me long, however, to re-

open and expose that place in my head, revealing the pain and the meaningless loss of self that was all around me. As convicts, we will forever be stained by the various and often blatant acts of brutality, as well as even the most subtle acts of degradation or violation and coercion couched conveniently in policy for safety and facility security. Even with short-term incarceration, I could not help but witness (and ultimately bear) the inescapable transformation of the woman I once was into the convict I became. There are many certainties in prison, not the least of which is the inevitable assimilation into a culture that is unique to convicts:

The sound of a person walking in leg irons is unmistakable, strangely rhythmic and melodic. Maybe it's the paper shoes, a muffled rustling on the cement. How strange to see a woman hunched over in an ill-fitted carrot suit (the orange government-issued jumpsuit), hands and feet bound, faces that are empty and expressionless, following a guard clearly unconcerned as he walked quickly and without emotion. I hear the jingling of chains in my sleep, I wonder how long it will take me to get used to this world – to watching the arrival ceremony of new shipments (slang terms for inmates); to the knot in my stomach that won't go away; until I see myself the way others do, as insignificant and worthless (Personal Journal Entry, 2004).

Why would we Expect Anything Different?

My experience within the walls of FCI Tallahassee seems to support the research that most women are sentenced for nonviolent crimes such as fraud or drug-related offenses (see Owen, 1998; Belknap, 2001; BJS Fact Sheet, 2005, NCJ 210677). However, any attempt to characterize female offenders must be hedged by disclaimers, as no single description can capture the variety of etiologies, traits, susceptibilities, or sheer randomness of influences that impel people to violate the law. I would suggest that the typical female offender, being non white, poor, and a single parent, is repeatedly victimized by society. She is expected to work to support herself and her children and to be a good parent; when she finds these expectations impossible to fulfill, and resorts to crime, she is punished. Yet no assistance was forthcoming to help meet the expectations of medical and family care. She is caught in an un-winnable situation. Most of the women I encountered came from poverty, were addicted to drugs or alcohol, and had emotional or mental health problems. My 'Bunkie' (one with whom you share your bunk) explained her life this way:

...sure I tried to work real jobs, but something always came up and I got fired or I had to quit. My mom was real sick, and if she didn't get her meds, she couldn't take care of my kids. I was making minimum wage and it felt like I was working only enough to pay for medical stuff for my babies and rent to keep us all off the streets. It's not like I woke up one morning and decided that turning tricks was the answer, but my babies' daddies didn't help no one. Society has put out there all these things people should strive for, except not all of us get the same chances to get there [Personal Journal Entry, 2005].

Another woman made this statement:

I've been a prostitute for years; I've been beaten, raped, and sold but I fed my kids and I had a place for my momma to live. Nobody never wanted to help me then, but now all of a sudden they want to lock me up. It ain't my priorities that need to change, it's how to keep those priorities and not be killed in the meantime (Personal Journal Entry, 2005).

Many of the women I met struggled to recognize the patterns of violence and addiction, while also acknowledging the cycle of abuse and generational poverty that plagued their families. For most, their crimes were not committed to *avoid* legitimate jobs or careers, but rather *in response to* years of desperation and deprivation. This is certainly not to condone or excuse their behaviors, but rather attempts by otherwise decent women to survive in neighborhoods and communities where so many men have been taken away, swept up in our massive imprisonment binge, but also ravaged by decline of local businesses, job opportunities, and deterioration of local schools.

I'd spent years reading about and studying the criminal justice system, but those words meant very little to me, even now. As I study the literature and explore the topic with my students, I am struck by the lack of "humanness" offenders are given. Criminals are the last group of Americans that it is socially acceptable to hate. In the academic books and media accounts, criminals are blank, devoid of personal nature, emotion and livelihood. I remember sitting in my prison bunk listening to the many and varied women as they told their stories. I could not help but be drawn into their worlds; worlds I vaguely understood, but often times would find

their way into my dreams. At times I found myself actively involved in their lives; to live with these women in such close proximity meant a sort of forced involvement, but what was awkward and uncomfortable at first, became solace and binding. All that I had read about and studied meant nothing as I spent my time living, learning, and growing with these women. Official data means little in prison, it becomes the faces, the lives, the stories, and even the deaths; this is what matters and these are the people who give these stories meaning.

... for me it is a struggle to remember who I am ... and to not allow myself to be degraded just because I made a mistake. Everyone does. That is not who I am or who we are. I don't want to become the person the criminal justice system says I am [Personal Correspondence, 2007].

Apathy in Suffering

The activity on the prison compound was as varied as the women that filled its walls. I met women from all walks of life, and somehow we all had to learn to adapt to our new environment. It is a world like no other, and each day (and night) brought something new. Prison reality is indeed harsh and unrelenting, with a hidden culture of norms, values, and social roles not seen on the outside; a milieu that seemed to force us to think only in surviving day to day. "Hope" seemed to be discouraged, although subtle glimpses of what *could be* permeated the walls and the visions of a life not lived. For many, this was their life, and to have hope or to dream of a better life would just make prison time that much more painful. I would only be there for a short time, but the weight of my future felt oppressive and heavy, and I was certain that if I could not shut out that part of my thinking, I would surely be crushed to death. I had to survive now, and that meant I had to learn to reconcile myself to prison life and the immediacy of the violence and the bedlam, but also to the mundane and the monotonous.

I hate this place. There is an awkward, nauseating aroma – a mixture of flowers and feminine hair products, watered-down disinfectant, and rotten meat (contraband left in someone's locker). I hate how the women smell. I hate how the guards smell. I hate how I smell. I hate that you can predict how the day/evening will go by the sickening cologne that wafts in from the main office of the unit – the predictability of knowing which guards are on duty, whether I will sleep tonight, or whether it will be another night of 'anything goes'. I hate

how the male guards leer and the female guards chastise. I hate this place.
(Personal Journal Entry, 2004).

The highlight of my day was the time spent on ‘the patio’ (the cement stoops that lined the prison compound) with friends. It is here that I found some of my most intense connections to others. This happened as we sometimes sat in comfortable silence, but also as we shared with each other our journeys through life. We discussed, almost dissected, our lives prior to prison. We recounted stories of pain and unimaginable sorrow and loss, our lessons of love, of resourcefulness and forgiveness, the necessity of laughter, our courage to take risks, and our willingness to fight for those things we believed in most. Somehow this emotional cleansing, to women so very different from me (or anyone I knew), had a way of healing old wounds. It seems so strange now as I look back, remembering the past with new insight and appreciation for all that I have learned.

Most of us would never have been friends in any other world; we were friends now by virtue of a shared criminality. I met strong and gifted women; devoted to their families, blessed in their friendships with others, and humbled by the grace of God. I met women who’d spent years being battered and beaten. While I did meet women from power, wealth, and money, the majority of women struggled against abuse, poverty, limited resources and a dismal outlook for the future. Many of these women are uneducated, but not stupid. They are tired; they are out of hope, love, and opportunities. They have simply given up on a society that gave up on them a long time ago:

Some young poor white girl tried to kill herself the other day by jumping from the roof of the chapel – she lived, but they say she’s pretty fucked up ...
(Personal Correspondence, 2008).

I was out on the track today, in my own world as usual, when L. came running up behind me and mockingly jumped on my back. We laughed and hugged, and recanted stories of the day. We listened to music on our portable radios, made fun of each others’ dancing abilities, and shared stories about loved ones in our lives. How is it in a world so far away I find companionship and emotional freedom like nothing I’ve ever experienced? Is it because all the superficial bullshit means nothing here? Is it because degradation and

humiliation have stripped away our exterior? Is it because we share an experience that has so profoundly changed us (Personal Journal Entry, 2004)

Sitting with P. on the patio, I can almost forget where I am. I awoke to the usual fighting and screaming – God I hate the ghetto hollering. I made my bunk, fixed my coffee, and wandered outside knowing she would be there. The anxiety dissipates with a friendly wave and a comforting smile. Today, like many, we discuss failure. She has been here six years, and I think how lucky she must be – she doesn't seem to fear failure, but rather seems to embrace it (Personal Journal Entry, 2005).

Even now, years after my incarceration, I find myself consumed with the lives of the women I left behind. I am relieved and blessed at where life has taken me, but I feel a deep sense of loss and guilt for those who remain caged, tucked neatly out of public sight. How strange it must sound to outsiders. We are, after all, merely criminals, without feelings, lesser in spirit and lacking in heart. I get phone calls periodically from some of the women in various facilities. On a good day, with no dropped or interrupted calls, the allotted 15 minutes seems to fly, and strangely, it is as if I have been transported back in time. Very few people will understand how or why I look forward to these calls. Not only is it a chance to make sure the woman with whom I am talking is physically safe, but on a very personal level, it allows me a brief moment in time when it is OK to be an ex-con. I have amazing friends and family who have been nothing but loving and supportive, but for those all too rare 15 minutes, my walls can come completely down, and that place in my soul that I work so hard to hide opens up - it is both painful and liberating. For that brief period in time, I am completely exposed, and yet I feel more at ease in those moments than most others in my day. I cannot explain it, nor do I really want to try. It just is, and I long for those times more than I particularly care to admit:

Behind these walls are some of the most beautiful women I have ever seen – elegant, demure, and proud; stunning even. Unfortunately, most of the women around me, although they try to hide it, project a look of death and desperation. The effects of drugs and alcohol so vividly clear; the toll time has taken on their faces and the permanent stains of abuse that mark their bodies and their minds. The vacant look in their eyes and the stories they tell haunt me (Personal Journal Entry, 2005).

Conclusion

Common thought has it that the prison system is not so bad, and that prison time is easy or inconsequential (Johnson, 2002). Prisons today are indeed far less cruel than when they were first invented, but that does not mean that incarceration is an experience without pain. In place of physical suffering, the modern prison inflicts a far more severe damage that is spiritual and social in nature. The loss of freedom is indeed fundamental, as is the loss of social status and the lifetime of labelling that come with being a convict. Chuck Terry, also a former convict, proffers that in addition to the physical adjustment to isolation in an over-crowded and often violent world, there is a psychological adjustment that must be made as well. The problem is not simply being locked up with hundreds of strangers, but is also with the difficulty of having one's self-esteem and identity inundated with the evidence of an unsuccessful life and the view that you are somehow less human and less worthy. Few see prison as an intricate social and psychological world, where the individual is extraordinarily overwhelmed and hampered with challenges so profound that one's very own identity is at stake (Terry, 2000). There is a self-loathing that develops among convicts (myself included), a personal feeling of diminished self-worth perpetuated by a system more concerned with effectiveness and efficiency than with human life.

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JUVENILE DELINQUENCY AND DESISTANCE: A PERSONAL JOURNEY

J. Renee Trombley: Assistant Professor, Southern University of New Orleans, USA

I have looked at my own story from the qualitative research perspective many times and I have come to several conclusions. First, my story is not that unique from most other girls who go through the juvenile or criminal justice system, at least from the beginning, and like others, there has been a combination of factors that led to my experiences, both growing up, during adolescence, and as a young adult trying to find my way in this world. Really, my story is not that unique at all. Maybe this is why I have such a deep appreciation for the study of criminology in general, because we as human beings are all so similar, yet our experiences with the systems that shape society invariably differ. Research describing the variables that shape this process still fascinates me immensely.

When I took my first Juvenile Delinquency course at the age of 24, while still trying to break free from the cycle of crime that had been my own life, I read research on girls in the juvenile justice system describing the levels of previous abuse that they self-reported. Looking at my own life I could see that trauma had been a factor for most of my life while growing up. I had several experiences, both in the community and at home, while still very young, and I am sure these events had specific traumatic impact that went undetected and untreated.

My mother was a single mother struggling through college while working two and three jobs just to pay bills and she has always done the best job she could with what she had. In fact, it would be impossible to talk about my own path to desistance without talking about my mother because when I was younger she is the person who made me believe that I could accomplish anything I put my mind to. Through all of her own struggles she served as a role model for me, and made me believe that no matter what life may throw at you, you could overcome if you persisted through the trials and tribulations. Believing in self and the process of life provided a foundation, but it wasn't until I found faith in God that I found the power those beliefs could rest on. I found out that a foundation doesn't have any good until you have some where to lay it.

A single mother who worked too many hours and was going through college could not provide adequate supervision for the overly curious and somewhat rebellious child that I had become. I was smoking cigarettes and running the streets with older kids by age eight, and by twelve years-old I was smoking marijuana, drinking, popping pills, shoplifting and selling both merchandise and drugs. That year I had already begun exploring options with the opposite sex and got arrested for the first time.

That was supposed to have been a joke but there was nothing funny when they took me to jail. It was April Fool's Day and I wanted to be funny for some friends so I thought it would be a good joke. I let security see me shoplifting and then yelled 'April Fool's Day' as I pulled the merchandise back out. He didn't think it was funny and somehow I ended up at the local precinct waiting on my mother to come pick me up. She had recently had surgery on her foot and was walking on crutches. She hit me with one of those crutches all of the way out of the police department. The police laughed saying that I was getting what I deserved and looking back I am sure they were right.

Somewhere around my 13th birthday I caught a shoplifting charge and I took my grandmother's truck on a joyride to a store a few miles away with some of my friends. I spent the summer grounded in my new step-father's house and it didn't turn out to be a real good experience for either one of us. I resorted to stealing alcohol and staying up all night drinking, trying to drown whatever perceived misery I was experiencing as a young teen. That is not to say that I wasn't going through some distressing experiences at home, but as an adult I understand things somewhat differently now. At that age, you have little autonomy and the ability to advocate for self-efficacy is limited.

I wanted to be an adult, provide and be able to live peacefully by myself. This was not an option for a 13 year-old and I found out, like I have with most things in life, the hard way. I snuck out of the house one night to hang out with friends and for some reason I could not make myself go home in the morning. I really did try to make myself go home but I just couldn't do it. The pain that I was experiencing there was too intense for me to handle at the time and I gave up the fight. For some reason I went to an old friends house and hid in her closet where I fell asleep. Her mother called mine, who came to get me, and then she took me home where I slept for two days. That was the end of anything I would ever have that would resemble the normal adolescent experience.

Locked Up

When I awoke my mother took me to the state authorities and even though a roundtable of personnel discussing my case in front of me concluded that a juvenile detention facility was not the best option for me, that is exactly where they sent me. Once in the system, it would be nearly a decade before I made it back out. My first real charge, the one that eventually allowed them to sentence me to a maximum-security youth facility for females, was a federal offense. I know, it sounds like a big deal, but I was stealing mail out of mailboxes to kill time. Definitely not a good thing to do, and certainly aggravating for the victim, but I am not sure it should qualify one to serve time in the same institutions we reserve for rapists and murderers. That is just my personal opinion based on my own experiences.

I have a lot of opinions based on a perspective shaped by my own experiences. However, I have been blessed to have been afforded an opportunity to be truly educated about the same system that dominated my life for so long. It would take a book to give details on the many different institutions and settings that I experienced during that time and the charges that I caught along the way, but suffice it to say that there were many. It turned out every file I ever saw on me had RUNNER scrawled or written somewhere on the front. This was a warning to whoever was working with me at the time. I did not enjoy forced confinement by any means and there were many times my solution was to run back to the streets. I had been hanging out in the streets since I was a child and somehow this is where I found my comfort.

I wanted to go home to my mother several times but that often didn't seem an option. Whenever we were reunited there always seemed to be problems. The emotional baggage I picked up along the way was heavy and burdensome and I always wanted her to take it for me, but she never could. It was never meant for her to carry. She had her own baggage to deal with. My drug and alcohol use continued, I suffered through a midterm miscarriage with twins that intensified my internal pain, and I somehow managed to stay in the system.

I served nine and a half months at a "youth center for girls" in Beloit, Kansas, a maximum-security institution designed to house the worst young female offenders in the state. I was released shortly before my 16th birthday with one-year of parole to complete, and then one week after my 17th birthday I was arrested again and charged as an adult. I had been living

on the streets as usual and was doing different hustles trying to eat and survive. I had run into someone with some stolen checks and we had run a few of them and had not gotten caught when one day I was particularly hungry. We stopped at Antonio's pizza on Main Street, in Kansas City, Missouri, where I had ended up after all the years of moving around.

That pizza was so good and all I could think about was how much I really wanted another piece of that pizza. I did not have any money and had to wait a few days for some of the money for the other checks I had cashed to come through. I begged my connection for another check and he told me not to do it. He reiterated what I had heard so many times out in the streets, "if you get greedy, you get caught." I took the check anyways to a check cashing place on 47th and Troost Avenue, in the heart of the city. It did not take long for me to realize the customer service agents had locked the doors on me from the inside and had called the police. The responding officer laughed when he looked at my driver's license ... "You just turned 17. I can take you to the County."

My mother bailed me out of jail and did her best to help me get through whatever it was I was going through, but by then I was out of control. I spent the next several years either in the streets, jail, or some other state correctional institution. I had begun a relationship with God, as I understand Him, and this is where I would constantly go, to my faith, even though my whole world was continually falling apart. I wanted to change. I wanted to do better. I wanted to use my experiences to help others. I remember telling my friends on the streets about all of these things I wanted to do and them telling me I was crazy. Yes, I knew I was crazy. My life proved that point, but it did not mean those dreams could never come true. Now I am living proof that they do.

Becoming a Mother

Having my first daughter, Destanee, changed my life. I spent most of that pregnancy incarcerated in a county jail in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I was facing a year in prison and was told I would need to find someone to take my baby after she was born. I made a vow to God that I would leave things that didn't belong to me alone if He would just help me be the best mother I could be to her. But to please let ME be that for her, not anyone else. I was released in time to have my child and I did learn to quit taking things that I couldn't pay for, no matter how bad I thought I may have needed it at the time.

I had three babies in two years and my faith was continually growing. These experiences gave me the determination to fight for my own life. To fight for what it was I had wanted the whole time, yet had never understood how to reach. It was not an overnight process. I have struggled through many things and I have also experienced miraculous delivery from certain obstacles. I remain truly blessed and as humble as my finite mind can understand to be. I am continually amazed at my life and at the progress that has been made throughout this journey. I take none of the credit, but can only speak of my faith. It has made me the woman I am.

A Student at University

I went back to school to fulfill my dream of helping people, not realizing that it would be my academic experience that would help me become the person I have always wanted to be. I have been in school since first going back in 1997. I am still struggling to finish my PhD in Juvenile Justice from Prairie View A&M University (Texas). It seems I have always had to work a little while longer than my peers, maybe I have struggled a little more. I don't know. Not all of my peers have made it as far as I have, so there may be something to be said for the struggle. The last grade I completely finished in my primary education was probably the 6th. I took my GED when I was 16 years-old and tried to take a few classes at the community college but I wasn't ready at that time.

I was 24 years-old when I went back to college the second time. Interestingly enough, new research shows this is about the same time the brain is fully finished forming inside the human brain. Even though my original intention was to go into social work I have been in the study of criminal justice, criminology, and juvenile justice since the beginning. In a way, it felt like home. Yet, I have never been overly confident on the value that is being placed on my unique perspective among other academics and peers in the field.

Conclusion

My introduction to the Convict Criminology Perspective and Group, and finding out that I was already a huge fan of the work of one of the founding members, John Irwin, helped me believe that even while expressing authenticity I could find my place here.

My combined experiences have not always bolstered this belief. Instead I find myself feeling perpetually caught somewhere between wanting to fit in with the "regular" people, and needing to stay true to my own experiences and the perspective this has helped shape. At the

beginning of a new semester I always ask my university students to let our classroom be a judgment free zone. I ask that we not get caught up in judging each other for how we talk, what we look like, or even our opinions and what we think. I believe we have to be free to truly express ourselves before any of us can grow and learn from the experiences that we have all encountered. Every voice matters, every perspective has importance. As I continually find my own voice I seek to empower my students to do the same. I think of it as one of the first steps in achieving the goal that I have held onto forever - the one where I use my experiences to help other people. I really am living my dream!

DESISTANCE FROM CRIME

David Honeywell: PhD Student Newcastle University, UK

My first offence was a robbery on a shop in York in 1983 when I was 20 years-old where I threatened a shop-keeper with a seven inch dagger. Then shortly after, while on bail, myself and another lad called John committed another robbery in Darlington. This time someone was hurt resulting in a second charge of 'wounding with intent to cause grievous bodily harm' after someone was stabbed - not by me - but with my knife. Even though it wasn't me who actually made the blow, the knife belonged to me and was in my possession just before it happened resulting in a serious crime being committed.

January 19, 1984, I was in the dock at Teesside Crown Court for sentencing with my co-accused John standing before Judge Angus Stroyne. There was no jury trial because we were pleading guilty. I was sentenced to thirty months youth custody and John got six years imprisonment. We were both then sent to Durham Prison.

After ten months in this notorious establishment, my parole answer arrived. The term 'Jam Roll' is English prison slang for parole where prisoners are released into the community to serve the remainder of their sentence. One day while lying on my bed, a sheet of paper suddenly slid underneath my door which I recognised by the logo at the top of the page as being from the Home Office. I knew it was my parole answer, so bracing myself for bad news, I anxiously read down the page until I saw the words: 'A panel of the parole board considered your case on 19 August 1984 and found you suitable for release on parole licence from 4 September 1984'.

Being released is an amazing experience, but my euphoria was short lived as once again I became restless and bored with everything in my life. I was continually drifting, unsure what to do with my life. I was drinking too much and being erratic. My parole licence was supposed to last for ten months. Unfortunately, my probation officer was concerned about myself and the safety of others, so he contacted the Home Office. After only six months, the Home Office recalled me back to prison to serve another four months.

The next time I used a knife on someone was ten years later when I left someone bleeding to death in the middle of a pub. Even now I can't comprehend what planet I was on at that time and still find it difficult to talk about. But though I had always been in possession of knives - it was that last incident when reality hit me like a sledgehammer of just how serious things had become. I realized that this man could have died. How many lives could that have ruined? What a thoughtless act!

This message was rammed home even further by the life-sentence prisoners I spent most of my prison time with. Most of them had committed the exact same act of mindless violence as I had, but they had not been so lucky. I was released after two-and-a-half-years, whereas most of them had already spent an average of fifteen years inside. They all had the same thing in common in that as well as ruining their own lives; many other lives had also been ruined forever. Some had missed out on their children growing up and their marriages had ended.

Before this sentence, I was still struggling with alcohol and life in general - going through some difficult times. I had made friends with a couple in Boosbeck, East Cleveland called Brian and his girlfriend Dawn. She had taken a shine to me and would make advances towards me when Brian wasn't looking. Naturally, I was flattered by the attention, but wasn't sure what to do. I was really uncomfortable about the whole thing. One night she had fallen out with Brian and so approached me as a seemingly single person. We spent the night together, but it transpired that she had done this simply to repay him after their bust-up. I was a marked man now. Things escalated when one night Brian threatened me, so while strung out on *Seroxat* anti-depressants and alcohol - as well as being paranoid and angry, something inside of me just snapped. I remember feeling that there was no other way out of this situation, but to confront this using violence. I had never had such strong feelings of hopelessness before. In my mind, there just seemed to be no other way.

One night, I decided to go and find Brian at the pub where I knew he would be. I also remember feeling an incredibly deep sadness that I wouldn't be seeing my mother and uncle for a while as I went and got two knives from the kitchen draw. I headed into the small village of Boosbeck and walked into Brian's local pub, *The Station Hotel*, which was very busy, yet we both immediately made eye contact as soon I walked in.

I shouted at him while pulling out both knives from my waist-band. Then while thrusting one blade into his chest, I stuck the other in his liver and then into his stomach. He somehow managed to pick up a small table and throw it at me but it didn't hit me. Several of the tavern regulars grabbed me trying to prise my fingers open from the vice-like grip I had on both knives while Brian lay on the floor behind me bleeding heavily.

Years later, the landlady at the time told me she and some others had dragged him through the back and used tee-shirts and whatever they could to try and stop the bleeding. I hadn't a care in the world that night. As the other customers wrestled to get the knives from me, I eventually opened my hands to their relief, and they took the knives and put them behind the bar. I was resisting letting them have the knives in case one of them decided to use them on me. Not one of them tried to assault me in any way. But the thing that seems so bizarre to me, now, is that straight after stabbing Brian, I went back to the bar and after handing over the knives, carried on drinking my pint of lager as though nothing had happened. I even asked someone for a cigarette which I lit up and slowly puffed away on.

I then engaged some of the customers in ordinary conversation. Something inside of me was relieved, yet very very disturbed. What had possessed me to do this? Why didn't I just stay away from these places and let the dust settle? Was I secretly provoking the situation? Or was I an innocent caught up in it all?

Six months later on 15 December 1995, the day of sentencing had arrived. I wanted to take every opportunity to save myself from a lengthy stretch, so one day, I took advice from a fellow prisoner who suggested I write a letter to the judge to offer my own mitigating circumstances. Using my best hand writing, I filled two sides of A4 paper explaining in depth, how I had allowed myself to get caught up in a bad situation and how I had allowed my emotions to get the better of me.

I explained how I intended to use my time in prison to educate myself as a way of opening doors to a better future. Just before sentence was passed, the usher passed my letter to the judge and as he respectfully read every word to himself, the courtroom fell silent. After reading it, he looked across to me and told me to stand up. He then said these words, most of

which are verbatim. But because of it being so long ago, some are words ‘to the effect’ of his summing up:

You have explained to me your actions today better than anyone else has been able to in this court. You said, you allowed your emotions to get the better of you and that is what you did. I commend you on your attempt to educate yourself while being on remand and with the sentence I hand out today, you can use that time to study. I sentence you to five years.

As my sentence was passed, I felt as though the judge’s words were very sincere. I now set my sights on achieving great things in the world of academia. I later learned that the judge was about to give me a much longer sentence had it not been for that letter. And it was then I really learned the power of the written word.

The Positive Influence of Convicts

The lifers in Acklington Prison helped me a lot by showing me where I could end up if I didn’t get a grip. One of them joked one day that I had a big ‘L’ learner sign on my back ready to follow in their footsteps. But the very thought of it was just chilling. They saw me as someone who was heading the same way and needed to learn from their mistakes. Their calming influence rubbed off on me. A few were published authors and Open University graduates. Some were incredibly creative and I often used to wonder what could have become of them had these talents been channelled early in their lives.

It was their influence that made me decide to start freelance writing for magazines, which I did from my cell using an old typewriter. I also enquired about studying through an Open University course. I enrolled on a Social Sciences foundation course. Surprisingly I was granted parole on February 1998 and six months later, took up my place at Northumbria University where I spent the first two years studying for a degree in criminology. I never imagined fourteen years later, my autobiography would be sitting in their library for other students to read. And as a result of the education I received in prison, in 2001, I graduated from Teesside University with a bachelor’s degree in criminology. Then two years later, I gained a master’s degree in Social Research Methods.

PhD Student

Now fourteen years since leaving prison, I'm a PhD student researching desistance and education, a published author and visiting lecturer. My Uncle Donald's passion for learning was infectious as it always had been when he first tried to help me study for a GCSE in law back in 1987. Indeed, other things have led me on to my path of learning. For example, there was the Durham prison officer, Mr. Coates who had put me on education classes in 1984, after I was sent back to my cell for refusing to sew mailbags, which led to my first ever qualification. Then there was the inspiring autobiography of a bank robber, turned journalist and postgraduate, John McVicar.

My mother who had attended college for years studying music, encouraged me to continue my studies I'd started in Durham prison, which made me take up a psychology 'O' level course at *Redcar College* in 1985. Then there were the lifers I had spent so much time with in prison who had a massive influence on me and my journey into prison education and writing.

But once I had reached university, it was ultimately Donald's influence, passion for learning, his endless knowledge, support and encouragement that drove me on to complete my degrees. I had finally discovered my route to desistance – not only from crime – but also from depression and alcoholism which were ultimately at the root of my criminal activity.

GETTING AN EDUCATION: FROM STATE PRISON TO GRADUATE SCHOOL

Veronica Horowitz: Masters Student, Kean University, USA

I was born in Iowa City, Iowa - a college town. My parents are well educated (they both have their PhDs) and I grew up in an upper-middle-class Jewish white home. I graduated from high school at age 16 and immediately enrolled in community college. I received my AA in Liberal Arts and was working towards my BA in Sociology at the University of Iowa when I was arrested at the age of 19 (I am now 27). Despite my battles with the legal system I was able to earn my BA during my time on probation before I was sent to prison.

Busted for Drugs

I believe that many of the revelations I had during my incarceration are tied to both my privileged life prior to my incarceration and my background in sociology, which allowed me to see how the details I witnessed had much broader social implications. In 2004 I was charged with two drug selling crimes, one for methamphetamine and the other for cocaine. I received the former charge for selling to my ex-boyfriend; he came to buy drugs from me with an undercover police officer in the car. I didn't find out for about six months, and when the police showed up with a warrant to arrest me I had cocaine in my apartment, hence, the latter charge.

Time in County Jail

When I was arrested I was taken directly to the Johnson County Jail in Iowa. This local jail was not designed to hold many women. There was only enough space for about eight women in the female general population unit. After my bond was set, and it became obvious I couldn't afford to pay it, I was transferred to a variety of other county jails in Iowa. I served portions of my time in Linn County, Lee County, and Cedar County jails. Most of the time I spent in jail was pending court. When I was finally sentenced I was given probation with two separate ten year sentences to run consecutively. This means that if my probation was revoked I would have a 20 year sentence. Moreover, my drug charges carried with them a mandatory-minimum of one third, meaning I would not be eligible for parole until I had been in prison for at least a third of this time. Fortunately, when I did get sent to prison, the judge who sentenced me altered my sentence from consecutive to concurrent, changing my sentence from 20 years to ten.

Although all the jails I spent time in were unpleasant, the conditions in Lee County were best and Cedar County was worst. In Lee County, although the cell space for women was far smaller than any other County Jail I'd been to (designed to hold four women at a time) the correctional staff were kind. The staff members treated us women as people, not malefactors, which palliated my stay there. I also learned something enlightening in the Lee County Jail in Iowa; there is a longstanding myth among women involved in the criminal justice system that male officers are not allowed to see us naked. I was disabused from this notion when I saw signs hanging everywhere explaining that male officers were indeed allowed to see us shower, use the restroom, and change. This sounds worse than it was, though; I believe this sign was hanging simply because the staff was overwhelmingly male and, as in all county jails, essentially all areas of the cell were constantly on camera. For the duration of my stay in Lee County I was never treated poorly or infelicitously by a male officer.

In addition to my time in jail I was also taken to a 21-day inpatient substance abuse treatment center in Iowa, and upon completion, directly back to jail. My time in treatment was pleasant and beneficial, although it was not easy going back to jail. When I was finally released from jail, about 100 days later, it was to a Halfway House in Cedar Rapids Iowa called the Hinzman Center. The Hinzman Center went well for me. There were lots of rules and restrictions but I read and reread the rulebook and followed these guidelines religiously. I got out of the center in the minimum time (after about four months) but the discrimination taking place in the Iowa Criminal Justice system was starting to become glaringly apparent.

Even in jail I began to realize, even at a purely demographic level, that something was not right. The African American population of Iowa is a little over 3%. In Johnson County this racial group makes up only about 5% of the population, but in Johnson County Jail there were many points at which the African American women outnumbered the white women. While I noticed the overrepresentation of African Americans in jail, I didn't become aware of any differential treatment until I arrived at the Hinzman Center. I do not know if this is because the staff to inmate interaction in jail is so limited it would be difficult to notice, if I was too wrapped up in my own life to pay attention to what was going on around me, or if racial mistreatment just didn't occur in jail like it did in other facilities, but I do know that the Hinzman Center taught me a lot about my white privilege.

As I mentioned, I was very careful not to violate any rules while at the Hinzman Center, but the arbitrary nature of the rules themselves, and the incredible discretion afforded to the staff members created conditions in which certain individuals were targeted and eventually sent to jail if the staff members didn't like them. I noticed that many of the targeted women were not white. Being OPA (Out of Place of Assignment) for example, was a serious infraction that could be given at staff discretion for something as minor as walking across the grass instead of on the sidewalk. Another serious violation was a failed UA (Urinary Analysis Drug Test). Understandably, if someone failed a drug test they received a serious violation for doing so and would most likely be taken back to jail. Less understandably, if someone could not pee in front of a staff member within an hour of being instructed to do so they would automatically fail their drug test. Hence, if a staff member approached someone coming out of the bathroom and asked her for a urine sample that individual was at a severe disadvantage. I was fortunately not targeted, and was therefore able to complete and leave the center on probation after a short time.

Probation Violation

Probation was a difficult road for me and I was eventually sent to prison on technical violations. Essentially my probation was revoked for making telephone calls to a couple of friends who were in jail, which was deemed a violation of the terms of probation because this was considered associating with known felons. Although I fought these accusations in court, the state prevailed and I was en route to prison.

State Prison

It was my time in state prison that truly changed me and instilled in me an apoplectic rage about the ways in which certain people are treated that has helped motivate me to desist from crime, drugs, and being sent back. The conditions in Iowa Correctional Institution for Women (ICIW) were far better than the conditions of any jail I'd been to for a number of reasons. In prison I was able to work, go outside, have face to face visits, and given access to far more hygiene products (although I had to pay for them). Being able to fill the day with more than television and sitting in a cell mitigated the passing of time. I spent about ten months in ICIW and was grateful to be there compared to jail. However, the advantages I had, not only white privilege but also class privilege, heterosexual privilege, and mental health privilege became undeniable and un-ignorable while I served time in ICIW.

I mentioned already that while in the Hinzman Center I saw that certain inmates (primarily African American women) were treated differently than white women because of staff discretion, but I was so careful to abide by all rules in the Hinzman Center that it was hard to see just how overtly unjust decisions by the staff were. However, in prison, although I tried to follow the many rules and restrictions placed on me, over a ten month period it was near impossible to do so, which allowed me to clearly see the overt discrimination taking place.

A quick illustration of this took place when I briefly worked in the kitchen (I soon got a better job, as a life-skills tutor which paid 50 cents an hour). In the kitchen, if you eat food while cooking it is technically considered stealing and when caught an inmate can be sent to the hole (solitary confinement) for doing so. Three women and I were caught red-handed by the kitchen manager, who merely said 'you'd better stop that, ladies' and walked away. A few weeks later, another woman (an African American ex-cellmate of mine) was sent to the hole for being caught by the same kitchen manager for eating. If it were not for the hundreds of examples of this that I'd seen I may not have attributed this to racism, but I saw a multitude of examples of white and non white inmates doing the same things over and over with far different consequences.

I have already talked about race a lot, an area of incredible interest to me. Racial discrimination in the criminal justice system is a huge because many states have a higher overrepresentation of African Americans jails and prisons in the US. But I noticed in prison that African Americans were not the only group that seemed to be overrepresented in prison. I also saw more Native Americans in prison than I had met in my entire life - but race is not the only issue in Iowa Prisons.

In the same way that staff members in prisons can use their discretion to exacerbate social inequalities against racial groups, the same phenomenon occurred against homosexual women. I believe this problem is almost worse because it is so undocumented and unknown outside of the prison walls. It took me longer to realize the heterosexism that was occurring because I was not aware that it was a problem to begin with, but once I became aware of it I saw it constantly. This is an ongoing problem that needs to be documented and changed and my desire to help in that process is yet another force that drives me to desist from crime.

I have come to the realization that all social inequalities are magnified in a prison setting. Class differences, for example, are stark in prison where anybody without outside income is at a severe disadvantage. I am undeniably aware of how much worse my time in prison would have been had I not been able to purchase a radio, a television, extra food, or hygiene products because I saw so many women who could not purchase these things. Making the standard wage of 28 cents an hour is not enough to afford these things. Women who owe restitution and child support, find money deducted from their inmate pay, with very little left to pay for canteen items. Making less than \$12 a week, without outside financial support they struggle to buy toothpaste and tampons (tampons, I should note, cost more than one week's earnings for such women).

Mental illness also is a horrific problem in ICIW. Women with severe paranoid schizophrenia are shut into a tiny cell for months on end; mental healthcare is a joke. Women are prescribed tranquilizers and sleeping pills at an alarming rate and physical healthcare is even worse. When women with severe mental illnesses act out and exhibit symptoms of these illnesses they are literally electrocuted with 'tasor weapons' or 'shields' (an electronic device the correctional staff use to cover themselves as they run towards a person shocking them on impact) then tied up like hogs-at the ankles and wrists, and dragged to solitary confinement. Women with more severe mental illness never leave solitary confinement; they sit in a cell all day with their hands covered in enormous mittens they cannot remove to stop them from scratching themselves. The way these women are treated disgusts me. I do not have the space here to go into the gross maltreatment of all of these groups, but I can say that it is what I have seen that has helped me to desist. For I know that I cannot help any of these women or any of these groups of people from behind the prison walls.

From Prison to Graduate School

When I got out of prison I paroled to New Jersey. I thought I would do better in a new place and I was right. I applied, and was accepted to the Master's in Sociology and Social Justice Program at Kean University and I am trying to find a way to help make the changes I know must be made. While I was in prison I felt like a bystander, witnessing first hand as inequalities took place and not acting in the interest of self-preservation. Now that I am out, I know I need to do something. When I got out of prison, while doing research on Criminal Justice Conferences I stumbled across the Convict Criminology Group. It has been a huge inspiration to me. I know that my criminal record will be a barrier to me, but seeing that other

people who have come from similar situations were able to make it gives me hope that I can too. It is because of my contact with the Convict Criminology Group that I will be able to present a paper on inmate misconduct at the American Society for Criminology Conference, November 2012, in Chicago.

Conclusion

Having strong family support, getting away from Iowa (both the place and the people there), and discovering the Convict Criminology Group are all important factors in leading me away from crime and towards a path of higher education, but the strongest force that helps me is my desire to change and help the women I left behind. Being sent to prison was awful and traumatic and dreadful for my friends and family, but it did help me. If I had not seen the atrocities occurring behind bars I do not know what path my life would have taken. Now I know that because of my insights and experiences I have the knowledge to create change and all I need are the tools. I hope that pursuing my education (my Master's now and eventually my PhD) will help me to gain those tools and that I will someday make a difference.

NOTHING PERSONAL: MASS INCARCERATION, PRISONER REENTRY, AND DISILLUSIONMENT

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The era of mass incarceration has brought recent attention to the process of prisoner re-entry. Most scholarly treatments of re-entry have built upon the classic “pains of imprisonment” literature (Sykes, 1958) and list the various needs and deficiencies faced by current and former prisoners. Re-entry analysis tends to emphasize the first days or initial period of return (Petersilia, 2003; Travis, 2001). The implication being that if returning prisoners can survive the initial shock of release, they will manage to gain a footing in free society and perhaps come out all right.

Longer-term analysis, however, may be less encouraging. John Irwin, perhaps America’s foremost prison scholar, suggests, “It is my belief that a long-term follow-up study of released prisoners would find that a relatively high percentage, perhaps more than 25 percent, end up on skid row” (2005:197). It seems, then, that whether the vantage point rests on the “moment of release” or on the “life course,” formerly incarcerated persons face many obstacles to getting on track with their lives.

The emergent field of Convict Criminology (Ross and Richards, 2003) portrays prison and related experiences as a largely hidden, difficult, and complex subject matter that is nonetheless usually presented in a simplistic manner (Irwin, 2002). Convict Criminologists tout ethnography as possessing the potential to disrupt and otherwise complicate our understanding of the justice process, while grounding knowledge in the lives of actual participants (see Jones, et al., 2009). Convict Criminologists also argue that the power of personal narrative, of story, is well suited to developing a critical understanding of prison as centerpiece of a flawed and destructive criminal justice process (Terry, 2003; 2004; Hendricksen and Mobley, 2012). Below, I will tell a story, an autoethnography (Lenza, 2011), describing an especially tense period in my own re-entry.

Employment security, a challenge for nearly all persons at the time of this writing, is particularly difficult for formerly incarcerated persons (Western, 2006). The story I tell here concerns a crucial moment in my quest for security of employment: specifically, for tenure within an academic institution. The tenure process provokes mental anguish for many. I've heard numerous stories of mental and emotional suffering, insomnia, isolation, even breakdown. My point is that even though the tenure experience is common, systemic, in fact, its affects are usually closely held. It can become a very private affair of intense personal accountability.

I came to academia very nearly direct from prison after ten years of continuous confinement. My offense was involvement in drug trafficking. I entered graduate school at the University of California-Irvine in 1995 bearing the Bachelor's (Economics, State University of New York, 1991) and Master's (Sociology, Vermont College, 1993) degrees I had earned while a prisoner of the US Federal Bureau of Prisons. I completed my PhD the day after the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Unable to secure a permanent position over the next several years, I found temporary work - a university fellowship, grant-funded community action research projects, a visiting professorship - before accepting a tenure-track position as Assistant Professor of Criminal Justice at San Diego State University (California, USA) beginning Fall 2005. The traditional period of "academic probation" - a status both ironically familiar and painful for an ex-felon - came to be extended from six years to seven years because state budget cuts and 'work furloughs' had reduced the number of days for which staff were paid to work. This 'extra year' was lucky for me, since my previous application for tenure after five years had been denied. The cause: insufficient peer-review publications.

Convict Criminology is characterized by its members' inclination to publish in non-traditional venues (Richards and Ross, 2001; DeKeseredy, 2011). I too followed this practice, in part because of a desire to contribute to social change. I had my doubts that the traditional academic path would facilitate my doing so. In the final year of my extended academic probation I did manage to publish a number of research articles and essays in peer-review journals (Mobley, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2012a; 2012b). Still, there was no real way for my sceptical mind to know if what I had done was enough for the review board, or if anything, really, would be enough.

Thus I found myself struck by anxiety, (post-traumatic?) stress, and perhaps paranoia, states of insecurity that have been known to cause individuals and even nation-states to behave badly (Gusterson and Besteman, 2010). I submit that this period posed a particular challenge to my re-entry. In my case, however, the challenge was not so much desistance from criminal activity per se, as is usually most feared, but from indulging in some of the underlying factors said to contribute to crime and detract from overall personal well-being: apathy, despair, and disillusionment. Here, then, is the story that marked the culmination of that time. It is followed by analysis.

Penal Insecurities

I am told that at my age if I were to lose my job I should expect not to work again. This is because younger, less costly workers and technologies are there to replace me. They say that folks like me are expendable, an indulgence surplus. And I believe this to be true. I don't believe it completely because I do see value in myself and what I do. But I believe it. Right now this belief seems especially damaging because I am in the midst of the final performance review of the probationary period of my employment. If the review goes well, I will be offered security of employment. If negative, I will be offered a "terminal year." That means fired. Let go.

Driving home from work I see what I take to be a homeless man pushing his cart of earthly belongings up a mildly steep city sidewalk. He approaches the driveway to a busy shopping center but before crossing doesn't bother to check both ways. Doesn't bother. His gaze remains locked and loaded, middle distance, front and center. What soldiers call a thousand-yard stare.

The sight of this man unnerves me. My attention is held fully captive as I imagine the difficulties and indignities of his life. His physical strength is formidable, for sure, yet his strength seems mighty in its rigidity while weak in terms of flexibility, adaptation. Should an inattentive motorist, for example, cross his path at just the right time - the wrong time - this man would undoubtedly find himself (myself?) crushed beneath grinding automotive weight.

I struggle to bring my attention back to the road. I do not see the full face of this man, yet there's something unmistakable in his bearing, his movement, his set. I am sure that this man knows, like I know, of life within an institution, perhaps many institutions.

Living in prison one learns that each person bears responsibility (and accountability) only for his own actions. This man, like most men in penal institutions, does not look around at his surroundings. His understanding is that the other pedestrians are responsible for the spaces they occupy, and the drivers for the spaces they move through in their vehicles. This man, like me, minds his own business. By force of habit he watches only his own next step. He holds himself accountable for the space occupied by his body and his gaze. All else that surrounds him, including the earth, the sky, and the very air he breathes, is thought to belong to that amorphous entity known to all the institutionalized as *They*. *They* control the resources and the environment, and they do with it, and with him, as they please. It's hard, this relative helplessness, but over the years he has found little that he can do about it. So he closes-off, withdraws, minimizes. He is here, yes, on the sidewalk, but not really. He is *in* this workaday scene, but not *of* it, not really.

I shudder to shake the disquiet as I roll through the next intersection, heading home. But the front-and-center gaze stays with me. It's undeniably familiar, well practiced, time worn. Silently, I wish this man well, when suddenly a (warning?) warming flush of shame comes to my face. I am forced to confront my *fervent* wish to avoid the necessity of donning his mask, that stare, ever again. Yes, I am told that if I were to lose my job that I should expect not to work again. And I believe it. I am a convicted felon, an ex-convict, and the part of me that warms to (and is warned by) the protective rigidity of the thousand-yard stare expects to lose this job, expects to push that cart, anticipates the indignities of dispossession, and readies for it.

Breaking (it) Down

I work as a college professor, a criminologist. I have been out of prison nearly twenty years and still this dread of dispossession is a part of me. Professionally, my work as a researcher and teacher is layered with the sensibilities of one who has fully inhabited a discredited social position. People say this enriches my work. Personally, the costs of such expertise are high. Sky high.

Formerly incarcerated persons are known to suffer numerous collateral consequences following periods of confinement. Scholars have amply documented what many of us know and feel: exclusion from housing, jury service, voting rights, volunteer positions, jobs, whole career paths (Mauer and Chesney-Lind, 2003). Yes, and living with a prison sentence is so much more than that.

It starts, of course, with arrest. One is yanked out of one's life circumstances much like those portrayals of persons vaporized by neutron bombs. Everything else remains the same, only you disappear. Conviction changes that. Your rent comes due and all of your things disappear, too. Your car is taken away and most of your friends and relationships are not far behind. In prison, you discover from court documents that you are now considered 'indigent' and you seek out the meaning of that term. The benefit of waived court fees is little consolation for being flat broke. You are down, out and ended-up in prison. And that is where you stay, until the day they kick you out. Then, usually, no one is there to feed, house, or clothe you anymore. You are still flat broke, an internally displaced person, broken in many ways, yet now you must fend for and fix yourself.

Most people that go through the trauma of arrest, conviction, incarceration and release, repeat the process, often many times. That the prison industry creates its own repeat customers is well known. My repetitions have been simulated and virtual, a silly and yet mincing mind-game on the penal merry-go-round. The simulated condition results from my dancing along the razor's edge as a prison volunteer and researcher. I go into prison in part, maybe, to see if they will (still) let me out again. My virtual exploration is on exhibit right here, both in this real-time writing, and in the events depicted above. Dealing with this experience, this gift that keeps on giving, is difficult. Why don't I just leave it alone? Because, it won't leave me alone. That much needs to be understood by those seeking to know about mass incarceration.

Mass Incarceration and the Convict Code

The convict code of conduct (Irwin, 1970; Irwin, 2012) is said to be an informal set of rules governing prisoner society. Its primary dictates are, "do your own time," and "don't snitch." More than anything else, the convict code constructs and stresses the reality that each man is sentenced, comes into prison, and will leave alone. The legally constituted aspect of his identity serves as a master status; all else about him is sublimated to that legal, physical fact.

Produced as a discrete, separate individual, no convict owes another anything, nor expects anything. No favors, no harms. Since nothing between prisoners is owed or expected, everything, all thoughts, words, and deeds, is considered to be consciously decided. Individuals are thereby held responsible for their decisions. The code is a simple extension of the broader societal legal logic that holds each prisoner accountable for his actions. Ignorance of norms/laws is no excuse to escape responsibility and punishment, not in prison, or on the street. The compacted, concentrated, black and white world of prison is even more demanding than the free world penal code, however, in that “intent” is assumed by the mere act of commission. There is no such thing as ‘guilty with explanation’ or ‘I didn’t mean to’. The rule is an unforgiving, ‘you break it, you bought it’.

This profound level of individuation is said to protect each prisoner from sanctions arising from the actions of other prisoners. In the words of one prison officer: “I tell them when they first come in, ‘If you mind your own business you are responsible only for yourself. If some jack-off wants to get smart and try something, let him pay for his mistakes. You keep your nose clean and you’ll get out when your number is up’” (prison staff interview).

Convicts as Privatized Personalities

The criminologist Ian Taylor (1999) cites historian Raymond Williams and his ideas concerning privatization in Western societies. Williams sees the most fundamental manifestation of privatization in the common, everyday, practices of folks who construct themselves as ‘private individuals’, and then isolate themselves from others. Even while on the move in public, Williams notes, people tend to be alone. Williams calls this phenomenon ‘mobile privatization’. Contemporary capitalism urges citizen-subjects to live alone behind guarded gates, travel alone in sports-utility cocoons, work at service, intellectual, or technical jobs, alone, and chained to computers and other “smart” devices, even when on the move. We are the products of a market society that seeks to create us as autonomous, isolated producers and consumers.

The convict code seeks to produce cons the same way. Privatized. Each existing in a private world. “Mind your own business; you came in alone, you do your time alone, you leave alone; best to protect yourself from the risk posed by others.” The convict code creates subjects not as mindless drones that blend in seamlessly with others, but as fully conscious

individuals who minimally acknowledge others because others have no meaning in their privatized life-worlds. In these personalized dystopias, the only significant relationship is with the rules.

The prisoner is kept congregated with others for the efficiency of the system, for its good, not his. Whether or not he benefits from the proximity of others, he simply must endure it. Yet even among so many he is isolated in his pain, burdens, and goals. The human predilection for sociality draws him to those around him, yet according to the code he is not to form any type of community, as it would pose a threat to the administration, and then they to him. Prisoners cannot form a consensus regarding living conditions, family problems, administrative priorities, or what-have-you. Convict society is thereby made mythical, little more than a management tool; something allowed to form or be disbanded by authorities. It serves at their pleasure.

Perhaps a broader discussion of the erosion of public space and the alienation of citizen-subjects should include, or even use as a model, the convict as the ultimate privatized personality. Owning nothing but needing some basic necessities and a tangible sense of ownership for status and esteem, he appropriates virtually everything from the public sphere and privatizes it.

Williams writes that mobile privatization is, “one of the defining dimensions of the emergent culture of market society” (quoted in Taylor, 1999: p. 137). The taking of public space by privatization (enclosure within enclosure) is rooted in the logic of the market economy, where resources are given value via control/ownership and then may be traded to create additional value.

The convict code encourages prisoners to be private people; to privatize the space they occupy. The chair in the TV room may be public space, but the con takes his comb from his pocket and places it on the chair to make it his own. Same with bunks, cells, lockers. Nearly all a prisoner’s material resources are public goods appropriated by him, privatized for his own personal consumption. This includes his bodily-occupied ‘personal space’, ostensibly public space that he takes and is prepared to defend until the moment he surrenders it, one way or another.

Consumers of Punishment

Even as he is homogenized as an 'inmate' the convicted felon is turned into an individual consumer, a consumer of punishment. He *is* in order to be punished. His "job" is to remain in place, open, and accepting with apparent docility the conditions forced upon him. The slavish, stupefied condition of learned helplessness that afflicts prisoners is no doubt caused in part by the lack of decision-making endemic to penal regimens. Certainly in any prison the array of choices available to one is circumscribed. Not totally eliminated, by any means, but circumscribed.

However, learned helplessness is both a social disease and individual pathology; it is a barrier to the means of achieving social capital, such as employment and re/integration, both inside prison and on the streets. Not only is the prisoner unaccustomed to making nuanced decisions, perhaps more important, he has a diminished perception of others, both in qualitative and quantitative terms.

Having lived for years among severely impaired humans, people reduced by their role ordeal as either prisoners or guards, he fails to expect much from those he encounters. Low expectations are then joined to his own diminished capacity. Being trained to see others in only the most superficial ways, as, for example, 'safe' or 'threat'. The current or ex-con has trouble in perceiving persons as whole, complex beings. Thus he finds it difficult to trust, to love, to evaluate with subtlety. He is much more comfortable keeping people in the roles he assigns them. Learned helplessness may be more of an antisocial disease that reveals itself after prison, on the outside. It is a learned inability to coexist with others. For his own comfort, then, the ex-con privatizes himself as tightly on the streets as he did in prison. This outlook must surely undercut his ability to remain 'free' on parole, just as it perversely expands his autonomy in the joint. In the words of Irwin (2005):

Most parolees eventually stay out of prison, but the majority of them would not consider their life a success. Nor would any informed observer. This is because many parolees, I suspect a majority, eventually end up living an isolated, impecunious, dependent life on the margins of society (pp. 191-192).

Back on the Street

As previously noted, I work as an academic criminologist. This means that I study crime and those most often involved with crime. Criminologists in the US are well aware that racial minorities are the people most often involved with 'crime'. It bears mentioning that, for a criminologist, 'crime' usually means those illegal acts that result in arrest and conviction. Of course many argue, quite persuasively, that the harmful acts of the powerful are rarely defined as crime. And since the powerful in society tend to be from the dominant ethnic/racial group - white people - perceptions and statistics on crime are skewed towards the portrayal of racial minorities as criminals.

The part of the city where I currently reside is almost wholly populated by brown people. As I drive past the shopping center with its 'Chuze' gymnasium and 'El Super' grocery store, I see brown teenagers streaming forth from the high school. Like almost every day, two police patrol cars, 'black and whites', are stopped in front of the school.

'Crime prevention' often means police or others intervening in shaky situations. Interventions usually are focused on young people because the young are thought of as 'high risk' both of committing and being victimized by crime. Certain racial minorities - Blacks and Latinos - are the obvious targets of crime prevention efforts, and not only because of the risk of their direct involvement with crime.

Blacks and Latinos are thought more vulnerable to crime at least in part because they have a harder time 'making it' in American society than do their white counterparts. American Blacks and Latinos live shorter lives and suffer more infant deaths than do whites. They are paid less, are sick more and find themselves less well educated. In fact, studies suggest that most Black and Latino boys do not finish high school (Alexander, 2010). Criminologists then, understandably, have a history of involvement in schemes to improve the life chances and lower the crime risks of Blacks and Latinos.

Recently, demographers have informed us that in two states so far, California and New Mexico, Latino children now comprise an outright majority of young people. Although these children remain at 'high risk' for crime, victimization, and for the many disadvantages associated with being a minority group, they are no longer a minority.

Hmm. As I watch our animated local high schoolers bop across the crosswalk, I note that the American Dream for minorities has always been portrayed as something achieved through assimilation and finding success in the majority mainstream. Now we find a new mainstream in the making, a majority group *that is the 'high risk' group*. Meanwhile the minority - white children - enjoy most advantages. Hmm.

Contemplating the future, my perhaps paranoid mind cannot help but ask if the US is on the way to becoming a place where a powerful minority group makes laws, enforces them, and otherwise structures society for its own benefit, while disadvantaging the majority? If so, will this make the US more like the apartheid regime of the old South Africa? If it does, if the US is indeed heading the way of South Africa - even under a Black president - what might the future hold for Americans? Tribal homelands, segregated, gated communities? Rising inequalities? A two-tiered justice system? A nation, in other words, headed for de facto partition and dissolution? Where might I and mine fit in? Where might you?

The other day, a college student, brown, like a plurality of my university students, came up after class to tell me that he had listened to a recording of a radio broadcast I'd made a decade before. It was for a public radio station in Los Angeles. The radio station later decided to burn CDs and offer them to paying listeners as subscription gifts. I had been happy to do the interview, and willing to contribute to the fundraising drive, but lately found that my enthusiasm for the project had declined. It was this tenure review. I did not know who knew what about me, or what they thought about what they knew.

The student said he was very impressed with the interview. He found my life amazing and inspiring and said the resilience I had shown in very trying circumstances was admirable; that he hoped to have as much resilience himself when difficulties came his way. I tried to be gracious, but I noticed an uptick in my heartbeat and sweat had come to my palms. Afterward, I thought to maybe curse myself for ever making my private life public. And then I remembered: as far as my criminality was concerned, I had no private life.

I keep my nose clean and the performance review is going well. Good thing, because as far as teaching goes, a university is it for me. At my age, and even with all my distinguished credentials, I sure wouldn't be allowed to teach high school.

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I FELL FROM THE SKY: CONVICT BECOMES PROFESSOR

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Nobody chooses how he or she enters this world. Some people are born to the bottom, others the top, a few with no parents. I fell from the sky. I am an orphan, raised in an institution, a ward of the state (see Richards, 2004). Nevertheless, it was a collective environment where adult childcare workers read books and shared their ideas and dreams. I learned to love school, as it was a place where I could prove I was as good or better than anyone, despite having no parents. I grew up tough and competitive, excelling in sports and academics, desperate to prove that I deserved attention.

I was fortunate - it could have been worse. At least I had numerous brothers and sisters. There were three meals each day, other children to play with, and I had my own bed. Still, we slept as many as five to a room and took our meals at long communal style tables. As orphans, we wore nametags on our clothes, had no parental protection or family privilege, and were raised to be self-sufficient.

The University

At age 17, I graduated from high school early and left the orphanage to attend the University of Wisconsin (UW). Once I left the institution there was no return. I was on my own with only the clothes on my back and a few bucks in my pocket.

Still, I was unprepared for the disadvantage of my poverty compared to the social-class privilege of many other students. I found most of the undergraduate students to be silly and immature, totally dependent on their parent's financial support and direction. Despite their cool demeanor and assertion of independent thinking they were still mere children. Meanwhile, I read textbooks in the college bookstore because I could not afford to purchase books. When I got hungry I would go hustle some over-fed suburban female student who had a meal ticket and lived in a dormitory. I was determined to be a good student, even if could not afford the books and food. Finally, I discovered the student aid office. I remember the

financial-aid counselor cried when I told her that I could not complete the parent information on the application form because I was an orphan.

Attending an elite public university I met students from all over the world. At UW, I remember taking courses about China, Latin America, and Africa and learned that my government opposed liberation movements all over the world. I was struck by the fact that there is, at the very least, three separate worlds existing side by side. I was born of the first world, which is composed of the rich industrial countries. The second world is the so-called developing countries, where the first world has elected to deploy some investment capital. The third world is the domain of countries that are largely seen by American and European bankers as places to extract mineral resources, rather than economies to develop as a means to raise the standard of living for the indigenous population.

The Pot Business

In 1970 I left the land of privilege and travelled to Mexico for the first time. I should have stuck to the tourist destinations, but no I had to seek adventure, get to know the people, and venture beyond the pale. Mexico is a country that may be characterized as balancing on the edge of the second and third world. This is a large nation, with vast potential, but serious economic disparities. The Mexican elite is very rich, and most everybody else dirt poor. I quickly found myself mesmerized by a country dominated by a ruthless upper class, mired in poverty and a long history of failed revolutions.

Spending months at a time as a guest of left-wing students in the interior of the country, I lived in villages and urban districts, where electric and water services were sporadic (if they existed at all), the daily staple was beans and corn, and the people knew the federal police and military to be bandits. In retrospect, I understood very little of the language or culture, but I still remember the poverty. The economic conditions, not just the beggars who stood on every tourist corner, but also the death that came so young and was so common shocked me.

My romantic interest in the plight of the Mexican people introduced me to a strange business, where Yankee greenbacks flowed south and pipe dreams north. Over the next decade I travelled extensively south of the border, returning home to the states, indifferent to the inherent risks, an adventurer playing a dangerous game. I played a role that could only

end in disaster. By the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the ‘war on drugs’, many of my friends were dead or in prison. By 1982 I was a bit worn from living on the lunatic fringe and way outside the law. The years of travel had taken their toll. Still, the work continued, as the Yankee dollars brought hope and relative prosperity to so many people who worked the land in quiet desperation. But I shouldn’t have been so surprised that the US Government thought less of my endeavors and decided I was a dangerous criminal.

Federal Prisons

I was arrested in 1982, and when I refused to cooperate with the Drug Enforcement Agency, indicted on ten counts of Conspiracy to Distribute Marijuana. Facing 150 years if convicted on all charges (15 years for each count), I stood jury trial in the Federal District Courthouse in Charleston, South Carolina. In 1983, upon being convicted of one count and while on bail, I appealed the case to the US Court of Appeals and in 1984 to the US Supreme Court. I was sentenced to nine years and designated to maximum-security at the United States Penitentiary Atlanta (USP Atlanta).

Altogether I stood trial in three federal courtrooms and completed two years on close bail supervision, three years of incarceration, and six years on parole, for a total of eleven years in correctional custody. I served time in several jails, penitentiaries, medium-security institutions, minimum-security camps, and a work-release center; and I had a half-dozen different parole officers (Ross and Richards, 2009).

I entered federal prison at the beginning of the drug war. Because I had fought a federal case all the way to the US Supreme Court, I was sentenced to maximum-security. The day I arrived at USP Atlanta the penitentiary was on fire. The Cubans had torched a number of buildings. I never entered “general population” there. Instead I was transported along with 200 other men first to FCI Talladega (Alabama), then USP Terre Haute (Indiana), and later to USP Marion (Richards, 2008, 2012) (Illinois) and then USP Leavenworth (Kansas). I got the tour of the federal “American gulag” (Richards, 1990, 2003; Ross and Richards, 2002; Richards and Ross, 2003).

In federal prison I found a lot of men like myself raised in difficult circumstances. Many of them were the products of indifferent parents, broken homes, the foster care system, or children’s homes. Few of them received regular family letters or visits. Once a year they

received a Christmas card or maybe a visit from their ex-wife. These men were very much like the children I grew up with in the orphanage. In many cell houses they were the more experienced prisoners who set the tune and ruled the tier. This included operating the most lucrative inmate business - gambling, drugs, and homemade liquor.

Graduate School

In 1987 I left federal prison, returned to Wisconsin, and entered graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Most men and women encounter serious problems exiting prison and re-entering society. Fortunately I had a lot of experience with difficult transitions. After foreign adventures and federal penitentiaries I was happy to be back at school reading books and writing research papers. I enjoyed graduate school at UW-Milwaukee and later at Iowa State University. Nevertheless, I was always surprised at the attrition rate, the number of students who lost interest in their studies, failed comprehensive exams, or never completed their dissertations. Then again, these students had other opportunities. They could pursue alternative careers. As a felon, my options were more limited.

In the USA, ex-cons have no protection from discrimination. In fact, by law we are subject to and singled out, for brutal exclusion and discrimination. As 'semi-citizens' we are denied employment, housing, consumer credit and the right to vote, depending on the state. There are even numerous states that deny ex-convict entrance to graduate schools and employment at universities, and, by federal law, university students are denied financial aid because of drug convictions.

Desistance From Crime

Despite being convicted in federal court 30 years ago, I have never considered myself a criminal. I do not regret my youthful transgressions of the law. Today, marijuana has been decriminalized in many states. I think it should be legal. Reflecting on my past, I see my participation in the pot business as an adventurous detour. I got out of federal prison in 1986, completed a PhD in 1992, and have now been a professor for 20 years. Fortunately, my formal education has provided a means to learn restraint and curb my reckless activity.

Desistance assumes that a person needs to find a new path, a way to avoid returning to a life breaking the law. For myself, the pot business was a long detour, where I deviated from a

path I had began in school many years before. I was young and fearless, and the money was good, and I was so tired of being poor. Maybe, I was just bored with studying at the university.

I exited federal prison with a bachelor's degree and admission to graduate school. I immediately began classes and then completed the Masters and Doctorate degrees in five years. I had no interest in returning to my former illegal endeavors. Instead, I used what I had learned about courts, jails, and prisons to inform what I researched and published.

Conclusion

I have told my story as simply and sincerely as I dare. I am an orphan and an ex-convict. I am the child of many parents, an adult assembled from the bits and pieces of many caring people who crossed my path and somehow shared their gifts. The lessons they taught kept me alive in the penitentiary and prepared me to be a professor.

What are the odds that a person with no parents and a prison record will become a university professor? Today, I am a Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. Every semester I begin my classes by quietly studying the faces of my students. I mean no offense. I am simply searching for those few souls that may find the courage to live their lives with their eyes open.

As an ex-convict criminologist I live my professional life with one foot still in the penitentiary and the other in the university. I enjoy being an ex-convict professor. As one of the leaders of the Convict Criminology (CC) movement (Richards and Ross, 2001; Ross and Richards, 2003; Jones et al., 2009), I prefer the company of my 'felonious friends', who although they have fancy college degrees, have not forgotten from where they came. CC is now thriving in the university and is beginning to inform and transform the way academics research and write about prisoners and prisons (St. John, 2003).

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A PRISONER STORY: THE THIRD TURKEY

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Many men on their release carry their prison about with them into the air, and hide it as a secret disgrace in their hearts, and at length, like poor poisoned things, creep into some hole and die. It is wretched that they should have to do so, and it is wrong, terribly wrong, of society that it should force them to do so. Oscar Wilde, 2011, De Profundis Kindle Edition, Golgotha Press. Locations 175-177.

A Bus Ride

The night was one of those nights when I wasn't sure if I slept at all. I was excited. Something was going to change, but I didn't know exactly what or how. The only person whom I was able to reach by phone on the day that I found out that I was going to be moved was my friend Jane. Prison phone calls are like that. There is no leaving of messages. There is no making two calls without stressing potentially fatal line etiquette. I could only hope that Jane, whose own husband, was incarcerated would be able to reach my ever stalwartly protective attorney Arthur Madden. I was a pro bono case for Arthur, but that was not a qualification affecting his actions on my behalf.

As I hopelessly tried to sleep, I distinctly remember the shadow of prison bars on the top bunk a few feet away. The shadow of the bars were a stark reminder that I was caged in what e.e. cummings (1934) called an "enormous room" with other - at least fifty other - men (no women here). At the lower end of medium-security, enormous rooms or dormitories are an effective correctional tool and a far superior life-style for inmates. Impossible in cell blocks, but possible in dormitories are inmates' ability to shut up screamers, restrain firebugs and suicides, and apply immediate first aid to injured or sick friends.

Finally, just before dawn, a hack (correctional officer) came to my bunk. Whether I was finally asleep or lying there awake, I'll never know. Holding a flashlight and Polaroid file photo of me, the guard asked, "Are you Curry?" I was instantly excited that my waiting was over and just as instantly terrified about what my next step would be. "We've been looking

all over for you.” Yes, the Federal Bureau of Prisons can sometimes not find a specific man in a medium-security prison. All jails and prisons have administrative incompetence in common.

As the guard led me past friends sleeping the restless sleep that caged men sleep, I lugged my box of books. My anxiety about what might happen next grew increasingly replacing any earlier wish to sleep. When we entered the halls of what was known as the “control” area, I could hear men talking in the distance. One particularly loud young voice was complaining about being stuck there for two hours while the hacks look for one “asshole.” “Okay,” I thought, “they’re all going to be angry at me on initial contact.” At least some of them considered me responsible for their delay and waiting. It was time for me to try to appear other than the soft compassionate person that I had worked to appear to be since I smoked that first joint sitting on a bunker in Vietnam. Suppressing my fears as I had to do those first days in Vietnam over a decade before, I pretended that I was someone else.

I looked straight ahead and ignored the men into whose midst I was led. The Federal Correctional Institution (FCI) officer who brought me into the room led me to a tray of cold fried eggs, bacon, and toast lying on the floor against the wall. The hack said that he was required to feed me breakfast, but that I should be “quick” about it because he needed to return the tray to the kitchen. I took the tray and banged it on the floor, knocking the cold meal on to what I knew to be a spotless convict-scrubbed cement floor. I banged it twice, though the second bang may have been unnecessary to dump my food onto the floor. I shoved the tray to the hack trying to act as nonchalant and as animal-like as I could. The officer whom I didn’t know and who didn’t know me looked as uncomfortable by my behavior as I could have wished if I had been a movie director telling him to look uneasy. I sat down on the floor and began to gobble down the cold breakfast as if I were a dungeon resident being fed for the first time in months.

After I had wolfed down my breakfast, things got even better for my newly chosen role as someone not to be “messed with” (or in the deadly play-yard chatter of my youth – kicked, crying, and begging). The ranking transfer officer told me that he wanted to talk to me away from the other prisoners. “Great! “They’ll think that I’m some kind of snitch.” Once out of earshot, the hack with a hint of empathy in his voice said that all of the other prisoners in the holding area were being transferred to level one or Federal Prison Camp status. He said that

he believed that the transition to “camp” status was one that should be gradually affected. I was touched by the hack’s concern for his prisoners and thought, “How sad it would be, if I were forced to kill him in some escape action.” I knew that I could do it. I have a wonderful ability given me by the military to think of adversaries as less than human. Prison is a great place for such survival tendencies to burst from deep in the ego and possibly even in the ID to conscious recognition and utility. “But,” the hack turned stern on me, “You have a 34-year sentence. I cannot possibly transport you in the same way as these other prisoners. I need to know that you won’t file a complaint that I transported you differently from these other prisoners.” I slowly gave the head hack my word that he need fear no legal or other action from me for sparing my fellow travelers restraint on the remainder of their bus ride. The alternative would have been more stupid than any hack could have imagined. Had I balked at the hack’s offer, he would have made sure key inmates on the bus would have known that their being chained was my fault. As the head hack’s subordinates wrapped and fitted me with chains, it was hard to act like this was something that I was used to. I repressed signs of my amazement and fascination. I hoped that this wouldn’t have some permanent effect on my mental health or worse my sexual tastes. Being chained among men with no chains made me more vulnerable to attack than anytime in life (except for several anti-Klan and anti-Nazi non-violent marches when racists hurled rocks and we sang insipid protest songs back at them).

When the head hack announced to the other assembled inmates that I had consented to special treatment in order to make all of other prisoners more comfortable, a range from respect to awe from the other inmates on the bus ride was easy to perceive. One very burly prisoner with a bushy beard pushed others aside to grab my box of books. “I got this, brother,” he said. That was good, because I hadn’t imagined just how restraining shackles can be. In the back of my mind, I wondered, “How can I defecate, wipe, and urinate without hands?” The hairy inmate, who was truly a mountain of a human, asked if I were a “vet”. After my answering affirmatively, the huge shaggy creature responded “special forces, two tours.” I shared, “Special Ops, Army, only one tour, late in the war.” Talking quietly the mountain advised, “I don’t know how you got here, but, if they take their eyes off you for even a second, run.” I had already noted the two shotguns possessively clenched by the two hacks supporting the head hack. Though always being a good runner, I had no intention of trying to outrun buckshot.

To myself, I thought as I hobbled along, “Would the hacks be going to all this trouble if they knew that I was a tenured associate professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of South Alabama with a PhD from the University of Chicago, with my first academic book already at the publisher?” The bus ride was largely uneventful. After the other bus riders had been deposited at Eglin AFB Federal Prison Camp (Florida), I was delivered to the Santa Rosa County Jail. My sainted lawyer had arranged for a federal marshal to be waiting for me there. Otherwise, I could have ridden buses and visited local jails for days. The prison officers appeared surprised when the Federal Marshal ordered my restraints removed and offered my box of books and me a ride on to Mobile (Alabama) where I began the torturous process of re-sentencing and appeal denials. Homeless, I lived as a volunteer groundskeeper and custodian at the Unitarian-Universalist Church (where else?).

The shackles and bus ride were my deepest penetration into the imprisonment experience. While I knew that things could get more restrictive, more painful in Sykes’ terminology, more “totalitarian” in Eric Olin Wright’s (1993) terminology, I had already been caged in structures suitable for restraining the fiercest predators this planet has to offer. I had become that most extreme opposite of a citizen of our society, the convict. I will never be the same. In my unconscious mind, I still wear those chains. Few other memories have made a greater mark on my mind. But, I did follow the old convict’s advice, I ran away, at least on my dealings with the legal system. I deeded my defiant declarations of injustice and slowed my radical politics for a few years (except for some writing, “bad” associations, and refusing to testify against others). From then on, I did not resist superior force or even the morality it claimed. I still didn’t cooperate with prosecutors, the FBI, or the DEA. But “the man” was already on my back, and I was a long way from being out of the prison experience.

The Illusions of Minimum-Security

When I was a toddler, my cousin Judy often babysat for me. Maybe it was because I was a whiny, fearful little know-it-all, Judy fed me a steady diet of substantially dramatic prevarications. One most unnerving for me was the story of the “snake doctors.” Judy told me that dragonflies were snake doctors. When a snake was injured or even killed, a snake doctor could heal the damage. When I was three, I stepped on a copperhead in our front yard, but my granny hacked off its head with a hoe before it could bite me. Once I’d been in the military and seen helicopters flying in formation, dragonflies make me think of Huey’s as well as snake doctors.

It was a very warm day. I had the jogging-walking path to myself at Eglin Federal Prison Camp, meeting not another person within half a mile. When I skirted the bird shelter located behind the sparsely wooded area at the back of the camp, the shoreline of the swampy lake bordering the west side of the camp was dotted (within my endorphin reverie) with snake-doctors and tiny garrisons of Huey helicopters.

On my return pass along the shore, I spotted a Puerto Rican prisoner friend running in the opposite direction. He raised his right hand as we drew close. We “high-fived” and exchanged defiant “Que-pasas?” Endorphins were hard at work in both of us. I felt great. But any sense of freedom was as illusory as the dragonflies being snake doctors or Huey’s. However we might feel in the moment, my friend and I were in captivity.

In his 1973 *Politics of Prison*, Eric Olin Wright suggested that maximum and medium-security would not be able to exist without minimum-security. Wright (p. 153) quotes Sheldon Messinger’s unpublished dissertation (UCLA) to describe the act of providing a prisoner with greater freedom “... it was, at best, a move from a position in which subordination was insured by rigid regimentation and continuous surveillance to one in which these immediate controls are relaxed, the inmate having proved his willingness to maintain a subordinate posture on his own.”

After my lonely appeal bond year spent as a post-doctoral assistant at the University of Chicago, I spent seven months assigned to Eglin Federal Prison Camp. Eglin FPC is a beautiful place. The only real stress is provided by the staff whose persistent harassment of inmates seemed more predicated on their embarrassment by their being assigned to “Club Fed” than any past or present behavior by the inmates. Eglin FPC is the kind of place where I would feel morally comfortable sending my own political enemies to be rehabilitated. Late in my time at Eglin when I became head clerk-typist in the education department, I found a former inmate’s hidden stash of official stationery deep in my new desk – Marvin Mandel, Governor of Maryland. I used the governor’s desk with pride. Eglin is not unlike the minimum-security camp in Kurt Vonnegutt’s *Jailbird* (1979, p. 43) where there are so many lawyers that “If you find yourself talking to somebody who hasn’t been to law school, watch your step. He’s either the warden or a guard.” At Eglin, there were, in addition to lawyers, mayors, physicians, at least two college professors, and a handful of protestant ministers.

While I came out of medium-security meaner and very angry, my psychological back was intact. But as Vonnegut (1979: 126) declares, “Everybody gets his back broken when he goes to prison for the first time. It mends after a while, but never quite the way it was before.” As with the inmate described by Vonnegut, it would be Eglin my second prison stop where my back broke. The weight of the “man” became too much to carry. And as Vonnegut noted about us broken men, we “will never walk or feel quite the same again.” As Sykes (1958, 2007) has noted, pain is what imprisonment is all about. The one unifying principle across every security level of incarceration is the pain of imprisonment. It is this pain that provides the energy for the “society of captives” as a system of action.

After two months, my prison supervisory team moved me to the law library, rumor had that it was based on inmate requests for a more educated clerk. I quickly recruited a lawyer-turned-smuggler to fill another open position in the law library. The influence of inmates on who’s hired where is what has been labeled “informal control.” The former member-of-the-bar pilot and I generated self-help descriptions of how to use the law library in different ways and set up the guide sheets as handouts in an unused magazine stand. In other words, I got moved from that job in less than two months for providing “too much legal help” to inmates. The director of education said that I was lucky to get off so easy. He said he knew of my having received three apples for writing a writ for another inmate. Snitching, while considered anathema to some inmates, is the rule among a comparatively large subset of the inmate population.

I was placed in a woodworking class “where a body was needed,” but more and more I helped education department staff with computer problems and performed extra typing for the education department. I struggled to be an invaluable inmate employee. One night I stayed up all night (except for returning to my bunk for counts) retyping prison regulations onto paper of a slightly different shade of green paper, so that lack of color consistency would not mar the next day’s FBOP inspection. No one on the staff had noticed until too late that part of the paper that I’d been furnished to type the originals was a slightly different shade than the rest of the paper. Each “favor” you do for prison staff gets you a little more personal autonomy or a greater portion of your own subjection to supervise. It’s sort of like taking federal grants except on a smaller scale.

Once when I was working quietly in the corner of a room with other inmates and staff passing through, I overheard a discussion of legalized abortion between a staff member and one of the tax-resister inmates. The inmate was against choice, the correctional officer “for.” When a supervisor came in, the “debating” inmate appropriately pealed. The correctional officer complained to her supervisor, “I hate it when the inmates try to draw me into political discussions.” The supervisor responded, “I just ignore them. I don’t like to acknowledge that an inmate’s in the room with me unless I’ve called him into my office.” When he noticed me quietly looking down at the new computerized grading program that I was setting up for him, the supervisor said, “Take Curry. I forget he’s even *in* the room. He’s like a piece of furniture.” The furniture stayed quiet. The furniture was happy ... eating crap ultimately always made me hungry for more in those days at Eglin.

Prelude to Prison

While I share much with other Convict Criminologists, there are some unique features in my case. Among them was my status as a tenured associate professor when I was arrested. Most of the group members were convicts that upon their release from prison went to graduate school to complete PhDs and then became professors. I was a professor that became a convict, and then upon release from prison, a professor again. Bernadette Olson Jessie is a second Convict Criminologist that was a professor that went to federal prison, and then upon release returned to academia. Today, she is a tenured associate Professor at Indiana University Southeast. Like all the members of the Convict Group, we are criminologists.

Another feature of my incarceration was that I had carefully avoided criminal activity all of my life and was wrongfully convicted on false testimony. Not unlike many of my brothers and sisters in Convict Criminology, I grew up very poor. I was born into a second-generation coal-mining family in McDowell County, West Virginia. After the mines shut down, my father, a miner, was marginally employed, often working two jobs at a time, in Virginia and Mississippi. I helped support my family from age eight on. I was admitted to a community college without a high school diploma. My family lived in the projects in Pascagoula. My mother was always sickly. When I was a teenager, she had what used to be called a “nervous breakdown”. Eventually she was hospitalized in the state hospital for the indigent in Meridian, Mississippi, where she received shock treatments.

Some academics assume that all the Convict Criminologist were just “middle class minor drug offenders” that did short sentences. Stephen Richards (2003) grew up in an orphanage. It doesn’t get much poorer than that. In my case, the attribution may be appropriate, despite my childhood, I was just settling into an unfamiliar middle class identity as a professor when I was subjected to a minor drug conviction. In comparison, many of the Convict Criminologists come from underclass and working class backgrounds, some did ten or more years in prison, for a wide array of criminal offenses, not just drugs, and today enjoy the relatively easy life of middle class academics.

Vietnam

Army ROTC offered me my ticket for finishing my undergraduate degree at Southern Mississippi. I was a cadet battalion officer and received the Hattiesburg Mississippi American Legion award for military excellence by a senior cadet. As a second lieutenant in Armor Officer Basic, I was selected for Laotian language school and training as a special agent in counterintelligence. In Vietnam, I always lived disguised as a civilian well outside military bases in the sprawling slums of that country. My first primary responsibility was human target identification as operations officer of a counterintelligence team indirectly assigned to John Paul Vann’s headquarters in the mountainous II Corps. I attained the rank of Captain though I never got to wear my bars. In II Corps, I often slept with a loaded 38 under my pillow. During my last four months in country, I was assigned as a team leader in the Special Operations Battalion of the 525 Military Intelligence Group. There I added subject interviewer or interrogator to my job responsibilities.

Returning to the states, out of my mind with PTSD, I enrolled in graduate school first at Ole Miss and then getting a PhD in sociology from the University of Chicago. In Mississippi, I served as state coordinator of Vietnam Veterans Against the War. In 1976, I took an assistant professor appointment at the University of South Alabama in Mobile, and soon became a regular as an expert witness for the local NAACP affiliate law firm and the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Becoming a Convict

My wrongful conviction by an Alabama jury was based on the false testimony of an undercover agent. He was Special Agent Grady Gibson, Alabama Bureau of Investigation. In fact Gibson had asked to be pulled out of his deep cover role, when I confronted him about

my suspicions that he was an undercover agent. Gibson had seduced my co-defendant Tom Ashby into purchasing small amounts of cocaine to be used by Gibson in order to treat his headaches supposedly caused by a head wound during his service as a Marine in Vietnam. When I met Gibson, he was our service organization's state "traveler". He had arranged meetings with the governor to develop improved state-level benefits for veterans. I believed Gibson's story, because it was easier. I have enough troubled clients at the vet center, so I did want to add Gibson to my client list or hear the details of his supposed injury.

Gibson took the stand, in the two-week trial, and presented a fantasy of wild partying Vietnam veterans motivated by their own hedonism rather than assisting their less prosperous veteran brothers and sisters. He painted me as a regular supplier of cocaine for other veterans. A young friend who had provided the cocaine that Gibson obtained through me was allowed to plead guilty to one count of distribution and given probation. With his lawyer's acquiescence, the novice drug supplier took the stand testifying that Gibson used more cocaine than anyone whom he'd ever observed using the drug. Tom Ashby and I also took the stand and honestly answered all questions about our involvement in our alleged crimes. Of three counts of distribution, the jury found me not guilty of two. The jury found Tom guilty of one count of distribution, both of us guilty of conspiracy to distribute and me guilty of one count of using a communication device (a telephone) to facilitate a felony. I had given Agent Gibson, at his request, directions to find a restaurant where he was supposed to join the supplier and me for lunch. In my case, the amount of cocaine was 6.2 grams. For Tom, I think it was an even smaller amount. Judge Brevard Hand who before the trial had said he wanted to dismiss the jury and find us guilty on all counts, sentenced Tom to 15 and 15 (30 years), and me to 15, 15, and four (34 years), all counts to run consecutively. The sentences were obviously political punishment for being vets against the war.

Even when I was told that Judge Hand had sentenced us to "A" sentences and that he could re-sentence us at some point in the future, I didn't feel any sense of relief or hope. Sometime that summer after the bus ride when I'd agreed to change my home of record to Chicago, Judge Hand re-sentenced me to five years, six years special probation, and six years regular probation to run consecutively, of course. Until my appeals were exhausted, I was assigned to the custody of Professor James Coleman at the University of Chicago and the Chicago Federal Probation office. After exhausting my appeals and serving fourteen months, I was released on the basis of the sentencing guidelines for 6.2 grams of cocaine.

Re-Entry

As most of you know, it's a tricky little game that we play as ex-cons with many painful twists and pitfalls. In autumn 1983, I saw an interim lecturer job at Illinois-Chicago Circle campus. The Department Chair was John Johnstone, a former student of James Coleman. I made an appointment and Johnstone interviewed me. He said that he considered himself fortunate to have an applicant to teach intro sociology courses with my credentials. The job was mine if I wanted it. Breaking into a sweat, I spelled out my legal status. He looked very uncomfortable as we shook hands, and Johnstone said that he might have some difficulties getting me approved. I left with unease, but flushed with the joy of getting back to the classroom. When I got back from the office, there was a message to call Jim Coleman. Coleman said that he'd received a call from a very upset Johnstone, who wanted me to withdraw my application. As soon as the call and withdrawal were finished I wept.

In 1986, just after work release, I was offered a post-doctoral fellowship from the government of the Netherlands to study the econometrics of health care. Judge Brevard Hand was notified, and he intervened to keep me in Chicago and under "necessary" supervision.

According to Oscar Wilde, "Society ... shuns those whom it has punished, as people shun a creditor whose debt they cannot pay, or one on whom they have inflicted an irreparable, an irremediable wrong." I had actually thought that criminologists with our knowledge of how the system works would be less likely to have such a tendency to shun ex-convicts. After too many years of hiding who I was from all but my departmental colleagues and reinforced by stiff drink, I ventured to bring up my past with another criminologist at the bar during American Society of Criminology (ASC) meetings. I didn't know the gravity of my faux pas, until years later when I met Neal Shover, professor at the University of Tennessee, after he spoke at my department. He let me know that he considered me a stupid drunk by my very inappropriate sharing of my inmate past with him a "stranger". Shover is stranger than I would have expected. If you're a Convict Criminologist, please hide your shame from him should you meet him. Shover also expressed his belief that Vietnam veterans who mention their service are all phonies. Evoked into participation in an unpopular war and unjustly imprisoned in an unpopular institution, I know I can never attain Shover's demanding standards.

Presidential Pardon

Unlike most Convict Criminologists, I had defense committees. In fact, I had an Alabama and a Chicago David Curry Defense Committee. The defense committee in Mobile was made up of my close friends and their relatives, all upstanding members of the community. In my lifetime of social incarnations, at no time could I have been un-impressed by the Chicago committee members: four distinguished University of Chicago professors, a decorated Vietnam veteran leader of VVAW, a Spanish Civil War veteran, a widely known female labor activist, and a progressive psychologist. Since so much work can be involved in defense committees, I was glad the committees assembled themselves. I don't think that I had the moral strength to ask someone to serve on a defense committee. It would have been similar to bumming my own bail money. Though a prominent Chicago firm produced my writ of cert to the Supreme Court "*pro bono*", the bill for "expenses other than attorney labor" was \$10,000. Owing all those people is still hard for me to handle.

Another event that makes me somewhat different from the other Convict Criminologists is that I received a Presidential Pardon in 2000. Amazingly, Special Agent Gibson helped me by morphing from lying drug user to convicted murderer in 1999. With Gibson serving life without parole, I applied for a Presidential Pardon. The pardon process, as usually practiced, rather than as done directly by the President, is tedious, frustrating, and slow with extended Department of Justice gathering and analysis of information. When the Pardon Attorney Roger Adams told me that my pardon recommendation was going to the president's office, where it would remain until some president chose to sign it, I told him that I was concerned about the effect of publicity on my eight-year-old daughter. Adams promised to do his best within the rules of press notification. He did, I was pardoned just before Thanksgiving with the other two turkeys. The turkeys stole most of the spotlight except for the Mobile Press Register, which made sure my university was made aware of the shame of my pardon.

Convict Criminology

In 2003, a colleague from another department approached me about a press story on the new group Convict Criminology. His son was in prison he shyly admitted. I quickly justified my colleague's confidence by sharing my own criminal justice system experience. I communicated with Stephen Richards who added me to the email shares from group members. At the next ASC meeting, I attended a convict criminology meeting. Steve

greeted me at the door. I also got to meet the greatest of our number John Irwin, and hear a great presentation by Daniel Murphy. When asked how I felt at that first meeting, I've answered that it was like a sinner finding church. So far, my participation in the group and associated personal healing has been far more rewarding than I ever could have imagined.

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TRAJECTORIES AND PATHWAYS: THE LIFE COURSE OF AN ASPIRING CONVICT CRIMINOLOGIST

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Introduction

The majority of criminological theories are based on the social causation and/or trait-based causes of crime which seek to explain the onset of criminal behavior. On the other hand there has been scarce theoretical attention that sufficiently addresses why individuals stop committing crime (Laub and Sampson, 2003). Previous research has examined the influences of employment and marriage (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Uggen, 2000), self-help groups, such as AA or NA (see Terry, 2003) as well as religion (see Schroder and Frana, 2009). The one thing that is evident from these works is that the etiology of desistance requires additional research.

In order to understand the desistance process it is perhaps best addressed by utilizing a life course perspective which involves two central concepts, trajectories and turning points. Trajectories are long-term patterns of behavior while turning points are short-term life changing events (Elder, 1985). By applying a life course perspective to my personal experiences within the desistance process we will see how experiences as a child may have predisposed me to a life of crime as well as how explicit turning points later in life have influenced the current trajectory of my life as an aspiring Convict Criminologist.

Incarceration as a Way of Life

A trajectory, or pathway, into a life of crime was provided early in life. As a child my family moved a lot, it was not uncommon to attend two or three different schools in any given year. My first brush with law enforcement was at age 14 when, at a motel my family called home, after washing a car for a neighbor, for which I was to be paid in marijuana, I accidentally drove the car through the motel lobbies plate glass window. Unbeknownst to me was that the car had been stolen and there were drugs in the car; the courts ordered me to serve six months unsupervised probation for this act. I began selling drugs, primarily to military personnel and tourists, at age 16.

It was not long before I established a lengthy criminal resume. To summarize, I am a “bitch,” a habitual criminal offender. From 1980-1999, I was arrested 13 times and served time in jail (less than 365 days) in seven different jurisdictions and have been convicted three times for felony crimes and served prison sentences (sentences in excess of 365 days) in two different jurisdictions. In 1999 while traveling through the state of Indiana I burglarized a liquor store, for the purpose of obtaining monies in order to prolong a three day crack cocaine binge. For this act I received an eight year sentence, with five years suspended, to be served as probation upon release.

In the state of Indiana virtually all prisoners upon release are under some form of supervision, either probation or parole. How one is supervised is contingent upon how they were sentenced. For example, an individual who is sentenced to eight years with no time suspended can earn day-for-day good time credit while in prison; as such the eight year sentence will be complete in four years. Accordingly, a maximum of two years of the four years of good time credit are to be served as parole. As noted above I was ordered to serve five of my eight year sentence on probation.

Two weeks prior to my release date authorities asked me what my plans were upon release, with no where to call home and no friends in the area it was decided that on my release date I would be transported to the court where I was convicted to make arrangements with probation authorities there. At 4:00 am on January 16, 2001, I was delivered to the sentencing court house. It was a typical Northern Indiana day, bitterly cold with four feet of snow on the ground. Dressed in prison issued khakis, with a check from work release for \$1100 in my pocket, and nowhere to go, I stood in the snow for five hours until the probation office opened.

Release and Probation

Upon meeting my probation officer (PO) I explained that I did not know anybody in Indiana and for that reason was requesting to have my case transferred to Louisville, Kentucky (KY). As the PO was familiar with a half-way house there, I was instructed to take a bus to KY that day and he would prepare the proper paperwork requesting that my probation to be transferred to KY.

It needs to be noted at this point that in Indiana POs do not have the power to arrest and are required to have a minimum of a four year degree. It has been my experience that the primary objective for Indiana POs is to assist individuals with the re-entry process. Unfortunately, this is not the case for all jurisdictions in America as each of the 50 states can implement policies as they see fit. For instance, in KY POs are an extension of law enforcement who tend to possess a “trail em and nail em” mentality (Richards, Austin and Jones, 2003a) which often results in distrust by offenders (see Frana and Schroder, 2008).

During my first communication with KY authorities I was advised that a half-way house was not a suitable residence and that other living arrangements would have to be made. In reality, as I was just released from prison, I had no desire to live with a bunch of men, so with the money I had saved from work-release; I happily made other living arrangements. Within a month of moving into an apartment I was arrested by KY probation for a crime which occurred ten years previously. I was detained in pre-trial detention for 60 days. Due to lack of evidence the case was dismissed and I was released back to the street; with no money and no place to go.

I briefly returned to the half-way house and within three months I had secured housing, acquired full-time union employment, and enrolled as a part-time student of sociology at a major university. Shortly afterwards the state of KY turned down my request to transfer my probation. It was stated that due to my criminal history I was deemed a high risk to return to prison and as such had to vacate the state of KY; I relocated ten kilometers away in the state of Indiana.

As I was originally sentenced in Indiana (IN) it was simply a formality to have my probation transferred to a different jurisdiction within the state. My first meeting with authorities was much more hospitable than those with KY officials. IN probation officials overall were impressed with my re-entry progress (i.e. gainful employment, and educational pursuits). In fact, during the four and a half years I was supervised by IN probation I was never subjected to a home visit, was only urinalysis tested for drugs three times and cannot recall any adverse interactions with IN officials. In fact at one point it came to the attention of my Indiana PO that I had regularly been driving an automobile without a driver license; an offense which

could result in me being sent back to prison for violating the terms of probation. Instead of revoking my probation the PO assisted me in navigating the governmental bureaucracy with the intended goal of acquiring a driver's license. It was understood, though not verbally stated, that I had to drive in order to work and attend school and that I would not suffer any consequences for my illegal driving activities as long as I did not get caught and that I needed to address this issue and obtain a legal license immediately.

A New Pathway: Education

During my time on probation I had decided to enrol in university. In the past I had never given education much thought. I had received a G.E.D (high school equivalent in the USA) while in a county jail for the sole purpose of obtaining a 15 day time cut. When I first arrived at university, like many undergrads, I was unsure what I was doing there. Unbeknownst to me at that time enrolment in university would be a turning point which would alter the trajectory, yet again, of my life.

I was shocked to discover that most of the students I attended classes with had never been incarcerated, nor had they experienced poverty. Various sociological concepts were easy for me to grasp, I understood the "subculture of poverty" (Lewis, 1959) and the convict code (Irwin, 1970; Irwin and Cressey, 1962; Sykes, 1958; Terry, 1997; Trammell, 2009) intuitively as I had lived these concepts. This was not the case with criminal justice courses. I regularly struggled to discuss or write about what I as a convict knew were the realities of incarceration and/or community corrections, which regularly were opposed to the theoretical or practitioner perspective presented in classes. In one class a professor stated that gangs were so prominent in American prisons that as soon as a convict arrives at a prison they must join a gang for protection. I informed the professor, as well as the other 150 students in attendance, that he was unfortunately misinformed, and had no idea what he was talking about (the actual words which I used are not suitable for print in this forum).

An Introduction to Convict Criminology

During my second year at university (Spring 2003) I was invited to meet with some researchers who wished to discuss how I was staying out of prison. At this meeting I would discover that the researchers, Stephen Richards and Richard Jones, were themselves former convicts. After the interview and having learned of my status as a student I was taken aside and formally introduced to Convict Criminology (see Austin, Richards and Jones, 2003a,

2003b; Richards, Austin and Jones 2004a, 2004b). During the discussion which followed I expressed that I was struggling in my studies as most of my class readings and lectures regarding prisons and prisoners seemed, to me, like nothing more than propaganda. I was directed to several works which contained a more critical approach which they felt would assist; I was also informed that if I *ever* needed any form of academic assistance they were there to assist.

I now returned to campus with renewed vigor, having been exposed to academic works with a critical orientation which was in stark contrast to what I saw as the dominant theory in criminology; rational choice. No longer would I write a paper that I knew to be spurious just to satisfy a class requirement. With a renewed passion for academia I now reflected on my life of crime for inspiration. In the past I had heard anecdotal stories of a diversion policy of utilizing military enlistment as an alternative to incarceration. Much to my dismay there is virtually no research on this topic. So during my senior year I designed and conducted research to discover if prisoners would welcome military enlistment as an alternative to imprisonment or as a condition of parole (Frana and Schroder, 2008). Not only did I enjoy going to prison to collect data, some suggested I was good at it, as my co-author and mentor for this project stated that the prisoners would never had opened up to him (a traditional academic) like they did with me. With this experience another path was suggested; grad school.

Graduate School

Two significant events occurred during my first year of graduate study. First, as a result of my writing (Frana and Schroder, 2008) I received communications from two government bodies seeking my collaboration for drafting criminal justice legislation (me a former convict). Second, upon completion of my Master's Thesis Proposal with committee approval, the department chair denied my proposal and advised me that I would not be permitted to conduct research in the Indiana state prison system. These two experiences revealed that not only could my works influence change but also that one cannot run from the past as even in the "ivory towers" (see Ross et al., 2009) of academia I will still experience discrimination due to my status as a former convict.

As a graduate teaching assistant I was afforded the opportunity to facilitate numerous classes'. In one class, community corrections, while examining the role of probation officials

regarding pre-sentence investigations I would distribute a pre-sentence report which was written about me regarding my last conviction and have each student suggest, to the hypothetical court, sentencing recommendations. During this exercise few students expressed any type of empathy. These students were regularly flabbergasted to learn that I, their teacher, was the person for whom they often recommended severe punishments. During the 2009-2010 academic year I would receive a university wide award as “Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant.”

Conclusion and Discussion

The above discussion outlines the trajectories and turning points which have contributed to my desistance from an extended life of crime. My life began in poverty; I dropped out of school in the 8th grade at which time incarceration seemed inevitable. The basis of this brief autobiography comes, for the most part, from my experiences teaching and lecturing specifically on topics of community corrections and the life course theory. When delivering these lectures I try to emphasize to students, particularly those seeking careers in law enforcement, corrections, and/or probation and parole, that a turning point in a person’s life may occur at any time and that *they* could be the vessel of that turning point which could alter the trajectory of an individual’s life all that is required is perhaps a little empathy and to abandon the us against them mentality which is dominant in American corrections today (see Frana, Lenza and Schroder, 2012).

By applying a life course perspective to my personal pathway to desistance we can see, as previous works have, (Laub and Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001; Sampson and Laub, 1993; Schroder and Frana, 2009; Uggen, 2000) that employment along with continued education has had a positive influence. The turning points and trajectories which have influenced my life since my last release from prison seemed insignificant when they occurred. It is only in hindsight, after thoughtful reflection, that their importance is exposed. I am confident there were other turning points that I am not aware of and whose significance is as yet not understood.

Like many other academics, the complexities of desistance, including that of my own, remain elusive. I cannot empirically state that the etiology of my desistance from crime has been the result of my experiences with probation, marriage, employment, family, education, or even a combination of all, though it does provide some insight into the desistance process of one

aspiring convict criminologist. My affiliation with Convict Criminology has unquestionably been important with advancing in education.

In prison people always make plans for their pending release regularly highlighting the changes which would need to occur in order to remain free. Consequently, it could be argued that release from prison is “*the*” turning point in a convicts’ life. These changes are regularly contingent upon probation and parole authorities’ approval. This perhaps has been the most important aspect of how I have been able to remain out of prison over the last 12 years; my experiences with probation officials. Had I stayed in KY, with their “tail-em and nail-em” mentality I am convinced that I would have been returned to prison. By being supervised in the state of IN, who poses a more empathetic and humanistic philosophy to corrections have I been able to continue to move forward and live a life where imprisonment no longer seems inevitable. As such it is suggested that jurisdictions abandon policies related to POs being an extension of law enforcement and consider a mission of helping persons with desistance.

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HOOD TO HOOD: FROM PRISONER TO PROFESSOR

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I am writing my story because it was hard for me to accept anything outside of what I knew. I had things figured out and knew I was on my correct path. I was wrong! I wanted to believe that I could get on the correct path but I did not have the mind to imagine my potential and possibility. From age 38 to 42, 1998 to 2002, I was incarcerated in the Minnesota Department of Corrections and more than I knew humanly possible, I was determined to find my path and live it even though it would involve pain. Nevertheless, I was determined to begin my life's journey.

I believe that all men share a certain level of dysfunction that lead to many problems that manifest themselves in society. When I reflect back to my life in the "hood" in Illinois, prior to my prison experience, I recall that I had things backwards. One problem is that I bought into the egalitarian view of work only to realize that there was an employment glass ceiling in place where I could see upward mobility but was blocked from achieving it because this fast track was reserved for a privilege few.

Another problem was as an African-American, I learned very early in life that the cops and courts had a double standard. Even when I was a youth, I watched as white youth were caught engaging in illegal activities. It appeared law enforcement simply referred them to social workers or school staff. On the other hand my cousins, my friends and I were labeled delinquents for the same acts. I did not realize that having few positive role models, and not having my father in my life, made my path to prison as a rite of passage to manhood, nearly inevitable.

Street Capitalist

So being frustrated with it all, I entered the stereotypical world of "Street Capitalism," a world of drugs, gangs, graft, gambling and other forms of crime. After all, in this world, instant gratification made the world go around and money bought attention and respect. However, while the veterans of this underworld understood the risks of being locked up, I

was naïve to this part of street capitalism. I failed to store away what was called, “bail, lawyer or bag money.” I ended up sentenced to twelve years in prison convicted on drug charges.

Prison Orientation

I began my incarceration at Minnesota Correctional Facility-Saint Cloud on a forty-eight hour quarantine hold and could not leave my cell for any reason. After the door closed on me for the first time, I felt alone, fearful and hopeless. I ate, read and slept the entire time. At the end of the hold, a male nurse came by and recorded my medical history and I began orientation. I was issued my prisoner’s identification number and found out that was to be my new name. I went before the Institutional Classification and Program Review Team and received a non-programming assignment, a recommendation for Anger Management, Parenting Classes and Critical Thinking Classes. I was classified as medium-security custody and scheduled to be sent to Minnesota Correctional Facility-Faribault on the next available bus.

The wait to transfer from Saint Cloud to Faribault was an environmental study of the prison culture. This was a time full of incessant inmate stories, lies and fantasy. I tuned my ear to what is called “penitentiary talk” which consisted of make believe, innuendo, flair and flash but the common theme was narrow patterns of thought. It was like the purpose of orientation was to mold us into androids. However, in the actual prison culture, the rules of the institution were disregarded and there was a series of unwritten rules.

Men’s Life Skills Group

Once I made it to Faribault, I got close to several prisoners. They shared with me that there was a prison psychologist, Dr. Dana Houck, who conducted a group that helped them deal with issues related to other parts of their lives. I immediately made an appointment to see Dr. Houck.

The basic lesson in my story is how I transformed from a mere male to a man in prison, and my struggle to maintain this status through proper mentorship. Hillman, Meade and Some’ (1992) highlight the importance of mentorship in *Images of Initiation*. They claim that the easiest way to end a culture is to have uninitiated males who don’t love life become men. They contend that mentoring males involves watering the seed that is planted within them and setting them on their path to growth.

My mentorship was facilitated under the guidance of Dr. Dana Houck, the Prison Psychologist. When he allowed me to join his Men's Life Skills Group and saw me individually as a patient. Dr. Houck started me on a process of self-development and growth similar to going from an acorn to an oak tree. He made it clear that, ultimately, I would have to bear the majority of the responsibility for my developmental process of "individuation" and to do my "inner work." Fritz Kunkel (1984) in *Fritz Kunkel: Selected Writings* describes individuation as a process of becoming yourself and finding the work that you were placed on this earth to achieve. Individuation in a nutshell is searching for the meaning in life and is based on an inner urge to find and obtain truth and a step-by-step process diving deep into the core of the personality of the person.

The basic idea is that since everything is alive everything seeks to fulfil itself. An oak tree is an acorn that has individuated. In my process of individuation, my work included recording dreams and associations with the dreams, writing daily journals of my reactions, feelings, and intuitions about myself in connection with what I saw in the world that connected to my issues or problems, and reflections of it all. Most important were the groups that I sat in on to discuss my insights and receive support, encouragement and clarification from others also involved in the process.

Another lesson I learned during incarceration was about change. I was used to doing things the same way and change came and by taking that first step, creativity and rewards entered my life. As I began to change, I started enjoying my life. I had a strong desire to know, and I wanted answers, so I was motivated to keep moving forward even though I did not know the outcome. During the process, I read a book by Moore and Gillette (1991) *King, Warrior, Magician and Lover*, which highlighted the seven stages of initiation. In these stages, the initiate moves from Unconscious Incompetence (doesn't even realize that he is not a man), to Conscious Incompetence (realization that he is missing something), to Conscious Competence (learning) to Unconscious Competence (effortless manhood). So pre-knowledge was a hindrance to my change process, and if I wanted to grow, I had to accept the uncertainty and unpredictability of the process.

I think that I was driven by the passion to really know myself. Once I broke through my comfort zone and embraced the part of me I had been running from, opportunity met me. My time in prison was like being in a cocoon or a monastery and the day came when it was time

to leave and take a different path on the journey. I had to follow through without resistance to change. Fortunately, after doing four years on a twelve year sentence, I qualified for early release. I followed through with the inner work, hope and a path to nurturance for change and received an early release from prison in April 2002.

Academia as a Transition to Freedom

Placed on parole from 2002 to 2009, I moved to the campus of Minnesota State University and jumped into the game of academia. Shortly after entering the game and moving up the criminal justice major ladder, I found that my ladder was against an unfamiliar wall. In the criminal justice academic game, the rules are based on the scientific method, research agendas and grant procurement. The goal of the game is to conduct research that has a good chance of being funded by a government agency or a foundation. The objective is to use the research to justify legislation, policy and procedures to widen the use of incarceration through truth in sentencing, abolition of parole, and mandatory minimums (see Ross and Richard, 2003). The problem is that there are methodological weaknesses and mistaken analyses in these studies and they are only as good as the intuition of those conducting the studies. Dr. Houck (2009) sheds light on this in his book *Life Changing Lessons from Hard Core Cons.*

According to Dr. Houck, the scientific method is often ego driven and is used to prove by empirical data that cognitive therapy is superior over all other therapies. However, cognitive therapy leaves out many mysteries of life, the presence of the soul and creativity. On the other side of the coin, Dr. Houck's program (which is not based on cognitive therapy) helps men to see deeper into themselves, to change their behavior, and gives insight into old patterns of behavior and helps prisoners to understand the musings of the soul. He defines the soul as the center of human consciousness where we come to know the soul through our human experiences of uniqueness and spiritual depth. The soul gives us the desire to create and preserve life and contains our intellectual power, ethical sensibilities, aesthetic sensibility, imagination and the unknown aspects of our personality (Houck, 2009: 4-6).

However, I found several mentors in Dean William Wagner, Dean Michael T. Fagin, Provost Scott Olsen and Provost Kirk Peterson. These are university administrators, who after learning about my story and background, still helped me to navigate academia by going against the grain of systems that buttered their bread. They believed in my potential and empowered me to set and accomplish goals and dreams I never knew possible. Most recently,

Provost Kirk Peterson hired me in a tenure-track position with the possibility of bringing my perspective to his university's education program at a nearby prison in Ohio.

In 2002, I received a Master's Degree in Counseling. Additionally, in 2003, I joined the Convict Criminology Group (Richards and Ross, 2001; Ross and Richards, 2003) and used this as part of my primary teaching pedagogy and personal philosophy. The group also helped to acclimatize me to academia and transition to free life. In 2005, I received a Multi-disciplinary Master's Degree in Sociology/Ethnic Studies and Corrections. In 2010, I moved from Minnesota to Idaho to teach at Idaho State University (ISU) and co-founded the ISU/Bannock County At-Risk Youth Partnership, "From Corrections to College. In 2011, I completed a Ph.D. in Sociology from South Dakota State University.

Convict Criminology: From Corrections to College

Receiving these degrees was all possible because Professor Stephen Richards, and the Convict Criminology sisters and brothers, taught me that I should use my voice to address the crises in the juvenile justice system. Ross and Richards' (2003: xvii-xxii) statement that "the failure of criminologists to recognize the dehumanizing conditions of the criminal justice system and the lives of those defined as criminal" motivated me to want to make a difference. When released from prison in 2002, I realized that I was part of what Arditti and McClintock (2001) refer to in *Voices* as the disadvantaged and marginalized minorities controlled by the criminal justice system (see <http://www.convictcriminology.org/voices.htm>).

I also realized that I was part of "soft-line" social control outlined in Stanley Cohen's (1985) *Visions of Social Control*. This was where the state roots social control in community-based approaches and conventional social boundaries. From my experience in community corrections, I had an inside view and decided early in re-entry that my contribution would be to let my experience inform the design, the critique, enlightenment and contribution to meaningful programming within the "soft-line" system. Within this context, I wanted to provide individuals with strategies of empowerment to break out of the cycle of "soft-line" control, namely an education strategy. Convict Criminology has always taught me to challenge the idea that a person's personality traits, level of self-esteem, or moral character can be determined by referral to the fact that they have been convicted of a crime or spent time in prison. Therefore, I sought to enlighten the public discourse on juvenile programs, deconstruct juvenile delinquency, re-construct intensive supervision to highlight youth

development, and to give voice to the people who have the best interests of growth-oriented experiences of youth at heart.

When I arrived in Idaho, I sat down with the Bannock County Chief Probation officer, Matt Olsen and formed a partnership to effect change in the Bannock County Youth Development Center Program. We decided to provide strong educational programming, social mentoring, and opportunities to engage in pro-social activities that would connect youth to community and facilitate successful transition from juvenile corrections to higher education. We thought that *Convict Criminology* offered a humane and empowering approach to developing this youth program. Our partnership helped to accomplish this by recognizing the legitimacy of diverse experiences and perspectives among multiple stakeholders, including youth themselves. In other words, we gave youth a voice and encouraged their participation in the broader corrections dialogue. Using *Convict Criminology* as a foundation, promoted cooperation among youth, corrections, colleges and universities, and various community partners that, by working together, created new and effective programs. Through this process, “juvenile delinquency” was deconstructed and reconstructed, and intensive supervision was modified to highlight growth-oriented experiences and youth development (Burnett and Williams, 2012).

The Corrections to College program is rooted in postmodernism (Ferrell, 1998) and post-structuralism, in the sense that the participants are encouraged to think beyond the status quo cognitive-behavioral restructuring which is based on the traditional assumptions of knowledge that look at youth through a deficit lens instead of through humanistic eyes. The program sought to foster critical thinking and transformation so that new knowledge could inform new behavior. The program used a statement by Michel Foucault (1988:155) as an important guide to change, “When one can no longer think things as one formerly thought them, then transformation is possible.”

Since I had a practical understanding of juveniles and comprehended their lived experiences, as well as abstract knowledge of the criminal justice machinery that informs what is missing from treating juveniles, I knew that the program should employ the unique research method of giving voice to the juveniles. So I recruited students from my Idaho State University courses, trained them and paired them with the youth as mentors and tapped into their creative expression through journaling and visual ethnography. As a team, we met the

juveniles on their own turf (Bannock County Idaho Youth Development Center) to observe, interact, serve, empower and to invest in the subjects' personal growth and as Richards and Ross (2001:185) wrote, "to get a little dirty by violating social distance and value-free sociology, which is committing an academic felony."

Within the education context, Convict Criminology encouraged me to reach out to and work with others the way that Steve Richards, Annette Kuhlmann, Chris Rose, Tracy Andrus, and Rick Jones and others had worked with me. They instilled a desire to improve the conditions and opportunities of others in transition toward personal growth. As reflective of this desire that was cultivated through Convict Criminology mentoring, I trained my ISU student mentors to help young adults transition from corrections to college (Burnett and Williams, 2012).

Richards et al (see 2008, 2010, 2011) depicts the Convict Criminology Perspective as a proposal of new and less costly strategies, that are more humane, and more effective approaches, for rethinking the way prisons are organized, and re-entry to the community is considered. At a time that the taxpayers are calling for tightening of governmental budgets, the Idaho State University-Bannock County Youth Development Center partnership worked to reduce youth criminal recidivism and help youth to become productive citizens in the community. ISU students used creativity and effort to provide services to the mentees that gave them the academic skills they needed to succeed in college. The program also used Post Modern theory helped them to overcome social inequality through mentorship, which help to develop human relationships to deal with the concepts of difference. (Carrington, 1998).

The Bannock County Youth Development Center and Idaho State University have partnered for over two years now, and feedback from all stakeholders is very positive. Bannock County judges and corrections officials and YDC administrators and staff have been delighted to have help and support from ISU students and faculty. YDC strongly believes that the partnership has helped youth make therapeutic progress faster and more thoroughly. ISU students and I have thoroughly enjoyed being part of a growth process involving all partners and ourselves. For me, transformation from prisoner to professor has been fulfilling.

Observations and Conclusion

After prison, I went through a personal restoration process and committed to never selling drugs again and desisting from crime. I vowed to never return to prison and have come to terms with myself and my past. I looked at what I did, what unfolded and how I processed my experience. I admitted to selling drugs and how drugs slowly killed people and their dreams and how I had a hand in that. As part of my restoration process, I gave back to others (specifically the at-risk youth population and my students), forgave myself and followed my heart and instead worked to develop my intellect.

I realized that it is what I learned in both prison and at university that has changed my life. Today, I am just beginning my career as a university professor. I am using my voice and working to deconstruct the status quo belief system that tries to exclude at-risk youth and students from taking part in the American Dream. Discrimination and prejudice has spread its tentacles into the juvenile justice system to target youth at an early age and thwart their growth and development. Additionally, I am constantly advising and mentoring students who have been or are part of the criminal justice system and have also faced the unique challenges and road blocks to their development because of social class and race, and their status as criminal offenders. I am a role model informing them that they too can transform their lives, the way I did.

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AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY ON DESISTANCE FROM CRIME

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In 1999, as a 24 year old assembly line welder in eastern Nebraska and a new father, I found myself in the perfect situation for unrealized trouble. For a bored energetic young man, Nebraska, a sparsely populated state of flat cattle pastures and few buildings over two stories high, offered few outlets for entertainment or expenditure of excess energy. As a child and teen I was quite precocious, constantly reading books, getting high grades in honors courses in secondary school, and participating in gifted student programs. Still, by the time I was 24, I had failed out of college three times, and had a difficult time attaining good grades, while yet still managing to get A's in the sociology courses I liked.

I had, by then, developed a large substance abuse problem along the way. Also, by this point, I had attended several drug and alcohol rehabilitation treatments, although the treatments were not successful. Thus, I was working at two low paying jobs, while at the same time paying child support to my estranged son's mother, and found it quite hard to make financial ends meet.

While working at one of the jobs, some co-workers approached me about earning some extra money by "moving" some drugs for them. At the time, this seemed like a good opportunity for me to create some sorely needed additional income. Soon I was moving ever-increasing quantities of drugs. In 2001 at the age of 26, I caught the attention of the Federal government. Even though I was never caught with any drugs, several individuals whom I associated with in the drug trade were caught with large amounts of drugs. Under threat of long prison sentences, they soon became "federal witnesses" essentially giving the federal government information about me in exchange for substantial reductions of their own legal penalties. This information was used to generate a "conspiracy to distribute cocaine and methamphetamines" federal indictment against me.

In the United States, there are 50 state criminal justice systems and courts, and one federal criminal justice system with its own respective courts, each with its own set of legal statutes and prisons. Federal statutes are generally harsher than state laws, and the courts hand out

longer sentences with less time off for good behavior. Federal courts generally focus on drug crimes that involve transportation across state and/or international borders, and all of the drug crimes I was indicted for and qualified for this category.

Off I Go to Prison

After sitting in federal holding cellblocks for ten months while going to court, I finally received a sentence of two years in prison, three months in a federal halfway house, four years of supervised release, and 300 hundred hours of community service for a first time non-violent offense. During the ten month court process, I was transferred to 13 different federal holding facilities, moving from facility to facility for reasons unknown. Some of these lockups were county jails, and smaller state facilities that the federal government contracted out to in order to hold the massive over-flow of federal inmates, and others were private “for profit” prisons. The massive over-flow is due to the war on drugs (Austin et al., 2001) within the United States, which has played an integral role in generating the largest prison population in the world (Rose et al., 2010).

Once the courts handed me my sentence, I was transferred by the Federal Bureau of Prison’s [FBOP] own airline (jumbo jets) to the federal diagnostics and evaluation center in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. This facility holds several thousand inmates, and is unique in that the inmates walk directly off the jet, and into the prison via a skywalk. I was housed in what is called ‘administrative population’ which means that inmates from all security classifications, from minimum to maximum, are housed together, yet at no time did I ever feel I was in danger or threatened. From this facility, my case was evaluated, and because I was a first time non-violent offender, I was assigned a minimum-security status. Thus, I was sent to a minimum-security prison in Yankton, South Dakota. Yankton Federal Prison Camp (FPC) Yankton is an all male facility designed to hold around 400 prisoners. Yet, at the time I arrived at FPC Yankton, the prison was holding over 600 inmates due to prison overcrowding issues generated from the war on drugs. Rooms designed for 4 men were often crammed with six to eight men.

From Prison to University

Fourteen months later, in November of 2003, I was released from FPC Yankton and returned to Nebraska. While in prison, I had a lot of time to reflect on the direction my life was going and decided that my best option for success and desistance from crime upon release was to

attend to my education. Consequently, I had taken college correspondence courses via mail while in prison, and had sent my application to the University of Nebraska, hoping to attend classes and finish my Bachelor's degree when I was released. My application was accepted, and in January of 2004, I returned to college, with the goal of completing my initial degree in sociology.

By December of 2005, I had navigated through two years of coursework, finishing my Bachelor's degree, and performed quite well academically. I caught the attention of some of the professors in the Sociology Department who strongly recommended that I apply for graduate school in sociology. I took their advice, and was accepted into the University of Nebraska's sociology graduate program a year later. Also, towards the end of my Bachelor's degree studies I had begun to develop a strong interest in crime and deviance research, and in early 2005, I presented at a large regional sociology conference in Minneapolis, and made contact with the Convict Criminology [CC] Group (Richards and Ross 2001; Ross and Richards, 2003).

To explain further, Convict Criminology is group of criminologists who share the common bond of past incarceration, and/or a strong interest in critical, progressive, reform based criminological research and criminal justice policy. The CC Group strongly believes in the power of mentorship, and provided me with guidance and advice throughout the course of my graduate career. The CC Group also places a heavy emphasis on research collaboration amongst members. The focus being the production of viable, relevant scholarship and publications, which is a vital to the furthering of CC's mission of creating an academic space for formerly incarcerated academics' voices to be heard, critically examining the massive social inequalities present in the current American criminal justice system, and formulating progressive/rehabilitative correctional policy (see Jones et al., 2009; Richards and Lenza, 2012).

My coursework for my Masters degree began in the Fall semester of 2007. When I had been in graduate school for a couple of years, and more fully understood how the academic world operated, I myself began to mentor the newer members of the CC Group, providing advice and encouragement in regards to navigating graduate school applications, how to properly approach the academy in regards to securing future employment, and how increase our marketability as formerly incarcerated academics.

I am currently a PhD candidate and am writing my dissertation. I expect to finish my PhD in May of 2013. During the course of my graduate career I have had the opportunity to travel extensively to conferences, complete study abroad courses, and to conduct research. In June of 2010, The Convict Criminology Group, in collaboration with KRIS of Finland, and Tampere University, organized the International Scientific Conference on Global Perspectives on Re-entry, at Tampere, Finland (see Ekunwe and Jones, 2010). In the summers of 2009 and 2011 I traveled to Scandinavia, spending time in Sweden and Denmark, and was allowed to visit a Swedish halfway house, and make contact with KRIS, a Swedish advocacy group for formerly incarcerated people that now has many international locations. Through these travels, I was able to make contacts with formerly incarcerated people who would lend their expertise to my dissertation research, and gain a valuable cross-national perspective on more progressive forms of criminal justice policy.

Desistance from Crime

After over eleven years of desistance from criminally deviant behavior, I can place emphasis on several factors that helped to refocus my priorities on pro-social activities. The first factor being the educational process, which functioned to channel my creative abilities and enthusiasm towards learning (abilities that I had always possessed, yet had been unused for many years) into a tangible goal. A college campus is one of the safest places for a person recently released from prison to be, as they are removed from their pre-incarceration environment, which generally lowers their risk for recidivism (Kubrin and Stewart 2006).

The second factor was the active support and mentorship the CC Group provided. Being a part of this group that is striving to overcome discrimination and the prevalent societal prejudice against formerly incarcerated people, a bias that is often encouraged in status-quo American society, has had a powerful and motivating effect on my academic journey. To have the opportunity to see other CC members attain prestigious university posts, produce quality research, and present it at academic conferences provides a sense of hope to a struggling future academic. This hope is especially necessary to new members of the CC group when they have recently experienced the degradation of the American correctional system, and who often feel that they have few if any options available to them when immediately released from prison. A final factor that I will mention will rely on the life course theoretical model of crime proposed by Sampson and Laub (2005) which proposes that as individuals age, they are

generally less likely to commit crime, thus a process of aging out of criminal behavior with the likelihood of recidivism eventually decreasing to levels of individuals without a criminal conviction.

In the case of my auto-ethnographic discussion, I would like to place the majority of emphasis on the former two desistance factors and the least emphasis on the latter. Education's ability to channel an individual's focus and energy towards positive life-goals, along with the mentorship, guidance, and academic foundation provided by the CC Group have expedited the process of desistance from criminal behavior by granting me access to a positive opportunity structure, and the motivation to utilize the positive opportunities.

Conclusion

My life experiences within academia and as a formerly incarcerated individual have created an opportunity for me to create pro-social change within the criminal justice system, and to add a new perspective to criminological scholarship. As a PhD within the sociological discipline with an emphasis on criminology, I possess the classical training and knowledge of my academic field yet I have also acquired the unique perspective of a former insider within the criminal justice system. I have experienced firsthand, the arrest process, court procedures, jails, holding facilities, and the daily life and ordeals of a prisoner within an American federal prison, and this experience provides me with insight into the actual routine of prison life, how prisoners construct reality behind the walls, how the pathway from prison to society operates, and a wealth of resources which I can apply to dynamic academic research. Such 'insider' experiences allow me to shed light on perspectives and issues that many relatively sheltered criminologists may not otherwise recognize.

Ex-convict academics who possess insider perspectives into the criminal justice system are able to, 'merge their past with their present and provide a provocative approach to the academic study of criminology, criminal justice, and corrections' (Richards and Ross, 2001: 181). Academia has provided me with the opportunity to mature and grow as both a productive individual and as a scholar, yet I still recall the lessons of the prison. I use such insight and experiences to further intelligent discussion and inform progressive criminal justice policy and creative criminological research within my profession. Through the journey from corrections to academia, I have experienced a process of maturation into a scholar and an informed citizen who is able to serve society in a positive fashion. Furthering

my education has provided my life with the intellectual discipline to better understand how individual problems are often reflective of larger social structures (Mills, 1959). Once this is understood, it is difficult, if not impossible to return to an individualistic perspective of life. As such, through education, knowledge, and maturation, I have become a very different person.

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EPILOGUE

Beth Weaver

I am extremely appreciative to all the contributors to this special issue of *EuroVista* for their candour; for sharing with us their personal experiences and for casting a light on the public or collective concerns they have encountered including, for example, issues of rights, citizenship and discrimination. As I said in the preface to this tremendous collection of narratives, in what follows I do not presume to offer any form of interpretive analysis but to draw together some of the recurrent elements across the narratives – and within that, to highlight some of the divergences and commonalities of experiences – and, in so doing, to contribute a commentary on the meanings they hold for me as a reader - which may coincide or depart with the understandings that other readers reach. As readers, we will all be differently affected by what these 38 authors have shared, and the meaning we make out of what their words bring to us will necessarily be influenced by what we as differently positioned people bring to them. It is from my position as a criminologist and former criminal justice social worker that I have read and re-read these narratives and the meaning they hold for me is undoubtedly shaped and influenced by the existing insights I have gleaned into the issues they variously raise. I do not have personal knowledge of the experiences elaborated here. The words of others have been the window through which my understanding has been informed. Similarly, this collection of narratives can only provide a window into the various worlds that our authors have and do inhabit. Nonetheless, looking through windows can teach us much about what it means to be human.

As indicated in the preface, our contributors make no claims other than to speak for themselves and it was our desire to create a space in which speaking and being heard were made available to those whose voices continue to occupy a marginal place in academic and professional spaces. Indeed, as Duncan (England) rightly suggests, and as this collection of narratives testifies, ‘we don’t need academics to tell *our* story’ [emphasis added]. Yet, perhaps what this special issue also illustrates is that while there are commonalities of experience, each story is distinct and even similar experiences are differently encountered which perhaps then illuminates not only ‘the problem of speaking for others’ (Alcoff 1991)

but also the complexity of what it means to speak as an 'us' – from within a group. Nevertheless, that these stories and the experiences elaborated therein are indeed unique to the storyteller underscores the importance of taking individuals' perspectives seriously, of recognising and respecting the person who lives the life and speaks the words.

While there is some overlap between the areas that I have chosen to focus on in this epilogue, the remainder of this epilogue will collate some thoughts on offending, on the realities of desistance, on experiences and effects of imprisonment and re-entry and on social attitudes and societal practices.

On Offending

Some contributors, including, for example Anon (Ireland), Dara (Ireland) and Horowitz (U.S) suggest that their childhoods or youths did not 'predispose' them, as some might term it, to engage in offending behaviour in so far as their backgrounds held no obvious clue or explanation as to why they became involved in offending. However, what these narratives have brought to my attention is that the meanings of and motivations for offending are as diverse as the type and nature of offending behaviours that people can and do engage in and the relational, cultural, geographical and structural contexts within which they occur. While, for example, Angelo (Italy) felt that his participation in acquisitive crime was an outcome of the exercise of rational choice, he similarly recognised that the peer or relational context within which much of his offending took place served to encourage if not amplify his offending. On the other hand, John (Norway) speaks of the 'seductions of crime' (Katz 1989) such that, as a precursor to desistance, he had to find a reason to stop, which seems to imply that he had to find a rationale for desisting. For him, then, the question was less about 'how do I give up crime?' but 'why should I?' Yet, Olga (Russia) seemed to pose the question 'what choice have you left me?' Crime for her was, incrementally, in many respects a means of surviving in a system weighted heavily against her. Indeed, as Olga makes clear, people's rationales for offending are not constant over time, yet neither are the means through which the desired outcomes of offending might be realised. Nagy, (Hungary), for example, discusses his susceptibility in youth to peer influence which was related to his (and others) desire for belonging and recognition (eg for being tough); yet, in early adulthood he appreciated that social recognition might be more widely realised through fraudulent activities that could provide the kinds of financial benefits that are easily socially recognisable.

I was struck by the frequency with which themes of belonging, recognition and escape occurred across some people's narratives of their offending. Olga, for example, felt that as a displaced person in search of a sense of connection she found, at least at one time, a sense of belonging and solidarity within her criminal fraternity or network (see also Atsushi's (Japan); Weaver (Scotland)). Gerritsen (the Netherlands) identifies that his offending was a manifestation of the lack of meaning or investment he had in a life that had been scarred by loss and trauma; Dixon's (Canada) drug related offending behaviour was underpinned by a sense of disaffection, confusion and anger at the world from which he found some respite in drug use. Nabill (England) recalls a sense of emptiness as a young child, a sense of being ill at ease. His enduring desire for escape from reality and for recognition is one he remembers from his youth; his early offending provided excitement, meaning and purpose and for a while, or to an extent, occupied this void. Like Dixon, his later participation in substance use was an extension of this desire to escape but which served only to compound his feelings of despair. Trauma and loss characterised Williams' (Wales) early childhood and, in this context, his involvement with gangs and drug use was as much about finding a means of escape as it was a quest for belonging. Years of longing and searching characterise his narrative of his offending days (see also for example Gerritsen (the Netherlands), Spekkers (the Netherlands) and Thomas (Canada) and Weaver (Scotland)) and his, and others' narratives instil in me a sense of what it might mean to feel lost in your own life, to desire connection and yet to be consumed by the need to escape. I am, then, reminded of Mike Nellis' words in the preface to Allan Weaver's (2008) autobiography; not everyone who lived similar lives 'went to the bad themselves ... [but] it is these exceptions who need special explanations, not the many who become hard and cruel because this is what survival and status-seeking amidst poverty and disadvantage demanded of them' (Nellis 2008: viii) and to which we might add, what trauma and loss engendered.

On the realities of desistance

In the preface to this issue, I outlined some of the recurrent themes emerging from theoretical and empirical explanations of the desistance process. In what follows, I outline some of the recurrent themes emerging from our contributors' accounts of their change process, although I cannot hope to do justice in this epilogue to the nuances of individual accounts which, I would venture, speak for themselves. Readers will nevertheless have observed the affinities between contributors accounts and the desistance literature more broadly, but just to

summarise briefly, desistance is typically associated with the acquisition or discovery of agency (the exercise of choice and control over one's life) and resilience, investment in significant social relations and associated social roles, access to opportunities for change (such as participation education or employment), the discovery of faith, generative engagement and concomitant shifts in people's personal and social identity.

However, Gerritsen (the Netherlands) raises a point that made me stop and think: the idea of civil disobedience versus uncivil obedience. If we conceptualise civil disobedience as a refusal to obey civil laws in an effort to induce policy and/or legislative change, then uncivil obedience might be understood as an uncritical acceptance or conformity with laws that violate rights that lack both morality and humanity. Gerritsen reasons that 'if desistance is taken to mean 'being well-adapted to the legal constraints that society imposes on its citizens, then what does desistance boil down to in a society that has gone astray? It would turn desistance into a matter of mere convention'. I think there is more to it than that; notions of adaptation and convention relate to the outcome which is easily reduced to notions of conformity to social and legal norms. When I read the accounts collated in this special issue and draw on the conversations I have had with other people who have given up crime, I am persuaded that desistance is rarely in itself pursued as an *end* but is embarked on as a *means* to actualizing their personal or relational concerns, with which continued offending is more or less incompatible. As Nabill (England) suggested, it is not about conforming to or pleasing others, you have to want it for yourself, but this needs to be contextualised through the lens of the realities of re-entry that our contributors have brought into view (see below). While wanting to give up crime is an important component of desistance, it is rarely sufficient in and of itself. Indeed, as some of contributors in this issue elaborate, the desire to give up crime long precedes its realisation and the process of desistance is, for some, punctuated by periods of reengagement in offending (see for example Atsushi (Japan); Anon (Ireland); John (Norway); Honeywell, Lunn, Nabill and Wackett (England); Ivo (Belgium); Trombley (US); Weaver (Scotland); Williams (Wales)).

The idea that people have to want to give up crime speaks to the role of motivation and agency in desistance, of self-determination and, for some, self-discipline. Indeed, many of our contributors observe that change is the outcome of considerable effort and commitment on their part, but more often than not they also recognise the crucial role that other people (be it professional or personal relationships) play in motivating or supporting them through this

(see for example Cathy, England) or in reflecting a different view of themselves or the world to the one they have become accustomed to, and the part that certain social roles, responsibilities and opportunities play in enabling them to realise this (be it in the context of families, education, employment, activism or faith). Indeed, finding a meaning and purpose to life, whether this is about supporting other people or self-realisation or spirituality, can often be what gets people through the hard and lonely periods that so often accompany processes of change. In this sense, then, individual, relational and structural factors interact with each other to create conditions through which change is enabled or constrained. However, none of this can be achieved in a vacuum and, more often than not, the realities of re-entry can undermine motivation, suffocate hope and make it difficult for people to realise their aspirations.

On experiences and effects of imprisonment and re-entry

As the narratives in this collection illustrate, and as Adam (England) observes, the effects of prison vary as widely as experiences of prison, and do so in accordance with individuals' characteristics, age at imprisonment, length of imprisonment and the cumulative or progressive effects of repeat imprisonment and the different penal cultures and institutions that people encounter in distinct penal jurisdictions. Moreover, as Olson Jessie (US) suggests, how people perceive and interpret their experience of prison and its effects can change over time. Nonetheless, prison is rarely experienced as a rehabilitative space; indeed as our Italian male contributor suggested, his time in prison did nothing to create the conditions within which desistance might be enabled and Adam (England) similarly reflects that his experience of imprisonment exerted neither a constructive nor contrary influence on his propensity to offend. Conversely, the distress Colby (England) experienced during his initial experience of prison was progressively eclipsed by his appreciation of the familiar routine and the respite prison offered from the uncertainty and unpredictability of his life on the outside while expanding his repertoire of criminal skills.

For some, prison triggered a process of self-examination as to how they arrived there, what had gone wrong and which directions their lives were taking (see for example Anton (Czech Republic); Burnett (US); Lunn (England); Smrek (Slovakia); Olga (Russia) and Tietjen (US)). For Nagy, (Hungary), his desire for a different future on release influenced how he managed his time in prison which included disassociating from his extant social network, many of whom were imprisoned with him, while encouraging and supporting similarly

motivated others. However, while prison may engender in some people the existential angst that can encourage an alternative way of being in the world, that this might translate into its realisation for only a few, and even then for some after one or two sentences while for others only after many, makes clear that prison is, at best, an unpredictable technique for triggering reflection and change. Unpredictable perhaps because as Olga (Russia) observes, this process of reflexivity requires a sense of self and identity, the very aspects of personhood that the prison system can overwhelm. That the pains of imprisonment create the conditions for self-reflexive examination is, however, hardly surprising, nor is the idea that few people leave prison unchanged (see below). Among the pains that imprisonment gives rise to, Nagy (Hungary) writes about both the effects of his imprisonment on his mother and girlfriend and the insularity that prison engenders. In prison, life is something that is happening to other people elsewhere over which the prisoner is able to exert little, if any, influence and, as Mobley (US) also suggests, from which he/she is forced to withdraw.

Olson Jessie (US) paints a vivid, if rarely appreciated, portrait of the women she came across in prison and the realities of their lives and describes the intense connections she formed with some of them. Mobley's (US) narrative of prison and experiences of the prisoner community captures the individualism or individuation, social withdrawal and dispossession required to survive penal institutions which does little to inspire the altruism, reciprocity or empathy that permeates some people's narratives of desistance but which he considers parallels our increasingly atomised social and professional worlds on the outside. Beyond the prisoner community, Horowitz (US) illuminates that the nature of interactions between prison officers and prisoners can have a significant influence on people's experience of imprisonment; being treated fairly and humanely was important although as she identifies, the likelihood of experiencing this depends on who you are. Horowitz illuminates the challenges of compliance with a system that creates impossible constraints for people coming out of prison (see also Frana, US) but which is intensified for certain groups because of the widespread discrimination directed towards people by virtue of race, class, sexual orientation or by virtue of mental ill health.

Release from prison presented profound challenges for a number of our contributors. Spekkers (the Netherlands) describes making the hard transition from a place where everyone knows each other, where everything was certain, to seas of unfamiliar faces and knowing no one. Gerritsen (the Netherlands) similarly elucidates the confusion and bewilderment he

experienced on release; the process of adjusting to a different world, to a different pace and to different norms of interaction. For some, the world one returns to is a very different one to the one that they left – not least because they themselves are or feel different or are seen differently (see for example Klara (the Netherlands). Gerritsen (the Netherlands) observes that prison can create enduring discontinuities for people between who they were, who they now are and who they can or might be and on how they apprehend the world. Although discussing her sense of personal and social displacement during her school years, Olga's question seems apt here - 'You know the feeling when you are kind of at home but feel homeless?' In similar vein, Dobrota (Slovakia) refers to returning to a different moral status or social position - as someone living 'outside the normal circle'. Prison toughened and hardened Spekkers (the Netherlands); your moral framework, he says, is rearranged. While he now feels more accepting of or tolerant towards people, he will not back from conflict and it has made intimacy and interpersonal relations difficult. Indeed, Curry (US) writes that prison breaks you and that you mend differently to how you were before; the reformed self this implies is necessarily different for different people. For Smrek (Slovakia) the self that emerged from prison was less ambitious, humbler and more mature which he attributes to the insights he gained from reflecting on his past in prison. Nagy (Hungary) similarly feels that he emerged a wiser, more reflective and determined man than the man who entered prison.

And yet the challenges of release are not just subjectively or psychologically experienced; there are significant economic, social and structural challenges to overcome (see below), which many people feel they were ill-prepared and under-supported to face. The arrangements and conditions for people coming out of prison vary across the world; Urdiales (Spain) elaborates that not only does the system do little, if anything, to help people but it is substantially weighted against them. In this context, Thomas (Canada), and others, advocate for increased support for people getting out of prison – economically and socially. For Dobrota (Slovakia), despite 15 years of custodial sentences, in which time he had only spent a year outside, he was released with a mere 70 Euros which, he observed, would not even enable him to acquire a night's accommodation. Dobrota advocates for the establishment of a support network for people released from prison where they might access advice and information, or, as Smrek suggests, assistance to meet their basic needs for housing and work. Thomas (Canada) suggests forming 'gangs anonymous' (GA) to provide similarly situated people with the opportunity to provide and receive mutual support to extricate themselves from gangs, to develop exit strategies, to support natural processes of reflexivity as to

whether this is ‘right’ for them while representing both a site of and resources for recognition and trust. With all of this in mind, Mobley’s (US) observation that more than 25% of formerly incarcerated people in the US end up on ‘skid row’, which he attributes to the inequalities and discrimination they encounter at both a societal and systemic level, begs the question – what is it that we are asking people to desist to? Indeed while these narratives illuminate quite different experiences and effects of imprisonment and re-entry, a sense of injustice and discrimination at a systemic and societal level permeate many of these stories. What, then, is civil or even just about what we are doing to whole populations of people, to children, women and men both during and following periods of punishment?

On social attitudes and societal practices: on being ‘a prisoner to [the] past’ (Duncan)

The theme of being ‘a prisoner to [the] past’ (Duncan, England), referring both to social attitudes and societal practices, occurred frequently across our contributors accounts and in particular in reference to inequalities of or discrimination in the labour market by virtue of the possession of a criminal record (see for example Duncan, Adam and Lunn (England), Weaver (Scotland), Urdiales (Spain), Gerritsen (Netherlands) Dobrota and Mudra (Slovakia) Anon (Ireland) and Angelo (Italy)). Moreover, as Olga (Russia) and our US contributors elaborate, the reduced citizenship status and denial of civic rights can extend far beyond discrimination in the labour market. Curry, Mobley and Richards (US), for example, discuss the discredited identities and social status afforded to formerly incarcerated persons in the US and the civil death by degrees that follow imprisonment including, but not limited to, exclusion from housing, jury service, voting rights, volunteer positions, employment, whole career paths, access to graduate school and consumer credit. As Dobrota (Slovakia) reasons ‘your punishment lasts until the end of your life’. In this context, Olson Jessie (US) astutely observes that people with convictions are one of few groups of people against whom it is still acceptable to legally discriminate. While it is beyond the scope of this epilogue to review the various arguments surrounding, for example, *rehabilitation judiciaire* or judicial rehabilitation (on which readers may wish to consult the *European Journal of Probation* 3 (1) 2011), given the ubiquity of these experiences across penal jurisdictions, I am left with a sense that some form of social movement might be timely, if not overdue.

Social movements (such as feminist, disability, social justice and labour movements) exist, to simplify a complex phenomenon, to challenge and change the economic, social and political issues or status quo that affect the quality and course of people’s lives and in so doing, to

transform social, political and economic realities. I can find little justice in the idea that long beyond the time at which punishment ends, people remain excluded from the common rules or benefits of citizenship, in the idea that their past actions have resulted in the, often permanent, forfeiture of civic rights. While human rights are accorded on the basis of being human, it seems that the exclusion of former or currently incarcerated people, or indeed people with convictions more broadly, from certain civil rights implies that one is less than a full citizen. To me this is equivalent to social degradation, symbolic of a passage from one moral and/or civic status to another. Informed by Donati's (2009, 2011) relational sociology, I have argued elsewhere (Weaver 2013) that reciprocity is both the defining feature of social life and underpins the common good in society, the first of which is human dignity. The human dignity of any person cannot be violated without the community or, more broadly, civil society suffering because to do so is to fracture the possibility of doing common good from the start. When we consider the centrality of themes of belonging, recognition, personal and social redemption, citizenship, and participation in employment and education to narratives of personal progression and change, the need to challenge this status quo becomes something of an imperative. Indeed, at the very least returning citizens¹⁷ should be so recognised through means and processes, and in that policies and laws, that enable the (re)connection of the individual to 'circuits of social reciprocity' (Donati 2009:227), that are restorative and allow people to fulfil their reciprocal civic obligations.

Concluding remarks

In this special issue, I set out to create a context or space in which speaking and being heard are made available to those whose voices continue to occupy a marginal place in academic and professional spaces and, in so doing, to create the kinds of conditions that make listening possible (Alcoff 1991). The experiences of offending, desistance, imprisonment and re-entry that our contributors have shared are in no way idiosyncratic or exceptional; they resonate, even accord with, research-based understandings of the processes to which they speak. However, for me, what these first hand perspectives have achieved is to texture these understandings with the realities of lived experience at the level of the individual while simultaneously illuminating their shared experience, not least in terms of the effects of exclusionary and prejudicial social attitudes and societal practices. While much of the focus of desistance research and the concomitant implications for policy and practice have to date

¹⁷ <http://www.phillymag.com/news/2013/10/24/mayor-nutter-lets-call-returning-citizens-instead-ex-offenders/>

focused primarily on supporting people to either help themselves or to navigate their way through the myriad obstacles they face, I am convinced that insufficient is being done to actively confront and challenge the systemic forms of oppression and discrimination that our contributors illuminate. To focus solely on overcoming these obstacles at the individual level runs the risk of accepting the status quo as it is, thus colluding with the social attitudes and societal practices that diminish the rights, resources and opportunities for desistance and reintegration available to marginalised groups. It is not just people who have to change, but the systems and practices that make it difficult for them to do so.

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A Short Resume

Institute of Social Studies and Curative Education of the Comenius University is tiding up together a multi-professional team of experts (psychologist, sociologists, social workers, social educators, lawyers and psychiatrists) in the area of child protection, older people care, capacity building of professionals, social exclusion, social policy, penitentiary and post-penitentiary care, in the region of Central Europe. The Institute was based under the department of Social work and his practical and research expertise. As a first and oldest school of social work in Czechoslovakia (1990), it was directly involved in activities related to building of a new welfare system based on democratic principles and in respect to human rights.

Department designed a successful study programme for undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students. The leading idea is to encourage our students to develop their values, skills and knowledge that respect the dignity of all people.

One of the Institute expert and employee is Prof. Malcolm Payne a writer, academic and consultant on social work, social care management and multiprofessional teamwork. He published over 14 books; more than 300 articles in magazines, academic and professional journals in health and social care in 14 languages and including leading professional publications.

The department as well provides number of specialized trainings for professionals in social policy and social work practice; networking activities with the public sector, NGO's, and private sector and emphasize students and the Institute of Social Studies and Curative Education involvement in professional and academic associations.

Our mission and vision is:

- to prepare students and professionals for leadership roles and effective practice
- to higher competencies, theoretical and practical skills of professionals
- to support social justice and diversity
- to research in the field of social work care and protection of vulnerable people
- to better quality standards of social services and counselling
- to develop, implement and evaluate ethical principles and emphasize professional's values
- to help with creation of new policies related to development of the services
- to publish on various social topics

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Beyond Bars: re-joining society after prison

***Jeffrey Ross and Stephen Richards (2009) Alpha Books pp 224
ISBN 978-1592578511***

**Reviewed by Shadd Maruna, Director, Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Queen's University Belfast**

We academics have many talents, but building social movements is not typically one of them. We are too fiercely independent-minded (save, sometimes, for loyalty to one's PhD supervisor – or at least one can hope) and ego-driven. We get a buzz from publications and citations and prizes. We want to be the researcher who makes the big discovery or the theorist who writes the great book, and sometimes this means stepping on (or indeed tearing apart) the competition to get to be top of the pile. We have a giving and nurturing side too, of course. We spend our weeks trying to help our students and graduate students become great thinkers, editing endless drafts and departing our wisdom in seminars. Yet, when it comes to the wider academic field, we tend to switch into Hobbesian mode - attack or get attacked in the war of all against all.

This makes the achievement of Jeffrey Ian Ross and Stephen C. Richards all the more remarkable. Ross and Richards deliberately and methodically set out to create a movement (a “new school”) of convict criminology in a series of meetings at academic conferences beginning in the late 1990s. I was there at the first or one of the first of these meetings - to break the awkwardness of asking us to put our chairs in a circle, the legendary Chuck Terry explained that this was like a recovery group for ex-positivists. And, the damned thing is that it worked. They did it! The convict criminology panels, now to be found in the British Society of Criminology as well as the American Society of Criminology, are without a doubt the most interesting, informative, and important panels at any academic conference. They are the only panels where I have ever seen panelists, afterwards, in floods of “tears of joy” from the session. The rooms are always packed, the buzz gets more exciting every year, as new members join every year, each carefully mentored and nurtured by senior members, in particular Ross and Richards themselves. In short, *they did it!*

Of course, Ross and Richards would insist, rightly, that “we did it”. True. Two people do not a movement make. There have been dozens of inspired and inspiring voices in the convict criminology movement that have kept this fire going in important ways. Yet, there is no questioning the sustained leadership that Ross and Richards provided from the very beginning along with the Obi-Wan Kenobi role played by the late great John Irwin. Their achievement is nothing short of remarkable.

True to form as an academic movement, books have played a key role in solidifying this process (although Convict Criminology has also been energised by a web presence from early on), the most important of these, *Convict Criminology*, was co-edited by Ross and Richards. They also co-authored *Behind Bars*, beginning with the immortal words “You’re under arrest” and intended to provide an account of the stages of incarceration from the perspective of the person experiencing it. Ross and Richards’ *Beyond Bars* represents an important sequel to this work. The book is intended to fill a gap in the literature between the huge number of academic books written about probation and parole (which, the authors point out “are generally written for a student audience by people who typically have very little first-hand experience with prisoners and parolees”) and the relatively small number of “self-help” books on prisoner reintegration which, although frequently authored by former prisoners, are typically “out-of-date and hard to locate” - indeed often sloppily edited, poorly documented and self-published. Like its predecessor, *Beyond Bars* is meant to be a systematic resource - appropriate for the curious undergraduate students as well as the recently released prisoner (but clearly the authors are most concerned with the latter readership) - written from perspective of the ex-prisoner.

Actually, the perspective taken in the book is not of one ex-prisoner, but rather two, somewhat inelegantly referred to as “Joe and Jill”. To be fair, it is primarily Joe’s perspective as a generic male ex-prisoner that is featured for most of the book, although Jill has a well-written chapter (12) devoted all to her experiences. By design, Joe and Jill are stock characters, an “everyman” and “everywoman” intended to represent the average experiences of many ex-prisoners based on Ross and Richards’ research, life experiences and readings of the wider literature. Yet, for this reason, of course, neither comes to life in any real way and these passages (sample sentence: “In prison, Joe and Jill lived with boredom, stress and violence”) can drag as a result. It might have been better to have chosen the specific and

varied experiences of some actual individuals that illustrated these more general themes that trying one's hand at fiction.

Of course, we are often told, as academics, not to generalize from single cases (and this is a - misguided and unfair - criticism of some of the early convict criminology publications focusing on telling one's own story first). One person's story we are told is "only" an anecdote. Social science needs to aggregate these individual narratives and tell generic stories about what happens to most people, to the average person, to Joe and Jill. Yet, in reality, there is no 'average' ex-prisoner, any more than the 'average' citizen or 'average' family with 2.4 children. It is only in the collection of original and unique stories – indeed like the life stories in the book *Convict Criminology* and the list of prisoner autobiographies the authors mention in *Beyond Bars* – that these general trends can be understood and appreciated.

Still, this work has been a part of the convict criminology idea from the beginning. The goal was always to draw on *both* autobiographical wisdom as well as rigorous academic research and, indeed, to challenge the field to account for how these two ways of 'knowing' actually differ (if they do). Understood in that context, as part of the wider convict criminology project, *Beyond Bars* is a crucial contribution - a sort of generational gift of wisdom from a collectivity who has "been there, done that, and gotten the PhD" to the more recent cohort of ex-prisoners (future convict criminologists, hopefully!) based on an aggregation of cautionary tales. The book says, learn from our successes, but also learn from our mistakes. This book was not around when John Irwin or Stephen Richards got out of prison years ago, but today's prisoners are lucky to have the resource of their collected wisdom.

Convict Criminology

***Jeffrey Ross and Stephen Richards (Eds) (2003) Wadsworth pp 387
ISBN 9780534574338***

Reviewed by Mike Nellis, University of Strathclyde

Most people in the UK (or indeed elsewhere in Europe) who read this American book when it first came out ten years ago probably liked and appreciated its passion and originality but would have been hard pressed to say in what niche it would have belonged in any criminological discourse outside the USA. It appeared at around the same time as “cultural criminology”, which did have broader international appeal, and because of their shared emphasis on understanding and appreciating authentic offender experience, the two “new schools of thought” were seen here as related developments, but with “convict criminology” very much the subsidiary. The book itself is evenly divided into chapters by ex-cons, people who have served time in American prisons and subsequently become academics, and a set of non-cons, career academics who, by dint of close working ties with prisons (as researchers or prison educators) have developed a consistently critical position on mass incarceration in the USA, akin to that of the ex-convicts themselves. The ostensible aim of the collection was to give voice to insider experiences of imprisonment and parole and to demand of criminology more generally, firstly, that it made room for ex-cons within its professional structures and, secondly, that it lent more of its established academic weight to criticising penal practice, and less to complacent, collusive research which either ignored the tough questions or simply and cruelly served state interests and legitimised the status quo.

The late John Irwin (1929-2010), who served time for armed robbery in the mid-1950s, and subsequently became a renowned professor, was indirectly the father of “convict criminology” and wrote a fine preface to this book. He noted that when he and one of its other ex-con contributors, Edward Tromanhauser, first made the transition from prison to university in the still rehabilitatively-inclined 1960s it was marginally easier than it was for the majority of the younger prisoners writing here, who made the transition in more punitive times, when educational opportunities in prison were less, and the stigma of being an ex-con, even in allegedly liberal institutions like university criminology departments, was that much greater. Many of them would not have been imprisoned at all had it not been for the war on

drugs and the escalating effect it had on incarceration rates in the 1980s. Stephen Richards, the co-editor of *Convict Criminology*, served a single sentence of eleven years (more than twice as long as Irwin) in nine prisons, including maximum security institutions like Marion and Leavenworth for nothing more than drug offences, and earned to the right to make every one of his eminently reasonable proposals for penal reform, which to many European ears would not sound all that radical.

Irwin details the roots of “convict criminology” in workshops at the annual American Criminology Conferences from 1997 onwards, in which the ex-con academics came together for the first time. Many of the papers in this volume date from those late nineties/early ‘noughties’ conferences (or cognate events) and were thus slightly dated even when the book first appeared, let alone now. Irwin acted as a mentor to the movement, but was not alone in supporting it, and like him, the ex-con writers are generous in their appreciation of the established criminologists and faculty members who opened doors for them and helped get their careers started. Not all had the same experiences, or had the same ambitions. Richard S Jones served a one year sentence, experienced both support and rejection in his early career, and admitted that like many ex-cons “managing a spoiled identity” there were still friends and neighbours outside academia from whom he would hide his history as a prisoner. All the contributors to the book, ex-cons and non-cons alike, share a commitment to the ethnographic method as a way of grasping penal realities, and a touching faith that more of this would be a significant counter to the politically and media induced myths about prisons and prisoners (elaborated here by Jeffrey Richards). Even the non-cons share autobiographical information in a way that isn’t really usual in academic texts, even now, and certainly wasn’t then; who knew, for example, that Barbara Owen’s interest in prison, which produced an exemplary study of women’s imprisonment (Owen 1998) was kindled by a brief liaison with a “bad boy” whom she subsequently visited in Vacaville, leading her to switch from art history to sociology and to then cross paths with John Irwin. William Archambeault’s chapter on Native Americans in US prisons is the most academically conventional in the book, but tells a neglected story of abuse and atrocity, not without bitterness, which may reflect his own Native American ancestry.

Some academic books on imprisonment and parole are boring despite themselves. This one is not, and tends to be memorable precisely because of the autobiographical information it contains, some of it angry and emotional. It gained added kudos from the fact that it helped

launch and consolidate a movement, in which convict criminologists (and aligned non-cons) show solidarity with the incarcerated, openly advocate reform, and support serving prisoners studying for degrees in prison. The appeal of authenticity apart, the book is also a fine advertisement for the kind of C Wright Mills-inspired sociology that inspires people to recast and rethink their “private troubles” as “public issues”, and vice versa - to see how larger structural and cultural forces shape experience and identity. The paradox of the convict criminology position is simply the ex-cons’ belief that by gaining an academic platform they will somehow be taken more seriously and become more influential as reformers, despite otherwise recognising that academia can all too often be moribund and conservative, and hostile to almost everything they stand for.

There have always been cons and ex-cons, in the USA and elsewhere, who sought to use their authentic experience as the basis for excoriating imprisonment without becoming academics, whether as novelists, journalists or social workers, even as lawyers. Some acknowledgment is rightly made of people like Edward Bunker and Wilbert Rideau in Ross and Richards’ “invitation to join us” at the end of the book, but maybe not to the full extent that it should have been, and Ross’s analysis of the many ways in which corrections can be misrepresented in popular culture tends to play down the positive impact that fiction, drama and even movies about imprisonment can have, if debate about them is carefully orchestrated and channeled. Ross plays down the wider “cultural politics of penal reform”, in which prison-focused art, drama and fiction in many guises has a key part to play, in favour of a conviction that academically-based argument will always be more objective, credible and influential. It is no criticism of this book, or of the ambitions of some ex-cons to become academics, and certainly not of the movement’s achievements so far, to say that that ain’t always so, in the US or here. Any new updated edition of this book - to which ex-con academic James Kilgore (2012) could usefully contribute on electronic monitoring, a subject inexplicably neglected here - needs to be a little more reflexive about the limitations of academia. It could also perhaps be more international in its selection of contributors - New Zealander Gregg Newbold is the only foreign ex-con here - because the US is no longer alone in creating “convict criminologists”.

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Behind Bars: Surviving Prison

*Jeffrey Ross and Stephen Richards (2002) Alpha Books pp 179 excl. Index and references
ISBN 9780028643519*

Reviewed by Christopher Stacey, Head of Projects and Services at Unlock

Do people get told what to expect before they get sent to prison? Are they prepared? Generally, before being sentenced, the only formal contact that people have is with their solicitor. After being charged, it can be a very lonely time waiting for the court process to begin.

Behind Bars: Surviving Prison is a US-based peer-written book designed to fill this gap. The target audience for the book is readily available in the 'Acknowledgements' section; "Dedicated to the men and women, both convictions and correctional officers, who on a daily basis survive the insanity behind bars". Interestingly, though, when explaining who the audience of the book is, the authors say of content of the book that it covers what "you need to know it before you're arrested, not after. After you're arrested it will be too late, because the journey to prison may have already begun."

At the time of publishing, Jeffrey Ross was an Assistant Professor in Criminal Justice and Social Policy at the University of Baltimore. He has co-authored a number of books on crime and criminology, and worked for four years inside a correctional institution. Stephen Richards was an Associate Professor of Sociology Criminology at Northern Kentucky University. He completed his degree and PhD while serving in a federal prison, spending eleven years in prison in total.

The positioning of this book amongst existing literature is particularly fascinating. Firstly, in contrast to UK-based publications, it certainly stands alone. There have been numerous UK attempts at 'first-hand experiences'; *I'm Still Standing* (by Bob Turney) and *Wasted* (by Mark Johnson) to name two. Often, though, these are written as autobiographies. There are, however, very few examples where the author tries so directly to provide an information-focused book, imparting personal experience. The closest example UK is also a recent one;

The Little Book of Prison (by Frankie Owens, in 2012). However, there is no direct equivalent to *Behind Bars*, ie one that is 'co-produced'. This is important. Far too often, there is an 'us and them' culture within prisons. This book seems to overcome this issue effortlessly.

However, this pair of criminologists manage to produce a cogent and accessible look at the brutal reality that is the US prison system. It aims to show new, current or would-be prisoners some critical survival tips, such as the best ways to avoid being beaten or sexually abused, how to land a favourable work assignment, how to work the parole system, and a glossary of prison slang to make the transition easier. These sections are very detailed. This is not surprising; they are undoubtedly based on personal experience. The authors talk through various aspects of prison life, including first arrival, food, work, education, sex and violence. The reader can be certain that the information contained in this text is not glossed-over, heavy-on-the-big-words academic pretence written from inside an office. Their humanistic and jargon-free coverage of what it's like to be taken into custody, processed and incarcerated is a refreshing departure from the stale, emotionally distant (and of often apologetic) coverage that is all too common in the academic coverage of this area.

However, the book seems to struggle to follow the well-intentioned path of producing an 'experience-based' publication. Unfortunately, rather than delving deeper into the promised subject matter (for example, it would have been good to read excerpts from interviews with former inmates, and anecdotes about mistakes they made in prison or how they prevailed in bad situations), the authors seem to be guilty of 'mission-drift', producing sections decrying the US penal system, the war on drugs and, most strikingly, dispensing incorrect/misleading legal advice (Chapter 2). At times, this advice could be seen as quite reckless (for example that a defendant should generally not plead guilty, and rather take the case through trial).

Perhaps these criticisms are unfair. At the end of the day, this book isn't meant to be founded on endless statistics - individual experiences can never guarantee to be broadly representative. The authors of *Behind Bars* simply put forward their thoughts and opinions based on their own experiences and ultimately, nobody can question these. It's not particularly clear *exactly* what the 'experience' is of the authors - aside from the 'roles' that each have had in the past. Nevertheless, it's fair to say that, in parts of the book, the authors stray into areas that they probably have little experience of (eg women in prison), or at least

where they're not writing from their own personal experience. In these situations, the book slips away from its strength and uniqueness.

Beyond the day-to-day goings on in prison, chapter 12 looks briefly at the issue of 'getting out', exploring briefly the types of release, then issues relating to after release. This includes issues such as finding suitable employment and housing. It would have been good to see this section be more detailed, as clearly the authors would have had some useful input on these issues. Nevertheless, and not surprisingly, it will be useful for readers to know that the co-authors came together again in 2009 to publish *Beyond Bars: Rejoining Society After Prison*. While not within the scope of this review, it seems that this further book, combined with *Behind Bars*, provides a comprehensive source of peer-based information following conviction.

Potential readers would be wise to understand that no book could prepare you for what prison has in store. The deprivation, brutality and violence of prison are unique, and it's hard to see how reading a book can prepare you for that. Furthermore, readers may be forgiven for dismissing *Behind Bars* because of its date and geographical focus. However, once you accept that the finite details may not be 100% reflective of modern day prisons, this book provides a unique perspective of life in prison, and should certainly be recommended reading for those preparing to go to (or currently in) prison, those working in prison (eg prison officers, social workers) and those with broader criminal justice involvement (ie probation officers, students and researchers).