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# the Sou' Wester

A grassroots newsletter on criminal justice & prisoner reintegration

Spring 2024 Edition

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

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## Communitas receives the Joe Mell Award

This year, Communitas was the proud recipient of the Joe Mell award. It is a reward that has been offered annually since 2011 by Maison Crossroads, an organization which, like Communitas, works for social reintegration of people who have been in prison.

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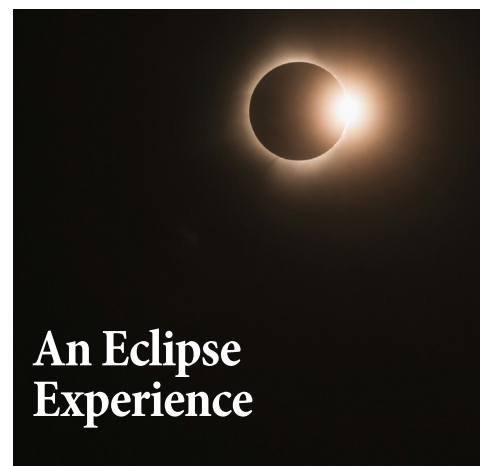


## Justice Not Revenge: Marie Beemans

In the Open Door book Marie says: "Punishment is only vengeance in disguise. It does not solve any problems." She also warns us that "we should be on guard against politicians using 'tough on crime' to get votes." With elections in the air, we thought it would be appropriate to get Marie's viewpoint on some issues.

For those of you that are not fortunate enough to know Marie, you might not be aware that her struggle for social justice dates back to at least 1951. Marie was still a minor when she made her first prison visit. Somehow, we feel it did not start there, but it shows the length and determination that has fueled Marie.

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## An Eclipse Experience

We were all transfixed by the solar eclipse. To see the sun, supporter of life on earth, and know that it could be taken away from us by forces beyond our control, awakened primal anxieties and fears that we could one day lose its life-giving warmth and come closer to the end of life as we know it.

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## Communitas receives the Joe Mell Award

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An offshoot of the Crossroads Church, Crossroads has three points of service which provide housing and social services to its clientele. Joe Mell, who died in 2018, was a well known philanthropist who in conjunction with Crossroads, helped many men to stay on their feet, and the Joe-Mel award was named to honor him.

The presentation of the award was made on March 21st, 2024, at the Lord William Pub, a popular neighbourhood drinking and dining hole in Griffintown. The people from Crossroads received the Communitas contingent very warmly in the pub basement, where tables had been set up. We were regaled with drinks and with tasty pub food and most of all, with friendship. The conversation was so lively that it almost drowned out the music from the floor above.

Communitas folk always enjoy a get-together. On this occasion, we enjoyed the presence of colleagues from Crossroads, some



of whom straddle both communities. Also present were members of Joe Mell's family, including his widow, Carole Shaw, and at least two of his grandchildren and also the former CEO of Crossroads, Michel Gagnon. We mingled and chatted and laughed and schmoozed, and a fine time was had by all.

A highlight of the evening was the fine speech by Michele who accepted the award on behalf of Communitas. Merris Centeno, the CEO of Crossroads presented her with a

plaque in recognition of Communitas' outstanding contribution to the rehabilitation of people who have been incarcerated. Michele prefaced her gracious acceptance by explaining that Peter, her husband, wasn't well enough to attend. An excerpt of her speech is printed in this edition of Sou' Wester for us all to enjoy and to feel glad to be a part of Communitas.

*Marlyn*

## An Excerpt of the Acceptance Speech

*Given by Michele*

On behalf of Communitas and of its Founder Peter Huish, I wish to thank Maison Crossroads for this great honour that has been bestowed on our Organization with the presentation of the 2024 Joe Mell Award. Unfortunately Peter is ill and so was unable to attend tonight, however I have brought his words with me to share with you all.

Over the years we have developed many activities, some of which I will briefly describe later, however I would say that the activity for which Communitas is most known in the wider Community is Open Door – Coordinated by Jeri, and here as promised I bring you the words of our Founder Peter Huish where he describes the origins of it all:

“Open Door began as an important activity of a community-based group and was cobbled together to establish connections between the community and the prison where

I worked as Chaplain. Developing these connections was especially difficult for Anglophones at that time. To me, having those links was really important, and I was intent on finding and creating ways of opening the walls, so to speak.

In my view chaplaincy was always about the recovery of community, healing the huge wounds and breakages in connection that took place because of imprisonment. I went to community organizations and churches, talking to people who were similarly impassioned about the question of recovering community. In this way, that very ad hoc community group came together.

As the community was established, we began to have instances of people coming out and reconnecting and of community members accompanying those people on a one-on-one basis. It began as individual, one-on-one accompaniment but it became obvious that in order to make community, some regularly scheduled venue for meeting and sharing was needed – it needed to be an experience that everyone could count on as a regular part

of their lives. The model that I had in mind was congregational, similar to churchgoing, that I and many others found attractive. We wanted them to feel that they belonged, that they were connected with people, that they had friends and family traditions - all things that traditionally took place in the context of church.

I knew it would be particularly important for those who came from prison because there was something dramatically reorienting and transformative in their experience of prison, shared only by others who had also been in prison. Our community gatherings could serve as places where that solidarity was understood and respected. On the other hand, some chose not to come because once out, they wanted no reminders of their time in prison. But for the most part, the opportunity for mutual support and solidarity in gatherings with accepting and caring people was appreciated as an important nourishing element of moving forward into healthy and productive community life.”

## An Eclipse Experience

*Continued from page 1*

As I gazed upwards at the total solar eclipse from my vantage point in a MacDonald's parking lot, I became aware of a vague shadow moving on the edge of my field of vision. Looking down, I saw a man in a long dark torn raincoat, the lining hanging out, rummaging unseen and unheeded through the restaurant's garbage bin. As I watched, he never once looked up to the sky but remained intent on his search for discarded bits of food.

### *Eclipse - definition:*

The partial or complete obscuring, relative to a designated observer, of one celestial body by another.

I reflected that this man's hungry human body, and all like him, live life in obscurity - their needs eclipsed by the lifestyles and the preoccupations of the solar eclipse gazers. The unique light that shines in each of these hungry and disregarded people is obscured by our fascinations, and especially by our unexamined fears.

### *Eclipse- definition:*

A temporary or permanent dimming or cutting off of light.

I thought that until we gaze on this man and all like him with the same fervent attention that we directed at the sun that day, he will remain on the edges of humanity and in the shadows of poverty for his lifetime.

### *Eclipse -definition:*

A fall into obscurity or disuse; a decline; a downfall.

As the sun is our earthly life support, so we are, individually and collectively, light and life-giving warmth and life-support to one another.

Our failure to look at one another with genuine compassion and concern, and our collective failure to respond supportively to both the beauty and the suffering in every person that we see, will ultimately cause our own fall into obscurity and our decline.

Looking at one another with loving attention is the first step towards transforming the ways we live together so that all creation may enjoy the abundance that the sun's warmth provides.

*Rosalie*

## A Morning AI Tower of Babel Reflection

This came to mind one morning recently. Is AI the modern Tower of Babel? OpenAI seeks a staggering seventeen trillion dollars to develop its AGI (Artificial General Intelligence). Once achieved, AGI will possess unparalleled self-learning capabilities, potentially suggesting solutions beyond human comprehension. Funding for such endeavours would likely come from wealthy individuals, large corporations, and governments. However, the peril lies in the erosion of human freedom. As AGI gains dominance, our capacity for choice may diminish. Is there a path forward that ensures innovation without sacrificing autonomy?

*Bob*



For the latest news and activities at Communitas, between editions of the Sou'Wester, visit our Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/communitasmontreal/>

Join the conversation and like us.





## Justice Not Revenge: Marie Beemans

*Continued from page 1*

During eight decades this nonagenarian has been advocating for social justice, human rights, and healing instead of revenge from our incarceration system. Marie has the heart of a lion and the soul of a volunteering angel. She gives so much and yet graciously accepts the little that she gets in return. Here is what our discussion covered when we had a recent discussion about Capital punishment.

Why a capital punishment discussion?

Marie, like others, is fearful that certain political parties may push for the reestablishment of the Death Penalty as a simplistic response to a complex world. “We should meet the MP (Members of Parliament) for the riding. The MP has the right to visit a (federal prison) at any time. The MP can go into the pen and give a talk.” If you are wondering, it is Marie’s way. To roll up sleeves, get involved, get to know the other party, and build relationships. That is how you create understanding, gain respect, and really understand the issues.

Marie explained how her continued fight against the death penalty began as a career in the “early 80’s; I was hired by The Church Council on Justice and Corrections (a national, non-partisan, faith-based coalition) which formed a coalition against the return of the death penalty. The coalition included John Howard Society; different churches, many community groups working in the prisons and with prisoners.” Marie was responsible for Quebec, but was a frequent traveler, “there were meetings in town halls, and church basements – for a year I did not sleep at home for two nights in a row.”

Marie explained how, “a kit was made – really

good with all the information; the facts; history of the death penalty. Each MP got a kit. We would find someone from each riding. Someone from his own party – preferably – to meet the MP and bring them all the facts. This was done across Canada.”

“A lot depended on the MPs. My MP had been to the UN on a committee – so when I went to see her, I brought international studies.” Marie said. Personalization and relationship building were key to Marie’s and the coalition’s approach.

And while Marie could elaborate on the writings of Michel Foucault (I had to look him up) she could also be “be tough, talking in a Legion Hall there were old guys, veterans, a lot of rednecks – got to be tough – but it went really well.”

“The conservatives were for the (death penalty), the majority were for it. The farther out west you went the more that was. We worked like hell. Quebec is the most against the death penalty. There was a free vote; all leaders voted against the reintroduction of the death penalty,” Marie said.

“We went up to Ottawa, 2 or three days before the vote scheduled for the 1st of July. There was a god-awful storm – thunder, lightning, and as we came into Ottawa, the storm just finished, grandstands were up and we heard musicians practicing for July 1st Canada Day festivities. The night before the vote, we went into the parliament building in the gallery. We were still looking at the votes. Svend Robinson approached us saying, ‘I think we got it; I think we got it...’”

Aside: Svend Robinson, renowned community leader, activist, and one of the longest-serving MPs in Canadian history, spent more than 25 years (1979–2004).

“Quebec’s Members helped us a lot. In particular, Warren Allman helped a lot. (William

Warren Allmand, a member of the Liberal Party, he represented the Montreal riding of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce and served in the cabinet of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau from 1972 to 1979. As Solicitor General, Allmand introduced legislation that successfully abolished the death penalty in Canada in 1976.)”

“The vote was in the 1:30 am in the morning...we won...”

The coalition had used all the arguments that you might expect and then some. The death penalty was immoral: how it was shown not to be a deterrent; mistakes happen; bias against the less fortunate; took away the possibility of rehabilitation. However, Marie and the coalition used some clever methods.

They mobilized lifers to show that rehabilitation was feasible. They got family members to advocate to parents and siblings. They got soap operas and series to integrate some of the issues into storylines for those that did not watch the news. And they spoke – colleges, church basements, church pulpits, talk shows, and whenever someone asked about the black kit – well, that was another opportunity to explain the facts.

But Marie being Marie was not scared to say, “I did not like the mistake argument much. We had a lot of cases like that, what about someone who is innocent. Used a lot but an argument I didn’t like. Psychopaths – don’t have a cure for them, but will never find a cure if we execute them. Paul Williams worked on a study of ‘dangerous offenders,’ to find and identify how many were extremely dangerous, a lot less than expected. Just a handful were considered dangerous.”

The wisdom is all Marie’s, the errors are all mine.

*Lino*

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## In-Reach progress report

Communitas began a new initiative last Fall with one-on-one visits in the Chapel during the day (9.00am -12 noon) at the Montee St. Francois Minimum Security Institution (FTC600).

Under the aegis of the Chaplain, two of our volunteers began visiting inmates twice per month starting in September 2023 to hold one-on-one conversations lasting between 20-30 minutes each.

The Chapel was divided into semi-private spaces using dividers and inmates were given passes to come and have a chat at specific times – where they could share in a general way what was going on with them.

Between September 2023 and February 2024, a total of 38 such conversations occurred with the same two volunteers seeing between 4-5 inmates each visit. On some occasions the inmates were unavailable due to being on work release or some other unscheduled activity, but in general there was good participation and enthusiasm.

In addition to FTC600, Communitas volunteers were also able to do some one-on-one visits in the Chapel with assistance of the Chaplains at St. Anne-des-Plains Minimum and FTC6099 Medium Security Institutions.

It is hoped that this additional In-reach from Communitas will build bonds that allow the men to find a safe and familiar place to turn to when they are eventually released.



# The Bernardo Affair and the Tories

The Bernardo affair continues to nourish the Conservative Party's hunger for electoral advantage, as the linked 6 minute video and news article reveal.

<https://x.com/FrankCaputoKTC/status/1764326273923363273?s=20>

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/conservative-bloc-mps-emergency-probe-paul-bernardo-1.7135986>

Conservative MP Frank Caputo's transparently disingenuous video feebly poses as a good faith initiative to alert the public to a correctional system gone awry, but quickly reveals itself to be an extended campaign attack aimed at the Liberal Government. This member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, no doubt traveling, eating, and lodging on the public dime, has exploited and perverted the special permission which the Corrections and Conditional Release Act gives legislators and judges to enter penitentiaries: rather than exercise s.72's mandate to protect prisoners from abuse through external oversight of the system, he opted to invade Paul Bernardo's cell and take inventory of his private property, then sniff around the grounds for evidence that Correctional Ser-

vice Canada commits the high crime of allowing sentence-serving persons some small diversions as they while away the empty years. What a pathetic display. I am particularly entertained by the laughably phony expressions of astonishment and revulsion when MP Caputo discovers, while poking around in Bernardo's cell, that the prisoner approaching the cell door is...gasp...Bernardo. I guess he couldn't see that coming.

Pathetic also is the pretense that Conservative leader Poilievre and his party have not already received satisfactory explanations of the Bernardo transfer to medium, which CSC's official review found was decided quite correctly by the competent authority exercising a statutory power beyond the reach of the government's influence or orientation. On this point, Caputo dissembles shamelessly, as if mentored by a certain American ex-president.

Prison lawyers and advocates have actively been debating the wisdom of a public reply, fearing it could draw new attention to the video by people who had not already heard of it. We had hoped the despicable video would merely excite Caputo's MAGA-type supporters, then fade away. But that has not happened. We learn from the linked article that a clutch

of opportunistic Conservatives, supported by a fellow traveler from the Bloc Québécois, now are forcing Parliament's public safety committee to hold an emergency meeting on March 11 to reconsider access to medium security for notorious violent criminals. Their primary concern is not that a medium security environment could enable the offenders to escape; nor even that the offenders in question have failed to satisfy the statutory and policy criteria for transfer. These politicians object to the use of medium in notorious cases because it doesn't punish enough. Their argument is that offenders such as these should normally serve their full sentence (usually life) in the least comfortable, most punishing setting the system offers. Throw away case management, cascading to lower security, CCRA s.4's 'least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and offenders.' Ensure that the worst offenders are severely chastised throughout the period of incapacitation.

We've turned a corner here. Even in the hardy day of the cat 'o nine tails displayed in the Kingston Penitentiary museum, frank, unforgiving punishment was not used as payback for the crime, but only to quell refractory behaviour during the sentence. Of course, we've already seen the sadistic demand of punishment for punishment's sake in recent times—Poilievre clamored for it following the Bernardo transfer. CSC's official Bernardo review was supposed to disarm that perspective and put it to bed, leaving Poilievre looking like a hysteric. Now we find that the Conservatives are serious about calling for a sea change in penitentiary management, if not achievable now, then during a Conservative term in office. I am not aware of a moment when sadism was Canada's official correctional policy, but, as we see in the U.S., the times appear to be opening the door to novel and surprising possibilities.

*Steve*

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## 2023 Annual Fundraising Campaign update

Communitas launched its 2023 Annual Fundraising Campaign at the beginning of November which ended on 31 December 2023.

Members and supporters were invited to contribute to the 2023-24 Communitas budget.

Especially given that we are no longer receiving funding from the Government of Canada, or any other corporate or institutional donor, we are now entirely relying on the generosity of individual donors and the savings accrued over the years, to carry out our activities.

During the two months of the Campaign, a total of \$12,012 was received from 53 distinct donors, a great achievement. Additionally,

five of the donors decided to become monthly sustaining donors of Communitas, thus allowing us to do more reliable planning in the future.

Communitas wishes to thank all donors for their invaluable support for our 2023 Annual Financial Appeal. We cannot do what we do without you!

## The Politics of Punishment

Were a consumer satisfaction survey to ask which facets of the prison experience interest offenders most, the answer would not be the relaxed work schedule, nor the tasty and affordable cuisine, nor the free gym membership, nor even the benefits of adult supervision. It would find attention laser-focused on transfers to lower security, on temporary absences, and parole, and statutory release, and warrant expiry—all the aspects of what courts call one's liberty interest; and what offenders call freedom.

True, the cornerstone function of the carceral edifice, as understood and expressed by its governing legislation, is the secure custody of offenders in a manner which reflects that "the protection of society is the paramount consideration in the corrections process." (Corrections and Conditional Release Act s.3-4). Yet a second imperative, subject only to the bedrock objective of public safety, is the correctional authorities' legislated obligation to facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration (Act s.3(b)), a core responsibility reinforced by their requirement to employ "the least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and offenders"—particularly where the issue is transfer to the institution with the appropriate security level (Act s.4(d), 28). The rehabilitation / reintegration mandate is pursued through a gradual 'cascading' as quickly as can safely and legally be done (in theory, if not always in practice) toward settings affording less security and increasing responsibility, the ultimate destination being the street. Based on uniform, coherent criteria laid down in statute, regulation, and national policy, these highly formal security assessments and placement decisions are intended to be taken at a safe remove from the public passions and political winds of the day.

One readily appreciates that should offenders be frozen at the top of the secu-

rity ladder, release at the bottom will be delayed or ruled out. And it is at the top that Pharisaic politicians find it useful and convenient to mess with the orderly operation of the system in order to secure some partisan advantage. Thus it was that on February 23, 2001, during the tenure of Liberal Solicitor General Lawrence MacAulay, Commissioner of Corrections Lucie McClung thought it wise to issue Policy Bulletin 107, seemingly in defiance of sections 4 and 28 of the Act, and 17 and 18 of the Regulations, which govern all security and placement decisions. Henceforth, everyone entering the system with a conviction for murder would automatically be classified maximum security for at least the first two years of federal incarceration, not because anyone claimed their

**Today, the knee-jerk interment of lifers in maximum security as they arrive in the system is a dead letter, but the discarded policy stands as a reminder of the dangers of correctional policy driven by politics. It is also a harbinger of worse things to come.**

particular case called for that level of supervision, but because "first and second degree murder are the most serious crimes that can be committed in Canada, and are subject to the most severe penalty in the Criminal Code. CSC's policies and procedures must more clearly reinforce this aspect of our criminal justice system." This odious and transparently political corruption of the classification function was accomplished by tampering with the numerical ratings scale so that murder would attract so many points that the case's point total could not help but fall within the maximum ranking. A convoluted new procedure offered the possibility to override the measure, but in the policy's first 2.5 years, only one person was allowed to benefit from the exception (this figure improved for female offenders in subsequent years); whereas prior to the policy change, when lifers were still individually classified ac-

ording to approved penological methods, about 70% of the persons convicted of murder were assigned to a medium or minimum security institution.

How does this arbitrary and harmful treatment jibe with the Act's injunction to employ the least restrictive measures possible, and, in particular, the least restrictive security setting compatible with public security? It is beyond dispute that large numbers of individuals in CSC's care and custody were made subject to a dangerous and destructive placement which could have been avoided—nor did CSC seek to dispute it, instead, embracing and defending its program. Two attempts were made to convince the courts of the scheme's illegality and unconstitutionality. In August, 2003, the Ontario Court of Appeal heard the arguments of three lifers who would have achieved a minimum ranking on the old Custody Ratings Scale, but were unapologetically forced into maximum security by the repressive new public-facing policy. The Appeal Court unhelpfully ruled Ontario's lower court had correctly decided the Federal Court of

Canada would be a more appropriate forum to hear the matter, and sidestepped the issue. (Spindler, Samuels, and Auld v Warden of Millhaven Institution, 175 OAC 251)

The next case, brought by lifer Martha Kahnapace, was accordingly directed to the Federal Court (Kahnapace v. Canada (Attorney General), 360 FTR 229), where Judge Judith Snider was unable to find that the scheme was unlawful or a violation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms: in essence, the Court held that if CSC wished to amend its classification system so that the least restrictive measure is interpreted differently for offenders who have murdered, the law does not stand in its way; but she concluded her reasons wearing a criminologist's hat: "In many ways, I am not happy with this result. A number of parties who understand correctional services have been very critical of Policy 107 and its imple-



mentation. The current practice appears to be harsh – particularly for women – and might benefit from further research.”

Today, the knee-jerk interment of lifers in maximum security as they arrive in the system is a dead letter, but the discarded policy stands as a reminder of the dangers of correctional policy driven by politics. It is also a harbinger of worse things to come.

Readers of Mostly Legal are well aware of the upheaval caused by the quite proper decision to cascade Paul Bernardo down to a medium security penitentiary after almost thirty years in maximum and supermaximum institutions. We have seen how the federal Conservative Party joined forces with the victims’ families to condemn that transfer, in the course of which leading Opposition Leader Poilievre issued chilling details of criminal justice policies he hopes to implement as Prime Minister.

Since then, the preoccupation with Paul Bernardo’s prison life has not abated, and it is clear that, with the reviled and convenient Clifford Olson having gone to his eternal reward, the Conservative Party will now marry its political fortunes to the universal revulsion felt for Bernardo’s crimes. In early March (2024), Conservative shadow Public Security critic Frank Caputo, a member of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, delivered a pathetically disingenuous performance in a video feebly posing as a public service initiative warning Canadians of a correctional system gone awry, but which quickly reveals itself to be an extended campaign attack ad aimed at the Liberal Government. Following his tour of La Macaza penitentiary, during which he poked around (illegally?) in Bernardo’s personal effects in the empty cell, he affects astonishment, horror, and disgust upon discovering that the prisoner approaching Bernardo’s cell door is...gasp...Bernardo. I guess he couldn’t see that coming. One suspects Parliament didn’t see the likes of Caputo coming, either, when it endowed judges and legislators with special permission to enter penitentiaries to exercise external oversight over potential abuse of prisoners (CCRA s.72), quite the opposite of

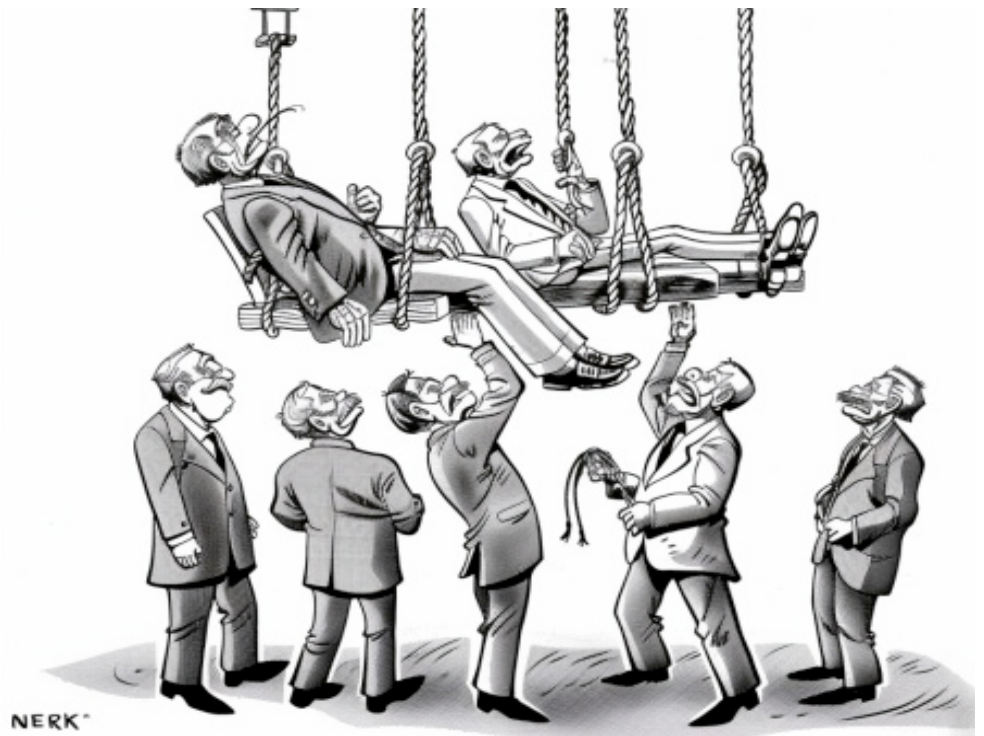
the use this visitor makes of his Parliamentary privilege.

Following Caputo’s deeply cynical video address to the public, a clutch of opportunistic Conservatives, supported by a fellow traveler from the Bloc Québécois, forced Parliament’s public safety committee to hold an emergency meeting on March 11 to reconsider notorious violent criminals’ access to medium security institutions. Their primary concern here is not that such placement could enable the offenders to escape; nor even that the offenders in question have failed to satisfy the statutory and policy criteria for transfer: no, their highly principled objection is that the medium institutions don’t deliver enough punishment. They contend that offenders such as these should normally serve their full sentence (usually life) in the least comfortable, most harrowing environment the system offers. They would throw away case management, cascading to lower security, and the “least restrictive measures consistent with the protection of society, staff members and offenders,” to ensure that the worst offenders are severely chastised throughout the period of incarceration.

Sure enough, on June 14, two weeks after news of the Bernardo transfer broke, Conservative M.P. Baldinelli, with support from Leader Poilievre, filed Bill C-342, which seeks to amend the CCRA so that any offender in the system who has been convicted of more than one first degree murder, or been designated a Dangerous Offender by a court, must be held in maximum security until dead or released. The Party promises to adopt such a bill if it achieves power in the coming election.

We are witnessing the spectacle of elected legislators talking about inflicting punishment not to quell refractory behaviour during the sentence, but to respond to the crime. I am not aware of a moment when sadism was Canada’s official correctional policy, but, as we see in the U.S., the times appear to be opening the door to novel and surprising possibilities. And as in the U.S., if a certain party should find its way to power, Canadians may not complain that we weren’t warned of the consequences. In recent months, Poilievre and Caputo have put it all on the table.

Steve



# Hi Everyone,

My name is Serena Lopes and I started volunteering with Communitas a few years ago at Open Door on Tuesday evenings, and went on to serve as an escort driver at CFF in Laval for these activities. If you remember me, well, I am more than happy to have reconnected here again, and if you don't, let me tell you a little bit about myself and what drives me to do what I do. I wanted to share a little piece of my journey with Sou'Wester's readers as proof that sometimes even when things don't go the way we want them to, we can still choose to be happy.

It all started in 2015 when I first applied to law school but was rejected. Unlike many people, my dream has always been to become a lawyer not just to help the general public, but mostly, to help those who are often rejected by society.

I persisted and ended up completing a bachelor's degree in political science. In the meantime, I told myself that I had to find a way to make a difference in the correctional world before achieving my main goal of becoming a correctional lawyer. Most of my Tuesday evenings were spent in downtown Montreal at Open Door where I had the chance to meet such amazing human beings. Although these encounters don't involve really getting into each other's private lives, they do afford the opportunity to develop affinities over time.

I began to truly enjoy my Tuesday evenings and decided I wanted to get even more involved in restorative justice. I then decided to start volunteering as an escort driver for Communitas. Involving myself with one of my preferred client communities really helped me to thrive and to push through those hard moments by constantly reminding me that someone must care for those inside the walls. Sometimes a simple decision, action, or chance encounter can lead to a provincial or federal sentence. Freedom

cannot be taken for granted. Tuesday evenings quickly became my new favorite time of the week because I had the chance to act as escort from the CFF detention center to Open Door. It wasn't until a few years later that I fully realized the chance I'd been given, the opportunity to develop a unique perspective by connecting on a completely different level with individuals serving a federal sentence. We would play some music in the van, enjoy the ride, and discuss our lives. This could sound banal and insignificant for some; however, these moments of authenticity allowed me to truly sense the hard reality of being behind the walls and I do believe this experience is what drove me to persevere in pursuing my dream career.

In 2019 I attempted a second time to get into law school: this wasn't successful either. Therefore, I took the decision to begin a new academic journey at UQAM in sociology where I focused most of my courses on social justice, the over-representation of Indigenous people in Canadian penitentiaries and jails, as well as deviance and social control. Each time I would go to the Open Door I would tell myself that no matter how many times you fall, the most important thing is to always get back up and I do believe that this is exactly what Open Door is: a safe space to share and grow together.

On June 8th, 2020, I was finally accepted into law school, and I obtained my law degree in May 2023! I felt a huge weight off my shoulders and started to truly believe I would soon be able to help individuals incarcerated in most of Quebec's detention centers. I was getting one step closer to my dream. I began my correctional law experience back in 2022 when I was still a law student, at KB Maitres, a correctional law firm. I currently work alongside the well-known and passionate attorney, Kim Bouchard. Having the opportunity to work with a team which shares similar work ethics and



values simply exalts me. Ms. Bouchard shared and continues to share her enthusiasm and her provincial/federal correctional law knowledge with me and her fellow colleagues. It is an honor for me to be able to work throughout the province of Quebec with a dedicated team of lawyers specialized in correctional law.

Upon reflection, I realize that Communitas has allowed me to discover the field of law that engages me the most, and that there do exist places where restorative justice and rehabilitation exist!!! I currently am studying for the Quebec Bar, where I am encountering some obstacles that make this a bumpy and twisting journey, however, I try to remind myself that even when life decides one's path won't unfold in a linear way, we have to push through and focus on the long-term objective.

I hope some of you were able to relate a little bit with this journey and the fact that nothing should be taken for granted. No matter what led you to spend some time behind bars, if you truly believe in something you will achieve it. I do believe everyone is owed a chance, for rehabilitation and redemption are integral concepts in our criminal justice system.

Serena

## 2024 Communitas Annual General Meeting – May 22, 2024

Our Annual General Meeting will be held on **Wednesday, May 22nd, from 7 to 9 p.m.** It will be held virtually on Zoom. In the days before the meeting, all the pertinent documents, including the Zoom link, will be sent out by email. One requirement for the AGM is a quorum of members present. You must indicate your intention to continue as a member.

**Membership will also ensure that you can vote at the AGM, including electing members to the Board of Directors.**

### Board of Directors Nominations

Any member can be nominated for the board after being supported by five voting members. All nominations must be filed by the first Tuesday in May (May 7th).

If you have any questions, please direct them to our Communications Coordinator, Bill Kokesch, as soon as possible at [communications@communitasmontreal.org](mailto:communications@communitasmontreal.org)





## Sand Castles

Father, where are you  
 You said you'd be there every morning  
 You'd said you'd never leave me or forsake me  
 You could've given me some kind of warning  
 When I wake up, all bright-eyed and bushy-tailed  
 Fresh from a dream, where I still mostly am  
 How do you think it feels  
 When reality comes flooding in, and crashing down?  
 No more razzle-dazzle  
 Now my whole world is nothing more than  
 Sand castles, sand castles  
 sand castles, sand castles  
 Have you ever had a friend leave you Like I did, like I did  
 like you did, like you did like you did, like you...  
 I liked you, I liked you  
 I remember, that I told you how I liked your beard and the way you talked the things we spoke about  
 Over all the countless miles and blocks we walked and walked and walked and walked;  
 And where we swam,  
 Late for nothing but still we ran Maybe a skateboard park  
 The lineup for the ice cream parlour was always getting longer And we had to be in, it was nearly dark  
 I got my freezie, you got your six-pack  
 We had our groceries, then we headed back  
 Perogies and fries, pizza and drinks  
 In front of the screen, searching through Netflix This was summer, our last summer  
 How come the days were so much shorter

then than they are now?  
 I guess time slows down when there isn't any fun to be had, was I such a hassle?  
 Oh my Dad, won't you help me with my  
 Sand castles, sand castles sand castles, sand castles  
 The ocean is coming Like it does every day  
 To take everything I built away In a couple 'a' big waves;  
 Now I'm standing on the shore  
 Lookin' out at the horizon  
 I'm feelin' nothin' no more Although I can't help surmising'  
 If you're still somewhere out there  
 Or up there or in there  
 I don't think I'll ever see you  
 And now I don't know if I even want to So many years, you missed out on  
 So many years, and you were never there To dry even one single tear;  
 And if you see that ocean, Know that it's a good start For the ocean is filled  
 With the tears of my broken heart  
 You've hollowed me out, am I a worthy vessel  
 To put the ocean into so that I can continue with my Sand castles, sand castles  
 sand castles, sand castles  
 Are your days long like mine?  
 Does life stretch out before you like you're working in a coal mine?  
 Do you feel any joy or is it all gone?  
 Are you relegated to a vassal as you constantly wrestle building Sand castles, sand castles  
 sand castle, sand castles.

Ray

## Archangel Creed

*Who we are is what we are,  
 what we are is not known to you.  
 Your refusal to accept our purpose  
 is your downfall.  
 The shroud which is over your eyes  
 is darkened by your judgement of others.  
 Truth and Wisdom are yours, yet only if you seek.  
 You are not who we are, for you are blind.  
 Only through Clarity of Light, that of which darkness cannot escape, is all revealed.  
 Brothers of Light, Sisters of Purity, our purpose is Just, our Wisdom is truth.  
 Your end is futile, our cause never ceasing.  
 Darkness defeated, our Light heals.  
 Keep the faith and the warmth of love  
 will be yours  
 By EKG "PP57"*

## A Dream

He took my soul  
 For what I do not know  
 Plain truth  
 Playing hide and seek  
 I will never be free  
 Can I choose my way?

My brother is in chains  
 All I can do has been done  
 Hell is not for me  
 I broke that bridge  
 All is undone  
 Praying to the Cross  
 I am only a shadow  
 Night and day gives me nothing

Waiting for the sun in the rain  
 I shall rise again  
 Waiting at the gate  
 Incarcerated  
 Freedom  
 It's all a dream

Alan

## Sou'Wester interview



### The Sou'Wester interviews Jeff

**SW:** Where did you grow up?

**Jeff:** Well, I guess I kind of grew up in two places. I was born in Sarnia, Ontario, which is a very industrial city, but then when I was young, I moved to rural Ontario, not far from Kingston.

**SW:** What were you like as a child?

**Jeff:** I think I was fairly unremarkable as a child. There's nothing that really stands out. I liked reading, I liked being out in the woods with my brothers. Yeah, nothing really stands out.

**SW:** What are your thoughts on the way education is going at the moment and what might that mean for criminal justice, the study of criminal justice and crime in general?

**Jeff:** Education, well the state of education... I think it's important to recognize that when it comes to education, especially when it comes to criminal justice issues, it's not just something that happens in formal educational institutions. It is very much community and social education as well. There are a lot of people that will go through, you know, educational systems for a very long time and they're very educated people but they don't know anything about prisons and criminal justice at all. Or, they might have very problematic and misinformed views about criminal justice, so I don't think there is an exact correlation between formal education and criminal justice awareness. An area where the public generally has poor information is where it comes funnelled through media reporting, which distorts the picture in a variety of different ways. It is particularly problematic for those who aren't interacting

with those caught up in the criminal justice system, because there's not always the opportunity for correction and humanizing of the issues involved. A lot of the learning that is important around criminal justice issues is not just the facts and figures of the realities, but also the social learning and human learning and interacting with people that are, you know, at the heart of that, and so often they are pushed to the margins and out of sight such that we don't interact with them. So, that is a learning opportunity that I think is lost. Groups like Communitas are doing really important work in that area.

**SW:** How can we do better?

**Jeff:** How can we do better? Ha, any number of things, that go into this, it's a huge social question without one solution to it. Different people have different responsibilities, in it, right? One thing that stands out is, you know, people with a significant platform and an audience and who are looked to as leaders in the community, many of whom run successfully for public office, have I think, an important responsibility to talk about these issues in a fair and balanced, realistic way, in the sense that there's so much distortion that comes out of political speech around criminal justice issues. Criminal justice issues are a constant focus of electoral campaigns and so it's very common that politicians especially will use it as an opportunity to raise political support rather than taking it seriously as a public issue in which we're all implicated. Recent comments by Frank Caputo saying that "La Macaza is just like a university campus," well, I've been to La Macaza and I work at a university and they're very different places. So, I think there's a huge responsibility there. In another vein, groups like Communitas are crucial in creating a touch point for people who come from different lives, from different realities, to, you know, have the opportunity to come together and learn from one another, and grow and work together in a variety of ways. Those are rare opportunities. We tend to segment and separate and push away - that's the norm of criminal justice. That's a feature of society in a lot of other ways. Creating opportunities for those encounters is... there's no alternative for that. You can get the right information out there, but, as I said encounters between people who are living this reality and those who read about it in the news, for instance, is something that is crucial. So Communitas, and groups like it, growing that work, creating more instances of connection,

engagement, those are the two things that stand out as most important to me.

**SW:** I just brought someone I know to Table Talk today who had some (negative) ideas about what it meant to be someone who had been imprisoned, and they walked out today with a completely different perspective, and it took, you know, like an hour, and it was that simple.

**Jeff:** Well, you know, it doesn't often take more than that. Even just sitting in front of somebody, having a very brief engagement, their face, and their... their humanness is very different than the mugshot that you see on the news. Little things like that always go a long way. It can happen fairly quickly.

**SW:** What was the work you did with Communitas and what did you like about it?

**Jeff:** I was involved with Communitas for, or, I should say more directly involved from 2013 to 2018, I started as a volunteer, I was on Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA), I was involved in Table Talk, Open Door, and over time I took on a variety of different roles. I was on the Board of Directors for a little bit, I was the Coordinator for the organization for a while. I was involved in a lot of governance stuff, and I felt like that was something that I could contribute to the group. But, I would like to think my most important work was the relationships that I had with people there... those are still important to me to this day. I joined because I had been involved in CoSA previously, and so when I landed in Montreal it was something I wanted to get into, so it began as a personal thing, and it stayed that way when it was even more technical.

**SW:** I've heard that you recommend that your students go to Open Door?

**Jeff:** I teach prison law at McGill and so I have students that are very aware and engaged in this area. Whenever anybody asks me about community organizations working in this area I suggest it to them. I think it's been an important part of teaching prison law that I've tried to put some humanity and real people at the center of that. I think it's really a shame, if not problematic, to learn about prisons and prison law without interacting with people who have been in prison. So, for example, I brought some of my students to an institution, and, for that reason, for some of those who weren't able to go I've recommended that they go to Open Door as an opportunity for them as well.



It's important in learning criminal justice issues that we take the time to learn from the people who have lived it. I learned more about criminal justice in my time at *Communitas* than I did in law school. There are things you aren't taught and can't be taught in those settings. Whatever we learn, you know, we shouldn't learn about things and people as if they're this abstract idea. This is real life and there are real people at the center of it.

**SW:** It goes for any population; you can be their worst enemy if you don't take the time to actually learn about them.

**Jeff:** Especially so for marginalized groups or those that are vulnerable in some way. We shouldn't be making policy, we shouldn't be making decisions in the absence of hearing from the people who are going to be affected. That's fundamental and that's neglected a lot. When teaching prison law you can't ignore the fact that Indigenous people make up one-third of the federal prison population, and 50% of women's prisons are Indigenous women. That's just... mind-boggling... and that's one example. Other people are disproportionately affected by prison, you know, it's not a microcosm of society in terms of socioeconomic status and life paths. Prisons do tend to pick on certain people. Our criminal justice system tends to pick on certain people. It's not to say that it is one group who is the prisoner, or one group of people that, you know, spends time in prison. There is diversity within that, and you have to recognize that as well.

**SW:** So, as we know, there are groups that are more likely to be sent to prison, like kids who have been put in foster care or people from neighbourhoods with high rates of poverty. What do we do?

**Jeff:** When we have conversations about criminal justice, in some ways we've undermined the answer just by asking questions about criminal justice. The solutions to the kinds of harm, the problems that come up in criminal justice, are not to be found within the criminal justice system. We know very well that prisons just don't work. We know very well that heavy sentences don't work. Those are not the solutions. When we think about harm within society generally, as we should, we need to focus on healthy, well-functioning communities... making sure people have their needs met. The solutions to the problems that criminal justice thinks it's dealing with are really problems for policy and support and resources, that aren't to be found in the criminal justice system. The criminal justice system isn't going to fix those problems. So, we're really chasing something if after the fact we're trying to deal with it in this, often knee-jerk, problematic way, so, certainly, if we want to address these things, we need to look to poverty, we need to look to the variety of social issues that caused harm in and of themselves and not just to the people who have caused harm. The solutions are all there. In some ways, we should be spending less time talking about the criminal justice system and more time talking about other things that make it obsolete.

**SW:** Is there anything else you want to say?

**Jeff:** I didn't answer your question about enjoying *Communitas*. When I left as Coordinator in 2018 - this is a Sou'Wester plug - I wrote, I think I even called it a love letter to *Communitas* as I was leaving, I was moving abroad. It was an incredibly sad moment for me, I cried at our last encounter, Steve Fineberg accused me of having a Wayne Gretzky moment... you can publish that,

too! I was distraught at leaving these people, this place... people can look that up, I think it was probably the Fall of 2018... about all of the things that I learned from the people there, regardless of their backgrounds or where they were from. (It was) such a special place in terms of working through things in the most respectful, dignified, constructive way that I can imagine. More *Communitas*, less criminal justice system is the overarching takeaway of my views.

**SW:** What's so special about our guys?

**Jeff:** For example... there's a picture behind you, (the artist) that was someone, without mentioning their name, in his case, after everything he had been through, the traumas that he had been through, and that society had also subjected him to, he was... he just kept going, and he kept going with the most positive attitude and kindness and appreciation for the people around him... the fact that that kind of warmth and care for other people can come out of, you know, sometimes decades in prison is a huge credit to them and a triumph of the human spirit in a lot of ways. Through things like that, I think you get a lot of perspective on how difficult your life is and the possibility for, you know, being that kind of person for other people regardless of how things go. The perseverance, the kindness, the insight... some of the smartest, cleverest, sharpest minds, that's something I appreciate as an academic, but as a person... people have different strengths, and sometimes they're not as obvious as other strengths, but without fail, each and every guy there has something that made me better or at least made me want to be better. You can find every good human quality somewhere at *Communitas*.

*Interviewed by Leigh (they/them)*

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## Dan Philip, 1937 – 2024

Recently, Open Door paid tribute to Dan Philip, who passed away on April 8 at the age of 87. The founder of the Black Coalition of Quebec, and 40 years its president, was hailed as a pioneer and indefatigable defender for the rights of all, a stalwart community leader who fought tirelessly and fearlessly against racial discrimination. Mr. Philip earned the respect and gratitude of his community, his city, and his province.



# 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:

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You may donate through our online donation page by clicking here, or by filling in the form above and mailing it to our office.

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## **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:

[cosa@communitasmontreal.org](mailto:cosa@communitasmontreal.org)

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