



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 as trying as the days spent behind bars. This is the third part in a series that looks at the different ways four men faced the challenges of life outside.

by Howard Goodman

Joe West: "I was asking the man, I was begging him, 'Man, I got to have a job real bad or I'm going to be in trouble. I know myself. I know it's coming. Please.'"

Joe West owed himself a good time.

Forty months he'd been in prison. All that time without a woman, without the sound of live music late at night, without the exultation of driving the neon midnight streets.

West got out of Oregon State Penitentiary and partied with a vengeance. He spent his \$100 gate money in 24 hours. And he didn't care.

He had a job promised. His father had lined one up at the foundry.

His father had been slogging at the foundry for 20 years. After 20 years, his father figured, the least they could do is give a slot to a man's son.

But no. They weren't taking anyone on. The personnel office told West to try again in a week.

It went on that way, West says. He was itching for money of his own. He was tired of old friends having to buy the drinks. He was looking for work and not finding it.

All the chemistry for failure was prepared. Within weeks West was committing new crimes. Within a year he was back in the pen.

West is a muscular, oval-faced man. His wide eyes are tinged with red, contrasting with the dark skin of his face. His speech is gentle, raspy and articulate.

Home is Portland by address, the ghetto by character. At 32, West is better educated than most prisoners. He says he is about 40 hours away from a bachelor's degree in corrections.

And he has a background of skirmishes with the law. He lost a big one in 1974. A judge sentenced him to five years in Oregon State Penitentiary for burglary.

He did his 40 months. He returned to Portland, to work at the foundry, he thought, and to live with a niece.



ASMAR ABDUL SEIFULLA
aka Joe West

It was not an easy adjustment, he recalled one day recently in an OSP visiting room.

"There's a lot of fear, man, in a dude. All of a sudden you've got to take care of yourself," he says. "If a guy's got any sense, he's afraid when he's getting out. If you're not afraid, you're not going to make it."

"It's not necessarily an advantage to live with your family," he says. "There can be crowding, there can be these demands they make on you."

"They're watching you all the time, even when they say they aren't, looking for tell-tale signs of regression to bad habits. If you stay out all night, they think you're with your old friends."

His relatives acted as though they were owed a psychological debt for having put up with a prisoner, West says.

"It's not a conscious thing, but they lay trips on you," he says. "They've been to the parole board for you, they've seen the warden, they've visited you. When you get out they want to be paid back."

An ex-prisoner, meanwhile, has a natural urge to taste his freedom.

"A guy wants a woman, he wants to party, he wants to see his friends—even if they're bad friends," West

says. "He wants to see if the world's the same as he left it. So you investigate. You go on expeditions."

Pretty soon West was running up against an old way of life. The life was measured in hustles and had the odor of heroin.

West stood apart, he said. But he was living on borrowed money and tiring of a thin wallet. He was finding no jobs, though he says he haunted the employment offices. And if one economic system closed its doors, West knew, he would have to turn to another one.

He tried a third time at the foundry, begging this time.

"I'm tapped out," he told a personnel worker. "I'm all the way tapped out. You got to give me a job. I know what's going to happen."

"But he says he can't do nothing," West said. "I know he's lying. I can see he's hiring people."

"Now I'm hot. I see an old friend at a clothing store. This is a guy with a bag. I tell him I'm broke. And he's a friend. He gives me this bag. He says I don't owe him nothing for it."

"And I'm back in the life."

The bag of heroin was a small-business loan. It was a drug dealer's first inventory. West started selling. Soon he'd be using.

"Now I'm on my way," West says, remembering that first bag. "Now I'm back on the way to the grave."

The money was immediate, West says. Within four or five days of his first sale, he rented an apartment and bought new clothes. He was a man about town again.

"Rags to riches," he says.

He was snorting at first to be sociable, he says. Within two to three months, he was pretty well hooked.

"Where I come from—the ghetto—everybody's snorting dope," he says. "It's hard to make a connection with any other kind of life."

"Who's got time for an ex-con? There's not that many humanitarians out there. Who's got time for an ex-con except another ex-con?"

Using, he had finances to meet. He dusted off a slew of old skills—robbing cash registers, short-changing merchants. Ten dollars here, twenty there. Then, for real money, he robbed dope dealers.

"Oh, I'd be robbing dope dealers right and left," he said. "It's easy. These are people who can't go to the police."

"I just crash the door and show my pistol. I stick them up all over. I'm just being an outlaw. Soon I've got them all gun-shy."

"I see them on the street. I'm just knocking them over."

It ended with a bust. The police got him for armed robbery.

West says he was arrested for a crime he didn't commit and convicted on fabricated evidence.

But that's all right, he says. Fair is fair. The police couldn't get evidence on the dozens of robberies he did commit, he says. They couldn't get any of the dealers to testify.

"The police do funny things when they know you're hustling," he says. "They're going to stick you any way they can—just like I'll do anything I can on my trip."

He drew 18 years at OSP for armed robbery. He's done nearly two of them.

Someday he'll face release again. How would he make it different, if he had the power?

"I think release should be more caring about a man," he says. "You're out there without money, without people to lean on. It's a trip, it's a real trip. No one wants to be accountable for a guy anymore once he's outside the walls."

"I think prison makes cripples of people. And I think it ought to help a guy become as independent as possible."

"In the ideal situation," he says, "I'd like to live by myself a couple of months, work-free. A guy's got to have time to unwind—emotionally, physically, spiritually to unwind. I'd take my time and really look for a good job. If I had a place to stay by myself for two months, rent and food paid for, I could do it."

"The state can keep the hundred bucks. That's pocket change."

"A lot of guys do real well in prison," he says. "Out of prison, it's like Mars."

"Men go to work every day in here. They learn to converse real well on social problems. They flourish in this incubator. All the nutrients are fed in. He needs a good feeling, he sees the priest. He can't get love, but there's a lot of brotherhood."

"Then the administration says out you go," he says.

"They could give you a print-out when you leave with some phone numbers and addresses. If you need food, here's the food stamps. If you need a job, here's a number that could help. If you're just lonely and need someone to talk with, here's a number."

"But they're so busy getting you off the sheet, they don't have time, man."

(Reprinted from *The Oregon Statesman*.)

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Shower aids Moore Street Center kitchen



Neighbors enjoyed refreshments during kitchen shower.



Liz Taylor opens gifts for Moore Street Center's kitchen.

Because a volunteer worker had noticed, during a kitchen assignment, that the Center was practically devoid of utensils to properly prepare a meal, friends and neighbors of The Salvation Army Moore Street Community Center, held a kitchen shower recently. The Center's kitchen is now stocked with an ample supply of utensils.

The shower, sponsored by the Humboldt Neighborhood Association, was held in mid-February; the volunteer worker was Madeline Noshub, Association Chairperson.

Besides giving us all these beautiful kitchen utensils, says Ms. Noshub, "the neighbors got to know each other and also had an opportunity to see The Salvation Army's big community center and its heated swimming pool."

Currently, staff at the center is conducting a feasibility study to determine whether there is a need for an expanded program of Senior activities in the neighborhood. For information on the current Senior program or the schedule of the hours of use for the heated pool at the center, phone Elizabeth Taylor, 282-2572, or call in at The Salvation Army Moore Street Community Center, 5430 N. Moore St.

The House Of
EXODUS
Alcoholism Educational and Treatment Center

1518 N.E. KILLINGSWORTH
PORTLAND, OREGON 97211
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MARCH

The House of Exodus youth program will be a major part of the agenda, of the local alcohol conference, to be held at the first Congregational Church, 1126 SW. Park, Portland, Oregon, on March 20, 1980 between the hours of 8:30 am and 4:00 pm.

This conference is sponsored by the Local Alcohol Planning Committee (L.A.P.C.) of Multnomah County Oregon.

Other agenda subjects are:

WORKSHOP STYLE

- A- Organizing a prevention program in your geographical area.
- B- Alcohol abuse and family dynamics.
- C- Main streaming youthful substance abusers into the labor market.
- D- Alcohol education: Drinking values clarification for adolescence.

Even though this conference will more than likely be represented by those who are providing services to the various communities of Portland, I am encouraging those citizens, especially those citizens with teenage children to attend. Get involved, we need your input...

Thomas Boothe, Ph.D