



Volume 36•No. 1 • February 2013

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president's message

KAREN DETERMAN

MCA President, Wright County Community Corrections

First of all, I want to thank the members for their confidence in me and electing me as 2013 MCA President. I'm excited to be such an integral part of a great group of professionals. As I was reading another association's newsletter, it struck me how we are all striving for the exact same objective, which is to offer members valued benefits, and legitimate reasons to join. As we move into 2013 and the Executive Board sets the 2013 goals, collaboration with other professional associations will be one of our primary goals. So, how do we accomplish this goal? Well, I believe it is by tapping into all the talents and expertise that correction professionals have and to share those assets with other correction associations. We have already made strides in this goal by working with MACCAC, MACPO, MCCA, Volunteers of America, and NAMI as supporting sponsors of the upcoming Capital Day, scheduled for February 21, 2013. In addition, thanks to Mark Groves' connections, last year MCA coordinated six educational workshops and invited MCCA members to attend. As a result of this collaboration, the idea of an "Association Liaison" with MCCA, and MACPO was born and is being explored further.

Another Executive Board goal for 2013 is to increase membership, including students and retired members, and to encourage all members to get involved. The call for volunteers was very successful, and resulted in numerous members stepping forward to get involved for the first time. Furthermore, we will have an ongoing discussion with the Department of Corrections to look for guidance on how MCA can encourage corrections officers to once again be involved and have a voice in MCA.

Despite the past fiscal challenges, MCA has continued to be a strong viable association. With the help of all members, MCA can continue to grow and provide significant member benefits, such as networking, educational opportunities, scholarships, voices in the legislative process, and a professional connection with our legislators. I look forward to a great year.

*Why did the cashier steal money from the till?
She thought the change would do her good.*



looking for articles

MARK GROVES
MCA FORUM Editor

Have you ever thought about seeing your name in print? Do you have writing skills that are just screaming to see the light of day? Are you (or your program) involved in something that others should know about; might be interested in? Well . . . here's your chance. MCA is always looking for articles for the Forum. You're probably thinking of something right now that our membership would enjoy learning about. Heck, you're reading this right now, aren't you?!

It's so easy to say "no." And, sometimes, you have to. Especially when you are busy or don't see the value. After all, isn't one of our primary mantras: *"What's in it for me!?"* or, this was one of my all-time favorites I used to use with my kids when they came to me with long, drawn-out explanations about something or other: *"Get to the part where I come in."*

As you know, improving the quality of corrections and community corrections services is what we're all about. It's our "purpose." In order to be effective, or for that matter, successful, any organization needs active, meaningful involvement among constituents.

MCA is founded on membership and volunteer involvement. Legislative initiatives, standards of practice, professional ethics, and ensuring top-shelf services are a direct result of "our" dedication and hard work. In order to assure this quality and accountability now, and in the future, your continued, active, meaningful participation is essential.

As we look to the future, corrections/community corrections needs to be cohesive and have a clear-cut direction. We need quality leadership and knowledge of the "people" to carry us forward. I am an MCA member. As you read this, you might be thinking, *"so am I."*

I decide every month to write something for the Forum. You've probably read some of my stuff. I've got another one at the bottom of this edition. I enjoy writing and when I read my stuff, I get a chuckle. I think to myself, "If I enjoy reading this, others will, too." I rather enjoy writing articles for the Forum. It's really the only time I get to wear my fedora, chomp on a cigar, type my thoughts using my two index fingers on my 1932 Royal typewriter in a smoke-filled room, and use up the rest of my supply of "white-out."

There truly is something in it for me. The comfort of knowing I have a legitimate voice in the future of my profession and the path of corrections, community corrections as a whole. Because you are already an MCA member, you already *know* what I'm talking about. Because of that, consider stepping outside of your comfort zone for a moment and send us an article to publish in the Forum. Or . . .ask a

coworker to consider writing something

Are you thinking about writing something for us? Probably not. Please consider it. I sure would like to talk to you about developing an interesting article. MCA is a great association with a very rich and illustrious history. Give it some thought. You have much to gain and much to give. I look forward to hearing from you:

mark.groves@voamn.org

Several years ago, Andy was sentenced to prison. During his stay, he got along well with the guards and all his fellow inmates. The warden saw that deep down, Andy was a good person and made arrangements for Andy to learn a trade while doing his time. After three years, Andy was recognized as one of the best carpenters in the local area. Often he would be given a weekend pass to do odd jobs for the citizens of the community.... and he always reported back to prison before Sunday night was over. The warden was thinking of remodeling his kitchen and in fact had done much of the work himself. But he lacked the skills to build a set of kitchen cupboards and a large counter top which he had promised his wife. So he called Andy into his office and asked him to complete the job for him. But, alas, Andy refused. He told the warden, "Gosh, I'd really like to help you but counter fitting is what got me into prison in the first place".

2012 MCA scholarship winner announced

Congratulations to MCA's 2012 Scholarship Winner!!

MCA received numerous scholarship applications and the committee had a difficult task in selecting a scholarship recipient for 2012, as all applicants were very qualified and deserving.

The 2012 award recipient is Jasmine Abraham, a Hamline University graduate who aspired to be a psychologist achieving a double B.A. in Psychology and Communications Studies during her four years there. While going to college, she worked for a program to help high school youth stay out of gangs and teach them life skills and inspired her to volunteer with AmeriCorps. She spent a year of service at Edison high school working with students at-risk of not graduating from high school. All of the students she worked with passed their classes and graduated from high school.

She also volunteered at a women's clinic focused on closing the gap on racial health disparities that women of color face. It was during this experience she decided to become a medical doctor. She is currently volunteering in a stem cell lab at the University of Minnesota and is also a doula (a woman who is trained to provide physical, emotional and informational support to an expectant mother and her family before and after the birth.) She is now completing coursework at Minneapolis Community and Technical College to be eligible to apply to medical school. Her extracurricular activities also include teaching social justice. This scholarship will help her to focus on her studies and continue to be involved in the community.

Jasmine is the daughter of Reena and Ron Solheid. Ron is a long-time MCA Member and Past President (2009).

Congratulations Jasmine and best wishes in your education and career goals!

legislative update

CAL SAARI

MCA Legislative Liaison

As you all know, the 2013 Session of the Legislature is off and running. Committees are formed and are scheduling hearings on bills although the area of Corrections and Public Safety have been pretty quiet so far. Commissioner Roy and the DOC will be presenting the DOC overview and budget information to the Senate and House Committees in the next few days and Committee Chairs have been scheduling various agencies to provide background info to Committee members which is really important with all the new legislators still working to get a handle on everything. I have been busy getting around to visit with legislators on our Public Safety/Corrections and Judiciary Committees and trying to spend some time with the Chairs relative to our MCA agenda for this year.

As of today, there have been 213 bills introduced in the House and 165 in the Senate. Only around 15 of those bills fit into our "watch" area and most thus far, deal with restoration of voting rights and civil rights restoration of convicted felons.

In regard to our **Legislative Tracker**, I am still working on a new format to report to you. Last year, we used a tracking system developed by the legislative staff. This year they have made significant changes to the format and it is designed for electronic tracking. This leaves too much work for each of you to follow up on a specific bill when I know for the most part, you simply expect an update from me on the status of bills we choose to track. I will instead be submitting our own tracker log with bill updates. I am preparing this now and will have something to you by the end of this week and then update that, every two weeks or earlier if necessary.

It doesn't appear this is going to be an overwhelming Session for Public Safety/Corrections, but several Committee Chairs have indicated interest in some specific policy areas which we'll likely see introduced in the near future. To date, none of the bills we'll track have been scheduled for hearing.

We have already received confirmation notices from Rep. Deb Hilstrom, Rep. Joe Mullery, Senator Warren Limmer, and the Committee Administrator for Rep. Michael Paymar in the Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee, who will all make some comments at the **Capitol Day** event scheduled for **Thursday, February 21st** starting at 7:30 AM. I am confident we'll have three or four more legislators join us that morning for breakfast, so plan to attend.

Member attendance is important for the success of this event. Remember to pre-register thru Deb Beltz.

Calvin Saari
MCA Legislative Liaison
SISUwithSAARI@aol.com
218-969-0151

One day I was giving a tour of the local court house. There was a court case in recess as I was showing the group around. I showed them the lawyers, judge, stenographers, jury, and court clerk. "As you can see there are a lot of different people that are involved in making this system work," I commented. At that point the prisoner that was sitting there yelled out, "but I'm the one who makes it all happen!"

red wing juvenile facility, a learning opportunity

KATHY HALVORSON
Superintendent, Red Wing

*"This school will shed on the land a broad, most beneficent and far reaching influence".
~Archbishop John Ireland, at the laying of the cornerstone of the State Training School at Red Wing,
May 20, 1890*

In October 2011, I had the great fortune to be appointed to the position of Superintendent at MCF/ Red Wing. I assumed it would be an easy transition as I had more than 22 years of experience with the Department of Corrections and I had worked at four other facilities. I quickly realized this transition would be different than any other in my career, as I had a lot to learn about juvenile services. As I met the staff at Red Wing, I realized I was surrounded by professionals who are very talented, dedicated, knowledgeable, and compassionate about juvenile services, not just at Red Wing, but throughout the state. I was confident that, given the expertise at this facility and by making connections with professionals around the state, I could learn.

First and foremost I focused on learning the mission and propose of the Red Wing juvenile facility, formerly known as the State Training School. The facility's history of serving the needs of youth in Minnesota began in 1889 when it replaced the State Reform school located in Saint Paul. Although some of the original buildings still stand, the mission of the facility has changed. In the 1800s and 1900s placing offenses, for the most part, were larceny and petty theft charges. In 1998 the Minnesota Legislature drafted statutory language to define the focus of Red Wing: "... When reviewing placement requests from counties, the commissioner shall take into consideration the purpose of the Minnesota Correctional Facility-Red Wing which is to educate and provide treatment for serious and chronic juvenile offenders for which the county has exhausted local resources..." (Minn. Stat. §242.41). This statutory language was used to establish specific admission criteria to ensure only the most serious youthful offenders are placed at the facility.

We have a defined mission that incorporates three essential elements: Restore the offender, victim, and community; Promote public safety, offender accountability, and pro-social competency; and, Provide premier continuum of services for serious juvenile offenders within a therapeutic environment.

The program model is based on an integrated approach to treat the whole child. Evidence based assessments are used to develop a treatment plan that focuses on five areas that are key to a juvenile's success:

- Cognitive Behavioral Skill Development
- Therapeutic Community
- Principles of Daily Living
- Restorative Justice
- Relapse Prevention

Walter Maginnis High School is located on the campus of MCF/Red Wing. A principal manages the education program and supervises licensed teachers. Residents receive instruction in the core subject areas and special education as needed. Eligible residents have the opportunity to earn a diploma or GED. Residents that have completed their secondary education participate in a work readiness program.

Residents also receive professional services in the areas of mental health, medical, and substance abuse.

A separate living unit is used to operate a Sex Offender Treatment Program where residents participate in sex offender specific treatment in addition to the other components of the program.

Transition services are an essential element to success in the community. Preparations for reintegration back to the community begin almost at admission. Residents participate in life skills classes, resume building, job search, housing options, financial planning, and service learning projects prior to program completion. A 90 day extended furlough is the final phase of the program. This allows the youth an opportunity to demonstrate his skills in the community while still receiving guidance and support from case management staff.

Our direct care line staff play a significant role in the success of the residents. Line staff challenge behaviors, provide guidance in daily routines, listen, and praise residents for their accomplishments.

We are currently exploring additions to our program to maintain our high level of service while being cognizant of changing population dynamics and ensuring an integrated approach. We are currently exploring adding a gang intervention program and incorporating functional family therapy components.

It is clear the Red Wing program is a component of the juvenile services continuum in Minnesota. Our role in this very dynamic juvenile system is to provide a safe place to create opportunities for change, to be role models, and – just as the Archbishop said in 1890 - to have far reaching influence on the youth we serve. Learning the juvenile justice system has been both daunting and gratifying. The learning curve is far reaching, but I have excellent teachers.

what is the minnesota second chance coalition?

MARK HAASE & SARAH WALKER
Co-Chairs, Minnesota Second Chance Coalition

In 2007 a group of Minnesota non-profit leaders and reentry practitioners met to discuss the possibility of raising awareness throughout the state regarding the challenges facing individuals with criminal records. Many of them represented organizations that provided direct services of varying types, such as employment and housing, but found that the success of their clients and their programs was greatly limited by the criminal records that often and more and more held them back. Organizations committed to reform agreed to host the first-ever event with the express focus of bringing ex-offenders and their supporters to the capitol and raising awareness of the too often invisible struggles faced by those with criminal records. The first "Second Chance Day on the Hill" was held February 13, 2008. The coalition applied for a small grant to help fund these efforts and with just \$5,000 was able to bring over five-hundred people to the capitol.

While the first "Second Chance Day on the Hill" was successful in mobilizing a large number of individuals to attend there were few tangible results to herald. However, many community members and non-profit leaders encouraged the informal coalition to host another "Second Chance Day on the Hill" the following year. The lead organizers of the group met and agreed to move forward with planning for 2009. That year, the mobilization efforts combined with direct lobbying efforts lead by the Council on Crime and Justice did lead to significant positive and tangible results. Governor Tim Pawlenty signed into law a bill which requires all Minnesota public employers to wait until a job applicant has been selected for an interview before asking about a criminal record or conducting a criminal record check, except for positions that already require a background check. Passage of this

legislation made Minnesota the first state to adopt a statewide "Ban the Box" law since the initiative to remove the questions about past criminal record was undertaken by All of Us or None of Us, a California based non-profit advocacy group.

Another law was also enacted limiting the admission of evidence of an employees' criminal record against an employer if: (1) the duties of the position did not expose others to a greater risk than that created by the employee interacting with the public outside of the duties of the position or that might be created by being employed in general; (2) a court order sealed any record of the criminal case; or (3) the record did not result in a criminal conviction. This law has since been lauded as one of the strongest criminal record employee liability protections statutes in the country.

The legislation was passed in large part due to the success of the grassroots organizing efforts of the Second Chance Coalition (www.mnsecondchancecoalition.org). At that time the Coalition was a diverse coalition of twenty-four community organizations, including: 180 Degrees, Inc. AMICUS, Goodwill/Easter Seals MN, Council on Crime and Justice, Rebuild Resources, Jacob Wetterling Foundation, RS Eden, Minnesota Council of Churches, NOLA Investigates – Criminal Defense Investigation, MN Catholic Conference, Minnesota Fathers & Families Network, Northside Policy Action Coalition, People Escaping Poverty Project, Project for Pride in Living, MN Children's Defense Fund, Peace Foundation, Take Action Minnesota, Minneapolis Urban League, HIRED, Life in Recovery, NAMI MN, Barbara Schneider Foundation, Elim Transitional Housing, Emerge Community Development, Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches, and Jules Fairbanks Chemical Dependency Services.

Since 2007 this group of leaders, advocates, and affected individuals have continued to meet and press forward with policy reform. Membership has grown to over 50 organizations. The Coalition recently held its 6th annual Second Chance Day on the Hill, with hundreds of attendees from across the state, over 20 legislators in attendance, and agreed-upon policy priorities such as applying "Ban the Box" to private employers, protection of juvenile records, and expanding voting right to felons immediately after release from jail or prison.

The Coalition is still informal and is not a non-profit organization, but members recently approved bylaws and the election of a 13 member Executive Committee in order to clarify roles and decision-making. 180 Degrees, Inc has provided administrative and fiscal support for the Coalition.

The efforts of members of the Second Chance Coalition have demonstrated the potential of moving beyond traditional organizational and issue silos. The Second Chance Coalition has successfully helped create bridges to non-traditional allies such as: rural and urban communities, Juvenile Justice Advocate and Criminal Justice advocates, youth serving/advocating organizations and adult serving/advocating organizations, small non-profits and large national non-profits, community based organizations and "systems" based organization, religious and secular organization, organizations with seemingly different issue focuses and among organizations traditionally vying for legislative support.

Non-profit organizations who could just as easily be competing for declining public dollars were working together toward common goals. One of the factors to which the Second Chance Coalition attributes success is the emergence of a new, youthful and energetic leadership. These emerging leaders have successfully collaborated while limiting organizational and individual power-struggles allowing an increased sense of individual and organizational efficacy. To accomplish all of this has required commitments of time and resources. In addition, it required leveraging individual and organizational relationships that no one organization could have managed alone. For example, Rebuild Resources, a social enterprise that works with individuals in the recovery and re-

entry process has provided T-shirts and Buttons at cost. Rebuild Resources, members of the coalition, believed the work of the coalition was in line with their mission and made a generous in-kind donation. Another factor contributing to the success of the Coalition and the passing of "Ban the Box" was a coordinated and professional marketing campaign. In preparation for the 2008 Second Chance Day on the Hill Goodwill/Easter Seals MN marketing department designed the coalition's logo. The slogan for the 2008 Day on the Hill was "*Can you Imagine Life without a Second Chance.*" Rebuild and Goodwill have continued to provide these resources each year.

The work and impact of the Coalition can best be summarized in the words of some of its members:

"Individuals who felt that their voices had long ago been forgotten had a chance to remind us about who they are and the power of their stories. Legislators who can feel isolated among their peers when talking about providing second chances saw the huge amount of grassroots support there was for their work."

"I was walking in the halls of the capitol – trying to get to the press conference on the Second Chance legislative platform when I ran into an acquaintance from one of the other participating organizations. We spoke about what a great day it was and how powerful cooperation among our agencies could be. That brief discussion led to a meeting between the head of my organization and the head of his, exploring ways our organizations can work together. It may lead to more solid ideas for partnering but, even if it doesn't go that far, it opened our eyes further as to what is happening out in the community and that's always a good thing."

"I am so proud to be part of MN Second Chance Coalition (I say it all the time, but it bears repeating!) This is such a victory for the men and women many of us serve who want nothing more than an even chance to re-engage community in healthy and productive ways."

"I am completely indebted to those who have offered mentorship and guidance and, I am even more indebted to the many individuals and organization who have worked on the issues of reentry for years. Their work laid the foundation for the emergence of the Minnesota Second Chance Coalition."

We hope that the work of the Second Chance Coalition will soon lead to more positive reforms for Minnesotans with criminal records and their families, and in turn our entire community. We hope you will join us. Below are the mission and principles of the Coalition developing in our second year.

Principles

The Minnesota Second Chance Coalition advocates for fair and responsible laws, policies, and practices that allow those who have committed crimes to redeem themselves, fully support themselves and their families, and contribute to their communities to their full potential. The Coalition supports reforms that:

1. Ensure that everyone, regardless of means or background, is treated equally and fairly through every part of the criminal justice system.
2. Maximize the ability of ex-offenders to access employment, housing and education; and to become fully contributing members of their communities.
3. Ensure that juvenile offenders are not limited in their ability to become successful adults.
4. Fully diagnose and treat mental illness and chemical addiction.
5. Limit the potentially adverse impact of the criminal justice system on children and families.

*Did you hear about the burglar who fell in the cement mixer?
Now he's a hardened criminal.*

thank you for holding your breath while I smoke

MARK GROVES
MCA Vice President

Last month I was reading *Time* magazine and ran across a briefing about electronic cigarettes. Electronic cigarettes!? What the heck are electronic cigarettes? Are you kidding me!?! This got me to thinking. I am a 1970 graduate from Northeast Senior High in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. The relevance being that one of my fellow classmates in high school and just so happens to be quite infamous is what this story is about. Back in '98 I contacted my old pal Joe, when he was visiting Minnesota for the smoking and health trial in St. Paul. As luck would have it, Joe rang me up back then to see if he could stay at my house during the trial. "By all means!" I told him. "After all, what are friends for?"

Anyhow, I called old Joe a few weeks ago to ask him about his impressions of electronic cigarettes. He was pretty excited and was hoping he could get his old job back. A little background on Joe: he was the chief spokesman for a major tobacco company. His position was phased out in 1999. Joe loved his job. He enjoyed the glamor. It seemed that everyone knew Joe. His picture was everywhere back then. When I saw Joe in '98, he was pretty depressed and couldn't believe the challenges he faced in what he depicted as the "neo-puritanical '90s."

Promoting their Liberty

Joe told me that "it is truly a joy to defend the rights of smokers. I find it a privilege to promote their liberty." He went on to say that he still feels deeply hurt that his position was "stubbed out." His portrayal was that his job "Went up in smoke as a result of the sanctimonious assault on the tobacco companies ten years ago."

Joe told me that his is "sick and tired of taking the rap for everything back in those days." He told me that he read somewhere that cigarettes were apparently widening the ozone hole. He was wondering, "What's next, fer-crying-out-loud!" The way things went, back then, he was also blamed for El Niño. He depicted it this way for me, "I can see the story now – world's worst storm caused by cigarette filters that people on cruise ships tossed overboard causes tsunami." He said he'd heard it all.

Joe is still pretty bitter. He continues to question the integrity of medical research that says American tobacco companies are doing the work of four Hiroshima bombs a year. "Smoking is a legitimate, pleasurable activity. When done in moderation, it is probably not much more dangerous than, say, life itself?" he told me. "We are not the merchants of death! And I damn sure am not a criminal!"

Dreary Anti-Tobacco Fury

Joe seems to have grown pretty weary since the last time I saw him. He sounded pretty exhausted by what he considers, "the dreary anti-tobacco fury." As we discussed different aspects of his work, he became very agitated and animated. Joe literally hissed the names of the "health professionals" who were leading (and continue to lead) the charge. He was pretty upset that Minnesota was proposing to raise the taxes on a pack of cigarettes a buck-a-pack. He can't see why the, "prissy liberals get to stage their unyielding holy war against the tobacco

industry thanks to immense, taxpayer-financed, red carpet, government grants." Once this line of discussion got going, so did Joe.

"Let me tell you, El Marko," he said, "they say that I earned my living by killing some twelve-hundred people a day. Yes, that's right – two jumbo jet plane loads of men, women and children. Oh, those poor, unsuspecting, innocent children – denied their bright futures – snubbed out – those happy moments of getting the game-winning hit; of high school and college graduations; marriage; parenthood; career fulfillment; breakthroughs in medicine, economics, and who knows how many Nobel Prize winners? Lambs. Slaughtered by good ol' Camel Joe. What's that adding up to? 400,000 a year! Genocide they say. Enough to make you weep – that is if we had a heart. Their lives stubbed out upon the ashtrays of corporate greed."

"I'll tell you what. The real issue before us is not smoking. No sir. It's whether we Americans want to abide by such documents as the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. If your answer is yes, then our course is clear. We're seeing this right now with the gun control debate. The government is taking over. Before you know it, we'll all be Orwellian zombies ala' 1984. We shouldn't be monkeying around with the bedrock principles our founding fathers laid down for us. Namely, our own freedom. This is what the United States of America stands for!"

As our visit continued, I explained to Joe that I am now the VP of the MCA Board of Directors and I'm responsible for developing the association newsletter. In fact, I was hoping to write about his situation in the next MCA Forum newsletter. He became quite excited about this. "Jeepers, Markus Aurelius. You've got yourself a real opportunity here. You can tell your membership about our side of the story. It's about time we get some fair publicity about how our industry is concerned about responsible advertising, health and underage smoking. Please emphasize that!" he pleaded. "I have no interest in young people smoking. Heck. I'm a father myself, ain't I? I'm tired of being told that I appeal to the younger generation. Just look at me. I'm no Barney. Do I even remotely resemble a Justin Bieber? Absolutely not! I'm just an ordinary dromedary for crying out loud. I'm not the pied piper. Sure, I can play a mean sax, but so what? I still like to hang around the beach, checking out the chicks and just being cool. Who doesn't? So what if I smoke three packs of Camels a day!"

"Why, I saw in this morning's newspaper that the NRA is planning an ad campaign targeting youth and guns. Sure . . . I can see it all now . . . they're gonna dredge up my name again and make me look bad. I'm tired of being kicked around." To cheer him up, I told him I always admired his cool "threads." That he's always had himself a mighty-fine wardrobe. And besides, he is the best, darned pool player I've ever seen. You know, I don't recall ever seeing old Joe without the old coffin nail hanging jauntily out of his mouth. Just thinking about Joe, I don't see the real attraction. But Keith Richards, Alice Cooper and Marilyn Manson were no prizes either. And look at their popularity.

"They say I am especially popular among children," he told me. "Heck, I saw one poll saying that more than 90-percent of six-year-olds recognized me in my heyday. I was supposedly more famous than Mickey Mouse. Well, how can that be? It's not like I was a Saturday morning personality. What did they take me for . . . some kind of cartoon character?!"

Popular Image

Joe was really on a roll now. I should have started confronting him and shut him down, but I kept engaging him, reflecting back what he was saying, and encouraging his sense of competence and autonomy. Boy was that ever a mistake! He told me about a bad experience he had on an Oprah Winfrey show he appeared on where he got

ambushed. The show was apparently supposed to be about his incredible success in public life – an exploration of why his image had gained such enormous popularity amongst our nation’s young people. “The next thing I knew, I was being compared to a Nazi war criminal. They had me sitting next to a mother of a dead boy – a National Merit Scholar, no less. This young man was the president of his student council and debating team. He volunteered at a local homeless shelter in his spare time. That is, when he was not tutoring young inner-city kids. Then they dropped the bomb. His only imperfection was one cigarette – proof that nicotine can be fatal in diminutive doses.”

The story goes that, “this boy was apparently forced to smoke that one, lonely, solitary cigarette against his better instincts. By, guess who? Smokey Joe. Can you believe it? Go figure.” Nonetheless, Joe says he continues to refuse to be duped into appearing on any more talk shows or make public appearances. This all now makes sense to me. I wondered why we weren’t seeing him in public anymore. I always thought he looked so cool on the billboards and I secretly admired his success. It seemed like his picture was in every darned magazine there was. Boy, what a fall from grace he took. ***Kaboom!***

He said that he’s had it up to here with all the anti-smoking zealots who form local and national organizations because of some remote personal tragedy they experienced – like having a relative who supposedly fell asleep while smoking and burned the house down. “That is typical of their attitudes,” he said. “They claim to know how we should behave ourselves. I say no. It’s the very same attitude that brought us prohibition and fifty years of horror living on the brink of nuclear destruction. Not to mention the last ten years of terrorist plots.”

Get a Life

“Why don’t they get a life?” he said. “No one,” he declared, “is more concerned about the problem of underage smoking than tobacco companies. Our company executives were no different from say, Pat Boone, Floyd the Barber or the Cable Guy. They are socially responsible members of the community. These stalwarts certainly do not condone underage smoking – or drinking, for that matter – for the simple reason that it is against the law! We’re made to feel like the Taliban or Columbian drug dealers for Pete’s sake.” Joe was definitely on a roll now. “And what about those hardworking, taxpaying tobacco farmers?” he said. “Aren’t they our brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, and neighbors for crying out loud? Their only crime is to be treated like marijuana producers when all they’re doing is growing a perfectly legal crop. I know a lot of them. Fine people; law abiding; very big in Boy Scouts, Rotary International; churchgoing, family types – take their kids to the zoo on Saturdays. I’m afraid that if things continue as they have been, the American tobacco farmer will vanish like the 8-track tape, the VCR, telephone booths, no less. And with him . . . a way of life.”

“And get a load of this, Marko Polo. Why, the other day, my own grandson says to me, ‘Grampa, is it true cigarettes are bad for you?’ My own grandson! What’s the world coming to? It’s not like I was a mass murderer, a child killer, profiteer, blood sucker of something. Jeesh!”

“I’ll tell you who the mass murders are,” he said. “Those twisted Dr. Frankenstein scientists. What about all those poor little bunny rabbits? It breaks my heart to see them in their little cages, puffing away.” “Puffing,” I said. “That’s right. Puffing! Those smoking machines they attach to them. It’s criminal, I tell you. Listen . . . if I had to smoke like five thousand cigarettes a day, I would get sick too. And I consider myself a heavy smoker.”

“Cigarettes don’t kill people,” he told me. “Neither do guns. Bullets kill people. Should we sue the pants off gun manufacturers every time there’s a shooting accident? Are they responsible?” I told him that my mom and brother died from lung cancer after smoking several packs of cigarettes a day. “Oh, yeah,” he said. “I remember

your mom and brother. Good people. What a bummer. I really liked them. I'm sorry to hear about their passing. Tough deal." He didn't inquire into their medical history, smoking habit or the incidence of cancer in my family. Instead, he steered the conversation away from the anecdotal and toward a scientific scenario.

Scientific Facts

"Did you know that 96 percent of heavy smokers never get seriously ill?" he asked me. I found that hard to believe. "It's a scientific fact, Marky. There's some very interesting research going on right now. Of course the anti-tobacco lobby doesn't want you to know that. Sure, smokers get colds, headaches, the flu; the normal sort of things everyone gets. But it turns out that they don't get seriously ill and the incidence of cancer has absolutely nothing to do with smoking. But I'll tell you what they do get," he said. "They get pneumonia."

He told me smokers are a scorned, victimized, shunned lot. "They have to huddle like penguins in the doorways in the dead of winter and shiver. There has been an extraordinary increase in this ghastly, life-threatening disease – pneumonia. It is well-documented by the medical community, thank you very much. And it's happening because smokers are being forced out-of-doors in freezing temperatures."

"Let's face it, Markus. We are turning one-fifth of our beloved population into social lepers. Talk about tyranny. Saddam looks like Mister Rogers in comparison. As a matter of fact, did you know that smoking is, in fact, healthy? Sure it is. For example, there are countless office workers who don't have to suffer the debilitation of carpal tunnel syndrome because of their constant banging on those blasted computer keyboards all day long, day-in, day-out thanks to cigarette breaks. And let's not forget about those over-the-road truck drivers who are more alert thanks to their occasional cigarette. There are even studies showing that smoking retards the onset of Alzheimer's. What about them?"

"I'm no moral degenerate," he told me. "Morality is not the issue here. Tobacco is a 100-percent legal product that millions of American adults enjoy, just as they do coffee, chocolate, chewing gum, or any number of other oral refreshments." Oral refreshments, I thought. That's an interesting way to put it.

Anyhow, Joe filled my ear with this kind of talk for a few hours. Thank goodness I called him on my cell phone. The long distance charge on my landline would have put me in the poor house. He could not figure out what everyone was getting so "huffy and puffy" about. Talk about huffy and puffy! My old friend Joe C adds a new dimension to that characterization. I thought to myself, "Boy, I sure miss talking to Joe. The guy is certainly a character. And besides, Joe certainly knows all about the in's and outs' of the tobacco industry. I wonder if those electronic cigarette folks will hire Joe to be their spokesperson. Wouldn't that be something? Probably not. Joe is pretty much over the hill now. I wonder how many people really remember old Joe Camel."

As I write this, I'm thinking to myself how much I could go for a heater right now. It's been 30-years and counting since I had my last drag. But gosh darn it, the urge is still there. Know what I mean? Now . . . there's an addiction for you!

about the MCA *FORUM*

The MCA *FORUM* is published six times a year by the Minnesota Corrections Association, a nonprofit professional association incorporated in Minnesota. Articles submitted by our membership do not express the views of MCA or the board of directors.

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Minnesota Corrections Association
PO Box 261 • Wyoming, MN 55092-0261
651-462-8320 • mca-mn@hotmail.com • www.mn-ca.org