

the Sou'Wester

Winter 2021

GORDON'S CHRISTMAS DINNER

On Christmas Day 2020, Gordon prepared a traditional Christmas dinner at his home for 81 people.

Given that gatherings are prohibited because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gordon then delivered the meals, with the help of volunteers, to some of Montreal's most vulnerable and marginalized men and women who live in social and transitional housing across the city.

ROMEL, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping people access decent and affordable housing, donated money to buy the food. Communitas's financial contribution was used to make Christmas stockings that were filled with chocolates, candy, mandarin oranges, soft drinks and Christmas cards. If social gatherings are still prohibited in the Spring, Gordon hopes to prepare and home deliver another holiday feast for Easter.

Dave



It was a cold and dark evening as we passed through the last prison gate, leading to the chapel a hundred feet away.

We'd done this countless times, but this time something was different. Off to the side, a dark figure huddled against the chill, and

upon closer inspection, the person seemed to be cradling something inside of his olive-coloured prison-issue coat. Two dark eyes peered out, eyes which grew wider as our curiosity brought us closer, so we kept our distance. The inmate's name was Henry, aka Red, and his gray, feline friend Kat was one of the feral cats that roamed the grounds inside the high double fence surrounding the prison. Apparently they have mastered the art of entering and leaving the establishment, much like the prisoners on Hogan's Heroes. Besides keeping the rodent population in check, they subsist on food that the inmates leave for them during their exercise time in the yard.

Henry is 56 years old with sandy red hair, soft-spoken, articulate and shy, and he has spent the last 36 years of his life behind bars. By his own admission, he is a loner, not comfortable in groups and cautious about making friends. So he appears anti-social, but as he says "I don't just jump right in, especially on my side of the fence where even though you meet some nice and good people, there are others whose moral compass is out of whack".

But Henry loves cats. Over the years, Henry has, by his count, taken care of 25 adult cats and nearly 100 kittens, like Turbo and Blitz, a

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We would love to hear from you!



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Send your letters to our editor at:
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The Sou'Wester name is a reference to Montreal's Southwest, where Communitas began its work in 1999 and is still based today.

 @communitas_MTL
 /communitasmontreal

HENRY AND KAT

(Continued from page 1)

pair he fed for 3 years but could never touch. Other ferals with names like Mitzy, Snowball, Calli, Smokey, Max and Sarah have received and returned Henry's love and care. But with Kat, Henry had formed an inseparable bond: the social outcast and the wild thing were meant to be together.

So every Monday evening that Fall, as the volunteers filed into the prison for the weekly Bible study with a group of inmates, Henry and Kat became fixtures at the gate, waiting to greet us. As the weeks passed into winter, Henry warmed up to the visitors and Kat was wary but less terrified. Then one cold, damp and blustery evening, we noticed that Kat and Henry were not at the gate. After Tim, our priest, unlocked the heavy door, we entered the chapel and there, in a cardboard box in the corner, lay Kat. In short order, Henry arrived and explained that a kindly guard had allowed him to bring Kat inside out of the elements. Thereafter the twosome stationed themselves on a chair in the foyer, just inside the door to greet us like old friends. Kat now welcomed our petting and Henry clearly enjoyed the conversation. Safe with each other, they now felt comfortable with us. "Guests" from outside are sometimes suspected of having ulterior motives for voluntarily spending their free time with society's outcasts, but Henry came to the realization that we were nice folks, there to give the men a chance to socialize with people who have a positive view of the world and their place in it. Kat also seemed happy to have us around, so we began to look forward to the day they might join us in our circle to sing hymns, read and discuss the Bible passage chosen for the evening, and drink the "wonderful" prison coffee and powdered milk.

Then the Covid pandemic struck, and suddenly, on March 13, incidentally Friday the thirteenth, the world went into lockdown. At the prison, this meant the inmates had to remain in their ranges or blocks with no visits, educational and exercise programs, and only one hour outside in the yard. Inmates from each range could not mingle with those from other ranges, and not even the priest could enter. It worked in the sense that the prison remained Covid-free, but it also meant that Henry did not see Kat for six days. When he did, he could not believe his eyes. Kat had lost half her weight, and, in Henry's words, "seemed despondent". He built a little house for her close by so that he could spend his hour of free time feeding and holding her. But over the next few days, her condition worsened. One week later on a Monday, she developed a runny nose and was congested. By Thursday another inmate, after his time in the yard, told Henry that Kat could not stand up and was not eating at all. Henry describes what happened next.

"The guard let me go out to see her but when I went to move her she meowed like I'd never heard before. I hurried inside to get my coat to keep her warm and some water, but when I picked her up, she meowed again in that same strange way. I put her on my lap while sitting on the ground and she quieted down and lay beside my leg. I cradled her head in my hand and tried to soothe her, gently rubbing her side the way she liked with my other hand, and she seemed to enjoy it. She hacked a bit, so I picked her up and she convulsed and puked on me. I knew it wasn't good and she probably wouldn't last until the SPCA came to get her. I brought her into the sun so she could feel the warmth. There was a faint purring as I stroked her head. I



could not really feel her breathing or moving because I began to sob at the thought that she was not long for the world. I did not want to move or disturb her because her meow just tore the heart out of me. After a while I checked and when I moved her, she was lifeless. I held her in the baby position and stroked her head while grieving her passing. The guards were nice enough to let me stay with her until the SPCA came to pick her up. I think that Kat held on to life long enough to see me one last time, to give me comfort and be comforted when she passed. She did not die alone or unloved, that is for sure. I prayed for her little soul, that she was a good cat and companion and that one day I may see her again. I really wished that my time would have come as well and we both could be free of this place together. But fate seems to have other plans. I'm dealing with it but it's hard. Kat was my reason to get up every morning and go out in the rain, heat and cold to see her. I know the lockdown played a role, the helplessness I felt when I'd worry about her,

but not be able to move where I wanted when I wanted. She will never be forgotten as long as I and others live, whose lives she touched and made a little brighter".

Shortly after Kat's passing, Henry applied for and got the job as chapel cleaner. This also involves setting up the chairs for Bible study and making the coffee when he has access, so I think Henry plans to be a regular on Monday evening in the chapel, the place where he felt accepted and enjoyed happy times. In August a new feral cat entered Henry's life, named of course, Kat II. And one day, when Henry has a small place of his own on the outside, in that place there will surely be a cat, the luckiest cat in the world.

On December 8th, after almost 37 years in prison and many denials, Henry was granted parole and a week later moved to a halfway house. And he is keeping an eye out for stray cats.

Bob



Communitas recently took part in a Christmas card campaign for federal inmates at several prisons in Quebec.

The campaign was initiated by chaplains at the Federal Training Centre and coordinated by Corporation Jean-Paul Morin in Laval. Other partners included Présence Compassion, le Phare de Longueuil, as well as Relais Famille.

An amazing 2,160 cards were received and distributed in six establishments, including Laval, Ste-Anne, Drummondville and Port-Cartier.

Below is a thank you note from the chaplains.

Hello! Today we received all the cards which you sent for the inmates.

"We are so touched by the outpouring of your holiday wishes for them. Not only will our inmates receive two cards each (one from the volunteers and one from the members of the organization Relais Famille).

But because of your generosity, inmates from four other institutions will as well. This was not planned but is a result of the overflow of your generosity. We chose to spread more holiday cheer to as many inmates as we could. So, thank you truly. In these difficult times, just knowing that there are people out there who still care, will do them so much good.

I got to read some of your cards, and I was so moved by how creative some of you were, either artistically, or with the messages — some of which included jokes or little stories, or just simple heartfelt wishes... this will certainly bring a smile to many faces.

Like I said, I got to read a few of your cards... but Chantal from Corporation Jean-Paul Morin read over 1800! And she went around picking up a lot of cards. So, on behalf of all the inmates, chaplains, and volunteers, we thank you for all that you have done for us.

Sabrina

Hello from the digital literacy workshop!

For the past few weeks, we've been meeting on Wednesday nights over Zoom and working on our digital skills. We began with internet basics, and then started getting comfortable with the applications available on Google Drive. So far, we've covered e-mail, using Excel for personal finance, and collaborating with others on documents using Google Docs. We've also been chatting about how the internet works and what it means to be an internet user. During last week's workshop, we covered

how companies generate revenue from advertisements, and what those pesky "Third Party Cookie" warnings that pop up on websites really mean. We then installed ad-blockers that block these advertisements, which is a step we can make as individuals to declutter our screens and reduce the amount of personal data being tracked. But the internet doesn't end there! It can also be a great place full of funny people with good intentions. Our workshop is ending on this hopeful note. This week, we shared community resources. Take Bunz, for instance: the app, website and Facebook group that allows you to barter and trade

goods with people in your neighborhood (No cash allowed!). It's also known as the place where I somehow scored a window air-conditioning unit during a heat wave for the price of one singular bottle of olive oil. Or, consider the Montreal neighborhood Facebook groups. NDG's Facebook group, "Thrive NDG", might get the gold star here for their collective reporting on the whereabouts of a wayward turkey named "Butters" who roamed the neighborhood until being hit by a car.

See you at Open Door!

Michaela

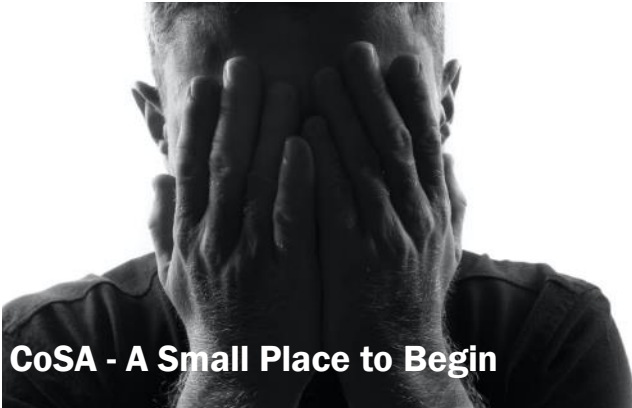
COMMUNITAS 2020 FUNDRAISING DRIVE

Communitas celebrated a successful 2020 Fundraising Drive. We had set our goal of raising \$20,000 at our last Annual General Meeting in fiscal year 2020-2021, and between 28 October and 31 December 2020 our community raised \$10,006 from 44 separate donations. Total donations for the year January – December 2020 was \$13,011.

We at Communitas are deeply grateful to all who have contributed to us financially, especially during this pandemic year when so many other calls would have been made on your funds.

We look forward to another successful year making community and assisting our members in fulfilling their goals.

Michele (Treasurer)



CoSA - A Small Place to Begin

What should we do when we have caused harm? How do we learn from the experience? When are we permitted to move on? And under what conditions?

Society offers a systematized and impersonal solution to the problem of crime—a carceral solution. It frees communities from dealing with transgressors but does little to rehabilitate them or reduce recidivism. Alternatively, in a restorative justice approach, victims and communities may opt to work with the perpetrator directly to seek justice and healing. But for all the benefits this process can entail, there's risk too. It's a burden no survivor should be compelled to accept if they do not freely choose it.

A Circle of Support and Accountability (CoSA) offers a variation on this, one in which those who were harmed are not called upon to participate. CoSA is a community-based model for offenders whose original community may not be available for this exercise, because of distance or through choice. Trained volunteers serve as proxies for those who were immediately affected by the crime.

In the beginning, we hear the offender's (or, in Circle parlance, the core member's) account of their crimes as they understand them. We review the various records of their transgressions and assessments of their character. And then, we simply talk to them, hour after hour, week after week, about their experiences trying to change patterns that have brought ruin to their life and those around them.

CoSA core members have generally been convicted of truly heinous acts. Despite this, it's probably easier for strangers of the right temperament to work with them than it would be for their former friends and neighbours. Because we are not the ones they betrayed, it isn't for us to grapple with forgiveness.

As such, provided that we sense honesty and commitment from the core member, we pull for their success: fewer stints in jail, more healthy adult relationships, real growth. Though it's not a requirement of our continued support, we often come to like them. Our advice is inexperienced. Sometimes communication breaks down. But we are a constant. We witness them.

What matters most isn't just that Circle volunteers care for core members, but that we expect things of them. To be held in community means both to be supported and restrained by mutual accountability. These are not separate processes. They are the necessary and ongoing preconditions for lives to securely intertwine. This experience of kinship and acceptance of responsibility is near the core of what it means to be human.

A Circle cannot offer a core member forgiveness. We cannot offer their victims the healing that comes from sincere and direct amends. We cannot even ensure the offender knows the full significance of their crime. But if one who has harmed is to live on, at some point they must be allowed a chance to earn a new trust. In that regard, a Circle is a small place to begin.

A Circle volunteer

An Open Door Spiritual Moment with John Lewis

Tuesday, December 28, 2020

Study the path of others to make your way easier and more abundant. Lean toward the whispers of your own heart, discover the universal truth, and follow its dictates. Know that the truth always leads to love and the perpetuation of peace. Its products are never bitterness and strife. Clothe yourself in the work of love, in the revolutionary work of nonviolent resistance against evil. Anchor the eternity of love in your own soul and embed this planet with goodness. Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won. Choose confrontation wisely, but when it is your time don't be afraid to stand up, speak up, and speak out against injustice. And if you follow your truth down the road to peace and the affirmation of love, if you shine like a beacon for all to see, then the poetry of all the great dreamers and philosophers is yours to manifest in a nation, a world community, and a Beloved Community that is finally at peace with itself.

John Lewis, Across That Bridge: A Vision for Change and the Future of America

First Impression at Open Door

I was asked to give my first impressions of Open Door and Communitas, and at first I found this question pretty daunting.

There's so much I love about Communitas that it's difficult to know where to begin. I'll start with what I love the most about Communitas, which is the idea that it's not about me. So much of my life revolves around myself. I'm so grateful for the opportunity to sit with everyone at Open Door every week and just be part of the group. I get the sense that this is what a lot of our members feel as well.

What stands out the most to me is that by showing up, we are all cultivating and supporting mutual growth. I get to learn something new with everyone every week. I get the chance to celebrate every time I hear that a member has gotten parole, or when someone has done something kind for others. In fact, I have a reason to celebrate every time I show up – every member brings something special to the table that I would miss deeply were I not present.

The spirit of inclusivity here really allows us to share in these wonderful experiences. In this way, Communitas and Open Door truly embody community in a way that I have not found in other groups. While there are all kinds of wonderful community groups out there, I personally

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feel that the variety of people who come to Open Door really provides us all with the opportunity to broaden our minds in a way that other groups may not. We're never just focused on one belief or one idea. We're all open to new ideas and to finding new ways to contribute. This is such an exciting concept, and it's great to have these ideas so well put together and all in one place!

There is such great value to be found in Communitas and the Open Door program. If there were just one thing I could say about what's being done here, it's that these programs are integral to the vibrancy and vitality of our community as a whole. Communitas gives us a chance to show up for each other, support one another, grow together and flourish. Being part of Communitas has given me a chance to see true community spirit in action. It's also given me extra incentive to get out there and do what's best for everyone around me. I see what everyone here is accomplishing for each other, and it gives me the strength I need to do the same. To anyone who is thinking that

it might be a good idea to get involved in this, I say go for it! Every new member makes the group that much richer.

Thank you to everyone at Communitas for creating such a welcoming and uplifting space!

Leigh



End of Year 2020-2021

As per usual, Communitas will be holding End of Year meetings in the next couple of months, so get ready and mark your calendars! They will all be held on Zoom and the time will soon be set.

We will begin on April 20th with the Annual Consultation. At this meeting, Communitas' members will be presented with a financial report for the closing year (2020-2021), as well as with a general strategy and budget proposal for the upcoming fiscal year (2021-2022). There will also be an opportunity to hear questions, concerns, and general input members may have.

On May 26th, we will gather again, this time for our Annual General Meeting. The main purposes of this meeting are, on one hand, to be accountable to our membership in terms of our organizational and financial health through the presentation of various reports, and, on the other hand, elect the Board of Directors that will guide Communitas in this coming year.

Remember that members can nominate a candidate for the Board, and that nominees do not have to be members of Communitas. To nominate someone, you have to submit the candidate's name, with



their consent to be nominated, and some relevant biographical information, and contact information. Four other members must support this nomination in writing. Send nominations and any question you may have about the process to coordinator@communitasmontreal.org or call 514-244-6147. The deadline is May 13th at 4:00 pm.

Coordination

Courtroom Sagas with a Twist!

In response to the many entreaties I've received from faithful readers, or wish I had, today's Sou'Wester will present two recent and cheery courtroom sagas, a counterpoint to the gloomy tidings which for too many months have oppressed our souls, weighed on our spirits, and tested our sobriety.

1. Detention during suspension matters

As most readers are aware, offenders on statutory release who breach the standard conditions of the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (CCRA), or a special condition imposed by a parole panel's decision, are suspended and hustled off to penitentiary to await the disposition of their case. Assuming the Correctional Service (CSC) parole supervisor does not withdraw the suspension, it next falls to the Board to decide whether to cancel and return to the street, or to revoke statutory release. In the latter situation, the law then requires CSC to calculate the day on which the offender will have served two thirds of the remaining sentence, which the law allows only then to take effect as the new automatic release date.

CSC enjoys a maximum of 30 days to cancel the suspension or pass the case on to the Board, while subsection 163(3) of the CCRA's Regulations affords the Board an additional 90 days from its receipt of the file to take its decision. Therein lies the problem: by the time the Board has dealt with the case and issued its post-suspension decision, setting the CSC sentence administrator in motion, offenders well-advanced in their sentence may find they've already been detained past the new two-thirds release date the CSC calculation is about to create.

The reader may easily imagine the frustration of prisoners who know their release date when finally announced will be in the past, and only because their captors have not processed their case sooner. For many years, prisoners and their legal representatives have pleaded for a quick revocation, but to accede to such

requests, the Board would have to prioritize the scheduling of cases by the anticipated new release date instead of the date of suspension. And this the Board would not do—until now...

Acting as applicant, the John Howard Society of Canada (JHSC), represented by lawyer Paul Quick of Queen's University's Prison Law Clinic, brought a test case before the Ontario Superior Court of Justice (2021 ONSC 380), and won a ground-breaking decision on January 15, 2021, which the Crown has not appealed. The first issue the Court was forced to address was that of standing. Justice Muszynski ruled that although the applicant was not an affected prisoner, the JHSC "is an established not-for-profit prisoner advocacy organization and has a genuine interest in the outcome of this application," something the Crown did not seek to contest.

What the Crown did contest was the applicant's claim that the impugned provisions of the CCRA, read together with The Regulations,

"For decades, suspended prisoners have implored the Board to spare them undue and avoidable detention, and the Board has refused— because it could "

unjustifiably violate The Charter of Rights and Freedoms' section 7, which treats of people's right to life, liberty and security of the person, and the right not to be deprived thereof except in accordance with the principles of fundamental justice. Rejecting the Crown's arguments, the Court pronounced the unconstitutionality of the offending regulation as it then appeared, and ordered it be read otherwise, yielding a version which compels the Parole Board to render post-suspension decisions "on or before the day on which the offender has served two thirds of the unexpired portion of the sentence after being recommitted to custody as a result of a suspension or revocation under section 135 [of the CCRA]."

How the Board will accomplish this feat is for the Board to discover, but the goal does not seem unattainable. Whatever rationale the Board advanced in the past, the judge found no evidence that accommodating the needs of this group would beget a backlog or procedural hardship, or occasion budgetary damage. "The only explanation provided as to why the

Parole Board does not currently prioritize making post-suspension decisions for offenders within this cohort is because the current legislation does not require it to do so" – as many have always suspected. So we are left with this: for decades, suspended prisoners have implored the Board to spare them undue and avoidable detention, and the Board has refused— because it could.

2. Late releases lead to lawsuit

Once upon a time, a Conservative federal government thought it wise to give its correctional system a thorough housecleaning. On November 1, 1992, the Parole Act and Penitentiary Act were swept away by a statutory package of updates known as the CCRA. Belying its staid political parentage, the legislation spawned an audacious innovation which youthful offenders and gentlemen traffickers came to know and love as the Accelerated Parole Review (libération expéditive), a child of the conviction that penitentiaries are a school for crime, and thereby contribute to the ruin of the young and

inexperienced. This was a time-worn commonplace, for had not Oliver Goldsmith already in 1762 recognized England's prisons as places "which find or make men guilty, which enclose wretches

for the commission of one crime, and return them, if returned alive, fitted for the perpetration of thousands"? A mere two hundred years later, Canada's government had also discerned the desirability of removing relatively innocent first-time federal offenders from the criminal environment at the earliest opportunity; and so it was that a new release program proposed full parole at one-third of the sentence for all offenders convicted of a non-violent offence who were entering penitentiary for the first time, so long as the Parole Board was "satisfied there are no reasonable grounds to believe" they are "likely to commit an offence involving violence" before warrant expiry. In 1997, an amendment expanded the APR to include eligibility for a day parole review on the same relaxed terms after six months, or one-sixth, whichever was longer, while ordinary prisoners continued to be eligible only six months before one-third (we do not speak here of lifers and other special categories).

The quasi-automatic nature of accelerated day and full parole sowed dissent in some quarters from the outset, and resistance only grew with the realization that Board members would have no power to refuse eligible offenders who, although judged unlikely to commit a violent offence, were foreseeably headed for non-violent recidivism (including large-scale trafficking). In a 2007 report, CSC concluded the liberality of the special APR rules was undermining acceptance of the ordinary discretionary release regime, and generally had “not proved as effective as discretionary release in mitigating violent reoffending.” By 2011, the Harper government had had enough, and the APR program was abolished as of March 28 of that year. With the elimination of their unique status, non-violent first-time federal offenders no longer reached day parole eligibility at one-sixth of their sentence, nor were they reviewed under circumscribed criteria indifferent to the probability of non-violent recidivism.

It was plain that many candidates who could have expected release under APR would now be denied under the Act’s regular test, but it also was clear that abandoning the program was a legitimate policy option as open to the government as its controversial adoption had been. Thus it was that the courts witnessed no pointless attempts to dispute APR’s abolition. It was, instead, the way in which the policy reversal was implemented that inspired dissent and provoked resolute opposition.

The transitional articles of the Abolition of Early Parole Act of 2011 were framed in such a way that as of March 28, the APR program would cease to exist for all federal offenders—including those already in the system. Three Pacific Region prisoners stepped forward to challenge this doubtful recourse to retrospectivity. Mr. Whaling, Ms. Slobbe, and Mr. Maidana had all been convicted of serious, but non-violent, crimes during the life of the APR regime, under which each would have been eligible for one-sixth day parole. Without APR, their dates would be pushed back three, nine, and twenty-one months, respectively.

The three plaintiffs placed their joined cases in the hands of attorney Eric Purtzki, and headed off to the Supreme Court of British Columbia, which ruled on June 26, 2012 that

“The Transitional Provision is of no force and effect, and (...) therefore does not apply retrospectively to the plaintiffs or others who were already serving their sentences on March 28, 2011,” leaving the APR program intact for these people. The Attorney General of Canada appealed that decision. The Canadian Prison Law Association and the British Columbia Civil Liberties Association intervened in support of the respondent prisoners, and on November 2, 2012, the British Columbia Court of Appeal confirmed the ruling of the lower court. One last time, the Attorney General of Canada, this time supported by submissions from the Attorney General of Ontario, filed an appeal, but lawyer Purtzki and his clients prevailed. On March 20, 2014, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the decision of the B.C. appeal court.

At the heart of the debate was the meaning of parole eligibility, and the proper interpretation to give section 11(h) of The Charter, which reads in part, “Any person charged with an offence has the right (...) if finally found guilty and punished for the offence, not to be tried or punished for it again,” equivocal language which may be and has been understood variously. In an earlier case, the Supreme Court had already settled on the view espoused by the three prisoners that ‘punishment’ refers not solely to the period of imprisonment imposed by the sentencing judge, but to their parole ineligibility periods as well. In their view, as those periods were fixed by the law in force at the time of conviction, a statutory revision postponing eligibility would constitute a second punishment, and a violation of 11(h) impossible to justify. The Crown contended, to the contrary, that a delay of eligibility flowing from legislative action did not punish them for their offence a second time, as section 11(h)’s ‘punished for it again’ describes a second criminal procedure culminating in a judge’s decision.

The Supreme Court found the harmful impact of a statutory amendment is analogous to the punitive impact of a criminal court sentence. It observed that while not every alteration of the parole regime will constitute a new punishment, a delay of parole eligibility is one of the clearest of those cases which do. It declared the transitional provision invalid, and

that APR still exists for all eligible prisoners who were sentenced before March 28, 2011. Two months later, the British Columbia Court of Appeal took matters a step further in the twin cases of Liang and McCullough. Based on 11(i), a related section of The Charter, the Court held that APR continues to apply also to persons who committed their offence before March 28, 2011, even if sentencing occurred after abolition. Subsequent caselaw confirmed that commission before that date of even a portion of the criminal activity is sufficient to satisfy the time requirement.

‘But,’ the interested reader will interject, ‘were we not promised a courtroom drama of recent vintage and interest?’ Dear reader, fear not: having at long last proven, in the face of determined opposition, that the Harper government should not have introduced retrospective abolition, Whaling and Liang have now filed for permission to bring a damage suit on behalf of those 3,252 offenders who languished in prison after their APR eligibility date as a result of the transitional legislation. On November 19, 2020, the Federal Court certified their class action against The Queen, allowing it to go forward to trial, and appointed the B.C. firm of Grace, Snowdon & Terpocki as Class Counsel. The rest remains to be written.

Steve



Open Door

What do you think 2021 holds in store for you?

I hope for worldwide peace and health.

I want my brother to be free of cancer.

I'm going to talk to more and more people about climate change.

I've signed up for Irish Studies at Concordia.

I'm going to keep in touch with the French side of Restorative Justice in Montreal and maybe see my family in Mississauga.

I'll try to be my best!

This Christmas was not about shopping, it was about spirituality. I see the good side of the bad time.

Get out of my chair and exercise.

I'm going to work on deepening my relationships.

Finish my Master's Degree. I can't even think about leisure.

Go to France. I have friends there.

I finished building my shelves and now need to fill them up. I also want to declutter.

Learn to speak Dutch, find a Buddhist temple, and find a job.

As I approach 90, I live each day as if it were my last. I'd like to go to Switzerland to see my daughter and also have our Communitas corn roast!

2021 will be long and drawn out; we have to accept it and not be frustrated. I'll keep playing the trumpet.

I'm going to continue to do everything that has to be done. I miss getting together with everybody.

Right now I'm on cruise control and I like it. I'd like to go back to university.

I'd like to persuade people of influence inside the pens to allow the guys to have computers.

I'd like to see a real whale. And I'm building a shelf in my living room.

Ditto to everything everyone else has said. Plus, I want to learn sign language.

Tomorrow I start my Spanish classes.

I'll get full parole in March. I'd like to become politically active and work for prisoners' rights.

I'm looking forward to one of the best years of my life. I will pass the Board and will get a new apartment.

I taught my parents to use Zoom and my relationship with my dad has never been better. Maybe I'll be able to visit them in June.

Since I can't go to restaurants, now when I want tasty food, I'll learn to make it myself.



On December 29, 2020, Open Door held a virtual New Year's Eve celebration, the first time in almost 20 years Open Door has marked the New Year with something special.

The activity at the top of this evening's 'menu' was preparation of a menu for a New Year's Feast, if we ever get to gather for a real in person feast.

The 28 or so participants split into groups of 4 to come up with dishes they would like, from appetisers, soups, salads, the entrée itself and dessert.

For the record, here is our dream menu for a New Year's Feast:

1. Smoked salmon on crackers or olives stuffed with almonds
2. Lobster bisque or split pea soup
3. Garlic buttered shrimps or crab salsa
4. Greek salad or céleri-rave rémoulade
5. Involtini or roast leg of lamb
6. Mozzarella, swiss, crackers, camembert, with chardonnay
7. Chocolate cheesecake or tiramisu
8. Orange & pineapple fruit salad or strawberries & cream
9. Smoked Pu-erh / chai rooibos teas, or mocha / americano coffee

Bon appetit!



News from the Inside

As of the beginning of 2021, there was good news that almost all inmates who had previously been declared positive by CSC for COVID 19 across Canada, have now recovered, with still twelve active cases reported in Alberta, Sask., BC and, none in Quebec, Ontario or the Maritimes. Only a couple of months ago, the Women's Institution in Joliette and the Federal Training Centre in Laval (where one inmate died) were hit by very high numbers, so there may be hope for better days.

As vaccines are beginning to be distributed, some of the elderly inmates, who may be more medically vulnerable, have received their

first dose. The Public Health Agency has the task of ensuring that all healthcare staff and their patients, within the CSC, are receiving the appropriate service. They also encourage inmates to continue to wear masks and respect the required physical distancing and sanitizing and hand-washing.

Another change that has begun is the National Menu, which means that extra calories have been added to the daily menus of male inmates. Women's institutions were not included as the women usually cook their own meals.

However, on the provincial side, there has been a COVID outbreak at Bordeaux with over 90 inmates infected and at least 17 guards.

A tribute has been awarded to Reynald Martel, who has worked as member of the Citizens' Advisory Committee in Donnacona for thirty-four years. This committee 's aims are strengthen public safety by helping diffuse major incidents, aiding prisoners in finding work after their release by canvassing employers, and generally create a link between society and the carceral world.

In Montreal, at Open Door, we recently have had the pleasure of welcoming some of the newly released and relieved ex-detainees, now adapting to half-way house and city life. Quite a change!

Margaret and Sabrina

Covid Status in Quebec Prisons – February 17, 2021

Federal	Total positive	Active	Provincial	Total positive	Active
Archambault	30	30	Amos	3	0
Cowansville	0	0	Hull	6	0
Donnacona	0	0	Leclerc	6	0
Drummond	18	0	Bordeaux	240	90
Federal Training Centre	163	0	New Carlisle	46	0
Joliette Institution for Women	54	0	Perce	14	0
La Macaza	0	0	Quebec	13	10
Port-Cartier	15	0	Rimouski	1	0
			RDP	32	8
			St-Jerome	107	9
			Sherbrooke	1	0
			Sorel-Tracy	2	0
			Trois-Rivieres	23	0
Federal Total	280	30	Total	500	118

Note: Provincial prisons not listed have had no Covid cases.

An interview with Donald

SW: Hello? I was just leaving you a message.

Donald: Yes, the hardest thing since getting out of prison is trying to figure out how to answer this smartphone. And yet I've had it for eight months now, even longer.

SW: That's okay. So you know how these interviews work: let's start with where you were born.

Donald: I'm from Nova Scotia. When we had that presentation on the history of Nova Scotia at Open Door and the presenter talked about Africville, I knew that community intimately. I had been in most of those houses. Those kids were my friends before the people were displaced by the government. They had such a sense of community; that's what I liked. I didn't have that. If you needed a glass of water, you could go to anyone's house and just ask, "Could I have a glass of water?"

My childhood sucked. After 8 years old I was in the Juvenile system. Child protection was not so good back then. You don't need to scare your readers with how bad a childhood can be.

SW: Did things get better when you were a teenager?

Donald: As a teen, I lived off crime and was a drug addict. Then I went to Toronto and things got worse.

SW: What were your strengths while growing up?

Donald: I was very good at sports. Hockey, baseball, football, bad at basketball because I had a lousy shot so I was always defence. I was always good at running; that's how I survived my years in prison. Running was a way to vent my anger and frustration, not just stay in shape.

SW: What were your early days in prison like?

Donald: The first five years were very violent, drugs, escaping. People feared me because I didn't know the word restraint. I did whatever to solve problems. Then in Maximum I started to change. I didn't want to deal with people that way anymore. I got into organized sports and institutional politics. I built my self-esteem by doing stuff I never thought I could do.

SW: What were inmate politics like?

Donald: Very interesting. Before that my feeling was, "Do what I want or I will hurt you." Now I had to get people interested in doing the right thing. It was a new way for me to think. I don't know if it's diplomacy, to say less and listen more. If you ask the right questions and listen, then people give you all the clues.

I was chairman of the Inmate Committee. A lot of people thought I couldn't do the job because of my past, no education, not communicative. But I thought, who's not represented? Most committees in prison are self-serving; if they get anything for other guys it's by accident. I looked at the guys who were not served and got their support: the Natives and the Blacks. The two minorities supported me 100%. Once I got elected, everyone liked me. The second time I got elected, it was a landslide. I got 375 of 400 votes.

Back then, in the early 80s, you had a lot of power. I got CSC to build a new visiting room and to bring adult education in. I started writing to Ottawa, saying, "We got 400 guys here, 200 of them can barely read or write. You have to read the TV Guide for them so that they know what's on tv."

I was involved in Prison Justice Day in Ontario, and now I'm involved on the outside, too, I organized ten days in Parc Vert, near the Atwater metro. We organized speakers: native elders, lawyers, Marie Beemans, QPIRG...78 people came!

SW: Are you working now?

Donald: I work part-time at a store. I got that job a week after I got out of prison. They knew I was a prisoner. They needed to pack up a bunch of food for local charities. Now I'm a member of their collective and I'm totally happy with it. It's nice to have a job that pays. For years in prison I thought, I've sucked society dry for years with police investigations and prison, I'd like to be in the position to give back. Now I have that opportunity.

The store is open during Covid because it's classified as a grocery store and a pharmacy, kind of. I do a café day at the store and a day of herbal medicines. Herbal medicines are complicated. I can help the customer find what they're looking for but I can't advise them on how to use it. I can tell them simple things like teas for sleep, maybe a headache. One co-worker has a degree, the other has been a herbalist her whole life.

SW: What are your short-term plans?

Donald: I'm leading a project to get a community fridge on Mackay Street. People can drop things off for other people who need it. Take what you need, leave the rest. I'm researching City ordinances and making sure the landlord doesn't cry the blues. It's our storefront and we can do what we want. I'm writing up the proposal and we're getting more people to help. The Potato is on board, that's a food kitchen at Concordia. Man, it's hard connecting with people during Covid.

SW: Why do you think everything is going so well for you?

Donald: I don't know how I became so fortunate. I got out last March in the midst of the lockdown. Everyone was out of work and I got a job, a dream job for a community-minded person. And I got a girlfriend; we're living together.

And I dealt with the demons that made me a criminal. I was fortunate that I got help there.

People said, "Donald, you've been inside 40 years. It's going to be tough for you on the outside." But it's not the financial support, that's low priority. It's the moral support, that's what has the greatest effect. One of the volunteers picked me up and drove me to the halfway house. I want to stress how important it is to keep in contact with all the community groups that go into prison: Recon, Open Door, AA—it doesn't matter if they're religious or not—they gave me support. I got tons of phone numbers, so if I struggle, I have people to call. The job I have came through a volunteer who went into prison. And Bill helped me to get furniture. It was the first apartment I had in over 40 years.

A lot of guys in prison read what you write. I say to them: do the little things. Go to the library and read the papers so that you won't feel like an alien when you get out. Get yourself prepared: ask about how to get your birth certificate, your Social Insurance card. One thing I didn't know is that if you have a Social Insurance Number and you're in prison for over 5 years, you have to get it reactivated. You can get it reactivated while you're in prison. But the parole officer didn't know that. There's a bunch of little things like that. You can't rely on the system, you have to rely on yourself.

The biggest thing is to keep in contact and be involved. Good things happen if you open your heart and trust and have faith.

Paroled!

The sun rises, and I still can't believe my luck.

It happened too quickly to fully process – one day I'm in a prison, a nice one, with my own room and very little to do all day: after all, inside or outside, we live in COVID times. Then the next day, a polite, dapper man looking at you on a wide screen is telling you that you can move to a halfway house. Three days later, you're there, no lock on the front door, able to go anywhere as long as you tell the disarmingly polite staff exactly where you are going, and for how long...

A smallish room, three beds, masks are around, lunch and dinner served and plentiful... like when you are going out to work everyday. A roommate disappears, likely back to the pokey and you ask no questions... Two weeks of downtime, then you are expected to find a job or activity to get you out of the house.

But what to do? I was a journalist, worked in PR and teaching, spent a lot of time helping out at prison schools during my time inside... COVID has hit the schools, and I don't feel like making a spectacle of myself again and work for a newspaper, even if that were possible. I did reams of translations for people, groups, and the media... But how to translate that into employment after 29 years behind bars? But people do that with a good deal of success...

An Open Door meeting helps. Everyone is happy I'm out, lots of good cheer... Smiling faces on my cell phone screen teach me another lesson on life in 2021. Fact is, under COVID the whole world is a jail. My

guilt over my crime means I'll never be truly free -- but neither will the rest of the world until COVID clears.

I explore the neighbourhood, especially the Dollar Store nearby. Jail provides you with everything you need... Halfway houses give you an allowance and expect you to buy what you need yourself. I shed my state-imposed state of childhood and get slowly used to the expenditure of energy free citizens spend day after day without ever thinking about it.

A friend takes me out for a day in the car. I am driven by my childhood home, the old neighbourhood, not much has changed, at least not as much as I have... And always there are cell phones. I am given one by a church benefactor. The new world is tech-savvy, full of passwords and codes to memorize. You need to be both in shape and smart to live in 2021.

This is a second chance, one I may or may not deserve, but one which I will put my shoulder to the wheel to try my best to make it a success. No choice – I can't go back to the lazy comforts of prison. Just after I left, COVID hit there too, and everything is locked up tight for safety and for safekeeping. Got out just in time. So now it's all about making lemonade out of lemons.

by Anonymous



REJOICE

All the EARTH and mankind rejoice and
Clap your hands
in marvels:
SNOWFLAKES of designs infinite,
whiteness so PURE!
WINDS that sing musical chorus
whistle and groan!
It's power swift to sway
those that cross its path-
to tremble and fear!
The TREES curl, shaken to dance
to shred their vibrant glows

void of colours and shades,
they remain empty-bare!
DEW descends in GENTLENESS
in STILLNESS and SILENCE!!!
But there comes THUNDER and LIGHTNING
showtime for a majestic display.....
likened to bands played
in the splendor of a FLASH!
Drops of WATER falls,
like BLESSINGS from heavens.....
then sudden CHANGE....
to TORRENTS....
like LAUGHTER and JOY of children!
Tarnished EARTH

shines PURE
in the reduction of pollution!
The SKY: remains the background stage
paints curtains of CLOUD formations
milliards in number...
LIGHT sparkling through!

COUNTLESS ARE OUR BLESSINGS...
I wish you
All that are: NOBLE, TRUE, BEAUTIFUL, GOOD,
and SUBLIME
Let HAPPINESS BEAM!

composed by Sr. Francisca r.g.s. on 25th
Nov. 2020.

A Covid Poem by Anonymous

What Would Shakespeare Say

What would Shakespeare say
If he lived in this present day?
Would we hear:
Covid, Covid, Covid:
Creeps in this petty pace
From time to time?
And yet so it is.

It creeps into my sleep,
And wakens me during the night,
And I spend my day in my pajamas,

And shower less.
Yet I am not alone
When boredom strikes
But two simple lessons prevail:
Masks and distance,
Masks and distance,
And oh, will we ever learn?

But Covid...
I took time to smell the roses,
And I even didn't know they were there.
I've learned a lot from Covid...
I've slowed down,
And saw what was in front of me...
Crisis and opportunity,
Crisis and opportunity.

Please support Communitas!

Communitas is a non-profit, volunteer-driven organization which welcomes (ex-)offenders back to the community by supporting them in their social, spiritual, emotional and practical needs.

We rely heavily on support from individual donors like you. The stigma associated with work in this area brings unique financial and other challenges with it and so your contributions are essential in sustaining our important work.

I support Communitas and their programs and am enclosing a donation of:

\$25 \$50 \$100 Other _____

"Tax receipts will be issued for donations of \$20 or more. Please include the following information for that purpose:"

Full name Including middle initial: _____

Address: _____

E-mail: _____



Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) at Communitas: Is it for you?

Communitas is proud to have introduced Circles of Support and Accountability (COSA) to Quebec in 2000 and have provided more than 50 circles since. COSA matches individuals with a history of sexual offending with a group of everyday community members who are committed to helping you navigate the challenges of life in the community and achieve a successful, crime-free life.

If you are interested in hearing more about the possibility of having your own circle, contact:

Monika Barbe 514-244-6147

coordinator@communitasmontreal.org

We would love to hear from you!



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Send your letters to our editor at:
info@communitasmontreal.org

www.communitasmontreal.org

The Sou'Wester name is a reference to Montreal's Southwest, where Communitas began its work in 1999 and is still based today.

 @communitas_MTL
 /communitasmontreal