

## A RISING TIDE LIFTS ALL BOATS

By DARIN BUFALINO

There is a proverb that says a rising tide lifts all boats. The colloquial or simile being that a good thing for one is a good thing for all. Of course there is always an exception, in this case if the boat happens to be on the bottom of the ocean or anchored so that it can not move freely it will not rise on the tide.

If we look at some of the recent laws enacted in the United States to protect now recognized constitutional rights and just for a moment transpose the proverbial rising tide to those laws, it can be assumed that society as a whole has benefitted. Recall the laws enacted making it illegal to discriminate for reasons of race, sexual orientation or religion and those enacted like Title IX or allowing gay marriage. Although you may not be a member of any of the aforementioned groups, theoretically you still benefit because ending discrimination of any person benefits everyone. Now the exception, of all the laws enacted to prevent discrimination against the myriad groups of disenfranchised people here in the United States, none of them benefit an ex-convict.

As a group ex-convicts are discriminated against on a daily basis, employment and housing leap to the forefront but are certainly not the only types of discrimination ex-convicts must endure as a class. Contemporary thinking tells us that discrimination of any kind against any person is illegal and immoral. Yet the public at large, our government and the politicians who represent the people find nothing wrong with discriminating against ex-convicts.

Remember the exception to a rising tide ? All of the effected groups have one thing in common, they can acknowledge individual members who rose, stood tall and fought for equality for years even decades at great personal cost. Each small victory like a rising tide, while ex-convicts as a class cannot. It is as if the ex-convict has sunken to the bottom of the ocean or anchored. Until ex-convicts begin to stand up for individual rights, as a whole the class will continue

to be discriminated against. Blaming the system for an ex-convicts inability to reintergrate back into our communities and society, even if true is only acknowledging the discrimination, ex-convicts individually and as a whole need to study the history and struggles of other classes who used the system and had laws enacted or repealed to protect them against what society once thought legally and morally acceptable to do to those classes.

In todays sōciety it is acceptable to discriminate against an ex-convict. The need to change this bankrupt societal norm is evident by recidivism rates nearing 60%\*. But until ex-convicts rise, stand tall and fight the good fight just as others have, society will continue to discriminate against them.

The individual ex-convict must change the way society looks at him. That change must be a positive one, thereby initiating societies perception of the class as a whole. Instead of standing for "The Man's " count in prison, stand up in society as a man not an ex-convict.

\* US Bureau of Justice Statistics