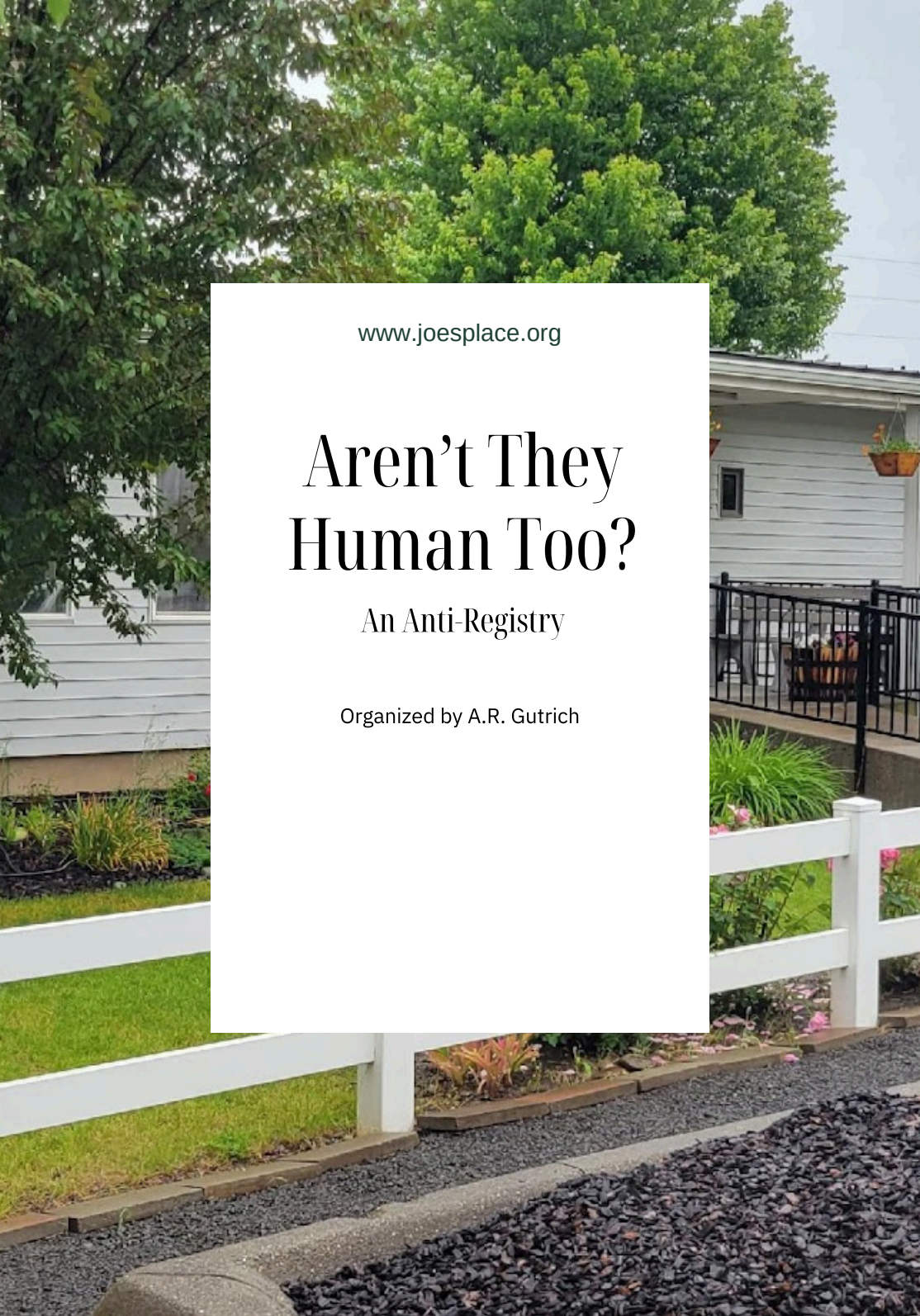


www.joesplace.org

Aren't They Human Too?

An Anti-Registry

Organized by A.R. Gutrich

All names have been replaced with chosen pseudonyms for contributors' safety, except for:
Joseph Field, *Joe's Place Director*
Rachael Butler, *Case/Progam Manager*
Alex C, *Caregiver*

Please note: This book contains material describing multiple forms of sexual abuse that may be hard for some people to read.

Artist's Statement
"*Wait, Why Are You Working with Sex Offenders?*"

Anna Gutrich,
Full-time student, 21

With most other forms of criminality, social movements are pushing to understand a convicted/incarcerated person within a social context as redeemable and rehabilitatable. The contexts of race, gender, poverty, mental health, etc. are considered when talking about crime, and folks who fight for a better system understand incarcerated people as existing within an oppressive justice system. Said system has been consistently highlighted for its institutionalized marginalizations of countless positionalities. Thinking like this allows us to look to more liberated futures where, at the very least, incarceration can be contextually analyzed and, at the most, is a failed system. However, those who commit sex offenses are not granted this progressive thinking on incarceration, this fluidity of change, and this critique of the justice system. Instead, we fall back to what we think we know— agreeing with the system on seemingly only this issue. Thinking nonnormatively about sex offenses is so taboo that even those intent on addressing "taboo" don't do it.

I'm a person that grew up in a culture that hates sex offenders. I grew up hating sex offenders. I would have proudly told you as much up until about 5 months ago. I understand that when you read words like mine for the first time, your first reaction is likely one of vehement disgust and utter disagreement— I've been you, and I get where you're coming from. All I ask is that you use everything you know about history, social change, and ostracization to think about why you think that, who taught it to you, and *if* that thinking helps society build a world with less sex offenses.

With that in mind, this book is made up of interviews of 8 Sex Offenders (SOs) living Joe's Place, a transitional living facility in Walla Walla, WA. Joe's Place is locally supported and provides therapy, workshops, and community work for registered

sex offenders (RSOs) and sex offenders (SOs) in the area. Besides SOs, I interviewed the director, Joe Field; the Joe's Place case manager, Rachael Butler; and a caretaker for one of the residents, Alex C.

Besides the SO's identifying information, I have not censored anything. SOs are already censored in many ways, whether it be physical or social, and my intention was for people (and that is what they are: people) to express themselves in the same way that people like myself, untouched by the justice system, have the privilege to do. Granted, I did have many casual conversations with the SOs I interviewed that, for obvious reasons, did not make it into this book. I wouldn't put a conversation between my classmate into a book without consent and I uphold the same standard here.

To be clear, under no circumstances do I condone sexual assault, abuse, & mistreatment in any form. Sexual assault is one of the most earth-shattering and painful things that can happen to a person. I would know— as defined by the law, I have been a victim of three counts of sexual offenses. But: The sex offender registry didn't protect me from my sexual abuse. Having a list of registered sex offenders, hating them, wanting to kill them, and me being taught to loathe them didn't keep me from being sexually abused. That is its own social problem —how sexual abuse keeps happening— but how it's handled helps no one, and wouldn't have helped me.

I'm sure there are many, both qualified and unqualified, people who would jump at psychoanalyzing why I, a victim of sex crimes, lean into interviewing sex offenders. Even further, people may question why I share my own sexual victimization with them (and some of the most healing moments have been telling SOs about my assaults). I wish I could meet some of those psychoanalyzing people because I would love to know the diagnosis— explain my thoughts to me so I don't have to. My closest guess right now is that I know the registry wouldn't have saved me. The doctor that put her hands inside of me while I was saying "no" is not registered. My former best friend is not registered. Even if they were, I never would have had the list pulled up to look because, as many of the guys I interviewed have said: it's your friends, your doctor, some guy you're comfortable with at the party. At worst, the registry distracts you, channels anger somewhere useless, and at best, you don't notice it at all and are still victimized by people not even on it. It wouldn't have saved me. I doubt it saves anyone.

Below that, it's been hard to *not* see my own victimizers as people. I always think of all the factors of confusion, what it would be like to talk to them about it now. My values entail that every person can change and grow. It's hard *not* to believe that my victimizer went home, maybe not that night or even that year, but eventually started to conceptualize what he did as wrong, shameful, and something he needed to move forward from. Though, remembering he did something similar to another person later, perhaps he is the same as he was when he looked at me sleeping and decided I was his. Either way, I'm still grappling with him as a person.

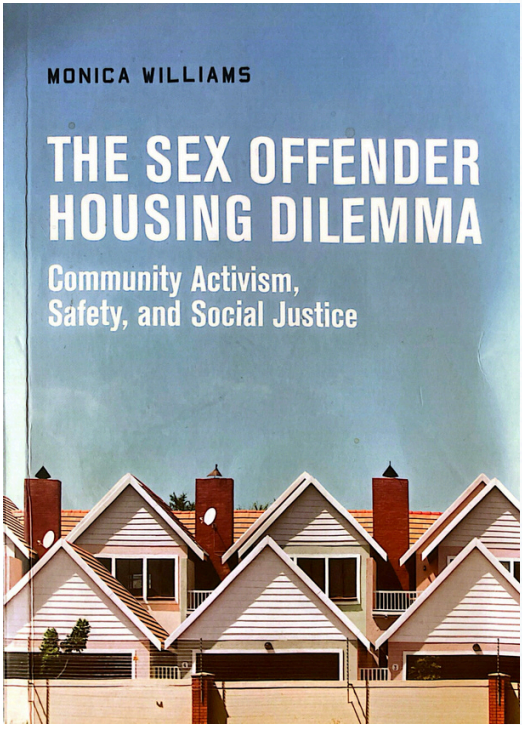
Since these guys at Joe's have not offended against me specifically, it's easier to hop right on that humanity immediately. If I was their victim, I would surely feel differently. I want to reach out through the world & stand with those people too. But I'm not those people, nor can I reach out through the world. So I just have to take the people trying to be better and move on with their lives at face value, to allow them to be that person with me & be grateful. One of the guys cried when I told him that I had been offended against and called me very strong. These echo things that the other guys have said to me. All of these men feel like grandpas or weird cousins at *worst*. I wanted to hold their hands sometimes and I didn't know why. Except that I did: it is as simple as humanity. I would never question the motivation between wanting to hold someone's hand who was my age and not in their position, but since this person is Different, is othered, is labeled as horrifying, I question that urge.

When I walked into Joe's for the first time, I wasn't scared. I *was* very aware of what had been told to me throughout my life about sex offenders. Lots of offensive words came to mind. I wanted to keep an open mind, but I was ready for creeps, you know? But it was a weirdly simple change of mind: I met the guys, and they were just people. If anything, they were some of the most respectful people I've met. That seems obvious when written down but, given the social expectation, also impossible. When interviewing, almost all were acutely aware of my comfortability. Most asked before closing the door of a room we were in together and when I said that it was up to them, there was some surprise. Some guys even remarked that they were surprised I wanted to talk to them at all or that I kept coming back. This exemplified both their rehabilitation and growth through treatment plans at Joe's, but also the regular social responses to their existence as SOs. It is a unique experience to talk to another human who has become used to being discarded, and I wish I could transfer the experience of it into the mind of everyone I meet.

Housing Insecurity/Inequality: Where can SOs go?

When released from prison, sex offenders are required to list an address. However, virtually no landlords/proprietors will rent/sell to SOs. The stigma drives these landowners away from engaging with SOs, despite no law, policy, or restriction legally barring SOs living in the community. This leaves SOs in unstable housing conditions. While generally, those concerned about the housing crisis call for everyone to have safe, affordable housing, there is a shocking deficit for SOs in this conversation. Many of the guys at Joe's referred to the homeless camp in Walla Walla familiarly, either having personal experience there or knowing another SO who did. This is doubly disadvantaging since, in some states, being homeless or simply not having an address to list automatically ups an SO's level to a higher one.

In Monica Williams' book, *The Sex Offender Housing Dilemma,* which Joe lent me after I described my hopes for this project, Williams outlines the violent reactions communities often have to SOs being placed in their area. The narrative of a "scary criminal" moving into a neighborhood post-prison is not exclusive to SOs, but where those incarcerated for non-sexual crimes have the wiggle room of forgiveness,

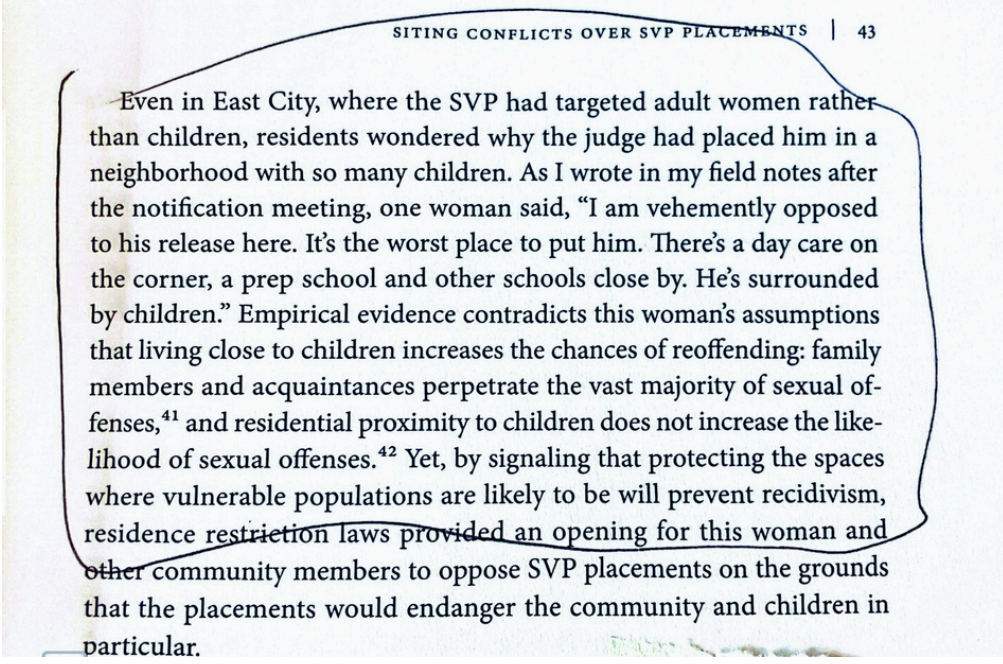


In Washington State, Tammy Gibson beat a sex offender with a baseball bat after receiving notification that he had moved into her neighborhood.[1] Neighbors in Detroit assaulted a man suspected of raping a teenager,[2] and two people in Texas did the same to a registered sex offender there.[3] Such acts of violence have sometimes escalated to murder, as was the case in South Carolina when two people killed a registered sex offender and his wife.[4] Other, less extreme cases have involved not violence but property damage, such as the suspicious fire that burned down a trailer meant to house a man in California who was labeled as a sexually violent predator (SVP).[5] These kinds of stories focus public attention on extreme but relatively rare instances of physical violence, threats, and harassment against individual sex offenders.[6]

While media accounts would have us believe that vigilantes across the country lie in wait for sex offenders who move into their neighborhoods, responses to sex offenders more often involve collective, nonviolent political and legal actions. For instance, communities across the nation have built tiny pocket parks in neighborhoods where local ordinances prohibit sex offenders from living near schools or parks.[7] Residents in one Florida town protested a proposed sex offender village not by torching the proposed site but by attending town hall meetings, signing petitions, and rallying behind political and law enforcement leaders.[8] These types of responses to sex offender housing proposals may be more socially desirable than vigilantism, but they still pose severe challenges to sex offenders trying to reintegrate into society.

This book focuses on the problem of finding housing for sex offenders. The public has little sympathy for these offenders, but a lack of social supports and stable housing can increase the likelihood of reoffending.[9] For these and other reasons, many scholars have critiqued policies restricting where sex offenders can live as ill-founded and potentially counterpro-

American culture regards anything with sex involved as weightier, meaning SOs are consistently marred by the presumption of them as a threat. While a person formerly incarcerated for a non-sexual crime *may* have the privilege of having "He's out of prison, but he's such a nice guy," said about him, SOs are rarely given the chance to even show themselves enough to receive this type of characterization. Even if they do, the registry speaks over anything they can showcase with their personality annd/or work. Instead, recidivism, monstrosity, and danger is assumed. At the very least, SOs are as isolated in the community as they were in prison, and at worst, they are targeted by acts of extreme violence— occasionally, attempted murder. This stigma is often inconsiderate of the specific sex offense committed entirely, operating on only the knowledge of the sex offender label via the registry.



SITING CONFLICTS OVER SVP PLACEMENTS | 43

Even in East City, where the SVP had targeted adult women rather than children, residents wondered why the judge had placed him in a neighborhood with so many children. As I wrote in my field notes after the notification meeting, one woman said, "I am vehemently opposed to his release here. It's the worst place to put him. There's a day care on the corner, a prep school and other schools close by. He's surrounded by children." Empirical evidence contradicts this woman's assumptions that living close to children increases the chances of reoffending: family members and acquaintances perpetrate the vast majority of sexual offenses,[41] and residential proximity to children does not increase the likelihood of sexual offenses.[42] Yet, by signaling that protecting the spaces where vulnerable populations are likely to be will prevent recidivism, residence restriction laws provided an opening for this woman and other community members to oppose SVP placements on the grounds that the placements would endanger the community and children in particular.

Note that Williams is looking at sexually violent predators (SVP), not SO/RSOs.

For example, the above woman's perspective, which lacked acknowledgment of the actual crime committed, is not singular; she represents a broad social idea of a) SOs as inherently dangerous to any vulnerable group and b) context as irrelevant. Though the SO in this example offended against an adult woman, the assumption is made that he will recklessly reoffend against children. This isn't a surprising jump on her end— the registry lumps people with the SO label all underneath the same umbrella, leading others to do the same. Though some registries list specific

charges, such as Washington's registry, all offenders are on the same list. Due to this, those who have committed a crime deemed "lesser" gain very little from it, having been equated with those with "greater" offenses. This is true for the literal level ranking (which includes Level 1, 2, and 3 offenders) and the socially decided "worst-of-the-worst," which is defined by communities, individuals, and the public. Either way, all variations of offenders are communally ostracized together, taken out of the differing contexts for their offenses and smashed down into a singular story— monstrous, uncontrollable, unchangeable. With this social narrative, it's no wonder landlords refuse to rent to SOs. They're hardly considered people.

This renting refusal means many SOs can't list an address at the time of their release, a cause for felony charges or further imprisonment. Unjust incarceration like this creates huge uproar elsewhere, but this impossible pipeline of no housing to repeat imprisonment for SOs flies happily under the radar. Homelessness is a crisis that already is deeply entwined with incarceration, but we see a new formulation here: homelessness as a punishment for incarceration, then subsequent further incarceration (or a level raise) for being homeless.

Still, if an SO *does* go through enough screening and development to find a place in the community, looking at any social media response to an SO moving in will tell an immediate story of why they would hesitate. Hate and threats calling for burning, castration, and murder are far from uncommon. This is a defense mechanism, a social script of what community protection should look like. Even the most progressive people jump to hatred and damnation of SOs because that is what we've been taught, a defaulting to the norm without critical thinking. This is especially problematic because uprooting an SOs life/comfortability has no correlation with minimizing recidivism.

In fact, as shown in the first page of Williams' book that I displayed, it is this exact lack of support and community ostracization that creates higher likelihood to reoffend, not the other way around. Isolation does not keep our communities safe from sexual offenses. Instead, the fear that a registered SO in our midst guarantees recidivism/sexual abuse becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: If society views you as monstrous, why not lean into it because there is nothing more that can be done? If people do not see your progress, your growth, then what is the purpose of making any? It seems hopeless for many SOs who are fighting to be seen as they are: changed, rehabilitated, grown.

Solving the Sex Offender Housing Dilemma

The scope of laws devoted to defining new sex crimes, ratcheting up sentences, and monitoring sex offenders upon their release has reached epic proportions over the past decade.[1] More than 750,000 individuals are registered as sex offenders in the United States,[2] and California's sex offender registry alone includes more than 120,000 individuals.[3] We have spent countless dollars protecting our society from these known sex offenders with little evidence that our policies and practices reduce the risk of new sex crimes. More concerning is that current policies such as registration and community notification exacerbate the problems that many offenders experience after incarceration, which may in turn increase the odds of reoffending.[4] Without the social supports necessary to help these offenders reintegrate into society, they are more likely to pose the public safety threat that community activists fear.

Communities, politicians, and criminal justice officials often work at cross-purposes as they try to achieve a shared goal of public safety. Nationally, politicians have served as middle-level actors who shape moral panic over sex offenders while also gaining legitimacy by playing off emotional reactions to the threat of sex offenders.[5]

Williams' own opinion shows that Joe's Place (which will be explained more in a few pages) is an incredibly fortunate resource. It's not a common occurrence to see a reentry house for SOs to begin with, let alone accepting SOs where they are, providing therapy and treatment, and getting them back on their feet with better chances of finding jobs and residence. Joe Field's (the owner of Joe's Place) work has allowed many of the guys I interviewed (and more) to live in the community when they had nowhere else to go. Unfortunately, not every SO has positive options like this; the system is pitted against people on the registry, leaving a stain on their life to set them up for consistent failure. While Joe's work is deeply powerful on its own, it is still negatively impacted by the restrictions of the system, the impracticality of the registry and all which comes with it.

While Joe and his team's support, care, and compassion for SOs is likely the best action to prevent recidivism, it is not the end-all-be-all: the registry needs to be rethought too. A humanity-focused approach is blossoming through the concrete at Joe's Place, and now a critical engagement with the registry needs to water it.

JPL Transitional Housing

Joe Field, Director
8 yrs running Joe's Place 56



"I'm a 56 year old grandpa running a sex offender business."

In my childhood, I spent 10 years being a victim of my stepdad, who is civilly committed now as a pedophile. It was an everyday. It was loving type of sexual molestation. When that came out in 1981, they took kids like me and put me in a psychiatric center— they didn't know what to do. So I went to the psychiatric lock facility. When I was able to, I jumped the fence and ran away and ended up in San Francisco as a heroin addict at 13 years old. As life went on, my dad goes to prison for a couple years, I'm a heroin addict, I meet my wife of my five kids at 15, we run away together, and just *was* a heroin addict, in and out of jails, prisons, rehabs, dealing with the everyday occurrences of being molested. You know, moving forward in 2015, I ended up testifying in my dad's trial and he got civilly committed. Did I ever think I'd work with sex offenders? Absolutely not, I hated them.

And as I'm going to grad school for social work, I asked God "what am I gonna do?" And he gave me this vision of doing what I do at Joe's Place. I had 500 dollars in my pocket, I rented this house, started getting little grants, and it's a reentry for sex offenders of all levels; people who shouldn't be sex offenders and people who are a very high level but still deserve to live out here. I created a very loving home —that's turned into three homes— that has community support, police support, etcetera. Now it's all over the state and they want me to put it in different cities. They want me to build one down in Richland. I simultaneously have a contract with the state on working with sexual violent predators (SVPs), and I basically built the reentry program for civil commitment as it is today. And that just opened doors for me.

I've never had trouble working with the SOs. One thing I really kept away from was reading details about their crime. I only have to do that when I'm testifying in court. I know they're all convicted of a sex offense and I have to pay attention to certain restrictions and rules. But did I have any reservations working with them? Absolutely not. Would I have them around my grandkids? Some of them, I've had them working around my house, but some of them, no.

Sometimes, *I* get labeled as a sex offender, in a sense. When I'm talking to people, they're like "oh, you work with the sex offenders, are you one?" And then other times, because I work with the sex offenders, people assume I think it's okay what they do, and no, of *course* I don't think it's okay what they do. I get labeled as the sex offender guy. But I just smile and educate them. Because before I did this, I was also not educated on sex offenders. I thought they all reoffend, they all seem like monsters, and they're absolutely not. But there is a stigma.

I'll give you an example. I had a young guy here, and he used to always say "I'm just a sex offender, I can't get a job" and I used to slap him on his shoulder, and I would say "Oh, are you? Are you out there offending? Because that's not what I



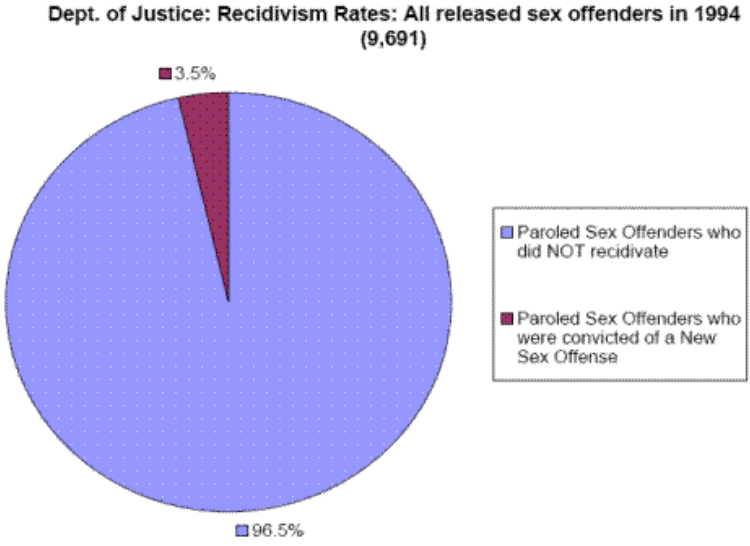


Exterior of one of the Joe's Place main houses.

see, I see a 25 year old man who had a fucked up childhood, fucked up circumstances, and he did this. But are you sex offending right now?" That's how I kind of approach them, "Are you *just* a sex offender?" If I look in the mirror every day and say "I'm just dumb," you'll believe it and then you will be dumb. So if you wake up in the morning and always say "I'm just a sex offender," you're going to spiral downhill into a hole. So that's how I approach it. I think the term sex offenders needs to go away, let's call them "registrants!"

I think the registry is stupid. People say, "Well, what about high level guys?" and I *still* think it's stupid. There's no evidence that I've ever read that says the registry helps, and other people still believe it does. Show me where sex offenders signing up on a registry that they're a sex offender makes our community safer! It doesn't. Show me how someone's picture and name being on a website helps our community! It doesn't. What helps is programs like this— truth, loving, caring, community, that's what makes it safer. So, yeah, registry, I don't believe in it. I have 3 guys living in my home labeled SVP, labeled sexually violent predators, and none of them have committed a crime in 30 years. Explain that one.

Therapy is great. I love the one-on-one community therapy that Julie Crest does. I love it. Does it cure? It doesn't *cure* but it gives them tools to manage themselves.



Source (Pub 2003): "Recidivism of Sex Offenders Released from Prison in 1994." (NCJ 198281)

It's like addiction. Addicts are never cured. I have been sober for 20 years, but if I go hit a dope right now, I'm locked, you know?

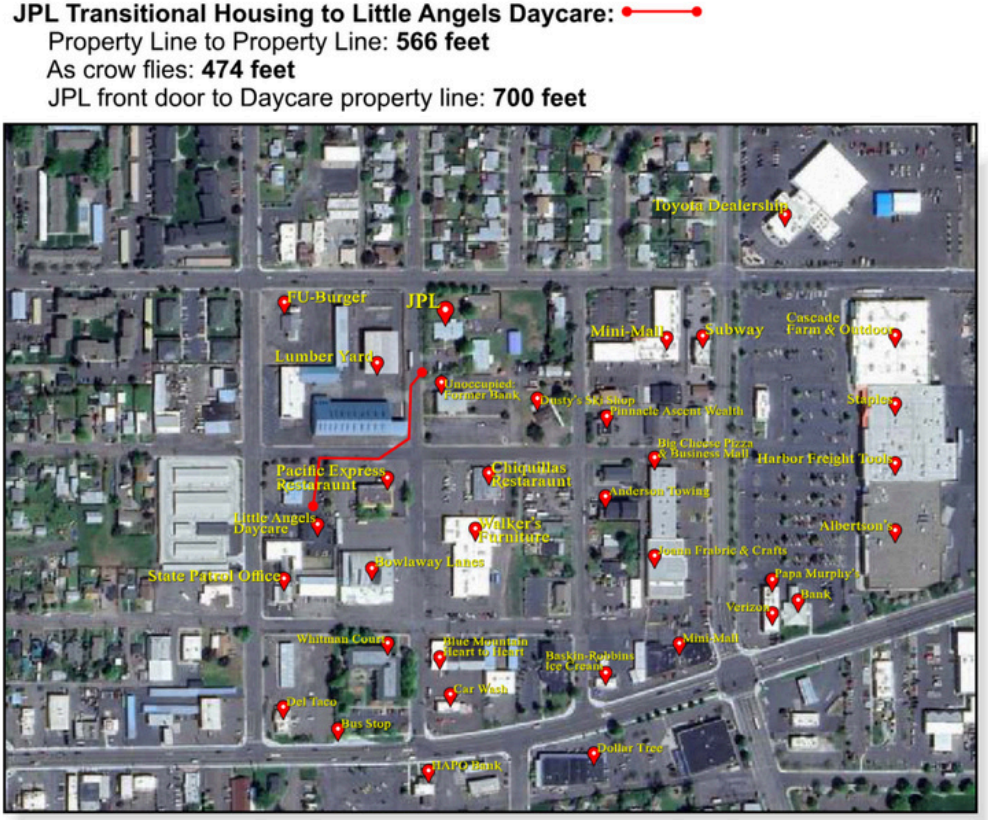
[When we do polygraphs, they're] subjective to the guy giving it, the questions. Sometimes it can give a baseline on a certain situation, I agree to that. But should it be the end all, the poly? No. And the PPG? I don't know any other way to put it to you, girl, but if you put all these electrodes to my penis, I'm- first of all, gonna shrink up, and second of all, I'm gonna be so nervous, you don't even have to show me pictures. They hook 'em up and they show 'em pictures of child pornography to get an arousal. I don't know, I think they're weird. I just think they're weird.

I think we need to treat it more like a mental health issue instead of —it *is* a crime, I get that. And you go to prison, I get that— but we need to put more mental health focus on it. It's in the DMS-5 we have diagnostics for it. So that's what I think.

[I wish people knew that the guys] are human, and that they have lots of skills. Try to get to know them. I haven't met one person that's came here that's left here saying "Oh, fuck, those sex offenders are shitty people." I mean, it's like, ask yourself, how do you feel when you leave after talking to these guys? Do you walk away saying "Ooh, fucking creepy, fucking sex offender" or do you walk away going "They're just people"? I don't agree with the crimes, I wouldn't want anyone raping my daughter or my grandchildren, but they're just people.

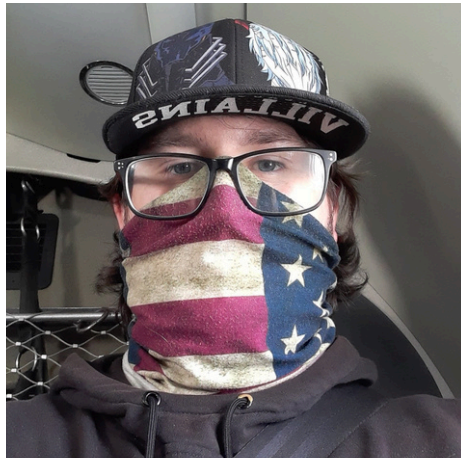
What I'm focused on is their life moving forward. First thing I tell guys when they get here is "your life going to change" because of those two words "sex offender."

What I'd like to see change is the perception that people have of what a sex offender is withoutbeing educated. Who is a sex offender? It's the one sitting right next to you, maybe. It's your mom, your dad, your uncle, your grandma, your fire chief, your police— I've had all different professions, nationalities, on my case load. Who are they? That's what I'd like to see changed, the perception of who sex offenders are. In 8 years, we've never had any trouble here. No reoffenses, no questionable shit, nothing. And why is that? I don't know, because they're people.



Google Earth bird's eye view of where Joe's Place is in relation to other businesses and locations in Walla Walla. In Joe's words, "We are in town, in the community, part of the town's safety. We have guys who, by themselves, refuse to walk by the schools or daycares so people don't feel unsafe and they don't seem questionable."

Link Yukino
6 yrs in the justice system
5 years at Joe's Place
25



Being 25 and having the label [of SO] is difficult. I am young, and I have a lot of life ahead of me, as my therapist would say. There was a bill to get rid of lifetime and basically let certain types of sex offenders, depending on their level, be removed [from the label], and my therapist used me as an example because I'm one of her youngest clients. So, from my understanding, at the big conference with her, the board, and whoever else is in on the deal, she talked about me being young and having so much life ahead of me. How being on lifetime is very difficult, inconvenient. A lot of people don't realize how terrible being on lifetime is.

[Social life] is part of it as well. My best friend *was* a sex offender; we met here and became best friends. Some of my other friends are an ex-girlfriend I dated back in high school who got back in contact with me, and her guy friend. I told them about my crime and they were okay with it. They see that I've done my best to change, which I told them a while ago, and they're very happy I've done my best to change. Besides that, it's hard to make friends. People assume the worst.

I had a job, lots of nice guys there, and we were talking abt this SO that used to work there, went to a homeless camp, and committed another sex offense. Our lead & two other guys started talking about him, but I kept quiet. Just hearing what they said, they weren't talking about *just* this guy, they were bunching up all sex offenders, grouping every one of us together, basically saying "they deserve to die," "they deserve castration," stuff that's really bad, basically. Unfortunately, that's how a lot of people see us. Even as a kid, I was raised to believe this is one of the worst crimes you could commit, and I never even questioned that thought until I got arrested for my offense, when I finally started thinking about how bad it was and how much I regretted it.



The cat is me. I drew it with a lot of scars because unfortunately, my past was terrible so I have a lot of scars. It represents how people point fingers, make jokes at us sex offenders; people want to hurt us, and sometimes people actually DO hurt us. The worst part is how people watch and do nothing except judge. That's what the eyes are for, how people are just watching. Not everyone deserves pain. Not everyone deserves to be treated cruelly.

My birthday was two days ago... The highlight of my day was that I got to go see my little sisters. One of them is my victim, and she still loves me and wants to see me. I did fuck up by victimizing her, but she still loves and cares about me. In fact, all she wanted was for what I was doing to stop, and I'm very grateful that she spoke out, it stopped, and I got the help I needed. I wanted to stop but I didn't know how. I tried to stop by distancing myself from her or watching more porn, but in the end, it just never worked, so I'm glad she spoke out.

Honestly, I was expecting the worst outcome, because I never saw myself as a good brother. I saw myself as a failure, especially because of what I did. I was surprised to hear my parents say that she still loves me, wants to see me, and fights to make it so I can see her with an approved chaperone. My family was very helpful trying to take care of me and her, both of our needs. The first meeting I had, it was very hard, I didn't know what to say or what to do, but I was very happy that I got to see her. And she was happy to see me. I didn't really know what to expect.

I stayed outside so my therapist could talk to my sister, and when she came back

out, she warned me that my sister wanted a hug, and when I walked in, she hugged me.

I cried a bunch. Part of me didn't feel like it was real. And I just didn't know how to react because, to me, what I did was the worst thing I could have done. Not only did I hurt my little sister in the worst way possible, but I hurt my whole family— my cousins, my other little sister, my mother, when she realized what I did to my little sister. I have a lot of family, and I have a bunch I don't give a shit about because they are terrible, but my stepmother, my little sisters— I care about them more than my own because they've treated me better than my own. I've wanted to get a tattoo for a while for my stepmother.

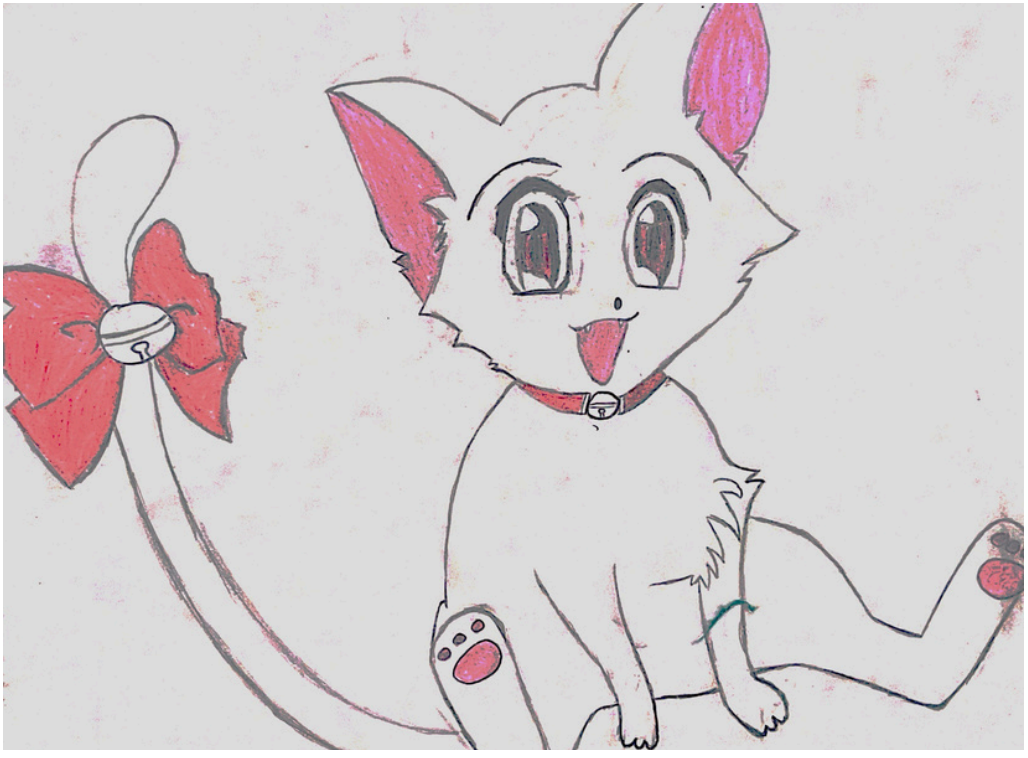
I gave my sister an apology letter and read it to her. It felt good to be able to apologize to her, but it also felt- how do I put it- not empty- but almost like it meant nothing in a sense because, to me, what I did is unforgivable. Mainly because some of my family has offending history and it feels like what I did was just repeating what my family has done. It just didn't feel real to me because what I did was unforgivable, should have never happened. I should have gotten counseling and figured something out. I don't forgive myself or what I did and don't think I ever will. There's a saying I heard from one of the guys: "we are our worst critics" and that's very true, especially for people like me, who are very harsh to themselves.

The meeting did go well, and the second meeting, the one I had on my birthday, was even better, because I felt like I could actually be myself around my sisters. The first meeting, I wore nice clothes, wanted to make a good impression like job interviews because I didn't know what else to do. This meeting, I just decided to be myself because why try to be something I'm not? Not just to allow myself to forgive myself but allow my sister to heal for what I've done, so I tried to just be myself. We had fun. I brought a couple board games, and they brought a couple board games.

We played What Do You Meme? which I'd never even heard of, and knew I wasn't going to be very good at. I hung out with them for only 40 minutes, even less than that, but we played. Then after the game, my sister, my victim, showed me some of her drawings. She is a remarkable artist and my drawings pale in comparison. I'm very envious of her skill, but I'm glad she's an artist.

Actually, when I got out of jail, before I got all my rules, my sister gave my dad, who picked me up from jail, a drawing of me and her. I was sort of her big protector in it, and it was her way of saying “I still love you.” I didn’t get to keep the picture because I didn’t want to risk getting in trouble, but I saw it, and I loved it, and it showed me she still cares. I don’t know when I’ll see my sisters again, but I promised them I’d show them my art because they’ve shown me theirs.

[I wish people knew] that it’s very easy to commit a sex offense, especially for children to other children. But I want people to know that therapy does help, especially if you apply yourself to it. I learned that immediately when I came here. If you don’t apply yourself, it can be very bad. It’s the sad truth that people don’t understand therapy is very useful for sex offenders. I’ve done multiple books of MRT and I’m almost finished with my sex offender treatment, and l



Done in high school, I drew this for a retiring teacher. She was a very good teacher and I very much enjoyed her company, so I drew it as a sign of respect, to show she helped me out a lot.

learned a lot from both. But, most importantly, I've been going through therapy about my trauma and it's been very helpful to talk to a counselor. When I talk to my therapist about suicidal thoughts or other thoughts, he helps me process why and how to deal with things, work around with it, I guess you could say. Therapy teaches you that intrusive thoughts are just that and shouldn't be acted on.

Yes, sex offenders are bad, but not everyone is terrible, especially when they're trying to better themselves. People should encourage people who get help, especially when it comes to an offense or a crime. If a person feels like that it's all useless, and everyone acts like it's not worth it, then that person is either going to get depressed, kill themselves, or commit another crime. It is truly better to help people and push them to go through therapy to try to change their lives, behavior, or character. In the long run, it's so much better. Ever since I started to change my character, I have a trust with my stepmother that I've never had before. I feel happy, I have come to realize that I am a good brother and am trying to be better for my little sisters. Not only are they happy about it, but I feel like I'm actually able to be around my sisters, I can actually be someone that they deserve to have as their brother. I used to focus on myself, play video games, watch TV, but now that I'm learning to be a better person and take the time for them, I feel like I'm getting to know them better than I did before. I'm truly happy that I get to see them, that they're forgiving me, and that we can have a better relationship than what we had in the past.

It's going to be different because of my offense, it's always going to be in the background, something we think about, but if we can try to have a better relationship, then I'm happy just being around them. To other people that is foreign, that is unheard of; reconnecting with your victim, having a good relationship with them, a better relationship to everyone. To department of corrections (DOC) officers or a district attorney, they believe that a sex offender should never be around their victim, never get to see them, be miles away from them, but they don't realize that reunification and clarification for the victim, in some cases, is better. With that, the victim gets a sense of closure, because they get to understand why I did it, what was the context for the offense, that it was a mistake someone made. It's not just good for the victim but for the offender who wants to change and who wants to get better for their family.

I want to give my mothers the son they deserve. I want to give my sisters the brother they deserve. I want to allow my sister to heal, before I even begin to forgive myself. Her needs are more important, and I should focus on letting her heal instead of myself. I am not who I was in the past, I am a much better person, I have worked hard on changing my character. I am becoming someone who may even deserve my sister's forgiveness. For the first time ever, I have grown proud of myself and feel that I may not love myself but can be happy with myself.



Construction work on the now-completed third house at Joe's Place.





Shots of the interior of Joe's Place. Each house is equipped with a full kitchen, personal full-size fridges for each resident, and an monitored area for internet usage per some resident restrictions.

Rachael Butler
Case / Program Manager
~ 1 year at Joe's Place



I had always heard of Joe's Place at my prior job because Joe had been connected to it. I'd always heard snippets about Joe's. So, when I was laid off, Joe's was this mythical place and I just figured, like "What the hell?"

I do the groups, I do foundational community support— making sure they are all working towards employment, making sure that their resumes are updated, making sure they're staying on top of their DOC stuff... if they are not great at talking to employers but there's someplace hiring, I can go out and talk to employers for them. I do a lot of talking. They come into my office and do a lot of just talking, talking, talking, talking. We do a lot of making sure that they know how to live. Yuki, we had to do a behavioral contract to make sure he knows to get up in the morning, to shower, to clean, just daily activities— living with people, chores, cooking, cleaning, doing the chickens, gardening. NAME, we're doing flash cards and reading and educational stuff. With NAME and NAME, I work on their peer support stuff, whatever homework help they need. NAME has needed help with computer stuff— whatever day to day stuff they need help with, I can do.

Prior to Joe's, I was like everybody else, who figured that sex offenders should burn, or be castrated— I felt the same as everybody else. When I think about my own kids, I still feel that way. But, when I think about my own kids with these guys, there's a lot of them, many of them, that I don't feel like my kids are in any danger being around. Sometimes I need to remember that just because I don't think that they're dangerous... like, I think about how NAME is going to buy a car from me. His crimes weren't with kids, it was someone his age, an adult. He came out to look at the car while my younger daughter was there and it wasn't any big deal, I didn't care.

And then my older daughter was going to come out too, and thought about how my ex husband would fucking flip, and if he took it court, he'd have standing. Like, it doesn't matter what I think about NAME, or I don't have danger associated with them, I do need to remember that they are registered sex offenders. It's a weird thing to think about.

My kids know specifics. They know names because I talk about them. [My younger daughter], who's ten, hears me talk about Shaky, and he's her favorite. She always says "Oh, Shaky's my favorite." If she met him, she wouldn't even like him, and I wouldn't want her to meet Shaky, he's a creeper. He's old and friendly and I like him now but I wouldn't want her around him. She has this image about what Shaky is like and what he would be like, she says "Oh, he's my favorite."

[My older daughter], who is 15, is disgusted by them. She goes to school with some of the grandkids of one of our guys, has heard about his crime, and hates him. I brought plants home from JOES place the other day, and she is just like "I don't want plants from JOES place in our house." And that's fair. Whenever I bring anything home, she's like "it's not from JOES is it?" She doesn't want anything to do with this house. That's how she feels about any crime— do the crime you should do the time. But my younger daughter, she knows and is more positive, like I had to drug test someone a bit ago, and she said like "Oh, I hope he doesn't get kicked out."

My mom was in social work, she's a drug and alcohol counselor, so she is very openminded about it. My dad was like, "They should all be shot" and a lot of people I know are like that. They say, "fuck them" and walk away from me when I'm talking about my job. I'm always surprised by that, by the people who don't want to have a conversation, that they feel one way about SOs and aren't looking to engage with different viewpoints. I guess I think that's too bad. I think that everybody is entitled to that, you can feel however you want to feel, that's your opinion, but it shouldn't bleed into how you treat others.

[The social perception of sex offenders] shouldn't stay [the way it is] because what's the point? It's an awful thing they did, but there are sex offenders everywhere in our families that don't get caught. Not that that's an excuse, but what are these guys supposed to do? Stigmatizing them like we are doesn't help.

The only thing we're doing is making it impossible for them to get jobs and move on with their lives. Yeah, it's a shitty, yucky crime that they did, but they're just trying to move on with their lives. I don't see the point in not letting them get an apartment or a house, or making life so hard. Because, no matter what, if they're going to reoffend —-like any addict, because it is an addiction— they're going to reoffend. Making life hard for them isn't going to be what stops them.

If I could change things, I'd make it easier [for SO] to get a house, or a job— job! Job is what I would change. It's impossible to get a job as an SO. Even if they were able to get a house, they wouldn't be able to afford the rent because they wouldn't have a job. And these guys will do hard labor. Most of them, they're stuck in so much shame that they'll do whatever work they can get. They're wanting to live under the radar. And there should be rules, right, like they don't need to be around kids. It probably wouldn't hurt to have them have to be in halfway houses and to go through a Joe's Place when they get out of prison, but to be able to move on from it. Right now, once they get here, there's no place for them to go.

I wish people knew that they are normal people. You have this creepy image in your head of a sex offender. You wouldn't think Link was one, or a lot of the guys. Some of them are weird, but not enough to make you think "sex offender." If I ran out of gas and needed help, there are quite a few guys I'd call at this house for help, without batting an eye, that I would trust to help me. I would trust most of these guys. They would help me just because I needed help, not expecting anything in return. They're good people. I mean, they really are.

Bob Jones
5 yrs in the justice system
~ 2 months at Joe's Place
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I ended up here doing communications over Craigslist. That was mine. And then I was charged with attempted rape of a minor, which was all a sting operation. I came to Joe's right after I got out. August of 2020, I was in Benton County, and I went from there to Shelton in 2021, can't remember the real dates, but I was in Shelton for 6 months. It was right around August 2021, I ended up at Airway. Yeah, so I had 58.5 months to serve, which is what I had given to me.

I don't think the general public knows the different levels of SOs. They put everybody into a pigeonhole type deal. With me and my crime, I didn't have a victim, but I might as well have with how people treat me. It just goes off. It's the intent. It's just that... it didn't happen. Yeah, I went to the area and that's where they got me. I didn't even get out of my vehicle, and I was leaving, but they said "Well, you showed up." I said "Yeah, but I was leaving, I was done, I was out." I understood if I got out, walked around, trying to figure out where to go, why they'd get me, but I didn't do that.

Experience in Shelton was brutal. It was very, very violent. There was always a fight. 2 or 3 suicides happened when I was there. It's not a well-managed place. I experienced people with sex offenses getting treated worse in Shelton. Airway was a cake walk, but in Shelton, I was confined to my cell for two months. I was able to at least take a shower, call family once a week, but that was it. I was clear down on the end of the tier, and guys would spray stuff on you, like disinfectant on your eyes, spit at you. And they don't really put the- there's no separation of anybody. They just put you in a cell. They say they try to match you up but they don't.

I was released in February 2025 and came directly here. My girlfriend picked me

up and took me here. It was a 2 month process to get here. My counselor in there wasn't very cooperative. They say, you know, if you have an address you can go to it, but I had addresses, and they refused them. They said one of them was too close to kids, the other was with my mother and my sister botched it. They want SOs to come into facilities like this. They don't say it, but they want that. You can spend time trying to find an address and they'll deny it, deny it, so you might as well come to a place like this, get your feet on the ground, get your affairs in order, a place to regroup. And this is. It's a good place, it's a safe place

My youngest daughter came here Saturday to meet with me finally. But they look at my crime as me being a predator. My daughter-in-law called me a predator. These things are just like, you know, they don't know the whole story. They read the newspapers, the news and all this other hearsay they look at— social media— but none of them had the courage to ask me what was going on, "Why did I do that?" What was I thinking. You know, now they say, for the family, I have to prove myself. Like, they said, I made this mess, they had to clean it up, so now I have to. Take responsibility, that's what it was. Do the right thing. It's hard, because you try to do the right thing, but then again, *their* right thing that *they* want me to do is not what I'm doing.

My right thing is to do better, to get better, to improve my life, to understand what happened to me; why did I do what I did? You know, come to understand myself. My daughter-in-law sent me a letter saying that doing the right thing is giving all my property to my soon-to-be ex-wife and pay her. And I'm like, "How can I do that?" That's what they say is "doing the right thing," but, you know, for me, to do the right thing is to take care of myself. I'm first because I wasn't doing the right thing before. I was trying to take care of everyone else except for me.

I wish people would see the, as I call it, the Bob 2.0. There's a lot to that. You know, I try to understand things more. I try to be more strong for myself, and people don't like it when I push back, when I don't agree with what they're saying. I guess it really boils down to: a lot of my family don't like change. They don't like if I change to be better, or I change things for the better. They just want to see me as who I was, to put that stereotype on me. I wish people would see, yeah, he did that, but he's not that person anymore.

I've had some really good interactions just walking through Super 1. This just happened last week: A guy I knew, who was from the same town, older than me, was happy to see me. We're talking, and I told him "Oh, you know, I've been in prison" and he says, "I know, I don't judge." I stood there and I just said "*Thank you*." He asked "How are you doing?" And I said "I'm good, I'm better." So sometimes it's good. I know there are people out there who don't want anything to do with me, and that's alright. They don't need to be around me and I don't need to be around them, and that's fine. That's pretty cut and dry.

It was surprising to me that [my now-girlfriend] reached out when I was in prison. When I got off work, after Christmas, I had a letter from her. The first letter I received, that was the start of it. It was good. She told me later she was nervous to do it, she was afraid I wouldn't respond. She pretty much gave up because it took so long. But once we started the letters, I was sending probably 3 letters a week and she was doing it too, and they were rolling. Then I got my tablet, and because we were still in quarantine, I was able to text her. That worked, but we still wrote letters. Phone calls, they came in later. So, between the texting and the phone calls, the letter-writing decreased. Instead of waiting for a response, you could talk. But I have a folder probably about this thick *[hands about 9 inches apart]* full of our letters.

Me and my girlfriend, we dated in high school. When I went to prison, she was worried about me. She made contact, and we just started going through everything. It was like we picked up where we left off. By the time I left Airway, during Covid, she had 600 visits. She'd be there Saturday-Sunday, she'd be there for both visits. The visits were about 12:30 to 7:30. They had a visitation area, cafeteria-style. You'd sit down at the table, you can play games, cards. We'd hold hands over the table, they couldn't be underneath. There were lots of limitations, which is alright. A lot of the stuff, I wouldn't do in public anyway. But visits from friends and family were very important. The people in visitation have a lot of influence as to what happens to a person. The personnel wrote up a really good paper for me. The board had to write recommendations, they watch your interactions. When family come in, they see that. It's documented, there are cameras, and they watch the videos to see how everybody responds.

It's crazy. DOC will say, "Oh, we want to put SOs back into society, be productive," you know, "blend in," but then there are all the restrictions. It doesn't work how they do it. I really feel that DOC could be helping people more, but they don't help at all. What you hear in Airway is one thing, and when you get out, it's different. They tell the guys "There are online classes you can take, culinary classses, you could be a chef, or do this, go work on this," but by the time you get done, get out, no, you can't, that was just to keep busy. There's nothing really there. It's hard for an SO to really restart.

There was a coffee place, Roasters, and it was in Tricities, and they had one here in Walla Walla by the Mister's. The guy that started that whole thing was taking off really big in the tricities, he was an SO. As soon as the people found out, he had to sell his business because people were protesting out in front of it. He had to get rid of everything. He was changing his life around, and this is what people were doing with him. He was successful, but he had to get rid of that. You can't do business online because they limit your internet. If you become homeless, you have to report in every day.

You're, as they say, set up for failure. That's pretty truthful. You got your check-ins with your DOC officer, but they only really want to know if you're being clean and sober, as they say. There's no talk of "there may be a job opportunity" or "you could get a place at this apartment complex." It's not like that. If you travel out of county, you have to have a pass, but they can look your stuff right up anyway. We have to do safety plans. Take yourself, for example. If you want to go to where your parents live, you have to write down all the possibilities: flat tire, car breaks down, vehicle accident, public bathroom— where are you gonna go? Restaurants— where are you going to eat? Where are the bathrooms at? Stuff like that, it's just crazy. A lot of people, that's not even on their radar.

What people don't look at is the base. And when I say "the base," everybody's base is different: what led them there. We need to look at what happened to get them to commit the crime. Everybody will say "Yeah, I did the crime, I did that," but what led them there is the other half of it. It's not making excuses or minimizing it. That's why I tell you I want to understand what happened. I've learned a lot. There's a lot of depression, PTSD is in there. Those alarms weren't

going off, and if they were, I just ignored them. It's tough to talk about, but I was looking at a way to get out, I was looking at suicide before my crime. I couldn't do anything, and I didn't know how to get out.

The worst thing is the internet. I'm so pasted on the internet. I'm local, I was a volunteer fire chief. They just threw everything on me. I kept telling them, even when I was in Benton County, "I want to see a therapist. I'm not good." That never happened. There is never any really good social care in the system to help a person start healing. All they're worried about is if you're going to physically hurt yourself or hurt anyone else. "If you feel that way, get ahold of us, and we'll come talk to you. Or if you need meds, we'll get you the meds." But that doesn't help, it just numbs the problem.

[I wish people would] get to know [the guys here]. I wish they'd get to know them before they made a judgment. Understand them. A lot of these guys in here are good people. I don't see them reoffending. But, when they hear [that people think they would], it just puts them back into that spot where they don't want to be.

To me, it's really really unfair that these guys can't get a job. There are so many places out there that could start them out in a warehouse job and go from there, and that could work for them. You see like, Walmart, Home Depot— nope, nope, they don't want you. Housing, it's the same thing. A lot of people don't know that. You can't get a job, and rent's so high, you know. I'm fortunate right now, because I'll be 62 in May, so I'm taking my social security. Some of these guys, they're not even there, and some of them don't even have social security when they get to that age.

They're remorseful for it, they're paying for what they did. And people say you just can't do that. Sure, yeah, we can't take off and just do what we want to do. For me, I'm life under the board, so I can't even sneeze without letting them know! Haha.

Daffy Socrates
34 yrs in the justice system
5 yrs at Joe's Place
58



My first horrific memory, I was 4 or 5 years old. I remember my mom acting funny. She was stoic, kind of, like, reserved. At some point, she told me to get my boat; my little tugboat that I had in my bath. It was my rubber ducky, you know. My grandpa was a commercial fisherman, and I'd gone out on the ocean with him and my mom once or twice. I loved him so much. He never got mad at me, he never disciplined me, he didn't really have to. I always wanted to be at his leg or on his lap or something. I grabbed my little boats, and my mom was distant, but, for some reason I didn't want to get close to her. We got in the car, went to the river, I had my boat. It was in the spring, the river was high. We went right down to the side of the water, and my mom tried to get me to push it out far away and get it back. But it- I guess it wasn't far enough, so she tried to grab me. I wouldn't let her get close to me, I just knew something was wrong. I truly believe she tried to throw me in the river. I was 4, I definitely didn't know how to swim. At that point, she made me get my boat and get back in the car. I don't know what happened after that.

My biological father and my mom were never married. My father was married, going through a divorce, met my mom, got pregnant. My mom told me when I was kid that she was first married, like 5 years before I was born, to a military guy from Alabama. She couldn't get pregnant and the doctor said it was her, that she was sterile. After she was divorced because she couldn't get pregnant, but here I am. My father wanted my mom to get an abortion. Basically, how she said it was: he wanted me dead, right. At this point... sorry... I got lost... I had a stroke a little over a year ago. It was like my mom wanted to kill me. When I was 7 or 8, she threw me to the floor in the kitchen, she had a fondue knife and pressed it to my back, said she'd kill me. After hearing that my dad wanted me dead and that, I believed I was supposed to be dead. You know, why am I alive? My whole life

at a very young age was very distorted. My psyche, my cognitive awareness, it was so distorted. Contradiction is: I grew up with everything.

When I was 6, we lived a block away from this park in Salem, Oregon. I went there to play and I went to the dugout baseball field. The walls in the backing were wooden, and it was inset into the ground. The only thing visible is a fence in front of you, sitting in a dugout on a baseball field. I went in because it was raining, and two guys followed me in there. One of them, the main guy, I recognized him from the church we went to. They pulled down their pants and bent over and told me to kiss their butts. I don't know, it's just crazy, like what the *fuck*? You know? I think more happened. I don't remember. I ran home, told my mom, and she called me a little liar, threatened to wash my mouth out with soap.

I grew up with siblings, relatives, neighbors, where we'd all mess around sexually. You don't talk about it, it's just something you do, you don't tell anybody. My older, older, older male cousin molested me on several occasions. Started raping me. He was doing his sister too, and I don't know, it's just- I believed that was the only way I was going to be loved. In fact, when I started getting in trouble for my sexual behavior like teenagers do, it was stuff I thought was normal, and it's not. Not everybody grew up like that. But a lot of people did, I'm sure, and a lot worse. I grew up believing that I'm supposed to be dead or I'm supposed to die. I don't know if it's TO die, but to BE dead, not exist. An abortion, right. My mother, I never felt love from her. I felt like hugs were an obligation to her.

When I started getting into trouble for my sexual behavior, I believed I was getting in trouble for trying to be loved. That psychosis continued into my adulthood. Subconsciously, maybe. I wasn't aware of it but I wasn't fully aware of anything. There's been a lot of times where I'm disconnected with people, I get really quiet, and then people are like, "What's wrong?" and I say "I don't know" and they say, "Yeah you do," and then I stop listening because they don't understand. A lot of times, I think there's something wrong with me. The shame is just so bad. I'm not worthy of love. You can't even ask for it, because that's sexual behavior, and you know.

When I first got into trouble in my early 20s, I did not appear outwardly the way I felt inside; scared all the time, confused, conflicted. All kinds of conflictions, oh my god. My whole thought-world. I came out as transgender a few years ago, almost around close to 10 now. I've always felt feminine aspects or energies and then also, manly ones, but I don't— masculine versus feminine. I really didn't know what was going on, I never talked about it when I was much younger. It was something to ignore, to shame away. I tried to do that, but it never happened, you can't shame things away. Oh man, this is so flipping crazy. When I'm looking back at how I thought, it's like "how could I be so crazy?" But, like, any kind of femininity, I would shame because I would feel vulnerable, like "You need to throw that shit away." I also shamed that masculinity in me too. So it was just *me*, different aspects and parts of *me* that I was shaming.

This last time I got into trouble, I spent ten years in department of corrections in Walla Walla. I've been in trouble more than once. It's just like, I've been in trouble almost 20 years now, been out of incarceration for almost 5, and for all senses and purposes, I'm stable. On the outside more so than inside. Some days, I'm a wreck, I'm a mess, a *hot* mess.



Some of Daffy's personal decor & collections in their room at Joe's Place.

The structure of my sentencing was this: I was under the ISRB, headed out of Olympia, pertaining mainly to sex offenders. If you commit a Class A Felony — first offense, it doesn't matter- you're under the board for supervision. That wasn't for me, I was a Class B. I was under the board is because I had a prior in a different state. After a year I was parole eligible, I got found releasable by the ISRB. The sentence review committee wanted a forensic psych evaluation to see if I met criteria for civil commitment. I saw Dr. Cumbersome (fake name) soon after that. The story that he wrote, oh my gosh, there were some things he said in there that were not only untrue but totally horrendous. I can show you the deposition for Dr. Cumbersome— One phrase in particular, every time I say this, I get scared because maybe the person hearing it think there's truth in it or maybe gets uncomfortable. I hope I don't make you uncomfortable at all. This was the one quote that Dr. Cumbersome put in the adulation that they got all frantic about. I started second guessing myself. I do that really bad, chronically. He was under oath when he did this. The quote in there, he said he didn't know how it got in there, and that it had nothing to do with me. He had to admit that in court. That's one of the reasons I'm not civilly committed. My crimes were never violent in nature, but I get that anything sexually offensive is considered violence.

But he said, the phrase, he said that there were reports of me having fantasies and desires of raping and murdering females. Can you understand that being so untrue and so unreasonable? When I was reading this, I laughed and was like, "My life is over." I was already suicidal beginning at a very young age. I dwell on the fact that I'm supposed to be dead, supposed to die, deserve it. Growing up, getting in trouble, doing terrible things to people.

I had 4 separate evaluations over a 10-year period by this doctor. Because I met criteria for civil commitment, the board found me unreleasable, and I stayed in DOC for 10 years. They hired an attorney for me, and he did some searching, this and that, and said that the evaluator they ordered for me was basically a gun for hire. He knew my case pretty well, so he thinks I have a good case to be releasable, because of how well I did in sex offenders treatment in Twin Rivers. I really liked that in Twin Rivers it's more treatment-oriented, though it's still a prison and they still shame you. Outwardly, they

project this image of it being a therapeutic environment. And it kinda was, especially for those who want to live that kind of life. And I was. I was so hungry for it.

A month after getting out, it was right in the middle of COVID scare, everyone still had to wear the mask. I wasn't on any type of probation or nothing. When I was released, I wanted to go to Eugene, Oregon. I was born in Portland. I love Eugene. I love the Oregon Ducks, huge Oregon Ducks fan. I wanted to go to Portland. My attorney found a place in Eugene called Sponsors Inc. and one of the criteria in order to be there is you have to be considered a high risk sex offender. Most places will only take level 1s and 2s. This place you could be high risk. I was approved, but because of COVID, they shut doors. But my attorney found Joe's and I've been here since.

When I was on the island, I was evaluated for gender dysphoria. I already had my name changed too, at the island. That's my real name. I was going by it. The doctor, she has experience with gender dysphoria, this and that, and she said I had it. I began hormone therapy. When I got the diagnosis, I could wear women's clothes, makeup —ah, I could wear makeup— and nail polish. Oh my gosh. It was really scary at first but it felt so good. I wasn't on hormone therapy for 3 years or so, something like that, which changed... you know. I can't walk around without a t-shirt anymore, I'll just say that. Although when I was on the island, most people wanted me to! I've had doubts if I was truly a woman, I thought about going through reconstructive surgery, all that stuff — gender confirming surgery, whatever they call it now. That was overwhelming, and I came to the realization that I'm not going do that. I believe I would kill myself.

Have you heard of two-spirit? I believe that. At DOC, I came outside as transgender or bigender or genderfluid, whatever the terms may be. I had a friend that was gay in there that's Native American. He told me about two-spirit. I read about it, looked it up. When I was locked up, I couldn't really use the internet, but since I've been out, I've been looking more into it.

I started writing in my journal about my conflicts in life, between life and death. It started very young in age. My gender stuff, that's a conflict. I'm



Daffy's screensaver of one of their guiding forces, Buddha.

coming to terms that there is no conflict; it's of my own making, I think, a lot of the time. Something so simple, after studying and researching. I'm looking at two-spirit, I'm looking at myself. I can just imagine it. I'm bald, this bandana is what I wear. I have a problem with being bald. I've always wanted to have nice hair. It got ruined when I went back into the closet, but I am coming back out slowly. I went to LGBT thing. I told Star Project, I want a wig and I want makeup and I want a dress or some sort of outfit, and I want to just be me.

Is it okay if I explain my awakening to you? It was so profound. A lot of people say "Wow," a lot of them don't believe me. So, I'm in a jail cell. And I believe everything in my life up to then led me to this point. I've had a problem with drugs and alcohol since being a teenager and on Valentine's Day, 2007, there's this guy that came into the jail cell. I'd met him before. Before I was arrested, when I tried to get involved in a dependency treatment center in Yakima. I was there and I was already a registered sex offender. Met a guy there, over the weekend, and I told him about it. He was the guy that came into my cell. His deal was meth. I've had some experience with meth. It's bad, bad stuff. I don't believe I'll ever do it again.

He smoked some in the jail cell. I was sexual with him. When I sobered up, and I was finally able to go to sleep and wake up, I woke up with this insatiable

desire to kill myself. But I didn't know how, and I'm afraid to do it. So I begged god or whatever is out there to end my life, I'm done, I'm tapping out, I don't want any more of this, I can't go on. At that point, in that desperation, I surrendered. I threw in the towel and I begged god to take me, I don't want to do this anymore. And something started happening, just so weird, and I don't know where it came from. I didn't believe it was coming from me. I began, like, totally giving up my whole belief system about everything. I was born and raised a Christian, and there were so many contradictions in that. Being in trouble for my sexual behavior, a wreck, a mess, my whole life. I believed, when I had that awakening, I pleaded— I didn't know what to believe about god, if there was one or whatever, to take me, but that didn't happen, as you can see! Haha. I threw away all my beliefs about everything, about god, about Christianity, about everything I was taught. I finally realized how chaotic and delusional my whole beliefs system was, distorted. I went on this search, I sought out god. This is the one time I didn't go to the Holy Bible, I went to everything else. I got into the big books about AA and doing the steps.

I had a vision after the awakening. I can't exactly remember how long. The awakening happened in February, it may have been March. I was still in jail. It was so real. This is what my vision was: I woke up in it. There's this endless row of trees, as far as my eyes can see and further, around the horizon. It was right in front of me. The trees were blowing in the wind. That was my god, that was god. I couldn't see the power, that was... it was moving all these trees, individually and in unison. It was so clear as day, and that's where I started. The wind. We're hearing the power of the wind right now, the wind chimes. It's a powerful thing. It provides as lot of energy, with windmills and stuff. After my awakening, my dream was to become a chemical dependency counselor. I looked into that. I've done the 12 steps.

The whole time I've been here in Walla Walla— since I'm a level three, everyone knows about me. I started going to AA, and people loved me there, loved when I talk and share. I started getting rides to and from meetings from a woman, I told her about SO shit and it was all good. Then, I don't know, it just blew up in my face with AA and with her, so there was publicity there. I moved out of Joe's at one point and had actually moved in with her. I wasn't

there very long and then I was in the homeless camp, the alliance. I was there for a year and a half, so I experienced homelessness for the first time. I finally got out of there, started getting involved in meth again, got a lot of negative publicity being there. So in a few circles I'm well known or have a lot of publicity, and that sucks. Couldn't find any job, no one around here will hire me except Express. Through them, I got a job in Western Oregon. I first started working there September 21st, and they hired me. I actually work there. I'm an employee. I think I have a chance at a promotion, at having an actual title or an operator job. So I have a job.

My time at the homeless shelter was good and bad. I went through a move back to desperation, that I failed at the AA thing and just... got depressed again, got involved in drugs, went through my suicidal world of ideation, whatever. I was really getting miserable. At the shelter they have, it's filthy, just, oh my gosh. One day, I got so tired of it, I just said, fuck. I got the cleaning stuff, went and cleaned the restroom, kept on cleaning the common area, and I started smiling again by just doing it. When people would come in and apologize, I'd say "Don't be sorry, you gotta use the restroom." I wasn't joking, I guess it's a refreshing thing to do something for the right reasons. I was feeling good! I was cleaning. I know other people appreciated it too. They made me the janitor, I lived in a building with the laundry room and the showers. I didn't get involved in the meth until after that. I got out of there.

I did all the modules for the Health Authority, and now I'm just waiting to take the class to become a certified peer support. Gosh, I think I could so much good. The gendered stuff, the drugs and alcohol stuff. The STAR Project, they haven't always worked with sex offenders, but now I'm over there. I first heard about shadow work through a lady that works there, and she talked me into doing the peer support modules. I did 'em all. Some time ago.

I deal with a lot of fear, fear of failure, being given a chance. How I came to terms with [what I did] is this: My whole life, I believed I deserved death, I didn't deserve anything but something bad. My behavior supported that belief. It made it concrete. "I'm a piece of shit, I deserve death, look at me." Anyone who sees me on paper, I look like a monster. When I was getting involved with AA, they found out what I did, and turned sour— they can't get over the SO

stuff. I still have issues with shame and I still have that voice that began with my mom and turned into my voice: “I’ll fail, no one will give me a chance, I deserve death anyway.” Well, I’m not dead. So there’s gotta be a reason. I have a lot of experience, I’ve learned a lot, and I believe I can do some good things.

I want to write a book. Joe remembers. I was talking to him when I first got here, and the other day he said “Hey, you ever written that book?” I said “What?” I ask, though, do I want to write a boook to try to prove that I’m good or worth this shit, worth the stay-around, is that it? Or do I want to do it solely to help people? I’m really not sure my intentions, maybe multiple ones. I just want to get involved directly. I could reach people, all kinds of different people, and that’s maybe the only way I could reach anyone. Talking to Star Project about peer support and stuff, working with people that no one wants to work with, except for you. My own reasons; I remember how sick I was and how messed up I was to be offending sexually. I know that there is humanity in people who do horrendous things. I think I can help somehow. Inspire, knock people around, and get ‘em to quit. Nah, I’m kidding about that part.

There’s a couple things I wish people would know. Registration, what is it for? They say it’s protecting an environment. No, it’s not, it’s just distracting. The guys out there offending are your brothers, your uncle, your dad, someone you know personally. You’re too busy looking at people with the SO label than looking at the victim having something horrible happening to them right in front of your face. You’re defeating the purpose, you’re focusing on something else. They just want a reason to harass someone, to hate on them. While you’re doing that, your relative that’s babysitting for you is messing with your kid! That’s raw, thats blunt, but I don’t think it can go any further without people understanding. I want them to get this message. I’ve tried, I’m trying to get connected.

I want to leave here. I don’t want to live in Walla Walla, I really don’t. I want to be closer to my brother, or to move to Oregon. My sister disowned me pretty much. I don’t know if I’ll ever see her again. She plastered me all over Facebook and Twitter. My brother showed me on his phone, he said “Look at this.” She’s my baby sister, and was born when I was nine. At the time, I

wasn't ready and living with suicidal ideation. Coming home, seeing my baby sister smile and reaching for me when I came home from school, it kept me alive. Now, I say she's trying to kill me. That's a bad attitude though. I want to tell her "How come you kept me alive until now?" It's all stupid stuff, negative shit I still live with. I like to think that voice isn't as loud as it used to be.

It's nice to see this, that someone would want to do this; To know the humanity with people who are castaways, or throwaways. I understand when I meet people who have maybe been a perp like myself being passionate to kill the monster but also give birth to a butterfly. I want to be part of the solution, I want to reach out to sex offenders. STAR Project thinks it would be great, so we'll see if it happens. When I first got out, I kept asking Joe when I could drop a level in registration and he said, "5 years." That's coming up in July. So I'm going to ask him again.





More of Daffy's personal collections. Daffy said, in our interview, "I'm a collector. I just want to collect things, I don't know why."

Shorty
4 yrs in the justice system
2 and ½ yrs at Joe's Place
71



My charge was my first arrest. I had to wait a month and a half to come to Joe's because there were no beds. The first thing that was of help to me was that my attorney knew the man that was over at protective custody (PC). I was in the jail, and he was able to get me into PC. That was a bonus because, as you've probably already heard, if you're not under PC at the jail or have someone who's got your back [as an SO], you can be in big trouble. I'm just a little guy and I'm old, so that was a big help. When I was arrested, was that they treated me like a log. The handcuffs are too tight, the floor is too cold because you don't have shoes on, and they don't care about talking to you.

The attorney they appointed me had enough sense to take me back to the courtroom even though I'd been arraigned once, and said "I want this man's bail to be reduced." The prosecuting attorney didn't like that but the judge said "Yup, I'll reduce his bail." That helped me get out, so I was out on bail, which was nice after only three days. Being able to get around the prosecution was kind of a victory in a sense. I sat for 15 months in this motel, and there's some reasons for that, but not because of my charge. Just for other reasons.

When they took me back after that 15 months, that's when I was exposed to the system, so to speak. When you go to jail or prison, as you've probably heard, the guards aren't always the nicest, but being in protective custody was good because I didn't have to worry about getting in a fight. SOs are gonna be targeted. Even in protective custody, believe it or not. There were instances where I could have gotten in fights, but I usually walked away. There was always a possibility that someone would come along, but what I did was, if I thought they were getting close, bugging you about what your charge was, I'd say "I don't ask and I don't tell." Most of the time, those guys could tell what you were about, why you

were there. I spent a little bit of time out of protective custody and that wasn't a pleasant experience. There were people who would've liked to have done damage.

Now, the justice system itself is not always just. It's not always equal in its punishment. There's some things that I don't think you need to know but, for instance, I've got restrictions on me that were placed there under my JNS that says I can't go certain places. But there's individuals that have some of the same charges as I did that are allowed to do that. They can go where I can't go. It's left up to the judge in that case. I accepted that early on. If the court says something, you've got to go to the court to get it undone. I'm just glad I didn't get put on the board— the board is really an unjust thing. It's permanent supervision. They'll always have to answer to DOC, and I'm so thankful that didn't happen for me, because it will screw up your life. I don't think it's fair in any sense of the word. There's people who don't deserve that at all. There's just no reason for it. But, the legislature is not giving in, they're hanging on to it.

We have been told in our treatment that repeat offenders are a lower percentage than [society] would like to have everybody think. They would love to have everybody think that repeating is at a higher rate than it really is. Right now, I'm in a holding pattern. I have a hearing coming up in May that will allow me to get out what I think is early for my sins. Now, when you got jail or to prison, you get good time. I got good time when I was in jail and I was released about a month early. But, because I'm on SOSA, which is an alternative program for sex offenders, I do not have good time. They have a release date for me in June, and I think that's too soon. I got released on Halloween and I'm supposed to be under supervision for three years, so I thought my release date would be on Halloween because that would be three years. It looks like the early release date is a valid deal though. If it is, that would be good. But there's no consistency. The justice system has its built-in biases. You have judges, prosecutors who are biased. Now, if a prosecutor is doing their job and doing it properly, I don't have a problem with that. My experience with the justice system was pretty cut and dry, and for the most part, I would say, fair.

I don't have a family left. I have one sister and her husband who have been with me since the beginning, but I lost my brother, and I've lost all of my children. My youngest daughter stayed with me, hung on for a while, but it's been on-and-off and I think she's done. Which is sad, but that's what happens with offenses: you lose your family and your friends. There was someone I ran around with for 15+ years and as soon as he heard about my offense, he was done. But there was also someone who came to me after my offense and was still my friend. It's a hard thing for some people. They forget that they're capable of either doing the same thing or doing something similar. The problem is that we built our society on levels. If you murder somebody— oh, you're a bad person, you get so much more time in prison or whatever. If you go out and have an accident and somebody dies in an accident... people don't realize they're capable of things that are just as bad because we've leveled things so that something seems more horrible than another. They think they can look in a mirror and say "I haven't done anything as bad" but I don't think you can do that. But it's still pretty hard to lose your kids.

I believe there is a God, and I believe there is a God that will someday judge because that's what the Bible says. The judgment will be based on not whether you committed a sexual offense or you committed a murder, but you're going to be judged on the same thing; sin. Everybody is a sinner, and it's all the same. So, He doesn't say that because you're a sex offender, you're the worst scum of the earth. If you can look in the mirror and tell God that you have never done anything wrong, then I'm sorry. I think that's what people have done.

I'm finding out that in some parts of our country, a sexual offense is so heinous that in certain states, sex offenders are identified by numbers on their driver's license. They're identified by, oh man, I want to say there's something on their license plate but I'm not sure. But there's a way that the police can identify you. They'll follow you around and make sure you know that you'll be gotten for any offense. Not just sexual— it could be running a red light! I know an SO who went to that state and he was warned not to go there because of what could happen. We're not sure that he didn't get put back in prison. But, they want to put these people back in prison for the slightest incident. One of the things they've do here in Joe's place, because it's mostly sex offenders that live here, every so often,

the DOC officers will come to check on you. They'll go in your room, and look, and see if you've got anything in there thats against the JNS. They'll do that, here, during the day time, when they're on duty. In this particular state, they were coming in at 11:30 at night to do "house check," and it's getting to be that way in lots of places. And I'm not saying that what we have done is "not that bad," but what I am saying is, to continually harass or pursue people who have committed this one crime is pretty obsessive. That's what it is. Obsessive. That's where this is all going.

I think what people want to forget is some of the other things you've done in your life. I believe that one of my gifts is to help people, and I spent 27 years as a school custodian. There were things about that that I didn't like, but the thing that I did like is that I was able to help people. I was able to help kids, I was able to help teachers, and, at times, parents. I believe that as soon as you offend sexually, people forget all about that and they concentrate on what did happen. I think that's people forget I'm somebody that was willing to help, go the extra mile for a lot of things. You were a middle schooler and a high schooler at one time, I was too, and you know what they're like! I spent years.

If people could just push that label aside, they would see [a registered person] is really no different than they are. They're humans, they make mistakes, they go down the wrong path. Making a long story short, I was acquainted with this lady and had gotten to know her a little bit, and unbeknownst to her, she made it so that I had to tell her that I was a sex offender. When that happened, her reaction was not "Oh no, how horrible!" She sat very quietly for a few seconds and then said, "Everybody deserves a second chance." And that's pretty impressive, to be able to say that. She was a teacher once too, so for her to be able to do that, it's amazing. She's now my girlfriend. It's pretty cool, she's a really cool lady. So there is life after this.

Reality is that we do deserve a second chance. Of course, there are individuals that deny that anything ever happened— "they didn't do it, they didn't know that this person was underage," they'll go on and on. I don't personally know anybody like that, but I know they're out there. If you're person enough to agree that you're guilty and that you want to change, that's the important part:

to want to change. You want to get back to where you were and get on with life. That's really important. If people could just see you as a human being who makes mistakes... Because that friend of mine can say that doesn't mean that she didn't have questions, but I was able to say "I'll answer any of your questions because I'm not there now, I'm moving on. I want my life that I have left to be good."

See humanity: love.

Shorty is not alone in the acceptance he gained when meeting his partner. While the registry seeks to single out people, place them alone, and claim monstrosity, its stark story fails to acknowledge the people out there who love those with the label: either knowing them before they offended and standing by them or choosing to embrace a person who is attempting to be better post-offense. The eradication of humanity that we see in social reaction to the registry is hugely unaligned with the nurturing, loving relationships that SOs can and do have after offending. Many of my interviewees had/do have girlfriends, those who acknowledge their offense and see the humanity in them, love them the way that the justice system and society would have us believe is impossible. In turn, many of my interviewees seem totally in love (though don't tell them I said that, they may be embarrassed), traveling huge distances to see their partners, wives, families, friends, and so on. The single narrative that wants us to see SOs as filth beneath our feet has no place for us to consider an SO as a loving family member, friend, boyfriend, or husband. Yet they are. In the same breath that we say "This person committed a sex offense," we need to be able to say "And they are a meaningful person who loves and is loved."

Alex C.
Caregiver for Joe's Resident
2 yrs caregiving at Joe's
27



There was the feeling that came up when they initially told me [I would be caregiving for an SO]. "Oh yeah, there's a new client, his name is this, and he's a sex offender in the sex offender home, will you be comfortable working there?" And I said yeah. There has to be a male caregiver because of all the guys here. I felt a little obligated to take the job, but overall no huge intense feelings. There was just a little alert in my head, because of what society says about people who are SOs. But I take care of him as if he wasn't. After doing his offenses when he was younger, he got caught up and went to prison for the next half of his life, and he finally got off that island, Joe got him here years ago, and a little bit later, I got here.

He's been the oldest guy here for a while, but Bob's got him beat now. While I've worked with him, one of the most important things that happened was: He was telling me, a couple months into my work, and he said "I have family I haven't seen in years. I have a brother, and I was wondering if you would help me find them. I haven't seen them in years." So I went on Facebook and found their children, reached out and said "Hey, I have your uncle, he's out of prison and he wants to meet you." Luckily, they were in TriCities and he has history there. That was one of the coolest things. That wasn't even related to the job, that was just good as a person; I've got a phone, and I can help you out.

Yeah, I mean, when my office ladies were like "Yeah here's his case. Technically we don't need to go this deep into it but we did. And this is what he did," I was like "damn." But then I met him and he wasn't like that, he wasn't that person. It's not to say that he doesn't have thoughts like that, I'm sure he does, but I think all his chemicals are too old to do any of that. He has a really simple life. He is satisfied with life, he's not suicidal, he always answers no to questions about that when we go to the doctors. All he has is bone pain from sitting in a

a cell for so long.

I can't talk for the other guys. I don't interact with them super intentionally. They interact with me, and I don't avoid it or anything, I respect them. Besides my caretaking, I don't come in and look forward to talking to someone specific. But convos come up! Some of them respect what I do for Shaky.

Those in hands-on roles working with SOs aren't the only ones who care and see the humanity of those on the registry—

Registrants, Families, Supporters Demonstrate Unity in Washington, D.C.

March 4, 2025 R H



Registrants, members of their families and supporters demonstrated unity in Washington, D.C. this week in a conference and a vigil near the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court. Both events included leaders and members of multiple organizations that support registrants and their families, including ACSOL, NARSOL, WAR, Florida Action Committee, SHINE, United Voices, Pathfinder and Restorative Action Alliance. Click here to watch the vigil video Click here to watch all of the conference videos Conference presentations addressed a wide range of topics beginning with a presentation by civil rights attorney...

Kjoy Guest

April 3, 2025 4:22 pm

I have been watching videos of various people speaking out against the registry. All of those people that I saw and heard so far are making me happy. They are giving me hope and faith that the blockage from employment, school, housing and many other issues will be gradually removed. They are helping me to find a way to prove to the public that I'm a normal person who just has a personal problem, and I'm using the tools necessary to control my mind and prevent any kind of invasion or violation on another person's human rights.

Janice's Journal: It's Time to Show You Care

June 28, 2024 webmaster

We are a community. A community that includes people required to register, their families and those who support them.

Some members of the community never committed a sex offense but pled guilty anyway. Some members of the community have been convicted of a non-violent, non-contact offense. And some members of the community have been convicted of heinous acts and designated as sexually violent predators.

Although members of the community appear to be different, we are fundamentally the same because we all know that the registration system is broken and does not serve the purpose of increasing public safety. We all know that registration is punishment regardless of statements made in decisions issued by courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court.

The question is how do we weather this storm? Do we ride out the storm as individuals who care only about their own well-being? Or do we ride out the storm as members of a community that care about each and every member of that community?

I have chosen to weather this storm as a member of the community that cares about each and every member of the community. And I invite you to join me.

Members of Fearless groups often help each other deal with issues related to being on a public registry, like getting probation or parole officers' permission for activities, advocating for ourselves, and building relationships with people who can help us succeed. The group does not give legal advice, but they can often help Fearless members find good lawyers or other resources.

One of the founders of this particular Fearless group explained, "I learned about the Fearless groups when I lived in another state. I felt very alone with a son in prison and learning about the registry and terms of release was overwhelming. It was at the Fearless meeting that I met the most wonderful and supportive people. I found that we were all in this together, and we were able to share our feelings and learn from each other. I remember crying on the way home after my first meeting because I felt as though I finally had a safe place to talk with others facing the same hurdles and challenges."

Sources:
ACSOL website,
NARSOL website,
Paul Hanley's Fearless: *Finding Strength in Community*

Bob
7 yrs in the justice system
1 yr at Joe's Place
82



I committed my offense about 20 years ago and I realized quickly what I had done. Basically, I stopped immediately. But it wasn't until about 15 years later that it caught up to me. I never had any offense prior to that or any trouble with the law. In fact, I'm kind of a model. Very active in the community and the church. Afterwards, I kept being active, but I realized what I'd done and I could never go back to that. My victim made a mention during a youth meeting about 15 years earlier, and that started the process. I've never had any problems since, in all that time.

During that process, I was evaluated by a psychologist or whatever you want to call her, and she determined that I was very contrite and had a low probability of ever reoffending. But the judge decided and told me right in court "I'm going to make an example of you." And the mother of the child I offended against, of course, wanted to see me locked away forever. So I got 5 years. I've been married, by the way, for 58 years. My wife stood by me all that time.

I ended up at Joe's because we had to sell our house; it was too close to schools. My wife found a duplex to rent. When I was found releasable, the owner of the place knew me, and had no problems with me moving in. The local CCO for me reviewed the place, found it acceptable, and they submitted the request to the board, but that board rejected it and went further, told me I was restricted to the whole township. It wasn't because of the safety, it was because they might be embarrassed if they ever ran across me. So we started looking around for someplace else for me to stay. I wanted to stay close to my wife, and there was no place in TriCities at all, no facilities, and the one that was available was in my restricted area. The only opening was too far away from my family, in Yakima, or here, so that's how I came down here, to Joe's Place. Because I had

no choice, basically. There are so few places available that would take a sex offender.

I have four children and one proxy daughter. They all support me. Two of my children live right in Richland where I'm restricted. My brother in law lives there. All my history is there. We're trying to figure out a way to get back together, me and my wife, but we're not physically together. I'm trying to file a brief to remove that restriction. I never thought it would take a whole year to get this far. That's my key goal for both of us. We're just trying to not be apart. And the system doesn't seem to care, one way or the other.

I'm lucky, at my age I don't have to worry about a job. I watch these guys in here and I see them try to get these low paying, minimum wage jobs, and they'll never get ahead in life. Myself, I have family, but it's hard to go visit them. I just want to the Boise area to visit my proxy daughter. She's lived with us since she was 14, she and her husband are fantastic people. They've been very supportive. To go visit down there, I had to call the sheriff's department ahead of time and they only gave me two days. It's hard, to take a trip down there, and only have two days. That's one of the challenges I've been facing— wanting to take a trip with my wife for more than two days. It's come down to the fact that we're just going to find a place to lie.

There's not much I can do without requestioning travel permits. When I first got out, and my wife came down to stay down here for a week at a local hotel, I couldn't stay with her. It was 7 weeks before they gave permission to stay with my wife. Been married 57 years, and I couldn't even spend a night with my wife. It wasn't until the therapist intervened, and told them it was an "approved relationship" and there was no reason to keep us apart. It was hard. It took me a long time to adjust.

The biggest change is my daughter-in-laws. Two of them are really with me. Because of that, I can't go to the West side to visit with my oldest son. Whenever she's willing, she'll let me know. Every few months, he comes down to visit me. I'm legally able to see my grandchildren, but I don't have much contact with them. My grandson's wife —he has two wonderful children, I've got pictures of them— doesn't want anything to do with me, but him and I were very close when

he was growing up. We're able to talk on the phone and text, but when I went down to Boise recently, I wasn't able to see him. While the main members of my family are all there, that's been the main problems. I've been getting support from my nieces and nephews, they've been writing me letters since I was in prison. I think I've been getting more support than the average person coming out. Someone I met in corrections had to out his two kids up for adoption because of it. His wife was into drugs and he had to give up his two kids. I'm just thankful I didn't have to go through that.

I was part of a prayer group, very active in the church, and the church basically told me not to step foot on their property. My prayer group stopped communicating. In fact, except for my family, there's been no communication. All my relationships are in my family now. I don't have one outside the family.

What I did was not me. It's not who I am. Anyone who knows me for a long period of time knows something was going on in my life that drove me that way, allowed me to make that choice. My family, my wife, they look at that and they can't believe it, it's not who I've been my whole life. It's not in my character. I couldn't talk to my doctor or my wife, I've been raised as a man who solves his own problem. I thought about it constantly, and I was scared. I couldn't really talk to my wife at that point in my life, our communications broke down.

I regret what I did more than you could ever know. I built up a bunch of walls and now they're slowly coming down. You're always looking behind your back, who you're talking to. I isolated myself those years except for certain people. I was fortunate to meet some guys who helped me and watched over me. I've seen too many fights, too many people get physically abused because they're sex offenders. You know, I made it through unscathed. It's a label that we don't like and society doesn't like, but it's there. For me, I just want to get back together with my wife and live whatever years I have left. I'm under the board so that means community oversight for the rest of my life.

We are just people. I think the vast majority... all they want is a second chance. The vast majority would never recommit any crime like that. Most of the guys I've met going back into corrections are just guys who violated a restriction, not committing an offense. There's always going to be a few bad eggs, but we're

thrown in a pot together. Every time I look at the TV and see a family structure there, I shake my head and say “What did I do? What did I do?” I see this immigration thing going on, and they’re catching these people to deport and calling them sex offenders, and they’re all getting lumped in with us together to be seen as the worst of the worst. You’re never going to see anything like that anywhere, I promise.

The people I’ve met are good, decent people of good character and good moral background. They’re not the type of people to go out and create problems and abuse the law. None of them are, from who I’ve met. They just want to try to get back to having a normal life. I think the weight of the stigma, having that label, plays with psyche all the time. I can’t believe these guys haven’t developed a lot more resentments and anger than they have, but they haven’t. They’re willing to accept that, because they have no choice. They just want to go back to having a normal life, to get back to society as much as they can.

If I could, I’d get rid of the registration system unless it’s a high level offense. Even then, registration has no proof that even deters any second offense at all. It’s a control thing that doesn’t stop anything. It’s more like punishment for punishment’s sake. Second thing is: I’ve served my time by the judge. To be on this life sentence of oversight is like having a second sentence all my life.

For example, I’m going for this polygraph test this week, and I did one last week, and it just dredges up everything about you, your offense. They have this sheet you fill out that requires every sexual act you’ve ever done down, every single thing. I’m tired of that. It doesn’t allow you to move on, to progress. To fill out these forms all the time. If it’s with my therapist that’s one thing, but this is with my case manager. I’m tired of having to share my offense, especially in extreme detail. It doesn’t do me any good on healing or getting back to feeling normal. It makes me just the opposite. I can’t see how these guys can really recover when it’s constantly thrown in their face all the time. To me, it’s like abusing their children when they’re growing up, telling them they’re worthless, and always putting them down. I think that’s what the parole system does, always putting these guys down. And this is the only group they do that to. I didn’t murder anybody, and yet they don’t have that oversight. I inappropriately touched a

young girl. That's what it was. I'm a low level sex offender. I think that's the goal of everyone here, though, to just feel normal again. To blend back in and be contributors to society in some way.

The last couple weeks— one of the guys here, 25, doesn't have his driver's license. I've taken him out in my car for the past couple of weeks, teaching him how to drive, parallel park, all that. I took him down there, and he got his license when he's failed this test four times before. And that's because everyone's always looked down on him and called him just a sex offender, but he got it! It's how I give back, do something good. I felt like a pop again.

The DOC was worried about me going with him to get his license. If I go in and nobody's there, I can sit there nicely. If there's a minor in there, I have to be able to judge if I can find an isolated place because I'm not allowed to have any verbal interaction with a minor. They were concerned about what I was going to do waiting for him doing his driver's test, that I'd be lurking around looking like a scary stranger. I have to do that sort of research every time, whether kids live there, and I have to write that all up and put in safety plans. In case I see some young girl and get aroused or, I don't know. Those are the burdens we have to face everyday. But I felt so good that he got his license, that I helped somebody. I think most people here just want to do that, just want to help somebody.

It's been extremely hard on my family. I recognize that. In fact, my daughter-in-law's husband that I visited last weekend, after the two gals went to bed, we just talked about how much they missed me and how hard it was not having me around. I know my wife had fallen into a deep depression for a while, had to float around from one son to another because she couldn't take care of herself. Only when we started to see the light at the end of the tunnel, that I was going to get out, did she get her act together. She called, and she said wanted to make a "nest" for the both of us. Now it's been a whole year since I got out and we're still not together yet. The system doesn't seem to care about family, or family structures. I understand concerns about the victim, but they ought to also have some concerns about keeping families and support groups together. It's hard on one's family.

It's lonely. That's the biggest thing I feel. Loneliness. I just feel alone down here. It gets to me. I'm only level one. My lawyer told me "What you did is so far down

the bottom of the barrel, you shouldn't even get six months" but between mother, judge, and the prosecutor, I got 5 years. I did what society asked me to do, and I wish it was over. What more do you want from me?

What more *DO* we want?

Many whom I interviewed cried during our time together. This was a deepening of the human connection I was hoping to build with people who have been told, by all areas in society, that they have no humanity left. Despite this being fundamentally untrue, I had been taught the same thing. It was incredibly evident in every tearful moment that was not the case, had never been the case, and was another of those "truths" we are socially fed that are not truths at all.

Many of the guys I interviewed had years in prison, treatment, and therapy to come to terms with their actions, yet many cried only when recounting them or describing their victim; acknowledging that they, as a human, caused pain for another. But many of them cried, too, because they had felt/shown such genuine remorse and growth but no one was willing to see it. Bob's finishing remark of "What more do you want me to do?" showcases the hopelessness that life on the registry evokes. For all intents and purposes, Bob's attempts at growth or showcasing his personhood are ignored by the system and by other people as individuals, despite the lifelong physical oversight that is intended to monitor said growth. It is undoubtedly wrong and endlessly harmful to commit a sex offense but, once someone has, what can they do? It seems that society would rather the person simply face unending hatred that comes with being named on the registry than hope an SO could change for the better. The question is raised again: What is the registry actually doing for the better? Is it protecting people from sex offenses or is it just giving us something to hate?

“Red Bill”
25 yrs in the justice system
~ 5 months at JOES Place
45



I’ve had two indecent exposure charges while on drugs, and I’ve never been registered, I’ve never had to register. I’ve been registered for drugs before, and those charges are definitely related. I babysit for one of my friends when they go to work, I help out with their little ones. I can be around kids, I can pretty much do whatever I want. I’m here because I needed a safe place away from drugs. It’s funny because I’ve gotta do some of the workbooks to stay here but some of them don’t really apply to me. For me, it was more about the addiction [that reshaped my relationship with people]. My stepkids know about it, and I even got my wife’s kids back after my charge. I’m honest, I’m also a smartass. I have a very big heart. I’m a very loving person, and I’m very empathetic.

When I was 8 years old, I stopped somebody from being sexually abused. I don’t know what happened because I blacked out, if I got sexually abused, but I stopped my best friend from being sexually abused. I got called to testify when I was 12, couldn’t testify because I couldn’t remember anything. They put me in a place in Seattle for my anger issues, which didn’t help, I was pissed! Started using drugs at the age of 16, tried to go save the drug world after that, that didn’t happen— failed attempt. Got my charges. I don’t know, I promised somebody I wouldn’t hurt people anymore, so I worked on controlling my anger after that. Didn’t grow up with a dad, only had me and my sister, and my dad lived in my hometown. Only seen him 3 times in my entire life.

When I was married, I had one year clean-time. Then we moved to the coast, I had three years clean-time. Then I started using again. Then [my wife] died. I got my son back when I was using, when my mom wasn’t able to take care of him anymore. Now my son is 22, he lives here, he calls me for advice. My sister is still in active addiction, and the rest of my family is dead. In the last year,

I lost my mom, my dad, my wife, and so on. I have my stepkids, two who are in active addiction and one who is not, who I have connection with. I don't even know if my oldest stepdaughter is even still alive. Nobody's heard from her in two years, I don't know if she's still alive or not.

I relapsed like 6 months ago. I was helping somebody out with her abusive ex, she was staying at my house, but she wanted to go home one night. While she was there, her ex kicked in the door and tied her up without me knowing. Her mom called me the next day and said she was crying, and I got there 2 minutes after he left. He'd beaten her for 10 hours straight, is going to jail. I relapsed over it. It was my choice to relapse but I relapsed. I'm very protective over females, extremely. I was an addict for 27 years— my drug of choice was meth and weed. I came here originally because my son had been taken from me and my ex came and got me, brought me to Walla Walla to get clean. I didn't have anywhere else to go. The people who brought me here told me that it was a relatively low sex offender area, which turned out to not be true. I don't mind, I don't mind being around sex offenders.

I don't mind [being grouped in with registered people]. I figured, addicts try to change, everyone else in the world tries to change, and they're allowed to, so why aren't these people allowed to? I have a few female friends that feel different but that's just the nature of it. People know who I am through my actions, not, you know... as long as I'm doing what's right and what I should be doing, people can say whatever they want. What other people think about me doesn't matter, it's what I think about me and my actions.

It caused me lots of problems with the people at NA, who labeled me as a sex offender just because I was living here, though they now know I was never registered. It took a while for that to go away but it just takes time. Nowadays, if I don't show up for NA for a couple of days, they show up here. I have people who care about me now. I have a very big foundation.

I don't give up on people. I tell them they can always come and talk to me. Can't use around me, but they can come talk to me. Only thing that upsets me with NA is that you get people that are like, "If you're not doing, the same thing I'm doing, I'm not gonna hang out or talk to you," and that's not caring about them. For

most of these people [at Joe's], they don't want to go to NA because the folks would give them a hard time. Which pisses me off. There used to be a guy that would look anybody up and spread it around. So, when I used to take them, I would tell them "Don't tell anyone shit about your charges," but most of them still don't go. Also probably because there's kids there.

They're just like everybody else. They can change. Before I ever had my charges, I worked caregiving, and they actually stuck me in a house that was all level 3 sex offenders. And these guys were the absolute worst of the worst. It was in Grand County, they had alarms on the doors, the windows, even in their doors. They had attacked every worker that had ever worked there. And then one day, all the other workers were gone, and they were all just looking at me, and I told them "If you attack me, I don't care what the law says, I'm going to beat the living hell out of you" as equals. They were all really good for me, just talked and did what they were asked to do. I think they liked me because I was just straight with them.

Crazywolf
25 yrs in the justice system
~ 5 months at Joe's Place
70



I had a niece. I told my brother she could come to my house and stay as long as she followed the house rules. She didn't, then started having guys come over, and I told her I would tell her husband if she kept doing it. Next thing I know, the cops are arresting me for rape. I ended up being the longest male resident at Mental Lake. While I was waiting to go to court, she was running around, bragging about how easy it was to put an innocent man in jail. That's what got me put in prison. Since then, I've had very little contact with local authorities except for when I was living on the streets, I had to go in every week and check in. Since getting to Joe's, I've only had to go in one time.

I've got a brother that stood by me all the time. He lives in California. My niece's dad took what she accused me of and used it against me for a long time. Recently, he decided to forgive and forget because he found out she lied. He wants to come and visit once I get my own place. It's tough, because he believed her for over 20 years, and we haven't really had anything to say to each other. But I followed everything they put down on me to do. No conflicts, no interest in anything I went to prison for. I've set out to help as many people as I can, basically. I'm on a fixed income but I don't let that bother me. If someone needs it, I'll give 'em a little help. That's basically what I do. Besides go fishing. Can't do my swordwork, automotive work, boat work, woodworking. So I pretty much sit around doing nothing.

It's been really tough. Trying to get people to listen to the facts as they actually are and not at the accusations used as facts. Most people say that "This is what you are accused of, and that's what we're going to look at, not anything you have to say." Okay, if you're not going to listen to the whole truth, you might as well not listen to anything! I let her in my house because she was my son's daughter. Someone told me later that her nickname was 9-1-1-Rosie because if

anything doesn't go her way, she was on the phone to the cops. I have no communication with her, even though the 5 year restriction order is up. I don't care because I don't want anything to do with her. She gonna lie on people, she's not worth my time. She's the kind of person I would warn anybody to be leary of.

Basically, all I'm doing is working on how to live a better life. I've been working on that since I got out of prison! I'm a caring individual. I care about everybody. I don't believe in titles. If someone messed up, if they go to prison, they've done the punishment that was handed down to them, then they deserve a chance to prove that they can do better. The label does create a stigma. It's hard to get around.

When I was in Dayton, I was kicked out of a place. The owner of the property's wife callled me a child molestor and I told her to shut up before slander charges were brought against her because that's not anything like what I was sentenced to prison for. Other people heard that, wanted to carry on, and I said, "If you wanna believe that, that's stupid. I'm not gonna change my life for you people. I know what I did do, I know what I didn't do." Anything that anyone does is a choice. You either choose to do right or choose to do wrong. I'll admit there are some situations where people are affected indirectly by how they were raised, thinking of right or wrong. But then there are people who were brought up in a good home and chose to do it anyway. I feel sorry for those that were not brought up the right way.

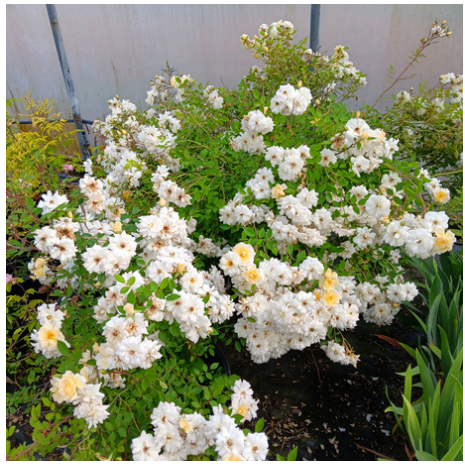
Since I've been in prison, I studied the Bible a lot. I became an ordained minister in 2004. I ended up not being able to do that because of some problems I have from the military— I can't deal with crowds.

But I wish people knew the facts [about SOs], about what brought the crime about. That would also entail: their upbringing, was there a problem in the parental sides of the family, was the child taught wrong? There's a lot of kids out there that I know are being taught wrong every day. If someone would just take a minute to sit down with em, talk with em, they could really help them on the right path.

I haven’t really heard anything about the guys here except for their crime. Talking to them, you can tell they’re remorseful for what they did. Showing remorse is a good thing. But there’s some that just really can’t show remorse the way the courts would want them to show it. I think that’s because of some underlying medical condition. It doesn’t matter what I do, or who I know, if something bad happens, it’s hard for me to show emotion. When my mom died, I couldn’t even show sorrow. My brothers got mad at me. One of my doctors had to explain to them that it wasn’t my fault I couldn’t, and that it’s actually because of the trauma and stuff I’ve been through.

That’s pretty much the way it is with quite a few of the people on prison for that type of charge; they are abused as a child and they come to believe that’s the way to function in society. The fault then falls back on the family unit not teaching them right.

Tito Dusty
24 yrs in the justice system
Living in the community
67



I was arrested in May of ‘94 and then never saw the out until 2017. Most guys get 7-ish years. I got close to 24 years. I have a different story than most people because with my crime, I actually did work inside the prison so they kind of protected me.

To begin, I drove trucks for almost 20 years. I worked at the DEA in Walla Walla and in ‘87, we left for safety. Then I retrained and was a licensed electrician in Wenatchee, where I grew up— where I started and where I went back. I committed my crime there. But I believe the grooming process started much earlier here, in Walla Walla. I trucked, so I was gone 99% of the time. And I’m not afraid of answering anything! I’ve talked to the man upstairs, my Heavenly Father. I spent my first 5 years in prison on my knees. As I learned what I did wrong. I’m not any kind of a zealot but I’ve always believed in the man upstairs, so that came with it.

Joe knows my story so I think that’s why he chose me. I have lived a horrendous life. I left home when I was 12. I started logging when I was 8, and drove my first truck when I was 9, because I was finally big enough. I was a landing foreman when I was 11. That started me off into trucking. By the time I was 17, I had been coast to coast about a dozen times already and I still didn’t have a license until then. Seen most of the US, part of Canada, part of Mexico with the truck.

I found an easier, softer way here. That was probably the walk downhill. I got into the drugs pretty heavy. I was in the crank to keep going, started smoking coke, I was into keys. I’d go cut it ‘cause back then we could get procaine. That’s what the dentist uses on the tip to numb before they give you a shot, mixed with the cocaine. You don’t notice the difference, nobody does. In about 5 years, it almost destroyed my life. I was ready to sell my load.

I don’t know exactly when intercourse began with my older daughter, but the grooming began when she was probably about 5-6, the rubbing and the touching and that. I was curious because I had never grown up around girls. I think what I found was that I already loved her, and at some point, through the drugs and alcohol, I lusted her. I may make it sound simple, but it’s not. The grooming process was long and drawn out before intercourse, which I think began when she was 12 or 13. It was Rape of a Child 1, 2, and 3, and then Incest. I don’t know why they charged that too, but maybe it was because of age at the time. They ended up sending me to Walla Walla, which is the worst prison in the system.

I have come to the conclusion that it was an addiction. I’m an addictive personality. I didn’t know that except looking back. Drinking allowed it, as well as: I drank because of it. She had been groomed and trained that way, so she came to me too. Not a lot, but every so often. I was drinking because of the unacceptable life. Most people who drink or drug is because something in their life is unacceptable. They use it as an anesthesiologist does, it helps you accept life as unacceptable as it is.

After I fell, I was on my knees for 5 years because I was learning. I was taking a lot of courses, & I was learning what I had done wrong so I had to ask for forgiveness for what I did. So how did I come to terms to it? I’m not sure I have. I haven’t had any contact with any of my family. I have an oldest girl, boy-and-girl twins, and then boy. The boy of the twins, he contacted me when I was in prison and they facilitated a call. That was the first contact I’d had with any of them. I think he was on a fishing trip.

I have never met with them so I could look the girl in the eye and say “Look, it wasn’t your fault. It was quite mine.” Hopefully she would understand. I think the oldest is 48 now. She was born in ‘76. She sent a letter when I was in prison, and the officer at SOU handed it to me;

“Here’s a letter from your daughter.” I’m lifetime barred from any contact, so why would they let that come through the system and hand it to me? They have my sheet, they know what I’m there for. I took it to an office and said “Now what do I do?” They told her “unless you want to go to court and present it, don’t send again.” How did I come to grips with it? The classes taught me what

I'd did wrong, the legal work taught me the laws I was supposed to be following, and the church, believe it or not, stood beside me.

I think the biggest thing was the 5 years on the knees asking for forgiveness and being accepted, finally. The learning, I mean, I had stuff from around the world on this subject so I could learn what I did and the affects of what I did, for both me and the kids. Even though the three weren't involved, they were affected. I don't think I would ever completely come to grips with it until I can look her in the eye and tell her my side of the story. Maybe all 4 of them. My church can arrange that, they've told me that. I haven't took them up on that. Maybe I just like the pain or something.

I love my kids, I still do. And my wife. We were together for 19 years. I helped her file for divorce while we were in prison, and it wasn't cheap even then. I had all my kids file on my social security so they had money. I look back on these things, and it obviously could have been different, but. Coming to grips with it is something that... I couldn't live today if I didn't. I don't drink, I don't smoke, I don't even drink coffee because of the religious part of it. No drugs.

I learned a lot about mental illness when I was inside. I ended up getting about 318 college credits when I was in there. They asked me to be a PhD when I was at the CC, but thats not the direction I was going. I learned a lot about psychology, sociology, and psychiatry. I was even in the special offender unit for a while. I took up a garden unit there and turned it into a gorgeous garden. It gave me a direction while inside, the the plants did. At Airway Heights, I did the same thing. We ended up with gardens inside the prison— the courtyard gardens, they called 'em. Then we pushed it so they could use the vegetables for the chow. I'm on TV! Channel 4 came and interviewed me. Most people would be afraid bc of the charges. But I stood the line for almost 24 years, I never PC'd up, no protective custody. I deal with people mano y mano. All the people that I deal with, most of them don't even know my past, which brings a higher standard for me. I have to be so very careful, the appearance of badness, that kind of thing.

Inside, I feel I've always had this herd of guardian angels. Some people believe in a guardian angel? I had a whole herd of them. I was in prison with my



Some of Tito's work as a professional horticulturist.

charges and I walked with my head up. It wasn't because of pride, or arrogance, or spite or anything but because I had worked hard. I took the custodial program and figured no matter where I would be sent, I would always have a job. I worked at the garden crew at Airway Heights, then at Monroe, the locksmith at Airway Heights. The CCO tried to interfere with everything, my education, but I did graduate with the planned soil sciences. I was the last of four boys, my three older brothers all passed away. My mom never had a kid that graduated. Now they call me a certified horticulturist! I knew that all before I went up there, so the classes were almost too easy. I made the chemical teacher mad because it's not my job to poison these plants.

I did some things in prison that I probably shouldn't have been able to because I built trust and rapport with the establishment. I didn't blame them, why would I? The locksmith was ex-Air Force and he was a good example for me to follow. I had opportunity a lot of guys don't. Being a horticulturist, when the guards found herbs and seeds people were hiding in their cells, they'd ask me what it was. I wasn't a snitch, I didn't do any of that, but I knew what I worked

hard on. I had to do something with my life in prison. I do these things because I've had a herd of guardian angels. I still come back to that. Sounds funny. I know people think "Aw you're nuts, so I say 'guess I am.'"

I kept my religious belief and stayed with the LDS church. When I got out, that was my first contact, the second counselor to the bishop at the time. The accountability at the church, I believe, is what I really needed, what I craved more than anything. I was supposed to go to Wenatchee. My family all still lived there. There were facilities were available there and whatever reason, my counselor in prison decided I should go to Walla Walla instead. I didn't pick Walla Walla, because since I worked with the DEA, it could be very dangerous. I was worried that people in the cartels... they're very serious. People remember me, mostly for looks and for my attitude.

I was trained as a person alone. I drove trucks, I was logging. Everything was alone— electrician, alone! Everything I'd ever done was alone. Leaving home at 12, stand alone, take care of it, you have to. The only friends I have are through the church. There's one guy not with the church who I am friends with— we met at Joe's. Oh, and one other guy, the attendant at the laundromat, we keep in contact. But otherwise, 90% of the people I know are from the church. My lack of trusting people has caused that. I talk to the lady next door. She's a single mom.

I got complacent. I have my own company, my own LLC. I strongly believe in plants what I'm doing to try to do. At the apartments [where I worked], we had to go around and tell the people who had female minor children about my offense. That was my responsibility. I moved in, and right next door, there was a set of twins, boy and girl. The boy was 6 foot something, and the girl, paternal, you know. I hired them to help me weed at the greenhouse. I was complacent, I didn't think of it... that she was minor female. The father was full aware of my past and my restrictions, but he'd known me already for 7 years. He dropped 'em off at my greenhouse. I was to give them a ride home. The boy always sat next to me, the girl on the outside. I was never alone, and I never even spoke to her. She was really tightlipped anyway. She just really didn't talk

much to people, even her father. I have security cameras, I know this stuff, you know. I gave 'em the ride home. Next thing I know, they upped my level from 1 to 2. Without notice, without hearing, without due process, without anything, you know. I have a lawyer on it now.

Word got out to the sheriff, whoever. I think the mother who had the give twins up because she runs a drug house, she turned it in. When I confronted the sheriff, he told me he couldn't tell me who accused me. I have a right to know my accuser, I'm sorry! I've spent 20 years in the court working with guys. But with the dirty CCO, they found me Level 2 instead of Level 1. That's up to DOC, not to the courts.

I had a good heart before I fell. I still have a good heart. It's considerably more hardened; prison will do that to you. I sleep with my eyelids open, caused problems with my eyes now. I have a good heart, many abilities, and the ability to do so many wonderful things. None of this has stopped me except that level raise. My life has culminated to where it is today. There's been some hard learning. I do things the hard way, it it seems like. I was taught when I was younger that when a man does wrong you need to fess up and face your mustard.

A few weeks after the level raise, the sheriff's office called and said "You have to give us all your money or you're going to jail." I only had 800 dollars so that's what they got. I was held accountable for my wrongs. But they're wearing a badge and doing those things. That makes me mad. I just don't act out like I used to. Ask Joe. He knows. Some of the things here I don't understand. Like the Level 2, I don't understand. Complacency, I do understand. Maybe that's what happened to some of our officials.

You know what? I think most SOs, their door opens with drugs and alcohol. Most SOs are pretty decent people. I've met one or two that were civilly committed. They have good hearts and you're able to trust 'em, most of 'em. I guess I've never formed an opinion about that. How would you treat an illegal alien? Me, I don't care. Maybe that's the way most people are. Giving a chance, I think that's a big one. People should give a chance. That's part of reintegrating into a community, you know.

I think I have a good network now. It's hard fought. The only way it would be better is if the file would be closed. I could have earlier but I didn't. If you're five years clean, you can go back to court and close it, but I didn't. I was always level 1 and thats how I should be. 13 months I took treatment. Giving a chance and trust is a big thing. The church fought for me, which I never had before. I stood alone. I fought hard, but I still stood alone. They went to bat for me. They even had to go in, get trained, and become my chaperone so I could continue to go to church. The CCO wasn't going to let me go to church. But if they want to fight, we'll fight. We've got a lot more than they do.

I think a mentor is a big thing. For any of these guys, they need someone to help guide them who has lived a regular life. If you want to put something in here that I believe, it's a mentor. In AA, they call it a sponsor. Those things are important, probably critical to success. I have a friend who took me my first year out of prison. At the time, he was bishop of the church. He took me to the Chinese restaurant over here and he spoke in mandarin with the waitress because he'd served his mission in China. This guy was so smart, he'd come up with the CCO, who would just badger him, and I've never seen anyone besides him who would stand up against a badge. I have that network around me that I can lean on, that I can ask questions to, that I rely on to help me decide things. I don't know if you realize but I was 36 when I fell, but I don't think I had a sober day for 5 years before I fell. I started drinking when I was, I don't know, 9. I bellied up to the bar when I was 13. Really! The mentor is something that, without it, I know I wouldn't be here today. I've called Joe, I've asked Joe lots of questions because I thought no one else would know how to answer.

I think if you could catch things in the grooming process and divert it, that would be the best outcome. I don't think sending people to jail actually does anything, I think it makes it worse.

Dr. Chris Wakefield
Sociology Professor
2 yrs working w/ Joe Field



In America, few would argue against the claim that the sex offender is our contemporary boogeyman. The sex offender is one of the few classes of people that it is acceptable or even normal to call for the death of, regardless of what social or political circle you occupy. No punishment is too long, no treatment too cruel. When we hear the words "sex offender", we imagine someone with no morality. Our mind's eye conjures up images of predators who hide not with shadows, but with words. We know the stories from the news, examples with dozens of innocent children who lost something essential to slake the thirst of a man who only stopped because someone stopped him and locked him away. And we know, deep in every bone in our bodies, that only an irredeemable monster could do such things.

There is just one problem with this story. It is only a story.

Each and every person on the sex offender registry was convicted of a crime, and, just like with any other type of crime, they did not trade their humanity in the act. A great many regret their actions-- and not just because they got caught. Many have (or had) families they cared about deeply. Others found pride in creative endeavors, a career, or skills they cultivated. Quite a few have had challenging lives, some that stretch beyond what the average reader could imagine going through. And a sex offense is but one part of a whole life of moments, good and bad, that make up that person.

For the numerous among us who have made mistakes in our lives, the reason we could grow and become better people was because we were allowed-- eventually-- to move past our failings. We were not defined by our missteps, but by how we responded to the lessons learned and interventions provided. It is the warmth of friends and family that makes the growth worth the hard work.

The sex offender is not given this grace. Instead, we mark them with a digital

called a registry. With no information but some of their biggest mistakes told to the community, all you can do is draw on the same fictions, the same boogeymen to fill in the gaps. Before you know it, monsters are around every corner and underneath every bed. The world is built for us to see boogeymen.

Eventually, as I grew, my mother taught me that the boogeyman is not real. And, she would be pleased to see, it only took me 15 years to learn that she was right. Only needed a dissertation and research with over 100 sex offenders to figure it out. I learned that if we want to make humans out of our boogeymen, we first must be willing to see all of their humanity: the good, the bad, the ugly, and the beautiful. And as these humans grow, it is the connections in this community that will make it worth the work.

Closing Statement
A.R. Gutrich

It is hard to say it better than Prof. Wakefield has. It's also hard to imagine that society will ever find a way to grow beyond hierarchies of oppression so long as a class of people that is utterly hated continues to exist. This means that any attempt to grow beyond oppression needs to address the sex offender registry's oppressive existence— humiliating and targeting SOs who are trying to grow into better people, while unsuccessfully claiming to protect our communities from sex offenses, allowing our government officials to focus science-disputed moral panic on sex offenses to boost their own reputation.

I have learned more than I ever thought possible from the guys I interviewed. No one moment can be named the "most important," though I think it's important to mention that each of my interviewees were earnestly hoping to make their lives better, to help others, and to continue doing simple things they love. They all acknowledged their offenses with full acceptance of the atrocity, explained the contexts with which they occurred, and showcased the steps they had taken to never offend again. Despite me being a stranger in their home, they all acted with compassion, care, and respect for me, each other, and the opportunities that they had been given by Joe or otherwise— so why is i

it that our social narrative claims these people as monstrous? How are we engaging in critical thinking in our classrooms, our protests, our literature, but not in regard to the sex offenses registry? How can it be that we are critiquing the justice system for its failings in every other area —its systemic racism, gender prejudices, lack of consideration for disability— but blindly accept the way it handles those charged with sex offenses?

All these questions need to be asked, often and loudly. Cherry-picking what parts of the justice system we support breaks down all hope for a brighter future, a more compassionate and understanding world. Our radical futures must include that which we have been taught to hate, to fear, to ridicule, and those futures must be built on a refusal to blindly do that which we've been taught. Take it back to the simplicities we learn as children: think of others' feelings, positionalities, contexts. A sex offender does not simply wake up in the morning intending to commit a sex offense, or so the guys I interviewed tell me, so their situation is that which is spun together by strings of the rest of their lives. After offending, many realize the toxicity and harm in these strings (without necessitating arrest, in many cases), and work for the rest of their lives to repair the mark they have left behind. "Why?" is the most important question, second only to "Aren't they human too?"

