

" Healing With Purpose "
By: Michael Flinner
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Whether locked-away in a concrete maximum security solitary confinement fortress, or out and about amongst ordinary low-level mainline offenders, eventually, some of us are met by a rather unexpected yet precious moment in time which somehow compels us to take an honest inventory of our dangerous and destructive wayward pasts.

This fleeting narrow crossroad presents a myriad of unfamiliar complexities. But once properly-navigated (however many tries it takes), a revealing peek at ugly long-buried truths about ourselves emerge while simultaneously placing stepping stones atop an unchartered rehabilitative path where both meaning and purpose collide --- assuming you elect to stick around for what ultimately evolves into long-term meaningful change.

For more than a decade, my unforgiving hardened heart regularly misdirected mistrust and fueled discord toward the justice system. Diagnosed as 'Clinically Depressed' and routinely in search of absolution through suicide, these self-destructive themes left me alone and emotionally-adrift, the empty soul of a hollow man consumed by misery in a world where few delusions of reprieve exist. Along with shadowy cracks in the cell walls of my tiny death row box at San Quentin, heroin had become a periodic friendly escape from reality. In earnest (while we're being honest), I regularly prayed for death by overdose but, it was obviously never in the cards. God's cards perhaps?

Having come from a simple semi-privileged life prior to this incarceration, I owned and operated a small landscape construction company in Southern California, but as fate might dictate, my alleged role in a mid-2000 murder conspiracy would wash that life down the drain, leaving many others behind to pick up the pieces and sort through the ruin where emotions had once acted without the benefit of intellect.

Contrary to popular belief however, people do change. All roads leading into personal wastelands within where growth and healing are found, remain complex in nature. One must be mentally prepared to experience healing, if real change is to

shine its light into your life. As change slowly blossoms, learning curves become increasingly-evident and our brain opens itself up to new ideas and/or reinvents unfinished things from our past that once appealed to us for some reason. Admittedly, I experienced this. Somewhere around my 12th year caged on death row, the afore-mentioned beacon of light woke me from the depths of an unfamiliar sleep. It was time to take back my life and discover my purpose. But how? And why now?

In weeks prior, an elder comrade (Steven) and I spent nearly every opportunity availed to us in order to discuss his brother's ongoing struggle to secure a life-saving kidney transplant. He was in terrible shape and near-death. Steven and I barked up the prison administration's proverbial flagpole looking for plausible solutions to this dire situation. Y'see, Steven was his brother's only available biological (willing) donor --- an obvious immediate solution to the problem. CDC-R (California Department of Correction's & Rehabilitation) denied Steven's appeal, and deemed him 'prohibited' from any such donation --- ever. This, with no legal precedent or explanation. His attorneys prepared to seek permission through court-ordered injunctive relief. During preparation of the legal petition in question, Steven's brother surprisingly received a deceased donor kidney from a local auto accident victim. He survived.

For months in the aftermath of this chaotic near-tragic ending, Steven and I decided to further research the laws, legislation, court cases, appeals, and whatever we could locate as it related to inmate organ donor policies across the nation. We were right in the thick of making some real progress and suddenly, Steven unexpectedly passed away.

Steven's demise became my impetus which drove me to carry the torch and continue this prison reform pursuit --- at the very least, given what we'd already been through, donations inuring to the health, welfare, and survival of state prisoner's immediate family, is what he would've hoped for in the end. I intend to see this through.

CDC-R has no policy or protocol for California State Prisoners to donate, except in the event of his/her death while in custody --- POSTHUMOUSLY. Despite the frustration, bureaucratic red tape, and situational mediocrity, not only will I find a way, but I'll do it sober.

Another year swept by when I was met with the devastating news that my father had been diagnosed with aggressive lung cancer that might require a lung transplant.

While riding the emotional roller coaster, a letter arrived in response to a series of a mailings Steven and I had done the previous year. California Democratic

State Senator, Cathleen Galgiani elected to promote our cause and present it to the State Senate in the form of an inmate organ donation agenda. This became SB1419. Passing through both Senate Health and Public Safety Committees respectively, we had one hurdle to clear --- Appropriation's Committee. Cue the theme from 'JAWS' here.

No sooner than we tabled SB1419 with this last committee, we were met with swift opposition by CDC-R --- the very same folks who prevented Steven from saving his brother's life. Ironically, it came down to dollars and cents --- money that would have provided each of the nearly forty (40) California State Prisons with adequate educational material and literature related to medical staff's obligations, the rights of the would-be donor inmate, procedures, etc.

Instead of permitting LIVING inmate organ donation, the Senate 'scrubbed' the LIVING donor aspect of SB1419 and settled for implementation of specific POSTHUMOUS organ donor provisions. For instance, CDC-R currently permits the would-be posthumous donor to place themselves on national organ donor registries and as a direct result of SB1419, has an amended Advance Health Care Directive (CDCR 7421) wherein prisoners are permitted to designate how and with whom they wish their remains be disposed of in the event of their death in custody. But people... why must state prisoners DIE in order to save a loved one in need?

With a little dedication, tenacity, and a slice of dumb luck, I learned that The Federal Bureau of Prisons has their very own legal LIVING inmate organ donor protocol --- a well-oiled policy which affords said gifts of life for biological, match-worthy, immediate family members in need. Now that this policy has been unearthed and copied --- one which caters to a mere fraction (approximately 10%) of the national prison population --- the culmination of which exceeds some 2.3 million men and women housed across this nation. Ask yourself why it is that only a tiny 10% of the national prison population are afforded the right to save lives?

Nearly five (5) years has passed since my father's death. My hope in the foreseeable future is to locate a fresh set of eyes and ears in a legislative partner --- someone capable of breathing life back into this pursuit, regardless what side of the political isle it falls upon. The great bi-partisan here is death itself. In a perfect world, this prison reform agenda would find a national lectern from which to launch itself. Wouldn't it make sense to mandate both State and Federal prisoners sharing these inalienable rights without state prisoners being systematically-precluded from the roles of the willing? Failing to create and/or adopt a national LIVING inmate organ donor protocol for any prisoner, regardless of their commitment offense or length of sentence would prove profoundly irresponsible.

We can surely agree that prisoners from all walks of life are not devoid of redeeming qualities. A vast majority of us fully understand and appreciate that healing through meaningful rehabilitative programs enables growth, change, and a deliberate sense of shared responsibility.

Today, these continued efforts can be found at the assortment of venues listed below. Tech-support and/or blogging about this deserving agenda from like-minded industry folks or those who have a particular interest in the subject matter are welcomed and encouraged to volunteer, however possible. I am but one man with a full plate. Please write with your questions and comments. Postage-permitting, I will answer all.

Respectfully Yours,

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