

Proverb 29:18

9-18-20

22 years ago I arrived at Mule Creek State Prison - Medium Custody - with a severe case of PTSD. Within the first year I had earned my way to Maximum Custody - which I maintained for two decades - touring the worst penal colonies in the state, from Corcoran S.H.U. - to Pelican Bay - to Lancaster, until at last I returned to Mule Creek in 2008 - a decade after I'd left in full restraints.

Imagine; 1998 to 2008, with cut voice chords - and no vision of a release date. Being left alone with Thought and Memory for 10 yrs. took its toll.

Then it took 12 yrs back here (at 'A' Facility), for me to reduce my custody points enough to qualify for my recent transfer back to a Medium Custody Facility. It's as if I've gone full circle and am finally approaching a real possibility of parole.

... Yet sadly I can't imagine what I will do to rebuild my life out there at 60 years old.

Earlier today I wrote a half dozen Transitional Housing programs intending to introduce myself and my situation. It's all too obvious that I simply won't be considered suitable for parole without parole plans and a network of people interested in my successful reintegration. Transitional Housing must be my first step I suspect.

My opportunity is knocking ... and I find myself in unfamiliar territory. Fortunately, that is why Transitional Housing provide ReEntry Services. I can only hope now that one or more reply, expressing a willingness to help me begin the process of reintegration from right here where I'm at presently.

I've spent most of two decades in self examination and self correction and KNOW I wouldn't be a risk to society if released tomorrow.

Housing and Employment at 60, is a mystery I've yet to solve though. Who will share their ideas of any options I've lost sight of? Either here on my blog site - or write me at:

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Five for Five on Facility C

By Chris DeHuff
Mule Creek State Prison

BETWEEN JANUARY AND February, five Mule Creek residents — four lifers and one with a determinate sentence — went before the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH) on Facility C. All five were found suitable for parole. Their hearings were relatively short, ranging from 33 minutes to 2 ½ hours, a result of the newly implemented structured decision making format. Their experiences can be instructive to determine commonalities.

The four lifers — Ramon Garcia, David Gamali, Darrell Logan, and Michael Bailey — have all been incarcerated for 25 years or more, their charges ranging from murder to robbery. All four spent a significant amount of time on the mainline before coming to the SNY (sensitive needs yard). They were actively involved in gang politics, violence, and drugs. All received numerous rules violation reports; Garcia lists 20 and Gamali 56. Bailey was validated as a gang member and spent 25 years in the Security Housing Unit (SHU) before making the transition.

Negatives aside, all four went before the Board with at least five years of disciplinary-free conduct. All of them participated extensively in self-help and other programming opportunities; not only did they participate, they internalized what they learned. One cannot “fake the funk” with the parole board. Going to groups and getting certificates is one thing; being able to articulate what you’ve learned is another thing entirely, and the Board knows the difference. The message from these four men: Live your recovery.

When asked what led to their transformation, the answers varied. Two experienced deaths in the family, one found religion, and the fourth simply matured out of the craziness. Education (college and vocations) and self-help, especially Criminals & Gangmembers Anonymous, seem to have been the most impactful in effecting change, though none of them skimped on the programs. These guys are serious programmers, and all of them put a lot of time and energy into their recovery. Gamali completed more than 50 groups.

The BPH experience was different for each man, of course, and expectations were different, though all went in prepared and emerged successful. Gangs, drugs, and violence were the focus of the hearings, and although prepared, there were still difficulties to be faced. Garcia, who was there for his initial suitability hearing, was nervous despite his preparation and struggled with his communication. Still, he was able to get his point across. Gamali didn’t think he was going to get a grant because the commissioners focused so much on his disciplinary history; nevertheless, he came out with a favorable ruling. It just goes to show that while we can’t prepare for everything that goes on in the hearing room, if we’re honest with ourselves and with the board, and we sincerely commit to being better men and women, then freedom is a very real possibility.

With the level of preparation exhibited by these four men, there were not many questions they struggled with, though there was one question that was difficult for one of them: What is criminal thinking? For those who don’t know the answer to this question, criminal thinking is any justification we give for our negative behaviors. Think on that and you’ll see the truth of it; if we’re being honest with ourselves, it really is that simple.

Each of the four men had a last word or bit of advice to share with our readers.

“I’d suggest that you be as responsible and transparent as possible,” said Garcia. “Be ready to speak and answer for everything you’ve done, and the work you’ve put in. ... Take accountability, and choose your words carefully.”

“We are responsible for our own rehabilitation,” Gamali stated. “Let’s change the culture of prison. If you put in the work, and internalize it, the doors are opening.”

Logan said, “If you live your life of recovery and rehabilitation and practice what you have learned, you will be prepared because you’ll come across as convincing and not trying to force answers you think they [the BPH] want to hear.”

“Do all the groups and correspondence courses that help you gain insight,” remarked Bailey. “Be honest, forthright, gain insight as to why you did what you did and why you won’t do it again.”

So, what is the takeaway? Ultimately, the message of these men and their experience is that if we do the work of rehabilitation, we will earn our way out of prison. The political climate in California is changing, and some say the era of decarceration has begun; the new structured decision making format of parole hearings is just more evidence of this. But that doesn’t mean we get a free ride; we must first put in the work. When we start taking advantage of the programming opportunities available to us the way these men have done — through self-examination and self-correction — comes the very real possibility of freedom.

Congratulations on your success, guys; you inspire the rest of us.

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