

Behind the Walls

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EDITOR'S NOTE: The difficulties don't end at the gate for men serving time at the Oregon State Penitentiary. The days following release are often trying as the days spent behind bars. This is the first part in a series that looks at the different ways four men faced the challenges of life outside.

by Howard Goodman

He started with \$100—that and his prison-issue shirt, pants, socks, shoes, T-shirt, shorts and belt. The state doesn't furnish coats, regardless of the season.

It was December and for Charles Hutchinson, 32, it was re-entry time. After 4½ years behind the walls of Oregon State Penitentiary, he was returning to live with the rest of us.

A man can be afraid to jump into water, especially if he isn't sure he knows how to swim. Nearly every day in Salem, men and women leave the state's penitentiaries; nearly all of them wonder if they can make it outside.

Many cannot. About one-third return to state prisons within three years because they run afoul of parole terms or commit new crimes, according to corrections officials.

But to all—those who make it and those who don't—come similar pressures: Finding a job and keeping it, making a home life, avoiding an old crowd or an old drug habit.

They are people who already have proven an inability to live by society's rules. Now they must cope with a world that didn't stop changing during the period when time stood still for them.

And all too often, they must attempt it with too little preparation.

The "gate money," the bare \$100 that many ex-prisoners start with, is much less than even the cheapest month's rent. While officials say they attempt to counsel prisoners about the difficulties they will face on the outside, ex-prisoners say the effort is, at best, hit or miss.

About 175 prisoners are released each month.

Nearly every day they leave, stepping through a side door at Prigg Cottage, the correction division's release center in southeast Salem.

There, in a high-school-sized building at the edge of a broad farm field, men and women prisoners wait out the last three or four months of their sentences.

The lights of Salem appear from the Prigg Cottage windows, flickering on the horizon across a bitter distance. The air inside is heavy with time.

People come to Prigg Cottage to wait.

Sometimes the time is broken by an interview with a counselor who asks whether the prisoner has lined up work and residence for his release. Sometimes the prisoner, accompanied by a guard, travels outside for a job interview.



CHARLES HUTCHINSON sitting among his friends at the Oregon State Penitentiary prior to his release.

though perpetually trying to peer out of a tunnel. He looks like a man placed on hold.

He is from Oakland, Calif., where his coming-of-age was typical for those who end up at OSP:

Convicted at 19 of contributing to the delinquency of a minor, 90 days in jail. He says he was caught buying liquor for a 17-year-old.

Convicted at 20 of receiving stolen goods. He says the case involved boxes of stolen liquor. He says he pleaded guilty and the judge let him go.

Convicted of grand theft auto, 60 days in jail. Acquitted by jury of murder.

Convicted of assault. He says he hit a girlfriend in a quarrel and she called police.

His recent sentence stemmed from a conviction for kidnapping handed down five years ago in Roseburg.

Hutchinson says he was with a friend who put the squeeze on a guy who owed him money. They picked him up in a car. His friend held a gun. The victim charged kidnap.

Hutchinson says his friend got five years. He got 10.

According to the Roseburg News-Review newspaper, however, Hutchinson entered Oregon in a stolen car after escaping from a Contra Costa County, Calif., prison farm in October 1975 with nine other men.

At the time, he was being held at the county farm awaiting trial on a robbery charge, according to Concord, Calif., authorities.

One week after the escape, a state trooper near Grants Pass began to pursue a car being operated erratically on Interstate 5, according to police reports. The reports identify Hutchinson as the driver.

Hutchinson sped to a rest area near Azalea and broke into a nearby farmhouse, waking a retired deputy sheriff and forcing him into his pick-up at the point of a sawed-off .22-caliber rifle, according to police reports.

Out of curiosity, he listened in on a meeting of the prison Toastmasters Club. Club members asked him to make a speech. He got up, wondering what he was going to say, and spoke of his arrests and his anger. He revealed his loneliness. His audience listened and applauded. Hutch joined.

He took to clubs. They were something to do. They were maybe a way out.

He became president of the anti-drug, anti-alcohol Keen Club. He had access to a telephone and office. He brought guest speakers into the prison. He joined the Jaycees and organized collections for the United Way.

He completed his high school education. He talked to legislators during an unsuccessful prisoners' campaign for conjugal visits.

He was, he discovered, articulate. He found he had a way with people.

"I went in as a young man," he says. "I came out as a man. 'I feel like an old one,'" he adds. "They took all my young years away from me."

It was in December. After 4½ years, Hutchinson was paroled to Salem.

He has no family or friends here. He knows ex-cons, but it's a violation of parole to associate with them.

He was paroled to an address—his girlfriend's—and to an employer—Capen Janitorial Service in West Salem.

His girlfriend drove to Prigg Cottage and picked him up. Their first stop was a bank on Lancaster Drive SE, where Hutchinson cashed his \$100 check. His parole papers were his only I.D.

They drove next to see his parole officer, who spelled out the terms of release. Then they drove home. And things started going wrong.

The \$100 disappeared fast. Right off, he spent \$60 for his girlfriend's rent. Then he spent \$35 to stock the apartment with groceries.

This was only fair, as Hutchinson saw it.

He and his girlfriend were a true couple. He was a prisoner when they met. She wrote him nearly every day he was inside. She'd visited twice a week. She'd seen the parole board on his behalf, talked to the warden. They'd discussed marriage.

But now she showed a new edginess. Too much was happening, too fast, she said. On their third day of living together, she asked Hutchinson if he had any place else to go.

"I still don't know what happened," he said several weeks later, trying to sift the puzzle for meaning. "Things were fine when I was inside. I guess she just wasn't ready to face the relationship in reality.

Then the job fell through. "I lost the contract," said Joseph Evans, owner of Capen Janitorial. "I had hired Charles, but I told him it was contingent on the flow of business."

Evans said Hutchinson would have worked on a cleaning crew at the state Highway Division building across State Street from OSP. But the state canceled the contract, Evans said.

"I'm sorry about it," Evans said. "I hope he finds something. I saw him at church Sunday (Salem Mission Church of God in Christ) and I know he's trying to hang in there."

Hutchinson's situation after three days on the outside stacked up like this: No place to stay, no job, assets totaling \$5.

He swore he wasn't going back to the pen. He thought about running

away. In California, he could be far from this trouble. But a clear-cut parole violation like that was an awful risk.

Desperate, he called a friend he'd made during last year's campaign to gain conjugal visits for prisoners. The campaign had failed, but Ron Huntley, then a legislative aide with an interest in prisoners' and minorities' problems, looked like a man who might help.

"I honestly feel that if Charles hadn't called me he'd be back in the joint," Huntley said later. "And that scares me."

Huntley telephoned around. He learned Hutchinson could work on a tree farm on the Coast Range. But he'd need work clothes, bedding and two weeks' supply of food. Where to get it?

Huntley had heard of a \$200,000 fund the Legislature had authorized to help prisoners meet one-time costs for rent and job-related expenses.

After an hour's phoning, Huntley tracked down the corrections authority who held the purse-strings. Then Huntley and Hutchinson went shopping.

Hutchinson picked up some work clothes and a sport coat for free at the Elks' Lodge. They were his first civilian clothes in 4½ years.

"I saw a man totally despondent and ready to split light up like a Christmas tree when he tried on that sport coat," Huntley said.

At the Veteran's center, they picked out used clothes, dishes and cooking utensils. They set them aside in a box. At a K-Mart, they

selected work boots.

Larry Daniels, a prison official, wrote checks totalling \$81 for the clothes and cooking gear, Huntley said. He spent another \$30 for groceries. The Salvation Army gave Hutchinson a \$15 food voucher.

Ted Winters, a friend and advocate for ex-cons, lent Hutchinson a rain slicker and sleeping bag and drove him to Alpine, a small town southwest of Corvallis.

Four days after his release, Hutchinson was planting trees. Just in time: If the parole board had learned he was without a job or address, they almost certainly would have sent him back to prison.

It's hard work on the mountain. The men carry 40-pound sacks around their waists as they climb hillsides, bending to implant seedlings. Men with lighter skins than Hutchinson's acquire dark bruises around the hips.

Five-hundred men attempted the job during Hutchinson's first two weeks, he said. He said he was one of the seven who stuck it out.

Hutchinson began at \$5.50 an hour. He was paid for 7½ or eight hours of work each day, although travel time often extended the day to 12 hours.

At night the men rarely had the energy to set up camp properly. Tents leaked in the rain. Dinners were hurried encounters with canned food. There weren't any showers. The atmosphere was charged with fights and rip-offs. Hutchinson would wake up in the chill of 3 a.m. unable to return to sleep.

"It's completely lonely up there," Hutchinson said during a New Year's week visit to Salem. "I'm one of the only guys who speaks English." Other workers spoke Spanish, he said.

After two weeks, Hutchinson had \$200 and got a ride to Salem. He gave \$35 to his girlfriend to help pay her phone bill. He bought presents for her and her son.

"Things were so sad," he said. "I wanted them to have a nice Christmas."

He borrowed money for a bus ride to Portland, where he stayed with friends and looked for a better job. He said he applied at about 20 firms. All said they wouldn't be hiring until April.

"A lot of times on the mountain, I wanted to run out," he says. "But I can't let myself down or the people who are counting on me down there. I'll hack it as long as I can."

He hopes a better job will crop up. He says he's shown he can work hard. Now, if he can only get a decent job, he might keep clear of prison for good. Without one, he might slip.

"I still feel that with a little bit of help, I can become a productive citizen," Hutchinson says painfully. "But now I'm at the bottom with nothing."

"One of my biggest fears is going back to prison," he says. "I saw a lot of people returning who thought they wouldn't come back."

"It's a disgusting-looking road. But I feel I got to survive it." (Reprinted from the *Oregon Statesman*.)

Lucid walls of time

Edited by Julius D. Snowden, 38013

Ah, the sweet, soft voice of the fair maiden in the distance, beckoning her love to her knight who is off to fight the battle.

Her hair as gold as the sun, high above the earth on a warm spring day.

Her eyes as blue as the sky, crystal clear as a mountain spring, and as beautiful as the sapphire.

Her spirit, moving freely among the universe, carrying her love to her man wherever he may be; carrying him through obstacles he may come across.

Ah, love, that soft, sweet, vibrant force which energizes the mind, gives life to the body, and enlightens the soul

My being is your being, my mind your mind, my love your love.

For with both of us together, combining our ever-radiant love what wrong can bestow itself upon us?

Let us be as one, and the world shall be a better place in which to live.

By Steven H. Daniels

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FEBRUARY

GENERAL STATEMENT TO BLACKS OF OUR COMMUNITY FEBRUARY BLACK HISTORY MONTH

During the month of February 1980 (BLACK HISTORY MONTH) three major unprecedented acts took place as positive steps for Black people.

1- The President of the United States proclaimed the month of February as BLACK HISTORY MONTH.

2- Nationally, Blacks rallied on a telethon in support of the United Negro College Fund.

3- Nationally, the news medias published facts of how Blacks had excelled in just about every facet of American life, and had contributed in major ways to America's superiority and leadership in the world, sociologically and technologically.

Now, lets remember that not all of us participated in, nor did we contribute to these three major LAND MARKS in Black History; however, from March 1st, 1980 to February 1st, 1981 it will be you and I individually and collectively who will be writing Black History, you might say that each of us is a plank in the platform of Black Culture, so in order to have a strong Platform each plank must at least support its own weight.

After all is said and done, it is performance that demonstrates the results of any measurement.

In all we do, let us perform...

- 1- To demonstrate respectability of self and others
- 2- To demonstrate responsibility of self and to others
- 3- To demonstrate accountability to self and others
- 4- To demonstrate positive attitudes to self and others
- 5- To demonstrate Honesty and prudence to self and others
- 6- To demonstrate a positive contribution to our culture.

Performance is the language all people clearly understand, let us through performance speak loudly..UNTIL NEXT YEAR...

Thomas Boothe, Ph.D

**"OSP was just one big prison.
Now I'm in a bigger one."**

Mostly they wait.

Eventually the parole board rules and their papers clear. And they're free to begin new lives of parole or freedom.

Then they stand like Charles Hutchinson waiting for his ride to take him from Prigg Cottage, parole papers in hand, \$100 in his pocket, looking out over the flatness of southeast Salem farmland like a foreigner on the border.

This is a story about people on release. It's about Wendell Long, who made it, free and clear from the system. It's about Joe West, who didn't, and is back in the pen. It's about Vernell Franklin, who finds the leash of parole drawing tighter the longer he is out.

And it's about Charles Hutchinson, who, in less than two months, was convinced that prison has only been purgatory; the outside was hell.

Charles Hutchinson: "OSP was just one prison. Now I'm in a bigger one."

He goes by Hutch.

He sits quietly, a strongly built man with a firm, sinewy handshake and a touch of doom in his eyes. He speaks in a soft, careful drawl.

The eyebrows are arched, as

Hutchinson ducked to the floor of the cab, aimed the rifle at the man's head, and demanded the man drive him to Portland, according to the reports.

They drove, with deputies behind them. They stopped the truck in forest country. Hutchinson fled on foot into the brush, reports the state.

Hutchinson came out of hiding and surrendered to state troopers five hours later, shivering and coatless in the cold and snow, the newspaper reported.

At his trial, he asked for a change of venue because so few Blacks live in Douglas County. He said he would be unable to have a jury of peers. The court turned him down, the newspaper reported.

Found guilty of kidnap he was sentenced in December 1975 to 10 years in OSP, the newspaper said.

He did 4½ years at OSP and he did them well. It was a stunted life in the joint, but Hutchinson found ways to expand himself.

Not at first. He started his time feeling angry and lost. A 10-year sentence looked like forever. He quit caring. He started fights. He got tossed into solitary five times, six times. He wasn't counting.

But then, Hutchinson says, he began to mature.