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In Memory Of An Inmate

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Mr. Murry Woodsworth passed away here at USP Tucson last week, at the age of almost 90.

He was born in 1929, and passed away just before Easter, 2017.

To most of society, and to most of the staff here at USP Tucson, that means nothing. He was, in the eyes of most, just a criminal, and there would be no sincerity in respect to his passing.

But on this essay, I am going to share with you the heart of this man, to show to you what prison officials don't care to tell you... that there are people in here, not animals, as often officers and staff believe.

Woody, as we called him, was a man. A man doing his time as best he could, and died fighting his case every single day, trying to get back to court. Where most inmates give up and crawl under a bunk, saying that the system is crooked and isn't fair, people like Woody rolled up their sleeves and fought for what he believed in.

Folks, do NOT believe that every person in prison is actually guilty of what he was accused of. Yes, there are guys here that deserve to be here, but there are MANY that were falsely imprisoned. Those guys, like Woody, fight every day by going to the law library and researching information that their Public Defenders were too lazy and cowardly to do themselves. Public Defenders are NOT there to help their client, because they get paid whether they win or lose. So people like Woody, guys that haven't given up on true justice, fight...every day.

Woody was a cranky-looking old man, and I say that with so much love and respect for the man. Rough on the outside, but a heart inside, if you took the time to talk to him. The stories he told, like that favorite grandfather at the family reunions that the kids loved to hear stories from. He cursed like a ship full of drunken sailors, but if you can get past that, you'd see that this elder had so much to share from life experiences.

I knew Woody from the same dorm, and inside of the 4 years I have been here at USP Tucson, I have come to respect that man very much. I cannot believe he had an enemy amongst the inmate population, and for his age, he got around better than guys HALF his age.

Woody would walk from the dorm, across the compound, in often times the Tucson heat (many days over 100) to the library. As a guy who loves to write, I often rushed to get to the library myself. I'm in good health and I walk fast to get there so I can get use of the word processor.

I am usually one of the first 2 or 3 there... Woody is NEVER far behind. He'd come in, wheezing after walking at a pace that an athlete would be proud of. He'd come in, get his word processor, and get right to work, fighting his case in hopes to get back to court, to get back to his family in Canada.



Why am I sharing this? Why is all this important for me to take the time to type this out? Because it is critical to share that the people in these prisons are people, and often are said to be worthless, because prisons often give one-sided ideas of who we are.

Prisons are necessary, no one will argue that, but what has been lost in the incarceration of the Justice System is the treatment of people, not "monsters", as the courts label us. Every person has some value; some worth, to the world, and it is humanity's responsibility to encourage that in every person, even when he falls...

.....especially if he falls.

Every inmate is important, every inmate has a story. Every inmate has value. It is the prison's responsibility to at least TRY to bring out some redeeming value in every person, but often times prisons do just the opposite, using their position to persecute inmates simply because they believe they can get away with it. I mean, who's gonna believe an INMATE?

So it is important to remember that these guys in here are human beings who deserve at least the idea that there is good in them. Such as the case with Woody.

I remember quite a bit of this old guy, one situation where by his accident, he changed a policy that was foolish to begin with.

Here in the law library, the staff, in an attempt to prevent chairs from being moved around, tethered the plastic chairs to the metal tables with metal cords. The inmates argued that this was VERY dangerous, because it is too easy to trip on that cord when pushing away from the table. It happened numerous times, but staff refused to listen. This was a safety issue that they ignored, despite many requests to cut those cords.

One day, Woody tried to get up, and tripped on the cord, fell on the floor and "busted his head up". There was blood on the floor and the staff had to get medical to come see about him. But this old tough bird, after getting up and tended to, actually was able to WALK to Medical.

In light of that accident, the staff had to IMMEDIATELY remove the cords from the chairs. It was clearly an accident waiting to happen, and because of Woody, they finally did what they should have done long ago.

Admitting this, I didn't spend a lot of time with Woody; I had a good conversation with him every once and a while, and always enjoyed it. I often thought of just sitting down and just listening to his tales of decades past, Woody delivered like a comedian, and you couldn't listen without laughing. He wasn't a George Burns, but he was still funny.

Woody passed, having spent his last 3 days with his family. After all the decades he spent fighting to get back to his family, his last days were spent- finally- with those who loved him.

Rest in peace Woody. We'll miss you.