

COMMENCEMENT SPEECH

TC GRADUATION 2014

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Hello Friends,

I'd like to share with you the text of a speech I wrote for the graduates of South Bay's T.C. program. (The Therapeutic Community Prog.) It was delivered by a graduate, and friend of mine, Onelio Fernandez.

South Bay's T.C. program is very similar to the 'Modality Program' run by the Fla. Dept. of Corrections. Usually participants are mandated by the state to complete the program because of a previous history of drug use, dependence upon alcohol, and other addictive behaviors.

Both programs are based upon the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy concept in which the goal is to change one's thinking in order to change one's behavior.

When taken seriously by participants, it can be a course of personal empowerment, and a source for positive change.

GARY
P.S. "CATCH AN ELBOW" IS A LIFE SENTENCE "L"

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You Know,

Nobody wakes up one day and says, "Hey, I want to get shot" or "I think I'll O.D. and flatline" or "It would be great if I could pick up a mandatory 20-year sentence."

Nobody wakes up one day and says, "I want to be an addict, or an alcoholic, or sit in a circle of convicted felons and share the horror stories that we've stitched together into what passes for life behind the wire."

Scripture tells us that there is a way that seems right unto man, but the way thereof leads to death. Only a fool would wake up one day and say, "I want to set in motion a chain of events that will lead me into the valley of the shadow of death." So, how is it that so many of us find ourselves in that valley?

How often do we have to hear a "holding cell door" slam or a gavel fall before we begin to see a pattern forming? The same way that it doesn't take all day to recognize sunshine, it shouldn't be that hard to figure out that we're walking in darkness, playing in the shadows, or following a false light.

Fortunately, there's a way to stop the madness before you hit that point of no return – before you "catch an elbow," or fall into a custom-made hole in the ground.

The beautiful thing about the TC program – if we choose to realize it – is that, it can provide us with the tools we need to start taking control of our lives.

Although we have a room full of graduates, it is my hope – in fact, it is my prayer – that many of you have picked up some tools with which you can make positive changes in your lives.

They call a graduation "Commencement Exercises" – and a commencement is not an end but a new beginning.

I'd like to share a few of the things that I have learned on my journey through the therapeutic community.

1. When all you have in your tool box is a hammer – every problem looks like a nail.

THE T.C. PROGRAM HAS PROVIDED ME WITH A SET OF TOOLS THAT SHOULD HELP ME TO MEET SOME OF THE CHALLENGES I WILL FACE AS I ATTEMPT TO MAKE A SUCCESSFUL RE-ENTRY INTO SOCIETY.

2. We are where we are today because of decisions we've made yesterday – so, why not ask ourselves, "What can we begin to do today that will make for a better tomorrow?"
3. I've learned the difference between reacting and responding. If you go to the doctor and he says you're having a "reaction" to the medication, that's a bad thing. If he says you're "responding," that's a good thing. It's from the ability to respond that we get the word responsibility. When we begin taking responsibility for our actions, we begin taking control of our lives.
4. I've learned that it's NOT just about me! Whenever I'd drop the ball and make a mess of my life, I'd throw myself a little pity party: "Why me?" I'd moan.

I had to do some growing up before I realized that by the time that cell door slammed or that gavel fell, I'd left a path of destruction behind me – friends, family and loved ones – strangers, victims and innocent bystanders. They all got swept up into the consequences of my mad dash through their lives. Like a bull in a China shop, I might have chipped a few cups.

5. I've learned that I can't control my destiny. I can't control what's going to be happening 5, 10, or 15 years from now. I can only control myself – and that "One act at a time" ... But each act becomes a brick, and it is with those bricks that I'll begin to lay the path that leads to that destiny. Each act becomes a brick in the foundation upon which my life "Will either rise or fall."

Each action is preceded by a thought, so let's begin to think clearly, choose carefully, and act wisely. TC did not provide us with a magic wand, but it gave us an opportunity to take control of our lives and the tools with which to do so.

I began by saying nobody wakes up one day and says, "Hey, I want to get shot – or I want to O.D. and flatline...." But we can all wake up tomorrow and say, "I've graduated from the TC program. I may not yet be where I wanna be, but at least I am not where I was." It is what it is, true! But it will be what I make it!

Congratulations!

Good Luck!

And may God make His Face to shine upon you all.

WRITTEN by GARY FIELD, AND DELIVERED - BEAUTIFULLY -
by ONELIO FERNANDEZ 8/2014 © S.B.C.F.