

Spotlight On Recovery



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Giving a Voice to the Therapeutic Community

Campbellsport,
WI, 53010

LEAVING THE STREETS BEHIND

BY TOM KROPP

Most prisoners here in Wisconsin can't leave the streets behind. We average a 70% ratio for returning to prison. I speak unfortunately with the voice of experience. Before our release dates, we have all these good intentions and plans to leave the street life behind.

But once we get out there reality pushes us into bad positions. We experience frustration with our parole agents controlling us and low paying jobs that don't pay the bills. Our relationships with family, friends, and loved ones come with pressure and responsibilities that we haven't handled in years. Our defenses get worn down and then one day we encounter the wrong male or female acquaintances that we know we shouldn't hang out with because they're bad news. However, we also know their fun. We tell ourselves that we've been good and deserve the chance to be a little bad and have some fun.

When we get away with it we start doing it more often. Soon we're routinely drinking, using drugs, hanging out with the wrong people from the seedy side of the streets. Suddenly our low paying jobs seem unacceptable when we can make a lot more money instantly by selling drugs or thieving. Soon we have to live a life of crime to support our habits. We get scared to go see our parole agent because we know we'll test dirty for drugs and alcohol and that we've left our low

paying jobs.

So, we skip parole appointments. Once we've skipped parole reporting we know we have a warrant out and we decide we may as well continue down the road we're on, lost in our addictions and lifestyle to support them.

I've lived this same route through six prison terms and I feel such self disgust and regret that words fail me. I couldn't accept that there was a clear line between legit and criminal. I thought everyone functioned in gray areas between legal and criminal. My crippling vices were largely alcohol and some drugs, criminal associations, and dating women like me. Bad girls, girls who had drug and alcohol addictions that ran in my circles.

I loved that gritty side of life on the streets and felt that I needed to be a part of it at least part-time. But it always took control of me. It always became full-time.

Now at age 47, I see there's no way for me to live part-time on the gritty side of the streets. There's no halfway part to it. It's all or nothing. Either I commit to leaving the streets behind full time or I'll be back in prison again.

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