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the Sou' Wester

A grassroots newsletter on criminal justice & prisoner reintegration

Spring 2022 Edition

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

Saying "Adios" to Monika

page 2

Bissonnette and Lifelong Imprisonment.

page 6

Sou'Wester content competition

page 11

The Communitas Short Story Club

Until Communitas created a reading group, I'd never been attracted to book clubs. Belonging to one, I thought, would entail ploughing to the end of long-popular novels of little interest to me.

Continued on page 2

Remembering Douglas Barnes

It was March 13th, and the soft snow on the side of Mount Royal had hardened into an icy hard ground-covering. A small group of folks were gathering there for one purpose: to remember long-time Communitas member Douglas Barnes. Doug passed away quietly on January 7th.

The group was led by an extremely sympathetic Elder, Tom Dearhouse from Kahnawake, forming a circle around a fire burning in the center. The people, most of whom had not known each other before, then began, one by one, to share their memory of Doug and what they knew of him. They were often very

different, from his love of cars to his love of children, to art etc. Several mentioned his reliability as an excellent worker. The gathering included family, co-workers, and Communitas members.

Doug was somewhat of a legend, a long-term prisoner who used his time inside to develop his artwork. Many of us had seen evidence of this on visits to the La Macaza or on the Communitas office walls. It was for all of us to discover that there were many other aspects to Doug.

Continued on page 3

Father's Day Reflection on Incarcerated Dads.

More than half of the incarcerated men in federal institutions and provincial prisons in Canada are fathers. As Father's Day approaches, it is appropriate that we look at one program in place across the country that seeks to help dads inside.

Dad HERO is one of many programs run by the Canadian Families and Corrections Network (CFCN) that aims to help families inside and out of corrections facilities.

Continued on page 5

The Communitas Short Story Club

Continued from page 1

But then, heralded by an email from Michaela, its initiator, the Communitas Short Story Club was launched, and I gave it second thoughts. First, it was a club focusing on short stories. Secondly, since the culture of Communitas is “outside the box” and not inviting pressure, I expected to hear points of view, sincerely expressed by people given to independent thought, on works not always included in the canon of book clubs (I admit to certain prejudice when it comes to Communitas).

I was not disappointed. The stories selected by group members were invariably of great interest and thought-provoking. I was introduced to Ursula K. Le Guin, a great writer of science fiction. Discussion was of the highest order as participants tried to meld the works of fiction with their own worldview. And there was no pressure. If you hadn't read the story in advance, you could hear it read aloud there at the meeting. Ten pages were the maximum length of the stories and they were emailed to participants in advance.

The Short Story Club was scheduled to run for six weeks till May 11th. After that Michaela would be leaving Montreal. Because of Covid, one meeting had to be cancelled and because of personal stuff, I could only attend twice.

The meetings were on Zoom. The two that I attended and all of the short stories were delightful.

The formula of the Communitas Short Story Club has great potential. Not only does it provide entertainment, but it also allows everyone to participate at their own rhythm and encourages the exchange of ideas. I hope that it will continue and expand to include members of our community whose freedom is curtailed.

Marlyn



Saying “Adios” to Monika

Monika became Communitas’ administrative coordinator in 2018 and stepped down from her Communitas responsibilities as of March 31st, 2022. In this article, she reflects on her time at Communitas. We thank Monika for her talents and her time with us and wish her success in her future endeavours. Monika remains a member of Communitas.

On accountability

During my years as Coordinator at Communitas, I learned so many things. Looking back, I think that when I was in the field, I didn't realize how much was happening, how much I was learning: from putting together an agenda for a Board meeting, and participating in said meetings, to following up on the financial health of an organization (and becoming good friends with Excel on the way). From learning how to take pub-

lic transportation to B16 (Laval), to communicating with CSC staff and going into different prisons in and around Montreal so I could work closely with people who were experiencing or had experienced incarceration.

It was a lot, and I am happy it happened. As you can imagine, learning all these things (if learning is ever a finite process... but that is a different conversation) not only took time but it also took being able to let things unfold, including skills, just in time... and not one second before, even if that comes with a certain messiness, tension, discomfort.

I think this lesson cut across every aspect of my job, and I believe it has everything to do with accountability, which might just be my favourite value. Accountability opens the door to acknowledging responsibility, consequences, and many times harm; it is only with accountability that we can address the needs that harm causes. And accountability invited me to see all those things (actions, consequences, messiness, discomfort, etc.) happening within me, and I saw (felt, is more like it) the importance of taking care of our own wounds... to be accountable to ourselves.

Yes, that is my favourite lesson from my experience with Communitas.

Monika



Communitas Welcomes a New Board Member

Communitas held its Annual General Meeting on May 25th, 2022 via Zoom. The AGM saw the election of a new board member as well as the re-election of six current board members. All were unanimously acclaimed.

The returning board members are Michele (Chair), Steve (Vice-chair), Roch (Treasurer), Jeri (Secretary), Pauline and Sabrina. The newest board member is Dave, who has been active in Communitas for several years. Dave brings valuable experience with him to the Board. He works as a gerocriminologist for Oxygen Services, a non-profit organization that supports older offenders serving long criminal sentences. He has worked in the field of social rehabilitation for 35 years in various settings: hospitals, prisons and halfway houses.

Peter Huish continues to serve on the board as an honorary member.

The board is assisted in its work by a Coordination Team comprised of Peter, Jeri and Bill.

Bill

Remembering Douglas Barnes

Continued from page 1



He was a hardworking man who worked in construction, installing drywall, doing carpentry and other related work. No matter how ill he might have been – it was very difficult to get Dougie, as he was fondly known, to stop and take a break.

Apart from his art, another passion in his life was his Mustang motorcar! Doug was determined over the years that he would buy a Mustang – and sure enough, he did, and it was his pride and joy. As his lawyer attested during the ceremony, he fought the bureaucrats tooth and nail to keep that car, even in the toughest times – and he succeeded in the end.

Doug attended Open Door infrequently – often not able to make it due to his work schedule. However, whenever he came,

he would sit quietly near a corner and just enjoy the evening. Many people would seek him out during the break to catch up and have a chat. For someone so talented he was a very modest man.

The gathering concluded with a chant and a prayer, followed by food for the cold and hungry group as they warmed themselves around the fire.

Douglas Barnes was involved with Communitas in one way or another for some twenty years. He was a talented artist, and

two of his paintings grace the walls of the Communitas office – **Two Bears** and **The Eagle**.

He will be missed by many – family, work-mates and by those in Communitas with whom he shared a close friendship.

Prints of The Eagle have been made available for sale by his family for the benefit of Communitas' work.



News From the Inside

I'll begin with the good news. The minimum prison at St. Anne de Plaines has restarted almost all of the activities that had been cancelled since March of 2020 because of the pandemic.

Even the outing of detainees, to Open Door has been scheduled for the third Tuesday of every month.

The Laval prisons are not yet so fortunate. There have been several starts made to programs inside the pen, but each time, another case of increased COVID numbers has caused another cancellation. We have been holding our breaths on word from the planning committee in Laval to decide on the re-

opening of the outings for Open Door from Montée St. Francois.

Recognition is due to the various chaplains from the prisons who have worked so hard to achieve this progress and who keep us constantly informed.

We now are left, however, with an urgent shortage of volunteer drivers to bring inmates, once per month from one of the pens in either Laval or St. Anne de Plaines.

This just in! We have learned, just as the deadline for the Sou'Wester arrived, that outings from the Federal Training Centre in Laval for Open Door have been approved and will begin this summer. Also, Chapel visits by our volunteers will resume at both locations at FTC Laval.





Rajah attends Open Door And other happenings

April 3 was Dr. Jane Goodall's birthday. We all know her as the woman who has spent her life working with chimpanzees and gorillas in East Africa. Jane's love for animals began early in life, so much so that it led to her parents discovering that she would even bring earthworms into her bed at night! The exhibition "Becoming Jane", currently in Los Angeles, features her first teddy bear, a tattered little bear who must be 85 years old since Jane turned 88 in April. That led Jeri, participating remotely from her parent's home in Saskatchewan, to introduce her own first teddy bear to Open Door, almost as old and just as tattered as Jane's. Neither of her older brothers was interested in him, but when he was presented to Jeri, she felt sorry for him because he had a tear in his eye. Rajah became her childhood companion.



Rajah, stuffed Open Door participant.

The Spiritual Moment then moved on to a video supplied by Leigh, showing that when rats are tickled, they laugh. We can't hear their laughter, but scientists use high-frequency sensors to be able to hear their little laughter. "These rats are happy when we tickle them," the scientist concluded.

"Does anyone have any thoughts arising from the Spiritual Moment?"

Donald answered, "How can those rats be happy living in a cage? In prison, we also laughed together but that doesn't mean that we were happy. Those scientists are misusing the word happy for what happens when they tickle the rats in their cages."

On April 12, we celebrated the rare occurrence of Holy Week, Passover, and Ramadan all occurring at the same time. Peter gave an overview of the significance of Lent and Holy Week for Christians, Steve talked about the origins of Passover (The Ten Commandments with Charleston Heston taught us that the angel of death passed over any house whose doorway was smeared with lamb's blood). Then our guest speaker at Open Door, psychology PhD candidate Mimosa, was asked (without warning) to tell us about her observance of Ramadan. She surprised us by saying that during Ramadan, it is believed that the devil goes on holiday, so whatever bad things you do are your fault. Don't say that the devil made you do them!

In another spiritual moment we talked about the lovely sounds of nature. Steve commented, "In the middle ages, villages were always in close proximity to forests, and the birds in the forest were so loud that they drove the villagers CRAZY." We can't assume that what we appreciate now was always appreciated.

On April 26 it was a joy to see Communitas' former community chaplain, Bob Bergner, after many years. He joined us on Zoom from the U.S. where he's involved in a group called Swords to Ploughshares. He told us about a children's baseball team that raffled off a semi-automatic weapon as a fundraiser for their team, and this so enraged a church pastor that he bought up all the tickets and won it. He then used it as a tool in speeches all over the country about the sorry state of gun culture in the United States. Bob and his church have taken up this work by collecting unwanted guns and transforming them into gardening tools, which they sell to people who generally do not use them for gardening, but to display and make a point (although he would have preferred if they were used for community gardening as intended).

Erandy and Paul led us in our first ever evening of Jeopardy at Open Door. What is the name for the dot on top of the i and the j? What is the largest country in Africa? Which car logo is this? We knew the car logos and the big country of Algeria, but none of us knew that the dot on the i and the j is called a tittle. The evening was full of competition and laughter, and we'd like to do it again.

Good things come in threes: we welcomed for a third time our friends Neal and Jason (on separate evenings). Documentary filmmaker Neal Rockwell spoke to us about his latest project, an exploration of The Commons (resources available to all), while World Bank employee Jason Spensley gave us the Bank's view on the top five threats to humanity. Number one is Climate Change Inaction, and others include pandemics, destruction of the environment and loss of biodiversity. Threats such as terrorism, cyber security failure, and digital power concentration are far down the list.



Communitas Welcomes Dutch Law Students to Montreal

Communitas welcomed some 30 members of the law faculty from the Legal Experience Committee within the Law Faculty Study Association VU University Amsterdam, at Fulford Hall on 25 April 2022.

They were visiting Montreal for a few weeks looking to broaden their views of law and reintegration from a Canadian perspective, and reached out to Communitas among others. They were specifically interested in receiving a tour, a presentation about our organization and information on what it is that we do on a daily basis.

Communitas quickly accepted their invitation and put together a detailed presentation of our programs as well as information on the Canadian legal context in which we operate.

Five members of the Board of Directors attended the meeting, (Michele; Steve; Roch;

Jeri; Peter (Hon.)) as well as Communitas staff (Bill and Natasha(intern)).

The afternoon started at around 2.15 pm with a crowd of Dutch students (all masked) flooding into the atrium where Peter was waiting to greet them. Fulford Hall (sides A and B) were already prepared from the day before with chairs spaced out safely, and the microphones and projector pre-tested and ready to go. A big thanks to Christ Church Cathedral for the use of the space!

Once everyone was settled into their seats, the afternoon began with a welcome and introductions by Michele and then we launched straight into Steve's talk about the way in which the Canadian legal system operates. There were many questions raised by the students, especially ones comparing the Dutch legal system to what obtains in Cana-

da. Students were horrified to hear about the number of men under a life sentence in Canada ('000s) given the number in the Netherlands is in the thirties. On the other hand, they were very impressed by the Canadian system of gradual release to the community – from temporary absences to halfway houses to full parole.

After Steve had answered all the questions, Jeri stepped up in her inimitable way to present Communitas – its history and programmes. Again there were many questions raised and we all took turns in explaining the impact and reasons for the various programs – from Open Door to In-reach, to Table Talk to Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) etc.

One and a half hours after we sat down, and before we knew it the afternoon was over! The students expressed their appreciation for all the effort put into providing them with such a comprehensive program and were extremely complimentary about the work that Communitas undertakes.

Farewells were expressed all around, the students helped to put away the chairs and we were all wrapped up and out of there by 4.45 pm.

An afternoon well spent!

Michele

Father's Day Reflection on Incarcerated Dads.

Continued from page 1

The Dad HERO program began in 2018 and is now present in seven institutions in Quebec, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia. It receives funding from the Movember Foundation.

The CFCN website describes the project this way: "The project is designed to educate and teach dads about parenting, how children grow, and why their children need them. CFCN has spent a great deal of time researching and building a lot of great exercises and activities to help dads learn in a fun way about the father-child bond, how to communicate with their child and how to work with a co-parent.

"It starts with an 8-week parenting course that is offered in the institutions over and over again. From there the men will move into a Dad Group in the prison that will meet regularly to keep them connected about something positive – their children!

"The project also offers a Dad Group on the outside - to continue to help men in our communities. This group is for dads who have been in jail, federally or provincially in the past, to focus on community parenting issues."

Dad HERO stands for Helping Everyone Realize Opportunities. The website goes on to say: "Being a dad doesn't stop because you are incarcerated. It's not just a title, it's a job, and each dad has many positives that they can offer their children, and their families. We want them to recognize that, to increase their confidence, and stay connected to build resiliency toward their well-being and successful family reunification."

CBC radio recently ran a feature report on Dad HERO called Fatherhood interrupted which can be found here by clicking on the link: <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/interactives/docproject/fatherhood-interrupted>.

More information on Dad HERO and the Canadian Families and Correction Network can be found at

<https://www.cfcn-rcafd.org/home>

or by mail and telephone at:

**PO BOX 35040, Kingston,
ON K7L 5S5**

1-888-371-2326.

Bill

Bissonnette and Life-Long Imprisonment.

The basic contours of our criminal law's response to the ultimate crime were drawn in 1976 when capital punishment was abolished, and major innovations since have been infrequent. In 2011 the sentencing landscape received a tectonic jolt as the Harper Conservatives reimagined key parts of the terrain in their own image, sowing the seeds of a reckoning which the Supreme Court of Canada delivered only days ago in *R. v. Bissonnette*, with profound implications for the present and the future.

A fundamental tenet of Canadian law which has stood the test of time is that all murders are answered by a mandatory life sentence—and to clear up a misconception cherished by many a journalist, no, that instrument of lifelong control does not disperse into the ether when release is obtained. The contentious issue has always been, and today remains, the associated periods of ineligibility for (full) parole. For first degree murder, this is 25 years; for second degree, it is ten, unless the sentencing judge, having considered the jury's recommendation, chooses to increase it to any number up to 25—and if there was a previous conviction for murder, the imposition of 25 years becomes mandatory.

While complaints are heard in some quarters that 25 years of parole ineligibility is inadequate to reflect the seriousness of first degree murder, a study by Prof. Alan Manson shows that prior to 1976, Canada's ineligibility periods were decidedly more punitive than those in other western countries; post-1976, Prof. Adelina Iftene, writing in the *Criminal Law Quarterly* (August 2021), has referred us to a 2020 study of the sentence for murder in comparable western countries which reveals our ineligibility periods as among the longest. What is more, research recently published by criminologist Jane Sprott and law professors Debra Parkes and Isabel Grant finds that the judge-imposed ineligibility peri-

ods for second degree murder have been increasing since 1977, as has the length of time before parole is achieved after statutory eligibility has been reached.

Still, looking over our shoulders at our excited neighbours to the south, Canadians will note with pride that there is one species of punishment found in many American jurisdictions which the Canadian system has never embraced—life without parole. After all, have we not said that every Canadian sentence has a definite parole eligibility date?

But not so fast. What if that date should be set so far in the future that death is almost certain to intervene before eligibility is reached? Is that not also a sentence of life-long incarceration? Such was the intention and harrowing effect of The Protecting Canadians by Ending Sentence Discounts for

“No crime, no matter how appalling it might be, can justify imposing a punishment that is intrinsically incompatible with human dignity, like a sentence of imprisonment for life without a realistic possibility of parole.”

Multiple Murders Act, which amended the Criminal Code in 2011 to read,

“At the time of the sentencing (...) of an offender who is convicted of murder and who has already been convicted of one or more other murders, the judge (...) may, having regard to the character of the offender, the nature of the offence and the circumstances surrounding its commission, and the recommendation, if any [of the jury], by order, decide that the periods without eligibility for parole for each murder conviction are to be served consecutively.”(Criminal Code s.745.51(1))

In the jargon which emerged, sentencing judges were empowered to ‘stack’ ineligibility periods, so that each term being imposed would only start to run after other periods had been served in full.

Now equipped with a devastating tool, the courts set about wielding it. Prof. Iftene's research uncovered 53 cases adjudicating

multiple murders between the amendment's introduction and May 27, 2020. Of these, 47 involved a single transaction, and in 25 of those, the judge elected to stack parole ineligibility periods. Of the 25, 45% involved ineligibility of at least fifty years. Once one factors in the offender's age at conviction and the impact of prison on life expectancy, and parole panels' reservations in the face of institutionalization, it is clear the Correctional Service is administering a category of sentence for which the prospect of release is illusory, if not in law, then certainly in practice; while at the same time expecting offenders deprived of hope to remain docile and compliant as they sleepwalk through the stagnant years pointing toward nothing but death. That a penological regime of this cruelty would find its way to the Supreme Court was as foreseeable as the change of the seasons. It

is unfortunate that the case destined to lead the attack revolved around such truly infamous events.

The facts are notorious. A young man, long wrestling with thoughts of killing and suicide, carried two firearms into the Quebec City Great Mosque and shot 11 worshippers—by his account, to express opposition to Muslim terrorism. Six victims died. In Quebec Superior Court he pled guilty to six attempted murders and six first degree murders and received the mandatory life sentence. The Crown asked for parole ineligibility to be set at 150 years, being six consecutive blocks of 25 years, a proposition Judge Huot deemed outrageous. Of the view that even two stacked blocks of 25 years would be disproportionate and an affront to dignity, violating sections 7 and 12 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms; whereas 40 years would be both appropriate and constitutionally valid, the judge employed the well-established adjudicative technique of ‘reading down’ to interpret 745.51(1) of the Criminal Code as if it permitted varying periods as defined by the sentencing judge to be used when imposing consecutive periods.

Bissonnette appealed his 40 year ineligibility period. On November 26, 2020, the Quebec Court of Appeal found that

a statutory provision which bestows on judges the possibility of imposing lifelong ineligibility is cruel and unusual treatment or punishment, a violation of s.12 of the Charter. As to the remedy, because Parliament, anxious to avoid the impression that one life has been valued more highly than another, intentionally declined to allow judges to redefine the term of the second and succeeding blocks, the Appeal Court ruled that the Superior Court's solution of 'reading down' s.745.51 was not available, and struck down the Harper government's consecutive block scheme as a whole, leaving the appellant with the basic parole ineligibility period of 25 years. As of that date, new offenders in Quebec could not be sentenced to more than 25 years of parole ineligibility, while offenders outside Quebec might receive multiple consecutive blocks of 25 years. This intolerable situation left Justice Canada with an obligation to seek a ruling binding on the entire country.

Enter, the Supreme Court of Canada. In a judgment released on May 27, 2022, a unanimous full bench decided that s.745.51, properly interpreted, allows only full ineligibility periods to be made consecutive, such that its least severe application creates a 50 year term. It then approved Prof. Iftene's view that 50 years would prove to be lifelong ineligibility for some, and went on to rule that a life sentence bereft of the realistic possibility of release is inherently degrading and an affront to human dignity, presuming as it does that this offender is without worth and can

never be rehabilitated. In the Chief Justice's words, "The horror of the crimes (...) does not negate the basic proposition that all human beings carry within them a capacity for rehabilitation..." and by depriving offenders from the outset of any possibility of reintegration, "745.51 shakes the very foundations of Canadian criminal law."

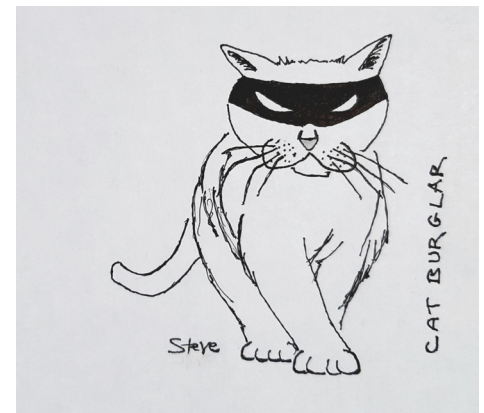
"No crime, no matter how appalling it might be, can justify imposing a punishment that is intrinsically incompatible with human dignity, like a sentence of imprisonment for life without a realistic possibility of parole. Since such a punishment must quite simply be excluded from the arsenal of punishments available to the state, the mere possibility that it may be imposed constitutes an infringement of s. 12 of the Charter. By way of analogy, a provision authorizing corporal punishment as a sentence for the commission of multiple murders — a sentence that would be imposed at a court's discretion and reserved for the vilest of criminals — could not, for obvious reasons, be held to be consistent with s. 12 of the Charter. The same conclusion must apply here."

The Court declared Criminal Code s.745.51 of no force or effect from the time of its adoption in 2011: "The applicable law is therefore the law that existed prior to that date." In light of this ruling, it is hard to imagine that any other offender now burdened with a parole ineligibility period greater than 25 years who applied to their province's superior court would not see that term rolled back.

What if this or a future government attempts an end run? What would be the constitutional status of new legislation for multiple murders extending the basic period of 25 years to 28? Speaking to the Sou'Wester, Simon Boris, one of the counsel who pleaded the case explains that Bissonnette was designed to yield certain specific answers; others remain to be written:

"At para 71, the Court specifically noted that 'Whether it is unconstitutional for a court to impose any ineligibility period greater than 25 years is therefore not at issue in this case.' [But] I also note the Court's comments in para 141, where they say, 'For the objective of rehabilitation to be meaningful, every inmate must have a realistic possibility of applying for parole, at the very least earlier than the expiration of the minimum ineligibility period of 50 years stipulated in the impugned provision for cases involving first degree murders.'"

Steve



Poem

Cancer

Can we expect GOD to care?
Because our past Makes our future,
Hoping tomorrow's news
Is better than today's.

He is a shadow of himself
Anger is held within
My feelings I must keep inside
This keeps me grounded

I cry myself to sleep
So much pain.

When push comes to shove
He is my hero.
Days go over and over
It's all the same.

He does not let the cancer consume him.
All I can do is pray
And pray some more.

*Thank you all for
Your prayers
It really helps.*

Alan

Stories from Open Door: From the Inside Out



Michaela

24 Nov 2020 Misinformation: From Roman Times to the Present

I heard about CoSA circles while listening to a podcast and that led me to Communitas. I keep coming back because I learn something new every week. It's great seeing how people care for each other.

I really enjoyed Michael's presentations on the Tree of Life, and Fraser's interactive presentations were hilarious, especially the one about ravens. I offered a presentation on the history of misinformation from Roman times up to the present day. Social media accelerates and intensifies the spread of misinformation. I also offered members of Open Door a six-week workshop on Digital Literacy.

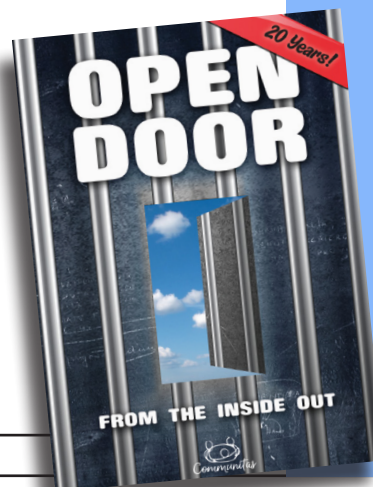
My understanding of offender reintegration has not changed so much as deepened.

I've always been on the side of restorative justice, although I didn't have a name for it before. What I learned from Open Door is that it's possible to create these spaces for people and the only way to do so is to bring people together. It's life-affirming to see people come together to do good.

I like reading, playing cards with friends and biking. I have a vintage 70's bike – it's Gatorade blue with gold detail. I officially graduated and am beginning a year-long fellowship that will allow me to continue

to volunteer with Communitas and learn from them. I'm inspired by how this community gets things done.

I have a vintage 70's bike – it's Gatorade blue with gold detail



Use the following link to order a copy of **Open Door: From the Inside Out**

<https://communitasmontreal.org/open-door-from-the-inside-out-a-book-celebrating-20-years/>



David Austin

Author and Professor

7 Sep 2010 Study of Montreal's Black Community • 10 Mar 2009
Violence: The How and Why (including a look at the works of Frantz Fanon) •
28 Oct 2008 Continuing research on Black Population in Montreal
• 21 Aug 2008 McGill Project: Montreal's Black Community

The first time I dropped in to Open Door, I introduced myself and said I was doing a study at McGill on the black population in Montreal. Everybody started asking questions and I ended up being the speaker for the whole evening!

The dynamics of the prison system are not fully appreciated. Age 15 is the crucial age. It can happen much earlier than that, but 15 is the last stage of innocence. It happens so fast. The social dynamics, the social inequalities, the systemic forms of day-to-day marginalization: they accumulate—and here I am speaking particularly about Black youth and members of the Black community, but Indigenous peoples obviously also have a similar but very specific experience—as part of what I refer to as the plantation-to plant-to project-to prison pipeline, which is of course tied to policing. Identity is connected to class. Affluent people don't experience the judicial system in the same way as people who are poor. Statistics tell us a story but it's the analysis that's important. Who's excluded, who's incarcerated, and who are the police in conflict with. When you have limited resources,

Age 15 is the crucial age. It can happen much earlier than that, but 15 is the last stage of innocence.

your very existence is called into question.

A bit of space has opened up post-George Floyd. This has opened up a space to thinking of the carceral system in general. It is important to take advantage of spaces like that, because these doors don't stay open for long.

I was a community organizer and youth worker, and now that my own children are older, I feel the need to go back to that work in one form or another, to be more involved in the community. As someone who teaches in academic institutions, I see the benefits

and drawbacks in theorizing and writing. One of the drawbacks is that research on prisons is often too abstract and sometimes self-serving, and especially now given the interest in the carceral system. But I think there are many people who are doing good and meaningful work on and in prisons, etc.

I have recently interviewed black folks who are inside or have been recently released from prison, as well as others who have had significant problems with the Canadian legal system. A final version of the study will be coming out soon.

Sou'Wester interview



The Sou'Wester interviews Sammy

by Leigh

SW: Where did you grow up?

Sammy: In Ahuntsic.

SW: What was your favourite thing to do as a child?

Sammy: Hang around in the park. Whatever amusement there was, we did it (laughs).

SW: Did you have a favourite toy or thing to do, anything like that?

Sammy: Not necessarily. We were kids, you know, we did whatever was available in those days. We're talking 65 years ago (laughs). Swings, things that you pushed, the spinning things and um, crow bars to flip things over, anything, plus we had our bicycles, and the park there had a gully, you know. We'd bike down and up in the gully. It was great fun! In general, this was our activity at night. Where I lived we were sort of closed off from St. Laurence, and the metropolitan and the two railroad tracks. So, in that area, we were kind of closed in, and all the children in the neighbourhood came there to play.

SW: I heard that giving a good impression is important to you, so what's the secret to looking good?

Sammy: Try to dress decent. As far as food I don't abuse it because that's no good. I don't eat a lot of meat. I eat a lot of vegetables, fish, and this and that. It's a health thing, it's not just to look good. It keeps you fit. As

far as clothes are concerned, I wear everything that other people wear, maybe I match it better or it looks better, it's just a question of how to match things. Mainly that's what I look at. Like I said, it's a matter of knowing how to choose them. With age you kind of learn what fits and what doesn't fit. Some people might be wearing the same clothes but they wear it shabby, and it doesn't look good.

SW: What's your greatest achievement?

Sammy: My greatest? Oh boy.

SW: Or what were you most happy for?

Sammy: Well, I was happy with my parents, when my parents were alive. We had a good rapport, it was decent, we had a decent place to live. We lived more like regular society. Not rich not poor, but decent. When I was young, we had a good time. My parents were good parents, so I enjoyed that part of life. With my mother, she loved gardening, and when she got older I used to help her. And it gave me pleasure to help her because she enjoyed that. It was part of giving back, you know, when she was young and did everything, and I sort of gave back to her help when she needed it.

SW: I understand you don't have a garden now - would you like to?

Sammy: Probably in a few years maybe, I'm still active enough. I'm getting older and a garden would be nice, to pass the time, and it gives you food. Especially with the economy the way it is, I think a lot of people are going into gardening and trying to save or find ways of saving money. It's getting tough on a lot of people. Like we were saying at the meeting tonight, you might blame the oil companies for the inflation and this and that, but I mean, if people didn't want the inflation to go up, if everyone stopped taking their cars to work, you would see that the prices of oil would go down automatically. Oil companies wouldn't have anything to do with that oil. So, it's up to us to force them, you know, not to gouge in prices. Because we would show them "Hey, you wanna charge so much? Ok, so we're not buying no more." You have to fight them. The government doesn't give two cents, because the higher oil goes or the higher food goes, the more taxes they make. So, they're in cahoots, they're making much more money now than they were before. The only way to beat them is not to buy their product. If everybody stopped buying meat, the farmers are going to have a lot of meat on their hands, and what are they gonna do with it?

Sell it at a cheaper price. It's a chain reaction. If people don't fight the government, or don't fight these oil companies, it's never gonna go down. You have to have people that are ready to sacrifice for the freedom of having something available that's a decent price. You don't expect to get things for free, but at a decent price. With milk and dairy farms and all that, they're stuck in a situation, because even if the cows produce more milk, they can only sell a certain amount. The other amount they gotta throw it away. This is the government. Why? All that extra, do something with it! Don't throw it away. There should be some kind of system, give it to poor people, to other countries... The farmer can't even sell it to somebody that goes there, who wants a gallon of milk. He's not allowed to sell it. It's only to protect the price. If there's too much milk on the market, the price goes down. We're stuck in this situation, unless there's a huge amount of people that protest. And you don't have to protest in the street, just don't buy it! That's it! ...It's all calculated so that they make more money.

SW: I heard you bring Italian sausages to the Christmas party, do you like to cook? What kind of recipes?

Sammy: Well, Italian cooking. I can make sauce for pasta, I can make ragu. Sausages aren't hard to cook, either on the grill or chopped up. Then you can add peppers and onions and celery and a whole mishmash, it makes a nice meal. Like I said, with my mom with the garden and everything, we used to grab fresh fruits and vegetables, this and that, and cut them up. When I was young, we would make good meals. I was cooking the other night, they were showing shows of Julia... what was her name? Julia Roberts?

SW: Julia Child?

Sammy: She was a cook but a long time ago, and she had studied in France and went back to the States and she did television shows, and they were very popular in those days. Now they're reshowing some of her shows. It's fascinating how she did the shows and all that. You have to cook, like I said, the right way. You can't eat fat stuff all the time. You need a bit of the fat for the taste. Fat is what gives you the taste, unfortunately (laughs). A lot of people seem to think it's only chicken that's not fattening, but there are other cuts of meat that aren't fattening either. It's a matter of how you cook it.

SW: What are you grateful for?

Samy: To be alive (laughs). I could have been dead a few times. I mean, with accidents and this and that. When we were kids, you know, when you're a child you don't pay attention to dying. That's the last thing that comes up in your head – is to have an accident and die – and you take risks that are crazy. It's like they were showing on CNN, some children running on a train track, just to run around.

For that sense, I have good genes that my parents gave me I guess, and I've never been really sick, and still today I feel good for my age. Pretty well my life has been good, I can't complain for that. There's a lot of other things to complain about, but not as far as that's concerned. I take it day to day. Listen, we all know we're gonna die someday, the thing is to postpone it as much as possible (laughs). This is what one has to

think. You're not going to be thinking of dying every day, either. You're gonna try your best and keep fit, be nice to people, and be comforting with anybody that needs comfort. This way, you try and avoid problems.

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Sou'Wester Competition!



The Sou'Wester is launching a competition inviting all who wish to submit a creative piece to be considered for publication in our newsletter. There will be a first, second and third prize awarded to the winners and runners up. All genre of entries is encouraged – short story; poems; art; cartoons; etc.

The Communitas Editorial Committee members will be the judges, and the competition will run until March 31, 2023.

First, Second and Third prize winners will have their entries published in the following editions of the Sou'Wester: Summer 2022; Fall 2022; Winter 2022; Spring 2023 as appropriate.

Deadlines for the first competition will be announced.

Entries should be sent via e-mail to :

Communications@communitasmontreal.org

or by mail to:

Communitas,
1444 Union Avenue,

Montreal Quebec,
H3A 2B8.

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

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