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C.E.P.S.

June 19, 2013

Readers of my Blog
Massachusetts/USA
betweenthebars.org

Re: PROVIDENCE JOURNAL ARTICLE ABOUT MCI SHIRLEY "WALK FOR HUNGER"

Dear Readers:

As I reported here previously we worked to have MCI Shirley approved as an official satellite site for Project Bread's Walk For Hunger. On May 5, 2013, we held our second annual walk as that approved satellite site. We raised \$1277.50 and had about 190 men walk 1000 miles to help feed the hungry. It was a spectacular day and I was so proud to serve as the event coordinator. It was an honor so serve.

A great friend of our community here, Bob Kerr, is a reporter for The Providence Journal. I am proud to say that I have attended Mass here at the prison with Bob. He and Joe Lab, two old school Vietnam vets, are great friends and Bob always takes an interest in what Joe and his pals are doing. I also proud to say I am a friend of Joe Lab.

Bob wrote a powerful human interest story about this years walk and a special feat that was accomplished. The prison system does not want the public to know that we are not the men their reports, folders and media releases portray us to be. Bob knows this as he actually has taken the time to come in and meet prisoners: men who have made mistakes. Bob is a professional. I wish their were more professionals like him in the media.

What follows is Bob's article. Please read it and afford me you opinion. If we are ever going to move our society ahead and actually reduce the core issues of crime (drugs, poverty, abuse, mental health issues) we must temper justice with mercy. Joe Lab is entering his fortieth (40th) year of incarceration. He was awarded the Bronze Star (with "V" for Valor) in Vietnam and Mike has twenty-five (25) years in and just got a five (5) year parole set-back from Josh Wall's parole board. Mike once played football with Doug Flutie. Joe and Mike are not the men their DOC folders or Josh Wall's conclusions portray. They are the men portrayed in Bob Kerr's article.

Please let me know what you think????

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Two friends take a walk close to home
Bob Kerr

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Bob Kerr

Mike Skinner and his friend Joe Labriola wanted to take part in Project Bread's Walk For Hunger last month. They wanted to do the walk and help raise money and awareness about hunger in the richest country on earth.

It wouldn't be easy. Joe's in a wheelchair. So Mike, who played football for Boston College and pumps some iron, would have to push Joe for 20 miles. And they would have to do it on the small track in their neighborhood because neither man felt like taking a chance on the streets.

It is best here to turn the narrative over to Skinner, who wrote a wonderful account of the walk. It is inspiring. These are two guys who aren't exactly flush themselves and aren't always able to enjoy the food they'd like. But they were out there in early May, to help those with even less.

Skinner pointed out the obvious challenge posed by Joe's health:

"Joe suffers from severe COPD [chronic obstructive pulmonary disease], so I am always vigilant when it comes to his breathing and wouldn't want anything to trigger a coughing fit. He also has an arthritic spine, and is absolutely going to feel every bump and rut we might hit.

"I thought about the number it would do on his kidneys and started to have second thoughts as to whether or not this was worth it.

"I shared my concerns with Joe. Know what he did? He laughed out loud and dismissed the topic from further discussion. For as long as I've known him, that's who Joe is, a true warrior, a Marine through and through. His body may be slowly giving out on him, but not his heart nor his mind, which are as sharp as they've ever been in the twenty-eight years that I've been privileged to know the man."

So they had at it on a Sunday morning, May 5. They had "carbed up" on pasta salad the night before, oiled the wheelchair and put new batteries in their Walkmans. Mike put energy drinks in the bag on the back of the chair.

They checked in at the registration table, got their official Walk For Hunger name tags and headed out on the track. They hadn't even completed the first lap when a front wheel on the chair started to wobble. Joe shifted his weight and the wobble stopped.

Then, at mile 14, Mike felt blisters developing on his right foot. As he walked and pushed, the pain got worse. He looked down to see blood on his right sneaker.

As they neared the end, friends cheered and shouted their names.

"I picked it up and went as fast as I could," Skinner wrote. "Joe was leaning forward as far as he could, like a jockey on a horse coming down the home stretch. As we approached the finish line, I pushed Joe's chair as hard as I could and then let go. I wanted him to cross it alone because this was for him."

Joe raised his hands in victory. They had done it - 20 miles in 5 hours. And they finished just in time.

The prison yard at Shirley Medium in Shirley, Mass. was being shut down for the day.

Joe Labriola, a Vietnam veteran, and Mike Skinner have been in prison for a lot of years and have a lot of years to go. They have come to terms with what they have to do to make prison life bearable. And part of that is covering 20 hard miles to help feed the hungry.

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