

We would love to hear from you!

1444 Union Avenue  
Montreal QC, H3A 2B8  
514 244 6147

info@communitasmontreal.org  
www.communitasmontreal.org

# the Sou'Wester

A grassroots newsletter on criminal justice & prisoner reintegration

Summer 2025 Edition

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

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## SKYDIVING. JUST DO IT!

Recently, I realized my lifelong dream of skydiving - jumping out of a plane, free-falling, and parachuting to the ground. I experienced a dream so vivid that when I woke up, I knew the time had come to 'just do it.'

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## Behind Open Doors: A Glimpse into a Unique Gathering

Here's to you, curious reader, who has yet to venture behind these open doors. Allow me to offer a glimpse into a remarkable event that continues to draw people in, year after year.

From the moment you arrive, you're likely to be greeted with a warm smile—or two. Familiar faces mingle effortlessly with newcomers, and the welcoming atmosphere is one of the event's greatest strengths. It's rare to see such a diverse

group gather with such genuine ease and hospitality.

The guests of honour are, without a doubt, the guys from the inside, accompanied by their driver. Their presence sparks meaningful, often profound, exchanges—conversations that linger long after the evening ends.

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## View from My Cell

Communitas member Colin McGregor has just released a book in French.

It is how a chance encounter with an inmate in a federal prison led Colin, a philosophy graduate and journalist sentenced to life imprisonment, to send a short, improvised article to Raymond Viger, publisher of the magazine *Reflét de Société*.

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## SKYDIVING. JUST DO IT!

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I found a parachuting club in Farnham, a stone's throw from Cowansville, called and made an appointment for a tandem jump the following Monday from the maximum height of 13,000 feet.

After viewing a short video, I met Ben, a young Kiwi (New Zealand) skydiving veteran with 5 years' experience and hundreds of jumps. I liked and trusted Ben immediately. After putting on our harnesses, we boarded the plane with about 16 other jumpers—three tandem pairs, the rest solo divers, hitching a ride to the drop-off point.

As we reached 13,000 feet, Ben tightened up the harnesses, and when our turn came, we approached the open door. Julian, a videographer, jumped at the same time as us, to record the event. Within seconds,

Ben deployed a drogue chute as a speed control and to keep us parallel to the ground. As we reached terminal velocity, the point at which the speed stabilizes, about 120 mph, the rush of air took my breath away. We assumed a spread-eagled position and hurtled toward the earth for almost a minute.

In the meantime, using hand gestures, Ben and Julian were turning circles and moving back and forth in a kind of celestial dance. When Ben deployed the chute, the harness dug into my thighs as our speed went from 120 to 15 mph.

For the next two minutes, we floated gently downwards, enjoying the view as Ben let me steer the chute using two handles overhead. I could see Cowansville Pen where I would be a few hours later. Ben executed a perfect landing, setting me down on the grass as gently as sitting in my easy chair.

This was, without a doubt, the most exciting, exhilarating three minutes of my life.

Would I do it again? Absolutely, if only to

encourage someone else to try it.

So far, only one in ten people that I've told have expressed an interest. Jared pointed out that at \$300 or so for three minutes, the cost is \$100 a minute. But the best comment must go to Steve, who exclaimed, "Are you freaking crazy?"

In the words of Tom Petty:

Learning to fly, but I ain't got wings,

Coming down is the hardest thing;

Learning to fly around the clouds,

What goes up must come down.

Amen Tom!

*This article was written by Bob. To view videos of his skydiving experience, click these links:*

[Learning to fly](#)

[Free fall](#)

[More free falling](#)

## View from my cell

*Continued from page 1*

That was in 2009. Their collaboration, aided by members of Raymond's team at Reflet de Société, has resulted in years of inside-out articles explaining to readers what prison was all about.

Colin was released from prison in 2020 after more than 29 years behind bars. From mid-2021, he started working at Reflet de Société for Raymond and his team.

Vue de ma cellule (View from My Cell) is a collection of his prison writings. Raw stories. Often touching, sometimes instructive, never boring.



<https://editionstnt.com/produit/vue-de-ma-cellule/>

## Communitas 2025 Picnic

*Planned for Saturday, September 13*

The Communitas Picnic this year will be held in Verdun near the de l'Eglise metro station. Our friends at Crossroads are welcoming us to one of their facilities located at 3901 Ross at the corner of Hickson.

***The picnic starts at noon and runs until 4-30.***

This is potluck occasion, so please bring a dish of your liking from salads to main courses to desserts and drinks. If you can, please bring lawn chairs.

After exiting the metro at de l'Eglise, go east for one block on Wellington, turn right on Hickson and go one block to Ross. It's right on the corner.



## Behind Open Doors

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Chairs and tables are arranged in a rectangle, usually filled by the time Jeri, our beloved MC, brings the room to order with her signature gavel. After a round of announcements, we introduce ourselves, one by one out loud, reaffirming our sense of community.

The evening officially begins with a shared Spiritual Moment—a reflection

that might come from a book passage, a poem, or a personal story. Anyone is welcome to contribute. Sometimes this sparks thoughtful discussion, with ideas bouncing gently from person to person, heads nodding in quiet agreement across the room.

Then comes the moment we've all been waiting for:

"...and now, it's time for our special guest!"

Each week brings a new voice and a new topic. The range is as wide as it is engaging—social justice, a travel tale, even a lesson in biology or the stars. Presentations typically last under an hour and,

time permitting, are followed by a lively and insightful Q&A.

By 8:30, cookies and juice appear, marking the start of casual conversations and deeper reflections inspired by the evening's talk.

There is truly nothing quite like this gathering—a space of learning, sharing, and connection. Its magic lies in its people, in the stories they bring, and in the quiet, enduring warmth of human kindness and acceptance.

*Nicolas*



## Books Are a Gateway

Books can be gateways to understanding, catalysts towards acceptance, as well as guides for enlightenment. This is true for those seeking reconciliation and truth via restorative justice. Books can help with the process, for all the individuals involved, their loved ones, and the community as a whole. Restorative Justice is a system of justice which focuses on restoration of harmony in the community.

The lessons are not found just in books about restorative justice. You have to search

for the insights and the enlightenment, but it is there. Below are three examples from my recent readings that show us part of the way forward.

**“Better for ten guilty men to go free rather than for one innocent man to suffer.” ~ Blackstone Rule:**

In Stephen King's *Never Flinch*, we are reminded of the Blackstone Rule. The logic was that it was a greater injustice to jail an innocent than to let a guilty one, or even ten, go free. Hence the quote, “Better for ten guilty men to go free rather than for one innocent man to suffer.” The story revolves around how society has drifted away from this concept. People take sides and want to win. “Bad decisions lead to grief instead of relief.”

In Emiko Jean's *The Return of Ellie Black* there are several issues which come to our attention. How society attaches a value to missing people. The richer and the whiter the person and their parents, the more attention that the case is likely to receive.

Also, how victims realize that the current system is broken. For a thousand cases of reported rape only a handful lead to a felony conviction. How much wasted time and effort. How much pain and suffering. And for what? An ultimate failure that satisfies no one.

And what happens if someone is convicted? Is there satisfaction? Is there healing? Is there a healthier community? That is very, very unlikely. The jail system is overcrowded, understaffed, and keener on warehousing

or punishing rather than on rehabilitation and healing. In fact, Greg Palast in *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* reports some disturbing information.

The overcrowding and the lack of resources in American prisons is hardly a surprise. The movement towards private facilities is supposed to provide a cost savings – but that too is misleading for the people prisons release are worse than they were when entering—not to mention uprisings or riots which need to be quelled at great cost to the states. You see, “Brutality is cheap, humanity expensive” – in the short run.

So much so, that one person stated, “My 15 months in the prison were hell on earth. I'll never go back.” The most profound thing about this statement is that it wasn't an inmate but an employee who said it.

It is bad enough that the offenders have a hard time forgiving themselves. It is amplified when the world puts imposed burdens – like getting decent food and surviving while they are incarcerated. What do you think is going to happen?

Books may not be the solution. They can, however, help. And while WOKE is becoming a bad word in some circles, let's hope that writers remain, if not woke, at least aware. They can then share their insights, and the world might just be a little better able to understand what is going on.

*Lino*

## Reimagining Justice for Black Communities in Canada

Grasping at the Root is a recently released report by the Canadian Association of Black Lawyers (CABL) that explores how restorative and transformative justice can serve as powerful alternatives to Canada’s criminal legal system, especially for Black communities. It sheds light on the deep-seated injustices embedded in the current system and advocates for justice models grounded in Africentric traditions, collective care, and liberation.

Canada’s criminal legal system has long perpetuated anti-Black racism. Through discriminatory policies and practices, Black individuals are disproportionately criminalized and incarcerated, often portrayed as inherently threatening. This systemic bias fuels cycles of imprisonment across generations and fails to address the underlying causes of harm—such as poverty, marginalization, and trauma.

Rather than promoting healing or accountability, the system relies on punitive measures and shame. Evidence shows that incarceration does not enhance public safety or reduce harm. Instead, it increases the likelihood of re-offending, fractures social relationships, and places economic strain on already vulnerable communities.

Justice rooted in Africentric values—drawn

from African and diasporic traditions—offers a communal and relational lens that prioritizes healing, responsibility, and collective well-being. These approaches challenge the Western legal system’s focus on individual punishment. Despite their significance, Canadian courts have largely dismissed these perspectives. A key example is the 2021 Ontario Court of Appeal ruling in *R v Morris*, which denied recognition of Black communities’ distinct justice frameworks.

Restorative justice emphasizes repairing harm through inclusive dialogue among those impacted survivors, those who caused harm, and the wider community. Practices such as mediation, conferencing, and healing circles encourage accountability and aim to rebuild relationships.

Although Canada hosts numerous restorative justice programs, many are closely tied to the criminal legal system. This connection risks reproducing the same racial biases. Interviews revealed that Black individuals are often excluded from restorative options due to prejudiced perceptions of their offenses. Additionally, many programs focus solely on interpersonal harm, overlooking systemic issues like racism and inequality that contribute to violence.

Transformative justice takes a broader approach, targeting the structural conditions that enable harm. It views institutions like prisons and policing as mechanisms of racial and class oppression. It acknowledges

that marginalized groups—including racialized, poor, undocumented, disabled, queer, and gender-diverse people—are disproportionately criminalized.

Operating entirely outside the legal system, transformative justice seeks to change the societal dynamics that foster violence, such as economic disparity and systemic discrimination. While it builds on restorative principles, it is explicitly political, aiming to dismantle oppressive systems rather than reform them.

The report draws on the legacy of Indigenous, Black, immigrant, disabled, sex worker, and LGBTQ+ communities who have developed non-carceral justice practices. It offers guiding principles for organizations building Black-centered justice frameworks, emphasizing:

- Community care and healing
- Self-determination
- Accountability without punishment
- Non-reliance on carceral systems

Informed by interviews and scholarly contributions, the report stresses the importance of centering lived experience and cultural knowledge in justice work. It calls for a shift toward justice that heals, empowers, and liberates.

For more details: <https://cabl.ca/>



**Birthday Celebrations for Margaret**

Longtime Communitas member and supporter Margaret celebrated her 90th birthday in style at her home on a lovely sunny day surrounded by her many friends and numerous family.

Communitas was well represented with 6 members making the trip out to “the Grange”.

The house was buzzing with everyone talking to everyone else all at once and in the garden others were occupied chatting on the garden swing and meeting old and new acquaintances. It was lovely to overhear the different conversations among the wide age range of guests – ranging from under 5 to 90, and to see the interactions of the different groups as we learnt things about Mar-

garet’s life that we didn’t know she was involved with – from teaching young ones, to MEC (Mouvement vers l’Esprit Communautaire), to Communitas!

Margaret herself was confined more or less to her chair, but that did not stop her being involved in many one on one or one on two conversations through the afternoon. Food was served and several beautiful cakes displayed – with Margaret having enough breath to blow out all the candles in one go.

Here is a photo of Margaret with some of the Communitas members who attended.

*Michele*



## Sacred Connections

**Communitas will welcome a new Intern this September (Carling) who will be offering a new activity called Sacred Connections.**

There has been interest in starting a group at Communitas similar to Gospel Zone but in the Community.

## Volunteer Coordinator Farewell Address

*Dear Communitas Members,*

I am writing to you from the blazing heat of Montreal's Summer, a season that makes us almost wish for the Winter we just barely survived! I cannot believe that it was only just one year ago that I joined Communitas. As an organization and community, we witness so much growth, development, and positive change that a year feels like a much more significant measure of time.

I am so grateful for the time I spent with you working all. Each and everyone of you has made my time here so meaningful.

Communitas changes people, I know that from firsthand experience. The compassion, generosity, and resilience that I have witnessed in every one of Communitas' members has reshaped my worldview. The

This space for Sacred Connections will be open and inclusive to a multi-faith and open spirituality group. It will be a place to hold space for discovery, open questioning and exploration of each person's spirituality and faith. Not only to discuss what a certain scripture or wisdom/text means to you, but also what you can do about it now or change in your life. This allows for an opportunity to hold a space where the group can share experiences, build support systems, and open discussions on important topics/themes that relate to these scriptures or wisdom/texts. It will also delve into what sacredness is, our own individual sacredness, sacredness of one another and all creatures/creation.

From there we will engage in an open-ended discussion on topics, themes that are important to you.

Examples of issues that might arise from the sharing include things such as: clari-

fying my values, emotional well-being, communication skills, managing conflict, coping, my challenges and opportunities, belonging, or others identified as important or pressing for you.

Carling, who is doing a Field Study with the Centre for Christian Studies will develop and undertake this activity in the community. She will plan, organize, lead, or facilitate a shared reflection /healing circle (every 2 or so weeks) with Communitas members in the faith and life perspectives of those gathered.

She will also take the opportunity of doing this individually or in a group when going into the prison(s).

*Michele*

connections and relationships I have both seen and fostered at Communitas have granted me a newfound appreciation of our collective ability to transform. It has been an honour and a privilege to help coordinate your efforts to make Montreal, Canada, and the world a more caring, equal, and forgiving place.

I know that as with everyone that has the pleasure of being a part of Communitas, I will be a lifelong member-- even if our meetings are fewer and further between. I have never felt more grateful for our continued ability to connect over Zoom.

I wish you all the best with your work ahead. Having grown to know you all, I truly cannot wait to see what the future holds for you, both individually and as an organization.

All my best,

*Sophie*



## Become a Communitas member!

Are you a member of Communitas yet?

Would you like to become one?

If you are passionate about social justice and interested in understanding how restorative justice impacts prisoners' rights and our broader society's wellbeing, Communitas might be a good place for you.

It's easy to join us! You can check out our activities on our website where our membership form can be found:

<https://communitasmontreal.org>.

Annual membership is only \$20.

You can also support our activities by becoming one of our monthly donors (currently we have 14), or by giving a one time donation.

<https://communitasmontreal.org/donate>

You are very welcome to join us.

Michele, Chairman, Communitas Board of Directors

## Three for the Road

*A social worker, a lifer, and a lawyer walk into a bar. The bartender says, “why are you three birds looking so cheerful?”*

*The social worker quickly responds, “I guess you haven’t heard about the Supreme Court of Canada’s landmark new ruling on the sentencing of minors as adults. I’m sure you know there is a vast disparity in the severity of sanctions authorized for adults, and the “meaningful consequences” the law mandates for youths. This second, separate sentencing regime flows from a statutory presumption that young people are more immature, more vulnerable, and less capable of making moral judgements than adults, calling into play “the principle of diminished moral blameworthiness or culpability.”*

Yet s.64 of the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) does allow the Crown to seek an adult sentence if it is able to (1) bring adequate facts to rebut the presumption of insufficient development, and (2) prove the usual sentence for a young person is not adequate in the particular case. And that is what happened in *I.M. v. The King*, wherein an offender aged 17 years and 5 months at the time of the crime was sentenced as an adult to a life term with 10 years of parole ineligibility.

The facts offered little to inspire leniency. In 2011, I.M. was actively seeking to acquire a .38 calibre handgun, and told his peers he saw the planned robbery as a stepping stone to greater criminal activity. On the day in question he went as part of a group including adult men to rob the home of another 17 year old of firearms. The victim, who was shovelling snow, resisted, and was stabbed 11 times or more, including in the face and back. The group then entered his house, struck his mother on the head with a handgun, and detained her while they searched the premises. A week after the murder—for murder it was—, I.M. fled the country, and was arrested in 2013.

The Court of Appeal upheld the life sentence, but on July 18, 2025, a majority on the Supreme Court found fault with the test the Youth Justice Court had relied on

in determining if the presumption of diminished culpability should not operate. They quashed the adult sentence and substituted the maximum sentence allowed by the YCJA, being 6 years of custody (less time served) followed by 4 years of conditional supervision in the community.

The Supreme Court decision clarified that the Crown must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the facts have rebutted the presumption of diminished culpability; and that only those facts are relevant which relate to the young offender’s personal attributes and behaviour as they reflect on their developmental age; what should not sway this calculation is the objective seriousness of the offence, as this does not shed light on the offender’s developmental progress.”

## A social worker, a lifer, and a lawyer walk into a bar. The bartender says, “why are you three birds looking so cheerful?”

The lawyer answers next. “I’ll be briefer than my garrulous friend. As explained in the Winter 2024 issue of *Mostly Legal*, during his term as federal Justice Minister and Attorney General, David Lametti was driven by a deeply felt commitment to overhaul our Criminal Record Review program, Canada’s flawed remedial response to wrongful convictions, also described as miscarriages of justice. To that end, he initiated public consultations in March 2021, and was able to table the Miscarriage of Justice Review Commission Act (a.k.a. David and Joyce Milgaard Law) in February, 2023. When he was purged from the cabinet in late July 2024, a blameless victim of the Bernardo debacle, his legacy legislation was still before the Senate Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights for fine tuning, but what he had handed his successor was largely a finished piece of work.

It has now come to my attention that Bill C-40, whose essential reforms are touched on in my Winter 2024 column, received royal assent on December 17, 2024, a historic day which passed under the radar likely because the new law has yet to be declared in force. That final step waits on the govern-

ment to set up the new independent review commission and hire and train the requisite personnel to execute the new procedures, but we need not fret: Parliament has spoken, and the introduction of the new regime is assured.”

Finally, the lifer speaks up: “for my part, I am celebrating the ruling in *R. v. Mariani*, a decision made last month by British Columbia’s superior court. All lifers are aware that s.745.6 of the Criminal Code, ironically dubbed ‘the faint hope clause,’ was introduced to entitle those sentenced to life for murder with more than 15 years of parole ineligibility, once they have served 15 years, to petition a jury to substitute a lower ineligibility period. That vital source of hope has been whittled down over the years, as

Parliament added the need to obtain a judge’s approval before applying for the jury trial; increased the jury votes needed to win from 2/3 to unanimous; ruled ineligible those with more than one murder conviction; and, in 2011, limited applications to a 90 day window following 15 years served. And then the final coup de grace: the

Harper government abolished the remedy outright for those whose crime was committed after 2011.

Now the B.C. Supreme Court in *R. v. Mariani* has recognized that total abolition of the remedy is cruel and unusual treatment or punishment, a violation of s.12 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and of no force or effect. As of July 2025, B.C. lifers who committed their offense after 2011 have been thrown a lifeline, albeit subject to the restrictions mentioned above. The government is expected to appeal; and once *Mariani* has been elevated to the country’s high court, should the trial decision survive, it will apply in every province and territory.”

So, you will ask, what’s the punchline? There is no punchline. Sometimes when three people walk into a bar they just want a drink.

Steve

# Redemption

## A Philosophical Examination of Perpetual Stigma in the Correctional Service Canada.

### Introduction

The belief in redemption is a cornerstone of many ethical, spiritual, and psychological frameworks. It is the idea that human beings, no matter their past actions, possess the capacity for transformation and deserve the opportunity to reintegrate into society as better versions of themselves. Yet, for many individuals who have committed serious crimes—particularly those sentenced to indefinite supervision—this belief is systematically undermined by institutional structures that label them as perpetual risks.

This essay explores the tension between the philosophical and moral necessity of redemption and the criminal justice system's tendency to impose indefinite stigma on certain offenders. Specifically, it examines how the designation of an individual as an enduring "risk" by Correctional Service Canada (CSC) creates a marginalized identity that contradicts principles of human dignity, growth, and justice. By engaging with philosophical perspectives on punishment, forgiveness, and human potential, I argue that a system that denies the possibility of full redemption fails not only the individual but society itself.

### I. The Concept of Redemption: Moral, Spiritual, and Psychological Foundations.

A. Redemption in Moral Philosophy: From a moral standpoint, redemption is tied to the idea of moral agency—the capacity of individuals to recognize their past wrongs, reform their character, and act in accordance with ethical principles moving forward. Philosophers like Immanuel Kant emphasized the importance of rational self-determination; even a criminal, he argued, retains the capacity for moral reasoning and thus the possibility of reform.

Similarly, utilitarian thinkers like John Stuart Mill would argue that punishment should serve a rehabilitative function rather than a purely retributive one. If an individual demonstrates genuine change, continued punitive measures serve no constructive

purpose and may even be harmful to societal well-being.

B. Redemption in Spiritual and Religious Traditions: Most major religious traditions uphold the possibility of redemption. Christianity, for instance, centers on the concept of forgiveness and renewal ("If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come" – 2 Corinthians 5:17). Judaism emphasizes 'teshuvah' (repentance), a process by which a wrongdoer can return to righteousness through sincere atonement. Even secular humanist perspectives recognize that human beings are not static entities but evolving moral agents

If spiritual and ethical systems affirm that no person is beyond redemption, why does the criminal justice system—particularly in cases like this—insist on an indefinite "risk" label?

## This essay explores the tension between the philosophical and moral necessity of redemption and the criminal justice system's tendency to impose indefinite stigma on certain offenders.

C. Psychological Perspectives on Change and Desistance: Modern criminology supports the idea of

'desistance' — the process by which offenders cease criminal behavior and reintegrate into society. Research shows that factors such as stable employment, social support, and personal identity shifts are critical in sustaining long-term change. The psychological concept of 'narrative identity' (how people construct their life stories) suggests that when individuals see themselves as reformed, they are more likely to act accordingly.

However, when institutions impose a permanent "risk" status, they disrupt this narrative. Instead of allowing a person to move beyond their past, they reinforce a deviant identity, which can become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### II. The Paradox of Indefinite Risk Assessment\*\*

A. The Illusion of the "Expiration Date" in Justice: I highlight a crucial inconsistency: individuals who commit murder but receive fixed sentences are deemed "safe" upon release, whereas those under indefinite super-

vision are perpetually viewed as risks. This suggests that the "risk" designation is not purely about the act committed but about bureaucratic categorization.

This creates a paradox: if two people commit the same crime, why is one allowed full reintegration while the other remains perpetually monitored? The answer lies not in objective danger but in systemic distrust of certain offenders—a distrust that resists evidence of reform.

B. The Problem of "Managing" Rather Than Liberating: CSC's framework implies that freedom is conditional and incremental, but never absolute. While gradual reintegration makes practical sense, the insistence that you will 'always' be a risk undermines the very premise of rehabilitation. If no amount of good behavior can fully erase the label, then the system is not truly invested in redemption—only in containment.

This approach mirrors what philosopher Michel Foucault called 'disciplinary power'—a form of control that operates through constant surveil-

lance and categorization. The individual is never fully free; they are perpetually subjected to institutional judgment.

C. The Psychological Harm of Perpetual Stigma. Being told that you will always be a risk is not just a bureaucratic classification—it is an assault on self-worth. Psychologically, humans need to believe in their capacity for growth. When institutions deny this possibility, they foster 'learned helplessness'—a state in which individuals internalize their lack of agency.

Moreover, social stigma compounds this harm. If the state declares someone a permanent risk, society will treat them as such, limiting opportunities for housing, employment, and meaningful relationships. This creates a feedback loop where reintegration becomes nearly impossible.

### III. The Value of Humanity and Positive Potential.

*Continued on page 8*

## Redemption

*Continued from page 7*

A. Human Dignity and the Right to Self-Reinvention: At the core of this discussion is the principle of ‘human dignity’—the idea that every person has inherent worth and the right to define their future. Philosophers like Martha Nussbaum argue that dignity requires the freedom to pursue a flourishing life. If the state denies this possibility based on past actions, it effectively reduces a person to their worst moment, negating their full humanity.

B. The Social Utility of Redemption: A society that believes in redemption is a stronger one. When individuals are given genuine opportunities to reform, they contribute positively rather than drain resources through perpetual supervision or recidivism. Conversely, a system that refuses to acknowledge transformation fosters resentment and alienation, increasing the likeli-

hood of harm rather than reducing it.

C. Justice as Restoration, Not Endless Punishment: Restorative justice models emphasize healing rather than endless retribution. If the goal of incarceration is public safety, then those who demonstrate reform should be fully reintegrated. If the goal is instead perpetual punishment, then the system is not about justice but vengeance—a stance incompatible with ethical governance.

IV. Toward a Philosophy of Hope and Institutional Reform.

A. Challenging the “Risk” Paradigm: The first step is to contest the assumption that risk is static. Risk assessment tools should account for demonstrated change, not just past behavior. If psychology and criminology recognize that people desist from crime, then institutional policies must reflect this.

B. Advocacy for Policy Change: Indefinite supervision policies should be reformed to allow for full discharge upon proven rehabilitation. This would require legislative and cultural shifts—recognizing that perpetual marginalization serves no one.

C. Reclaiming Narrative Agency: Finally,

individuals in this position must resist internalizing the “eternal risk” label. By asserting their own narrative—one of growth, responsibility, and humanity—they challenge the system’s reductive logic.

Conclusion

Redemption is not a privilege but a fundamental aspect of human dignity. A justice system that denies this betrays its own purpose. One’s struggle is not just personal but philosophical: it is a fight for the recognition that no human being should be eternally defined by their past. The true measure of a society’s morality is not in how it punishes but in how it believes in the possibility of change.

One is more than one’s worst act. One’s humanity—and one’s potential—transcend the bureaucratic categories imposed upon one. The challenge ahead is not just to prove one’s worth to the system but to insist that the system recognize its own obligation to honor the redemptive capacity within every person.

*By TJCI*



## Maybe You Are There

*By Ray*

Maybe you are there  
This invocation, this prayer  
Break the silence, fill the air  
Maybe you still care;  
I light the fire in my heart  
Stir the cauldron of my soul  
Burn the incense of my reason  
This being a season of parts to stitch and make whole;  
I pick the wild herbs I know  
I honour what I can  
From limitations grace will grow  
To feed the Pan within -I honour who I am;  
Though less than human I’m perceived  
I take it on the chin  
There are gods & goddesses still believed

Who also know this suffering, and that to end is to begin;  
Somehow this desolation  
Has become a house of power  
Somehow in isolation  
Locked away in the Dark Tower  
Comes a realization  
That it’s not this second, but it tis the hour  
To lose your skin, loose your hips, and let it spin,  
This is the incantation, time to begin  
We re going for the gold, though all we now have is tin  
And I may call this salvation, but it’s not from irredeemable sin  
It’s a reunion without judgement  
Except to ask, “Where you been?”  
And maybe tears for what was lost  
And tears for what is found again  
It’s only time, my friend  
Time, an element of the Wind (blow through me, blow through me,  
blow through me now) And of the sound of whatever’s going down  
In this one-horse cow-town, at long last... Comes the chance ...  
to dance

*This poem was offered up as a spiritual moment at a recent Open Door and inspired a deep and meaningful discussion.*

## All of my pain is a spider

All of my pain is a spider  
I've learned not to crush  
with the heel of my shoe  
but to guide with a page  
of my journal  
into an empty glass  
asking questions about its life,  
its purpose, as I walk  
careful out to the garden  
and rest it down on the earth.  
My pain, how happy it is  
to leave me whenever  
I treat it kind.

*Andrea Gibson*

## Freedom is a must

Freedom after jail, oh what a sight  
To finally leave behind those walls so tight,  
To breathe in fresh air, to feel the sun,  
To know that a new life has just begun

The weight of the past, oh how it fades,  
The memories of pain, the never-ending shades,  
The endless routine, the ominous and gloomy days,  
All just a memory, how it all fades

To start anew, to chase new dreams  
To let go of guilt, to shed those old screams,  
To embrace a world that's bright and new,  
To see beauty where we once saw blue,

A second chance, a precious gift,  
To leave behind the past and let our spirits lift,  
To make amends, to right what's wrong  
To find a place where we truly belong

Freedom after jail, a chance to be free  
To chart our own course, to let our souls be,  
To walk with pride, to hold our heads high,  
To know that we've grown, to look at the sky

So let us embrace the world outside  
To celebrate life, to feel alive  
To never forget the lessons we learned,  
To leave behind the past, make amendments  
For bridges burnt

And so, we move on to life anew  
With hope in our hearts and dreams in view  
For freedom after jail, oh what a sight  
To know that we have won the fight

*Marvin*



*Artwork by Ali*



### The Sou'Wester interviews Marvin.

**SW:** Where were you born?

**Marvin:** I was born in Jamaica. I came to Canada in 1993. I was young, seven years old. It was a culture shock, like the first-time seeing snow. I arrived in the winter experiencing a snowfall, experiencing cold weather. Also, eating certain foods was like a new experience. I was used to eating a certain way and then, all of a sudden, there's all these varieties of different fast food and different breakfast meals and stuff like that. I grew up in Jamaica eating a lot of vegetables and fruits and stuff like that. Yeah. So, I was like a vegan/vegetarian growing up. Having access to all these varieties of restaurant chains was like a culture shock. It was so different.

**SW:** What intrigued you the most when you arrived?

**Marvin:** I think the fact of being on the plane for the first time ever. And then reconnecting with my actual immediate family, like my dad and my mom. They immigrated to Canada when I was very young, so I never really got to see them. I was raised by aunts and my grandparents in Jamaica and then I found out that I had a younger sister, so that was something to look forward to in Canada. Coming here was a new experience.

**SW:** Did you find it easy you make friends?

**Marvin:** Well, I started school in Grade 1. So, you know, at that age, it's like everybody in the neighborhood where I was from was like ethnically diverse. There were a lot of immigrants in those times. We were in western Toronto. So yeah, I guess I didn't stand out cause everybody also around me also had immigrant parents. My vocabulary was a little different because I had the Jamaican patois that was really strong. So, I had to learn to express myself in a more normalized Canadian English. As I said, everybody was like either West Indian, Asian descent. Muslim or Arabic, it was really diverse. So, in grade one, we were all learning together, making friends, playing, running around. It was alright. It was immersive and we made immediate connections.

**SW:** What activity kept you most busy as a child?

**Marvin:** As a kid? I liked adventure, being able to wander off and do things like that. I was just always exploring the city and the neighborhood. When it came to sports, I played a little bit of baseball growing up and I was really heavy into a track and field. Track and field, like the 100m relay, the long jump. I did all those things growing up in elementary school.

**SW:** What was your best friend like?

**Marvin:** My best friend, oh, he was Vietnamese. He was a straight up person, you know, like he's very artistic too. He had like a natural gift for art. He could draw anything from memory. And I'm not talking like childish drawing, it was really artistic, a real gift. He could be an animator or whatever. So, he had that gift. We just used to wander off to do random things together. He was a good friend. I got to meet to his family because he had a lot of brothers and I met his mom and dad and with them being Asian, you think it would be like a culture shock, like them saying a black kid or whatever. But it wasn't like that. They were very welcoming, and they knew he was my friend. So, I was there as his friend. They didn't make it hard for me to be part of their family at dinner time and stuff like that. So. It was a really good experience having him as a friend. And it's funny, because when I moved out of that neighborhood, he also moved somewhere else, and his family eventually ended up moving into the same neighborhood I was in for a short period of time. So again, we reconnected. It was nice.

**SW:** What can you tell me about your high school years?

**Marvin:** They were fun years. It was exciting. When I left elementary school, I did some extra credits for grade 9 so I was more an academic student at one point when I was growing up. So, I did the whole summer school thing. I took a computer course. When I started Grade 9, I already had like an extra 2 credits for that year. I was also a part of the school's theatre. I did the regular high school stuff. But then I fell off into things. I got hooked on the whole smoking marijuana and stuff like that, in Grade 11. I fell off and dropped out of Grade 11. But I did finish my Grade 11 much later on.

**SW:** What was your favorite subject?

**Marvin:** My favorite subjects were science and English literature. I read a lot of books,

you know, I was more into like the fiction stuff growing up, like a soldiers and urban books and stuff. Now I am into the non-fiction books. I like autobiographies and anything that's fact based. A book that I recently read was a book called Egyptian Yoga. It just pretty much breaks down the definition of yoga, what yoga is and what it really meant to be, compared to like the interpretation of Hollywood and how it's more glorified. This book actually breaks down the chakra and the whole concept of mind, body and soul and stuff like that. So, it was really interesting. You actually delved into the actual concept that goes back to Egyptian times where they practiced all these arts, where they had a oneness in the connection with spirituality. So, all these practices were designed to connect you with a higher purpose and stuff like that. It opened my eyes on what all these things really were, you know.

**SW:** What would you say would be your biggest life lesson?

**Marvin:** My biggest life lesson? I would say that would be to always practice patience and mindfulness. Sometimes in life we want to have the instant gratification that luxuries provide and stuff like that, so we end up overlooking many things. We end up missing out on family, missing out on a positive role model because we're chasing that gratification. And with that comes all the negative aspects of glorifying negativity. So, my biggest life lesson would be to like take things slow, be mindful, live life at that pace. My goal right now is trying to be successful. And not by any means but doing things legitimately. I've just been trying to rebuild all that lost time I had with family, you know, due to my incarceration. So, I've been spending a lot of times these past few months just reconnecting with family, nieces, my sisters and siblings, and just trying to understand life and live life the right way.

**SW:** What do you see for yourself in the future?

**Marvin:** I see myself being successful. I see myself building a life that I could be proud of, one that I'm walking the path where it's based on morality and not just greed and selfishness. I would like to do more poetry. One of my poems is in this edition of the Sou'Wester. My whole goal is to like, really get me in tune with nature and the world again and be able to have original ideas again and write poetry.

*By Bill*

Dear Sou'wester,

What I appreciate about the Chapel here in Cowansville is that it is Inter-Faith - a variety of religions share the sacred space. Perhaps it is a microcosm for the ideal of the World, you know, besides the concrete and barbed wire that surrounds it. As the resident musician I am asked to provide music for different religious and cultural events. I take this seriously, studying and preparing for them. The selections I am submitting this season are song compositions I recently performed at the Eid al-fitr (Muslim) celebration of the end of Ramadan, and the recently begun Pagan meeting, which happens once a month.

The song "Fifty Years is related to the following passages from a book I came across while preparing for Eid called "After Beautiful Patience" by Elias Malik. The song is from the point of view of two Soulmates who while in the eternal realm agree to be apart for 50 physical years, not fully understanding the length of such a separation:

"Soulmates in Islam"

In Islam, the concept of Soulmates is rooted in the idea that souls were created in a realm before this world, and that certain souls were meant to find each other in this life.

Till death do us part is not enough Fi du-nya wa Bl akhira

I wish to be with you in this life and the next A love that never dies

The thought / that your name / has always been next to mine.

You were my destiny/ from the very beginning." - Elias Malik

Thank you, once again, for considering my submissions. You are very much appreciated; I think of you often.

## Fifty Years

By Ray

You were the light, the white, the face within,

I was the dark which you could not begin

To understand. You were protected by

Some unseen hand, or Angel spy,

I was the wrath from those whose path I crossed

In ancient times when everything seemed lost,

You were the guide that led them safely on,

They owed a debt and thus they did no harm,

You were the pureness of a higher plain,

I was the other

Fifty years - was the deal I made with you  
Fifty years — looks easy on paper

Fifty years - I would wait for you

Fifty years - on this trail of vapour

You were the spring, the sun which shone for all,

I was the cold, the moon, the end of fall,

You held the worth of all in high regard,

I was the crack, the crumb, the speck, the shard,

You were the pure, the virtue that I sought,

I was the need, the guilt which could be bought

By any jinn or sacrifice or creed

I was the foul, succumbing to my greed,

You were the one forgiving even me,

I was the other Fifty years - was the deal...

You were the right; encompassed second sight

I was the wrong; one who did not delight

You were the one to pause, and told me so,

I was the one who laughed but did not know - don't go... now I'm singing don't go  
You were the only one I ever hurt, or so I thought -

I was the other - I thought that I could survive, for

Fifty years - Without you by my side, what's

Fifty years - When you have eternity, just

Fifty years - Should be nothing; a shadow

Don't go, now I'm singing don't go

Don't go for 50 years, or even 15 seconds ... all the things I didn't know... you told me so... don't go.

## Read the Sou'Wester, learn things

*To the Sou'Wester,*

I read with interest Ron's article on page 8 of your Winter 2025 Edition discussing the prevalence of opioid dependency in Canada's federal penitentiary population and

CSC's evolving response. There is no shortage of attention in the mainstream press to the overdosing crisis in urban neighbourhoods, none being more reported than the drug use in Vancouver's Downtown East Side. It can be no surprise, then, that this social problem presents in concentrated form in the penitentiaries. Still, I was not expecting to read that "As of February

2024, nearly one in four federal inmates in Canada are (sic) receiving opioid agonist treatment..." Thanks for bringing this startling fact forward.

Steve

# Please support **Communitas!**

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

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

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

\$25     \$50     \$100     Other \_\_\_\_\_

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

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*Montreal QC, H3A 2B8*

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

**CLICK HERE**



## **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)

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

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