

We would love to hear from you!

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the Sou' Wester

A grassroots newsletter on criminal justice & prisoner reintegration

Spring 2025 Edition

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

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At Communitas, we've recently begun a games time: Fun and Games, after Table Talk, our weekly community lunch. This one day, I was sitting with the Bobs, who always have something interesting to say.

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Communitas Annual Consultation Meeting

Communitas members participated in a very generative, enthusiastic, and collaborative consultation at our Annual Consultation at Open Door on April 22nd. This conversation was particularly fruitful as we had a diverse group of member representatives, all contributing their perspectives on how we can better meet our membership needs and strengthen our activities.

The participants were divided into 5 groups of approximately 6 per group and

given the following three questions to consider:

1. What needs of yours could Communitas fill that we currently aren't? How could we do it?
2. How do we advance these and other brainstorming ideas?
3. What do you see other groups doing that Communitas could try?

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**The 2025
Communitas
Annual General
Meeting –
May 21, 2025**

Reflecting on playing games and luck!

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At one point, one Bob mentioned something that got me thinking, that chess was a game of skill, but backgammon was a game of skill and luck. What's important about backgammon, I realized, is what one does with their luck. In other words, we must skillfully use our luck in the hope of coming out on top.

Reflecting on this, I realize that at times I have been quite unlucky in life. I used to find it easy to blame bad luck for poor choices. When I made conscious decisions to make better choices despite the bad luck, things got better. As things got better, so did my luck. I would say now that actually, I'm quite lucky. Some call it luck, God, or the Universe that is being kind to me, but whatever you want to call it, I believe it happens because I'm trying. If I'm

looking, I can see that I'm lucky in so many ways, every day, and for this I am incredibly grateful. When I share that luck with other people, it seems it gets even better.

I think sometimes about people who gamble, and as we all know, sometimes people win and sometimes people lose. Sometimes when people win, they get caught up in the fantasy of winning and so they keep playing, and soon they find their luck runs out and they are worse off than when they started. Why do we do this? I think when we rely too much on the luck, it runs out and we end up losing. If we are lucky, and we have the ability to walk away and to use what we have to take care of ourselves and others, we keep winning.

I recently participated in a raffle to support a worthy cause, and I won a gift card to a thrift store. I never gamble or bet, but I decided one day to support a community in need by buying a raffle ticket. It was okay to me if I lost, only because I am lucky enough to have what I need in life and this community doesn't. I haven't used the gift

card yet, but when I do, I will use it to buy something that I know I'll love and it will make me happy whenever I wear it. I know that by buying a nice shirt at a thrift store that isn't contributing to environmental destruction, I will feel good when I wear it. When I feel good, the work I do to help others and the interactions I have with people and the community in general, end up being more positive.

Or maybe I will give the gift card to a friend who is having a hard time so they can feel good, too. I am certain that using my luck to do more good for myself or for others, will bring me more luck. These are the choices I try to make with my luck, always with gratitude for what I have. I make these choices trying to keep an awareness of what I don't really need or of needs that are imaginary, while keeping in mind that there is always someone else who is in need. What do you do with your luck?

By Leigh (they/them)



Notice of the 2025 Communitas Annual General Meeting – May 21, 2025

Our Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 21st, at 6 p.m. It will be held virtually on Zoom. Those without Zoom access may gather at the Communitas office in the Undercroft where Zoom access will be available.

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.

If you have any questions, please direct them to our Communications Coordinator, Bill Kokesch, as soon as possible at

communications@communitasmontreal.com



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

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

Communitas Annual Consultation Meeting:

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The groups discussed several overlapping themes. Participants discussed how we can better meet the needs of men within prison by directly addressing the everyday practicality of transitioning from our communities within prison to our communities on the outside. Also identified was Communitas' need for a full time, compensated volunteer coordinator, to help strengthen and support our volunteers. Another common theme of group discussions was Communitas' need to rely on community support, from similar organizations, universities, members, and city; many groups connected this need with a need to be more visible outside our community. It was noted several times throughout the night that the majority of our needs can

only be addressed with more escort drivers to accompany men to activities outside the prison. Making this our absolute priority.

Other ideas that were shared included:

- Acquiring assets such as: a house (office, kitchen, bedrooms, boardroom), a car, a garden;
- Help transitioning between inside and outside more generally: guidance on everyday activities in the modern world;
- Have one day a month where we have a secular activity within the prisons/ a group discussion activity similar to Open Door.
- Incorporate our religious activities into our activities on the outside eg. continue to host bible group discussions.
- Escorted Temporary Absences (ETA) at Table Talk; weekend activities for Unescorted Temporary Absences (UTA); Escorting men in the pen to weekend activities.

- Prioritize networking with other organizations working in the same field.

- Develop a sort of "survival" guide prepared with advice from men who have already been released/ volunteers.

- Have a 25th anniversary Open Door Documentary

- Pay what you can fundraising dinner
- assistance getting work/ supporting children of those incarcerated, rehabilitation/ therapeutic counselling

We thank everyone who participated and will present these ideas to the next Annual General Meeting, scheduled to take place on 21 May 2025.



A Message from Your Volunteer Coordinator

Happy Spring Communitas Volunteers!

Surrounded by Montreal's emerging Spring, I have been reflecting on a recent seasonal spiritual moment shared at Open Door. Remarking on the miracle of resurrection, one of our members recalled last year's daffodil bloom outside of 1444 Union Ave. While speaking with another Communitas member, they realized the daffodils had grown visibly taller over

the span of their conversation. These daffodils, planted as bulbs in Winters past, were resurrecting themselves before their very eyes! Anybody who has experienced a Montreal Spring will not doubt the truth in this story. In a matter of days, the city has emerged from snow and ice into a landscape of budding trees, Spring blooms, and birdsong.

In my interpretation, this spiritual moment carries a twofold message. First, the proof of the possibility of change, resurrection, and regeneration is omnipresent in Spring. Second, Spring itself is not on view year-round: it must be preceded by a period of fallow, of growth unseen and invisible to the observer.

Both of these truths are familiar to our volunteers, whose labour and its impacts are both seen and unseen. Behind every volunteer's energetic participation in Open Door, Table Talk, Games Day, Gospel Zone, CoSA, and Sou'Wester meetings and editions are moments of unseen reflection and self-evaluation. The same can be said of our volunteers' impact. At Communitas, volunteers are surrounded by the spirit of all four seasons year-round. Independent of the time of year, we witness the effects of our work - renewal, growth, harvest, and rest/reflection - on our community members and ourselves. Like gardeners, we are

familiar with patience and devoted efforts. The communities we are collaboratively accompanying take time to bloom, and the effects of this are not always immediately apparent.

Witnessing Communitas volunteers' work and immense impacts has given me a new appreciation for most things in life, especially Spring. Reflecting on the time, effort, and contemplation volunteers put into their work at Communitas has made me regard the world around me anew. I now appreciate the buds and blooms and the period of effort and regeneration that preceded them.

Thank you for all that you do at Communitas, volunteers. We immensely appreciate all of your efforts and impact, seen and unseen.

Your Volunteer Coordinator,

Sophie



2025 and Open Door

2025's Open Door started off with the tradition of our "Review of Last Year" and "Looking forward to This Year." These are great exercises for community building, because we learn about what is happening to each other outside of Open Door.

For the 17th year, Jeri helped us to welcome in the Chinese New Year as we begin the Year of the Wood Snake. It's a year of upheavals in politics, but also of inventiveness and elegance. Use your time well that you may do well.

We welcomed our friends from **McGill's School of Dietetics** who spoke to us about gluten and lactose. The difference between an allergy and an intolerance is now clear. One can have an allergy to a food and still eat it (perhaps with uncomfortable results) but people who have food intolerances must never eat them.

One of the themes of 2025 so far has been addictions. We've had three presentations on this subject, "Cravings" by **Zoey**, "Addiction and Stress" by **Bianca**, and "Opioids" by **Leigh**. These presentations have raised questions such as "are addictions diseases or

simply the result of bad choices?" Sadly, we learned that fentanyl addiction often begins innocently with a doctor's prescription.

Our weird and wonderful evenings continue. For St. Patrick's Day, **Marie-Eve** led us in an evening of Irish dance and taught us that the origin of the steps was the watch guard standing outside the house, giving warning to those in the house of an approaching adversary. **Will** presented two evenings: "25 Years of Cover Stories of the Economist" (plus ça change...) and "The Demise of the East Coast Fisheries." Can we rely on farmed fish in the future? It seems not. **Sophie** introduced us to the concept of micro-history with a case study entitled "The Cheese and the Worms" (hmmm...). **Nic** took us beyond the heliosphere (pitch black outer space beyond the reach of the sun) on the journey of the 1977-launched Voyager Probes and the fascinating practice of Gravity Assists.

Nina, who has just finished her degree in Political Science, carried on the Open Door tradition of our students presenting one last time before they move onto their next adventure. Nina presented "The CIA's Playbook: How the US Sabotaged Post-Independence

Development in Africa," helping us to understand why the African countries do not join the ranks of the developed nations. Nina is returning to New York to work as a Community Advocacy and Organizing Intern. This will involve working with the community in the South Bronx to advocate for prison reform (such as bail reform and changes to minimum sentencing requirements). We say a warm good-bye and sincere thank you for her work with Communitas, and we wish her all the best in the future.

Finally, Communitas is approaching its Fiscal Year End and our Volunteer Coordinator **Sophie** hosted the Annual Consultation: an evening of brainstorming for what our members would like to see undertaken in 2025 – 2026. Lots of great ideas came forward! We encourage everyone to attend the Annual General Meeting on May 21.

Only at Open Door can one learn so much while having loads of fun within a diverse and caring community.

Jeri

An Open Door spiritual moment

"Communitas" is a Latin term that refers to a sense of community or social bond that exists among individuals or groups of people. It goes beyond mere social structures and hierarchies and implies a deep sense of connection and equality among its members.

The concept of Communitas has been explored in various fields, including anthropology, sociology, and religious studies. It often arises in the context of rituals, rites of passage, and transformative experiences

where individuals come together in a state of shared purpose and solidarity. During such moments, social distinctions and hierarchies may temporarily dissolve, leading to a feeling of unity and shared humanity.

In anthropology, the term was popularized by the Dutch anthropologist Victor Turner, who studied rituals and the role of Communitas in various cultural contexts. He argued that Communitas represents a liminal or in-between stage in social life when individuals or groups experience a temporary suspension of social norms and a sense of togetherness that transcends everyday social structures.

Communitas is often contrasted with "structure" or "social order," as it represents a more spontaneous and unstructured form of community. It can be seen as a powerful force for social cohesion and as a source of inspiration for collective action and solidarity.



**From the Sou'Wester archives –
December 2009**

Volume 1 Issue 2

Restorative Justice Week

When the Church Council for Justice and Corrections of Quebec invited the MSCM Steering Committee to organize the closing event of its Restorative Justice Week activities, we enthusiastically agreed.

Steering Committee member and life-long restorative justice volunteer, Marie Beemans came up with a great idea. We would invite representatives from the different groups implicated in the ongoing social struggles of Montreal North—minority youth, the police and the larger community. Each attendee would be assigned to one of these representatives, who would coach his/her coterie of attendees in the way things look from their 'interest group' perspective.

At the end of the evening, the three groups would come together, each representative leading his/her group of newly minted

youth, police or community members, for a plenary discussion on the current Montreal North situation.

What a crazy, compelling idea! The potential for failure was real, as was the potential for a meltdown of anger and aggression. But the possibility of true, real-life transformative learning was real too. So away we went.

Marie did a spectacular job of organizing the entire evening, from finding speakers to assuring publicity, to ordering the food. Our three representatives, Claude Aubin, a former Montreal police detective, Shirley Sarma of the Quebec Human Rights Commission, and Jonathan Dugay, a young man of colour from Montreal North, trained their respective cohorts with aplomb, humour and incisiveness.

We learned of the challenges faced by young members of the police force, the pressures placed on them by the simple fact of wearing a uniform, and the disorientation many feel arriving in the fast-paced and the ethnically complex realities of Montreal, from far-flung, homogeneous and quiet rural regions of Quebec.

We heard the frustrations of minority

youth who feel under constant surveillance, who feel the injustice of force too often applied and too in frequently justified and who feel trapped in dead-end lives in a dead-end neighbourhood.

We heard the fears and concerns of community members living in a rapidly changing society, a society where they do not always feel at ease nor easily find a place.

At the end of the evening, the discussion amongst the three groups, led by Brian McDonough, President of Aumônerie Communautaire de Montréal (ACM) and Nancy Labonté of Carrefour Voyer Spiritualité, was a little slow to get going. Finally, it did hit a passionate stride and reached a culmination in Mr. Aubin's frank witness to the emotional challenges faced by members of the police force.

The atmosphere of the room shifted palpably as he spoke, highlighting Restorative Justice's potential.

When people, even apparently irreconcilable adversaries, share their own profound experience, and listen to the profound experiences of others, things change.

Relationships are transformed; healing begins.

Submitted by:

Robert Bergner

Community Chaplain

When Probably Isn't Enough

A loyal reader of Mostly Legal has recently asked, or meant to, “did anything of interest happen on March 14, 2025?”; provoking the reply, why yes, that’s the day the Supreme Court of Canada released its decision in *John Howard Society of Saskatchewan v. Saskatchewan (Attorney General)*, 2025 SCC 6. Inquiring minds will then want to know if this was ‘a big deal.’ Again I must respond in the affirmative—one of the biggest. Indeed, the mere fact the Attorneys General of Canada and four additional provinces, with an additional array of lawyers’ associations and rights organizations, received permission to butt in should tell you matters of importance were afoot. And the list of judicial authorities touched on by the majority and dissenting opinions stretched from here to Nunavut.

The weightiness of the moment is immediately felt in the opening words of the majority’s reasons for judgment: “A fundamental principle of Canadian law is that the guilt of a person charged with an offence must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt before they are punished with imprisonment. This appeal invites this Court to confirm whether such a principle applies to persons behind the walls of correctional institutions who are charged with disciplinary offences. I conclude that it does.”

So much for suspense.

Yet what looks like an easy answer was no tautology: to get there the Court had to pass through the meaning of the terms ‘imprisonment’ and ‘offence,’ the history of segregation, the presumption of innocence, the evolution of the habeas corpus remedy, the present scope of prisoners’ civil rights, and the relationship between imposition of a prison sentence and the loss of earned remission. Truly, there is not much related to the oxymoronic nexus of prison and liberty which did not come under scrutiny, and one may claim without fear the carceral bar has come away possessed of more clarity than when the John Howard Society initiated the case in Saskatchewan’s Court of Queen’s

Bench in 2021.

Some sceptical reader will wonder, “why the fuss? Have the courts not always insisted on the burden of proof just approved by the John Howard ruling?” Well you may ask, for already in 1980, when the federal system replaced its absurd Warden’s Court (CSC as complainant, prosecutor, judge, and executioner!) with a tribunal presided over by an Independent Chairperson, CSC’s new Commissioner’s Directive taught that “if a conviction is to be registered, it can only be on the basis that (...) there is no reasonable doubt as to the guilt of the accused.” Today, that prescription is firmly rooted in the Corrections and Conditional Release Act at s. 43(3): “The person conducting the hearing shall not find the inmate guilty unless satisfied beyond a reasonable doubt, based

What many will not realize is that this apparent bedrock of prison disciplinary practice was instituted by the Legislator as a political choice.

on the evidence presented at the hearing, that the inmate committed the disciplinary offence in question.”

What many will not realize is that this apparent bedrock of prison disciplinary practice was instituted by the Legislator as a political choice. What was lacking in 1980 and remained so until this very month was the High Court’s recognition of a constitutional imperative placing the burden of proof standard safely beyond the reach of Parliament’s pleasure, and no longer leaving provincial systems to do as they wish.

The obvious source of constitutional guidance is section 11(d) of The Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which provides that “Any person charged with an offence has the right (...) to be presumed innocent until proven guilty according to law in a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal.” As noted by the majority in *John Howard*, “s. 11(d)’s guarantee of the presumption of innocence requires that the state **prove every element of the offence beyond a reasonable doubt.**” (my emphasis)

So far, so good, but discerning readers will

see trouble ahead in the words “charged with an offence.” In *R. v. Wigglesworth* (1987), the Supreme Court ruled this applies “when the proceedings are (a) criminal in nature or (b) may lead to the imposition of true penal consequences, such as ‘imprisonment.’” How does a prison’s disciplinary system measure up to that test?

The Supreme Court took up the question in *R. v. Shubley* (1990), brought by an Ontario provincial prisoner who had spent five days in solitary confinement for a disciplinary infraction, and then was criminally charged on the same facts. Mr. Shubley sought a stay of the criminal proceedings, arguing that they entailed a violation of s.11(h) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which reads “Any person **charged with an offence** has the right (...) if finally acquitted

of the offence, not to be tried for it again and, if finally found guilty and punished for the offence, not to be tried or punished for it again.” Thus, if a disciplinary offence could be shown to

constitute an offence in the sense of Charter s.11, the perpetrator could not be held accountable a second time in criminal court. (my emphasis)

The majority in *Shubley* held that the disciplinary proceedings were not “criminal in nature” because they possessed neither the essential characteristics of criminal proceedings (adversarial format, sworn testimony, strict rules of admissibility, etc.), nor the purpose of public accountability. Mr. Shubley fared no better under the other arm of the *Wigglesworth* test. Although he had been stashed in segregation for a (brief) time, and was at risk of suffering a loss of earned remission, the Supreme Court viewed both of these carceral outcomes as distinguishable from the imposition of a sentence of imprisonment, seemingly the only event which could satisfy the *Wigglesworth* test of true penal consequences.

My reference to remission will require explanation. Canada’s Prisons and Reformatories Act confers on both provincial and federal prisoners the potential to earn one day’s remission of their sentence of incarceration for every two days served in prison with good behaviour. Since the adoption of the

Corrections and Conditional Release Act in 1992, the award of fifteen days per month has been automatic in federal, but under the preceding federal statute, as in the provincial regime in Mr. Shubley's case, the performance of prisoners was assessed at the end of each month, and a maximum of fifteen days remission awarded only if merited. For prisoners in Shubley's situation, release was postponed by loss of potential remission.

We have seen that the constitutional case for proof beyond a reasonable doubt had run into a judicial dead end. Legislatures were free to adopt a strict standard for disciplinary conviction, but were equally free to facilitate conviction on a more relaxed basis. Our federal Parliament, although unfettered by a constitutional rule, nevertheless embedded the higher standard in its Corrections and Conditional Release Act. Saskatchewan's system, like Quebec's, chose a different path.

Section 68 of Saskatchewan's Correctional Service Act states "A discipline panel shall not find an inmate responsible for a disciplinary offence unless it is satisfied on a **balance of probabilities** that the inmate committed that offence." (my emphasis) As explained by Saskatchewan's Inmate Disciplinary Hearing Manual (Adult Custody Services, 8 June 2021), "Essentially, the question the discipline panel must ask is whether the evidence, facts and arguments demonstrate that it is more likely than not that the inmate committed the offence." This as much as admits that where it appears the accused might not be guilty, but prob-

ably is, the court will deliver a verdict of unqualified guilt. The John Howard Society of Saskatchewan, experienced in representing prisoners in discipline matters, received standing to act on behalf of Saskatchewan's offenders in the province's Superior Court, and embarked on a mission to correct this iniquity. In their way stood Shubley.

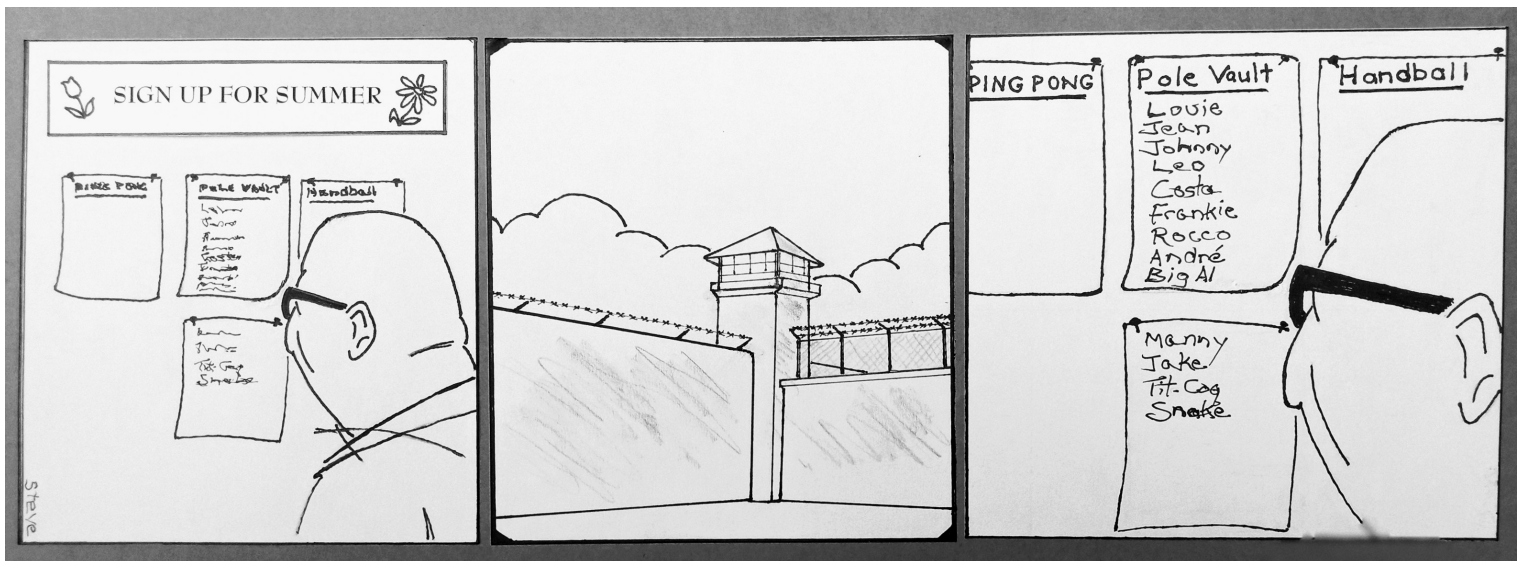
It is noteworthy that Saskatchewan's statute allows for sentences of deadlock, segregation, and loss of earned remission for the commission of a major disciplinary offence, satisfying the Wigglesworth test on its face, yet not in the opinion of the Shubley court. So long as Shubley remained good law, Charter s.11(h), as interpreted by Wigglesworth, could not require disciplinary offences to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

Thirty-five years later, our Supreme Court Justices agonized over this dilemma, knowing conviction on a balance of probabilities is obnoxious and wrong, but hesitant to undermine a jurisprudential tradition on whose stability so much depends: "The decision to depart from a precedent of this Court should not be taken lightly. This is because adherence to precedent furthers values such as the certainty and predictability of the law." At the same time they conceded that in "some exceptional circumstances, however, a compelling reason will outweigh the benefits of following precedent and justify a departure. It is uncontroversial that one such compelling reason is that the rationale for the precedent in question has been eroded due to significant legal change."

In the end, the Court gave full weight to its move from a formalistic interpretation of Charter rights to a more generous approach giving voice to the purpose of the right in question: the legalistic distinction Shubley made between a sentence imposed and a later increase in the degree or length of imprisonment no longer seemed viable. In the words of Chief Justice Wagner, "I agree that Shubley's application of Wigglesworth's true penal consequence test rests on eroded legal foundations. (...) When an inmate faces the risk of disciplinary segregation or loss of earned remission, they face the possibility of additional imprisonment — a true penal consequence. I would allow the appeal, set aside the judgments below, and declare s.68 of the [Saskatchewan] Regulations to be of no force or effect."

With those words, a constitutional duty to find guilt beyond a reasonable doubt where liberty is at stake fell on every prison jurisdiction. Here in Quebec, the regulations governing provincial disciplinary proceedings were amended accordingly without argument or hesitation. A big deal indeed.

Steve

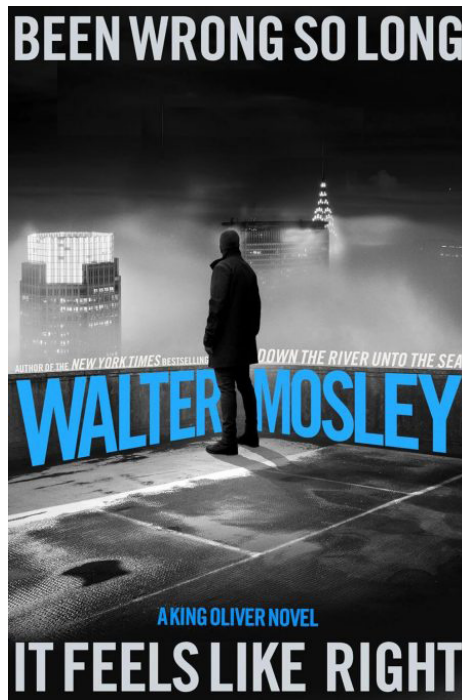




Been Wrong So Long It Feels Like Right: Book Review

Walter Mosley can tell a story and shows that there are at least two sides to every story. The protagonist, Joe King Oliver, is a former cop, a former inmate, and currently a private investigator that seems to live and breathe by restorative justice principles. He understands that getting into trouble is an easy thing, getting out of trouble, is much harder.

While trouble and money are often interwoven, troubles go beyond that. People often battle and fight not because they want to hurt, but rather because they are hurting. Restorative Justice tries to make people – offenders, victims, their families, and society at large understand this, and to deal with it. In a way that does not seek vengeance and further hurt, but rather healing and restoration.



Some people are afraid of going to prison. Others are afraid of leaving the familiarity of prison. And, yet, others say “You could take the man out of the prison but not the prison out of him.” Yes, life is complicated that way.

“You could take the man out of the prison but not the prison out of him, that’s what they said.”

Trying to find a husband’s wife and daughter – seems simple enough for a man like King. Yet, something does not seem right. Too easy, too much money, for a job that the police could have handled. What isn’t the husband telling them? Where is the justice in this case? King strives to find out, and gets himself and his friends into some hot water.

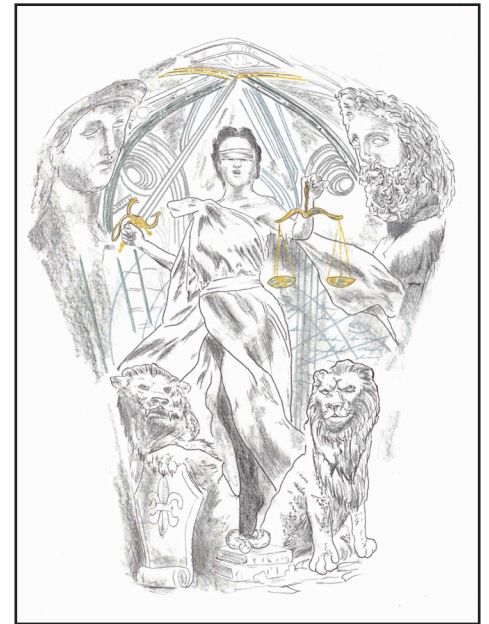
Or how about a father sent to jail for being a crook. But can a crook steal his own money? You see there are always at least two sides to every story. And the truth does not always lie in between. Sometimes the lies – especially when presented as evidence – get in the way of the truth. “Lying is permissible in the execution of justice.”

And is there justice in prison life? Who cares about “a faulty heating system or filth. From cloudy water to fungus-enrusted American cheese, prison life offers few alternatives”? Not too many people. After all, those people are criminals in jail, right? This novel is a very urban, gritty, and believable story. Too believable, at times.

Lino



by Thomas in Cowansville





A Sou'Wester contributor from Cowansville was recently moved by the death of a fellow inmate. It was someone he worked with daily in the library. It inspired him to help organize a memorial service complete with a song he composed.

The Climb

When nobody stays alive; nobody stays alive

It's strange that we still survive, When nobody stays alive

Everybody come with me tonight, everybody come with me tonight

Whoever you are, It don't matter if you're wrong or you're right

Come with me tonight

Bring me a river, bring me a river, bring me a river, bring me a river

Bring me a river, bring me a river, bring me a river, bring me a river

So that I can drown, 'Cause

I'm goin' down, I'm goin' down, I'm goin' down

For the last time, For the last time, For the last time

And then I'll start my next climb, my next climb.

Put your hands in the air, Put your hands in the air,

There's not much more to share, But you can just, put your hands up in the air

We can just wave bye, We can all just wave good-bye,

'Cause all life has to go on after it dies, Somewhere, somewhere, I'm going somewhere

Bring me a river, bring me a river, bring me a river, bring me a river

Bring me a river, bring me a river, bring me a river, bring me a river

So that I can drown, 'Cause

I'm goin' down, Im goin' down, I'm goin' down

For the last time, For the last time, For the last time

And then I'll start my next climb, my next climb.

You know I done my time, Don't you know I done my time

Ok, Okay, Maybe I didn't always walk a straight line, but I done my time

And it ain't reasons or excuses, I face whatever truth is

Ah, Nickel, Quarter, Dime,

You needed help, I helped you out; You played the goof, I called you out

Anytime, every-time, I had the time

And now I'm starting my next climb, Wonder what I'll find

Don't need no reward, No hill-top mansion on a gold-paved road,

Ah, but an open door, Yeah, if you could, just once more

I'd like to come and go through an open door,

This is what I'm climbing to find, I - just couldn't stay inside any longer

There were days that I was stronger, and

I don't run, I don't hide, but I couldn't stay inside even

one minute longer - Don't you think | did my time?

For whatever was my crime - all my crime?

Now I climb, and feeling ever stronger.

Maybe I'll find the ones I wronged - maybe I did a little right

Maybe I'll find the ones I crossed - maybe things will be alright

And once more - just once more - maybe I'll find an open door

Where I can come & go as I please - Ah, that would bring me to my knees

I'm not trying to figure out what it all was for

I ain't looking to even out any score

I just couldn't do ten seconds more, inside,

And just cause I died doesn't mean that I'm not still fighting on your side

It's just another kind of ride

Sooner or later, you have to turn with the tide

I didn't quite make it out, then, but I tried

But when it's your time, well, now I can say it with about an ounce of pride

That I finally, finally, finally made it outside

One way or another and I'm about to discover

On this climb, all the time led me to another kind of an open door

On this climb, all the time led me to another kind of an open door

Ray

Sou'Wester interview



The Sou'Wester interviews Bob M.

SW: Where were you born?

Bob: Memorial Hospital in 1949, in Verdun, and we moved to Lachine when I was 10. So, all of my exciting years were in Lachine as a teenager.

SW: What were you like as a child?

Bob: I was precocious. From the time I was 10 months old, I was walking and climbing, and my mother would find me on top of hutches and all over the place, and she said I never slept. I never slept. Even today, I don't sleep very much. I wasn't a bad child. I was just active.

SW: Speaking of which, you mentioned that in school you were bad at French and chemistry, and you wouldn't run. So, can you tell me a little bit about that?

Bob: So, when I went to school, I did the same thing. If the teachers tried to talk down to me, or, you know, tell me what to do, I resisted. So, we had a gym teacher, uh, who made us run a mile every week after gym class. I always came second or third running around the field doing this mile, but I wouldn't join the track team because, well, he was a very authoritarian kind of person, and I was rebelling. So I refused to do that.

Even though I thought I had talent for running, as for French, I just didn't like French. I didn't enjoy it. Chemistry was my worst subject. It was beyond the theory of it, I just

didn't get it. I guess I'm a very visual, tactile person, and if I can't see it and touch it and do it, I just don't learn it.

SW: All right. So then, what happened later on with those things?

Bob: When I still had no experience, I got a job just by chance in a pharmaceutical company. They saw that I had some intelligence, so they said that I was too good for the tasks I was doing and they put me in the chemistry lab doing simple tests. I took to it. I just took to it. I was good at it. I learned very quickly, and, uh, within a year or two, I was doing some of the most difficult analysis. I was good at math, so I was good at doing calculations. I just had an aptitude for it, even though I showed no promise in high school.

As for the French, I met a French girl, and I married her. Married for 15 years and had two sons together, who were both fluently bilingual, by the way. So, the chemistry led to a career of 41 years in pharmaceuticals. I never had a day of work that I did not enjoy. I thought it was fun. It was always fun to do the analyses and then see them work or not work. It was always exciting when something didn't work, and you discovered that the product was no good. You really had to prove it. So, most of the time everything worked, but other times it didn't work, it was... exciting.

So, the running... When I was in my 30s, I started to gain a little bit of weight. I was always very skinny, but I put on a few pounds, so I started to exercise. Part of the exercise routine was to go for a little run, from which, I discovered, lo and behold, I really love to run! So, this led to running in a running club, uh, training and doing long-distance races, including 20 marathons.

SW: Wow.

Bob: And I, I really loved it. I had an aptitude for it after all, and I did well. I usually placed quite high in the races.

SW: So, when you were young, did you enjoy running and was it just the teacher you didn't like? What was happening there?

Bob: I didn't realize I enjoyed it. I just ran as a small child, I ran everywhere. So, it seemed natural to me. The reason I didn't join the running club was because, um, it was very structured, and you had to run up and down these hills... And do what I considered silly things. It wasn't fun. Mostly because I didn't like the teacher, and I just

refused to go along. But that's just because I'm stubborn.

SW: I think that's fair. Tell me a bit about the marathons. Are you still doing marathons?

Bob: Oh no, I haven't done a marathon in 20 years. I just got bored with it, I think. I did so much running, and I thought I sort of achieved the best results I could get. I'd realized my potential. I had a coach, and I got some really good results, but then, uh, it just kind of became boring after a while. I still run. I run, but I don't do races. I don't compete like that.

SW: So, you really got into it for a while.

Bob: Coincidentally, at the same time that my running was decreasing, I discovered kayaking. I love to kayak and to this day, my favorite thing to do is kayaking.

SW: Tell me a bit about how you kayaked with the whales.

Bob: I was doing some kayaking and I met these two guys out there, about my age, and we got to talking, and one of them said, "Well, we're going to Tadoussac to kayak with whales," and that just blew me away. I said, "Oh, I'd love to do that," and they said, "Well, why don't you come with us?" And so, off we went to Tadoussac, the three of us, and we camped on the shores of the St. Lawrence near where the Saguenay River comes down by Tadoussac. The water there is very deep. It's partially salt water. It's hundreds of feet deep, and there's blue whales, huge whales, right whales, belugas, everything. You see everything there. You kayak, not that far from shore, and you just wait, and they come right beside you.

SW: You weren't nervous at all to do that?

Bob: I was told they would come right up to you and swim beside you but not touch you. So, we had one whale come within 50 feet of us. It was roughly 70, 75 feet long. Before we saw it, we heard it. We heard the blow, and then we turned and it came out of the water, and its eye was looking at us as it went by. It just kept going and going, and it just seemed to never end until the tail came out, and it was it was one of those really awesome moments.

SW: Can you tell me a bit about the joys of grandparenting?

Bob: I have sons who are 43 and 41 now. They're completely different characters. The older one is calm and reasonable. He doesn't react to things physically, he reacts by talk-

ing things out. His younger brother is the exact opposite of him, even from a young age. If you push him, he'll push you back twice. Those were my best years, bringing them up. My older son had a son, and two years after that, he had another son, so two grandsons who were identical in character to him and his brother. The older one is very reasonable and likes to talk about things. The younger is not verbal, he's physical. I love being the grandfather because you don't have the responsibility of the discipline and of teaching them manners. You just have fun. You enjoy them, you spoil them, then they go home.

SW: I really want to ask you about the time you were arrested.

Bob: At 15, things were very tumultuous. I was misbehaving in school, playing hooky a lot. I was a regular at the vice principal's office in grade nine. I think I was there more than I was in class. During the summer of '64, some friends of mine and I decided we were going to hop the fence at the local pool at 3 o'clock in the morning and go skinny dipping. We did this very quietly. We did it a second night, and not so quietly and by the third night, we were getting pretty brave. I was doing cannonballs off the life-guard seat and making a lot of noise. Somebody called the police and the next thing we know, two police cars and four policemen with the lights flashing came roaring up and broke the fence down to get in. They said afterwards that we broke the fence, but they broke the fence. We were all taken down to the police station, like I say, at three in the morning, and they tried to scare us. It didn't really work because we thought this was pretty exciting. One of the policemen said, "Are you having fun now?" And I said, "We were until you arrived."

So, then they took us home. By now it was about four in the morning, and I was the last one to be dropped off in front of my house. They had the lights flashing and everybody was looking out when the policemen took me by the scruff of the neck, up the front steps. And now my whole family was up, my brothers, my sisters. My brother was horrified. My father said, "I'm going back to bed," and my siblings were all laughing because, oh no, I was really in trouble this time. They were quite amused.

My punishment was that my mother decided I should be grounded for two weeks, and that the only place I could go to was the

pool. So, I had to go back to the scene of the crime. Well, that experience scared me straight. Back then, Lachine was a very small community, and word spread, and even in 2025, I'd be telling somebody that story and they'd say, "Oh, I heard about that."

I should say that the last time I was taken into the office at school to be strapped or punished, it was the same vice principal and the same teacher. I guess he had brought a few of the other students that same day. The vice principal said to the teacher, if you want to try, you have to do it yourself. The teacher literally broke into tears and ran out of the office. The strap was about a foot and a half long, a piece of metal with corrugated rubber on both sides, so it pinched the skin. It was kept in this huge book, like a ledger, and you'd write your name and how many times you got hit, and the strap was like a bookmark in the ledger. When the teacher ran out of the office, the VP looked at me, closed the book and said, "Bob, stop being such an asshole." I never give him any more trouble.

It's well known that people who are abused are more likely to abuse, though not always. It can break your spirit, and you don't really want to break the spirit. You want to modify it, but you don't not to break it. When I was sent to my room, for me it was the worst punishment of all, taking away my freedom... If I was in there for an hour I'd be in agony, just because I had no freedom. So, I think the prison system works the same way. It doesn't help. It doesn't solve it any problems. And sometimes it makes them worse.

SW: What are you grateful for?

Bob: Well, I'm 75 years old and in good health. I'm especially grateful for my wife, Camille, because with her, it's probably been the best 20 plus years of my life. Life to me always gets better as you get older. I couldn't be happier.

I just wanted to say I never in my life imagined I would be going into a prison, because like most people I didn't want to think about that. Prison is like dying, it's a terrible thing going to prison, probably the worst terrible thing. When I retired, I was looking for things to volunteer in. At first, I found things like bartending at folk festivals and security detail and fun things like that, where you didn't get paid, but you got free beer, and free entertainment. Then some friends of

mine said "We're going into the prison once a month," and I was intrigued by that, and I said, "Oh, do you think I could come in?" So, I went in there a little in 2010, and spent about 15 years, going in once a month. It was not what I expected. The inmates were not what I expected. They were good guys, they were just like me, and I just enjoyed being with them. I really felt for them, that first time when I left, and I was able to leave, and then they had to go the other way. That part was tough, but then, by that time, they were all pretty happy because they'd had a good meeting. They enjoy talking to the volunteers and the bible study and all those fun things we do on Monday nights. I love the drive back. It takes about an hour, but just being by myself in the car... I can think about all the things that have happened that evening. I'm in a very good place. I really benefit from the experience. They always say how grateful they are, that we go there. So, I suggested to my wife that she come because she's more of a church person than I am or was at the time. And so, she came... She's so strong, she believes that her faith will always get her through any situation. And no matter what the situation is, she always gets through it. She knows she'll get through it, and it's her faith that does that. I'm privileged to have some of that rub off on me.

When I went to the prison, I met a few other volunteers and one told me, "Oh, if you like coming here, you'll enjoy Open Door." There was also the opportunity to meet some of the guys on the outside that I first met on the inside. Even to this day, I see guys coming from B16 that I've known from inside for 15 years. To see them making that transition... it's the most gratifying thing to experience.

By Leigh (they/them)

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