

The Journey

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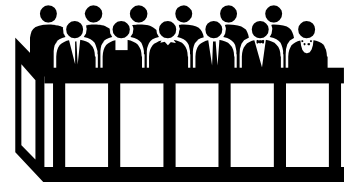


Restoration, like healing, is a journey that we all must make together. We lean on, support, learn from, give ideas, encourage, and grow in the attempt to heal, make whole again, and restore that which was taken during the commission of the crime. As correctional professionals, advocates, victims, community members and offenders, we are on a journey that will change our lives forever as well as those lives that we touch along the path of our journey.

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Jury Duty



My name is Joan. And I am a victim of Crime. I was kidnapped and raped 15 years ago. That was when the New Me was made. The New Me sees everything differently than before. Everything is different, scary, and new. I learned to do everything over.

Six months ago I was called for jury duty. I filled out the questionnaire, noted that I had been involved in a serious crime, and had testified before. Under the "why you think you can't participate" section, I wrote that I was a victim of crime, and it would cause me great emotional stress and trauma to be in a court room again. Of course this would exempt me, no one wants a crying juror!

The jury call-line had no mercy. My number was called. The clerk of courts was no more gracious. I called the jury duty office and explained, as I have had to do countless times before for other reasons, that I could not be a juror because I was a "crime victim." As if it was a disease. I still think it is. There was no mercy. I sat quietly at my desk at work and tried not to cry - unsuccessfully. I didn't

sleep the night before. All I could envision was the lawyer asking me why I didn't think I could be a juror. And crying in front of everyone, like the 14 year old little girl I would feel like.

The next morning, I paid nearly \$5 for coffee from Starbucks because I felt sorry for myself. And I needed the caffeine. As I got closer to the courthouse, my brain started to shut down. I couldn't decide where to park, what to bring in, where I put my coffee. The guards at the door startled me. There was a line to talk to the mean woman who told me she didn't care what I was, that I was called for jury duty. She told me which courtroom to go to. I went. There were 70 other people waiting. We all sat close together. They were in my space. I started sweating, and my heart rate went up. Focusing on breathing and not passing out became my goal. Every muscle in my body was stiff. Don't make eye contact with anyone. Focus. Think. I inched as close to the wall as I could. I might crack if someone touches me. Four hours later, I went back to work. I wasn't chosen. This is the new me.

“The dead cannot cry out for justice...

... it is the duty of living to do so for them.”

I know a man who, at the age of nearly 17 years, brutally and with deliberate planning, murdered his mother and his 13 year old sister. In the light of day, he disabled the telephone, collected a baseball bat and aquarium plastic tubing and waited for them to return to the house. He attacked his mother as she walked in, beating her, strangling her, returning to her battered body several times to continue the attack. He rummaged through the kitchen drawers and found two steak knives; he walked back to where his mother lay helpless, probably already dead, and he stabbed them into her neck in a crisscross pattern. At some point, his little sister entered to see her brother killing her mother. She screamed out his name and began to run. He tackled her, beat her with the bat, and also strangled her with the plastic tubing.

The truth is never taken
From another
One carries it always
By oneself.
Giko

He shoved her body into a small half-bathroom and shut the door, only a few feet from the entryway where her beaten, strangled, and stabbed mother now lay dead.

He goes upstairs to shower and pack his things, while the bodies lay downstairs. Once freshly showered, he comes back down the stairs and rifles through his mother's purse taking money, credit cards, and car keys. He then calmly walked out to the garage, jumped into the family car and drove away; leaving the garage door up and the door open into the house. His stated plan was to drive down to Texas and visit friends. He made stops along the way, buying candy, pop, music cassettes; he stayed a few hours in a motel before getting back on the road. The Highway Patrol finally picked him up on the interstate within 24 hours of the killings. He didn't hesitate to confess to the murders of his mother and little sister.

The sentence from the U.S. criminal court system: 1st degree murder in the killing of his forty-three year old mother, and “reckless” second degree murder for the death of a beautiful thirteen year old girl. He received 15 years to life for his mother's murder - 77 months for killing his sister. This man spent the first 10 years of his incarceration in a psychiatric penal system, a hospital setting as I understand. Much liberty was granted in his daily routine. In 2003 he was finally moved into the jurisdiction of the DOC (department of corrections) ie: prison. So he is now in his sixth year of incarceration in the prison system.

Fifteen years have passed. For the families of the victims, they first passed moment by agonizing moment, reality literally ticking by. Continually, before the eyes of the family left behind, are the beautiful daughter and big sister, the sweet grand-daughter and dear niece as well as crime scene photos of swollen gray faces, broken bones, pools of black blood. In looking back, it seems as though time just slowed down, and in a continual loop all of these events slowly scrolled by in front of one's eyes. At some point, time must have resumed a relatively normal pace. Gradually, the remaining family reentered their lives and began to walk through them. And eventually a new life was being lived, one where the abhorrent slaughter of their beautiful and beloved girls was just the never-ending backdrop to daily life. It has never gone away for a single day – I'm tempted to say moment, but no one would believe that – unless they've lived through the murder of one they love.

And now there comes a new phase to this grotesque show of horrors. This man is eligible for parole. After only 15 years. If he gets paroled, his time will have been entirely served by the brutal murder of his mother. So the concept of justice comes to be at the forefront of my thoughts all of a sudden...and all the while the smiling faces and wide eyes of two beautiful girls no more - blue eyes, strawberry blond hair, laughter, silly smiles - all scroll incessantly along in the background, though intermixed with visions of strangled swollen faces, puffed and gray blood filling the floor, hair solid with blood ... all of these images I see everyday, as now, when I contemplate what justice really means.

It is my duty.

Deb McDowell

From Marcy Stroud - Mt. Pleasant Correctional Facility:

I had this especially successful/inspirational female sex offender write this before she left prison. I wish everyone could have seen how hard she worked. Here's what she said:

When I came to prison I was dealing with a lot of emotions concerning myself. I was angry, I was hurt and I was scared. Unsure of what was ahead, I slowly moved forward, getting all I could out of my treatment classes. Struggling along the way, I continued to push ahead. I decided to make a commitment, a commitment to my victims. I asked myself, "What is the one thing I can do to give back for what I have taken?" I decided I would become a healthier person in all areas of my life.

My commitment changed from myself to them – victims of crime. I believe making victims a priority in your treatment is a part of making you, an offender, successful in life after prison. You are capable of being a happy, healthy and productive part of society. I believe in you. Now it's time to believe in yourself.

Melissa B.

I HAVE PERMISSION

By Anonymous (Survivor of sexual abuse)
Submitted by Gerald Blanchard

I have permission to
break the chains
of yesterday's pain.
After all that strife,
a new lease on life.
I have permission at last
to be free,
to be me.
To throw away those
masks
and stop those boring
tasks.
I have permission
to trust, to accept, to love
me.
I have permission to be
the me

I was meant to be.
It's so strange how long it
took
to look at me.
I'm not perfect,
but I'm not bad.
And I can be sad,
mad,
glad,
laugh and love.
So look out world!
Since I have permission
to love me,
there's so much love to
give away.
My love of self and others
is here to stay.

Personal thoughts after the loss of Coach Ed Thomas

By Dean Lindeman, North Central Correctional Facility and previous student of "Coach T."

The random distracting preoccupation continues. I work for the Department of Corrections, and as part of my job as counselor at the prison, I facilitate a program called Victim Impact. Because of this, I know many victims of various crimes. I have become very familiar with many of the issues pertaining to victimization. However, I *now* know what most of them go through, the difficulties they typically experience, and what they might endure in their future. There is no "right" way to deal with being a victim, just the realities of coping with a "new normal" the rest of life - to view life in a "before & after" sort of way – through a new lens which is forever influenced by the life-changing trauma.



People talk about moving forward, and they do so with good intent, as if we could move forward enough to end up in reverse – back to the way it was before. "Moving on" toward "closure" is said as if victimization is a chapter we can take out of a book, as if were we to read it enough, we could decide to erase or delete it. That sounds nice, to throw it away and be done with it; but, we can't. Fortunately, the people we have lost can live on through more than our memories. We can replay the videos and retell the stories. And it is important that we do something with our feelings, our gratitude and new wisdom, and our awareness that we did not have before.



Since the murder of Coach Thomas, it has been fascinating to see and read all of the insights and accolades of countless others who share this loss. When I see all of the video clips, pictures and memories that others have, it is helpful. Recently, I was able to attend the first home football game in Parkersburg since his death. This was a spiritual event for many, including myself. We could feel Coach T.'s presence all around that field. Although the conversations were typical, we also smiled and laughed and reminisced. It was helpful, but it left us wanting more: to relive the past, at least for a little while longer.

The influence of someone who has suddenly been taken from us seems to find a new place in our lives. We will never be able to answer the question "why" in our random, unpredictable world of good and bad. The answer will only change from day to day, as our world goes on. We can never "let go," at least not completely. And that is good because, if we are paying attention at all, we need them – the memories, the influence, the inspiration.



"Coach T." Edward Arthur Thomas
July 17, 1950 - June 24, 2009

The Tunnel

By Mitch N.

People always say
There's light
At the end of the tunnel
But darkness
Is all I ever see

I continue to walk
Down a blind corridor
Occasionally stumbling
On loose stones

Although I fall at times
I always reach my feet
Feeling the walls
I inch my way forward
Continuing on life's path

Today I've reached
What seems like the end
A wall of rubble
All the way to the top

I sit and ponder
Do I simply give up
Or do I search
For a way through

The journey has been
Long, cold, and lonely
Painful at times

I want to lay down
And forget.
Not wanting to continue
Or remember how I got here

Standing there
I realize how much
Is on the other side.
The possibilities that await
So I reach out
And begin to pull
Rocks from the barrier

The longer I work
The higher my hopes become
I can see glimmers of light
Sparkling in the darkness

Once again I have hope
As the rocks come away
My confidence builds
Tearing down
To build up

I tirelessly work
Continuing forward
Knowing the light
Is just beyond

One day
I will reach it
And bask in the glory



The Oakdale Community Choir: A New Initiative at the Iowa Medical and Classification Center

By Mary Cohen, Ph.D.

After researching prison choirs these past five years, I began the Oakdale Community Choir in January 2009. We started with 22 medium security general population offenders and 22 community volunteers. Now after completing our spring and summer seasons we have grown to 25 "inside" and 25 "outside" singers. The primary goals of the Oakdale Community Choir are to provide choral singing experiences for two groups of people: (a) Iowa Medical and Classification Center general population offenders who are not restricted to their units and (b) community volunteers who have an interest in learning more about issues in the prison system locally, nationally, and globally. Because the nature of choral singing involves slow, detailed, and thoughtful work toward a group goal; verbal and nonverbal communication skills; individual and communal musical expression; and physical coordination of one's body alignment, breathing, and singing, it is a particularly meaningful activity for incarcerated people. The combined volunteer-prisoner aspect of this choir allows prisoners to experience a "sense of normalcy" as they work side by side with community members. The volunteer singers enthusiastically participate in the choir and speak of how much they gain from their choral participation.

An important aspect of the choir is a writing component designed to encourage singers to think more deeply about choral singing between our weekly rehearsals and reflect on how features of choral singing relate to aspects of daily life. Some writing prompts encourage singers to articulate the personal meanings they find in the lyrics of our songs. We use a few of these for introductions to concert selections. Another purpose of the writing component is to develop camaraderie and fellowship among our very different living contexts. Newsletters created periodically of members' writing help build our sense of communal identity.

We concluded our first season this past spring with a concert themed "Peace and Place" on April 21 for outside guests and on April 28 for offenders and IMCC staff. We dedicated our concert to the memory of Lowell Brandt, former warden of IMCC who supported the choir from its initial planning stage. One of the writing prompts asked choir members to reflect on this concert theme.

An offender singer wrote:

"Every voice I hear reminds me of what is possible. Togetherness, teamwork, acceptance, and the list can go on. Those voices carry with me as the volunteers leave and I return to prison. While we sing I'm not in prison. I'm in peace. I'm in a choir of gifted musicians who share my passions and joys. The choir helps me along my path to find my place in peace."

During the summer season I facilitated songwriting activities. I was very impressed that these singers composed over 20 songs. One, titled "Crossroads," delivered an upbeat message about moving onward with your life. I composed music to accompany these words. At the rehearsal where choir sang this song, another inside singer asked me to put music to his poem, "In My Mother's Eyes." I was concerned about finding time to complete this task, but agreed to do it anyway. When I got home and read the poem, I immediately decided the song should be in D minor and in triple meter, like a lullaby. Then after I composed the music to the first part of the song - the chorus, I placed my head on my piano and knew that I could only complete this task in short spurts because of its emotional intensity.

In My Mother's Eyes: Reflections from a Medium Security Offender

I wrote the words to the song, "In My Mother's Eyes," when I was sitting in my room looking out my window and thinking of my mother. I remembered how she looked when I was leaving the

courtroom. I looked into her eyes and saw the hurt they showed because I had let her down. Please read the words closely and take them into your hearts. Perhaps you can remember how you have hurt a loved one at sometime.

In My Mother's Eyes

Chorus: In my mother's eyes, I can do no wrong
I'm in her thoughts and prayers always
Through her prayers, she asks God to keep me strong
So I can make it through another day

The look in my mother's eyes, when I went away
Will eat at my heart, 'till my dying day
There was so much love in those hazel eyes
I saw it all, when we said our good-byes (Chorus)

Though the look you gave, made me hang my head in shame
I know the trust you had in me is gone for now
But I will try to ease all of your pain
Through the Lord, I now make this vow

I will never hurt you, like I did on that day
I want that look you give, when I do right
That look of love, that is like a sun ray
The look that keeps the dreams away at night (Chorus)

From Mary Cohen:

After the choir sang this song for the first time, immediately everyone applauded. I noticed one inside singer taking his glasses off to wipe away tears from both eyes. I realized the group needed to process this powerful experience. One inside singer said, "That was the most beautiful thing I have heard since I have been in prison." There was a long pause. Another offender said that everyone could connect with the words of the song. A volunteer singer said that she thought the words and melody worked well together.

One volunteer singer reflected about his song:

"Of course, we don't have to be sentenced to jail to know when our actions have disappointed parents, spouses, children or friends. I think the song conveys in a moving way how all parties can be disappointed, the offender is not abandoned for what he has done, and hope and love remain."

From offender singer who composed the song:

When we performed "In My Mother's Eyes" it was hard for me to sing it. My mother wasn't there, but when we started to sing it I saw my mother standing out in the audience with tears in her eyes and smiling. The way the choir sang the song made me feel that there was a lot of love that they put into it.

I look forward to the choir's continued growth and development and future teaching and research projects. These programs may provide an excellent model for other institutions and partnering organizations to follow.

Adding Victims to Offender Re-entry Case Plans

By Pam Benson – Correctional Counselor at ISP – Ft. Madison

The Department of Corrections utilizes a Re-entry Case Plan for each offender. The Case Plan is a tool for offenders to identify their needs and to make a plan to address those needs through interventions while incarcerated or under supervision. Case Plans reviewed regularly to mark progress and identify obstacles to achievement of their goals. During the past year, the Iowa Corrections Re-entry Team created a Case Plan Committee to make needed changes – so that the Case Plan would be better utilized as the tool for which it was intended.

I want to thank Mary Roche and the Iowa Corrections Re-entry Team's Case Plan Committee for the initiative to push for the addition of a victim segment in the offender's Re-entry Case Plan. I have found, in my work as a Corrections Counselor, by asking offenders who their victims are and what actions they can take to repair the harm, it has had a huge impact on them. They begin to realize who all their victims might be – including their own family and community. And, for many offenders, it is the first time they have thoughts about action steps they can take to repair that harm.



Responding to Sexual Assaults in Custody

The DOC Division of Investigative Services has just completed a dynamic training on Introduction to Conducting PREA Investigations. The training included an introduction to the law, and red flags on offender behavior, both victim and perpetrator, as it relates to sexual violence in custody. Training also included information on conducting staff interviews in a unionized environment, facilitated by Deputy Director Jerry Burt who received rave reviews by attendees.

In addition, the training covered policies and procedures with Assistant Attorney General Forrest Guddall discussing the difficulties in conducting administrative investigations of potentially criminal conduct.

The training was an intense day full of vital information that will assist staff with identifying specific characteristics and behaviors of offender victims and perpetrators of sexual violence along with interviewing techniques on sexual assaults.

The nature of sexual assault of offenders in custody makes it extremely difficult to investigate, and difficult for an offender victim to disclose what has happened. The added difficulty is the requirement to share details of the trauma with someone that perhaps the victim has yet to trust. A thought-provoking message of the training was the daily stress of being behind bars added to the trauma of rape. Therefore, it is important to remember to be patient with offender sexual assault victims, and take time to think through all interactions with them in an attempt to reduce the trauma to those who are already vulnerable.

Teama McGregor

THE JOURNEY

VICTIM ADVISORY COUNCIL NEWSLETTER IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS



Restorative Justice challenges us to design and administer a system that places the needs of the victims and the harm done by the offending behavior at the center of the process by which we sanction and hold the offender accountable. Crime is recognized as harm done to victims and the community. The goals of restorative justice are promoting understanding, accountability, and healing. Persons may contact the Victim and Restorative Justice Programs Administrator at 515-725-5742 or email mary.roche@doc.state.ia.us for more information.

VICTIM ADVISORY COUNCIL GOALS

- Expand victim outreach programs and services
- Assist judicial districts in providing victim services in community corrections agencies and other related community agencies
- Enhance public awareness concerning victim rights and services through public education programs
- Assist other agencies in the development of victim education efforts and assist in cross-training programs with allied criminal justice and victim service professionals
- Develop legislative and Department proposals to enhance victim rights, services, and programs

