

# Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition

MY NAME IS BOB....

*...and it's my first day out of prison.*

## Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition

Colorado Criminal Justice  
Reform Coalition  
1212 Mariposa St. #4  
Phone: 303-825-0122  
Fax: 303-825-0304  
Email: [info@ccjrc.org](mailto:info@ccjrc.org)



## A DIARY

This is the story of a man who is released from prison, homeless in Denver, Colorado. His journey is a common one. Will he make it on the outside? Or will he get caught in the revolving door back to prison?

## **INTRODUCTION**

We hope this story will help people better understand and imagine the struggle and barriers people face after they have been released from prison. It's not the story covered by the media. It's not a situation likely to be considered by legislators and other policy makers who have built their careers on "getting tough" and locking people away. However, these prison doors swing both ways. Bob's experience is the real world for thousands of people released from Colorado prisons each year.

### ***The majority of people on parole don't make it.***

In Colorado, 65% of those released on mandatory parole in 2001 were re-incarcerated within 3 years. The overwhelming majority of those reincarcerated had not been convicted of a new crime but had their parole revoked for a technical violation, which means that they violated a condition of their parole. Not having a job or a place to live is a technical violation. Not paying restitution, child support and all the other financial responsibilities are technical parole violations.

Our current parole laws and re-entry policies are not working. There is not enough pre-release planning or post-release support. This set up for failure has enormous costs and is one of the leading drivers behind prison population growth in Colorado.

**PLEASE GET INVOLVED!!!**

I was glad, he was just trying to help a brother out, and I didn't feel good about the whole thing.

For me things are a little different. Long story short, they filed an Escape charge, which is a new felony and gave me another year. I have two technical violations. One is for a hot UA and the other is for Association. I'd like to just finish my entire sentence and get out free. I have a new charge though which means that I have to go out on mandatory parole again. I didn't want to come back, I just couldn't keep up. Maybe by the time I am supposed to get out again someone will have figured out what's really going on out there.

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*Photos on pages 7, 21, and 22 were taken by  
Chris Takagi of Apelios*

Tom apologized, he said he'd been on parole for over a year, and they hadn't come by his house for months. He'd said he'd never think that they'd come by on the weekend. He said that my parole officer would probably show up in the next day or two, and that maybe if I explained what had happened that he'd give me a break. We weren't doing anything illegal, so hopefully, we'd get some play. I just thanked him for what he had done to help me out.

A week later, I was sitting in the day room when the officer bellowed out, "Bob, you have a visitor." I went into a small room and there was the young man I had seen two weeks before at the parole office. He told me that he had been down to the 11<sup>th</sup> Ave Hotel to see me on that Friday night. I had forgotten to call in for my U.A., so he went to check on me and when I wasn't there, he issued a warrant for my arrest. I explained to him what had happened, and he just shook his head.

"Sorry, Bob, you have an Association charge, and Not in Residence violation. Since you missed your U.A., it's automatically considered hot. My hands are tied. I'll see you at your revocation hearing. We'll see what the hearing officer has to say."

Tom's parole officer was a little more understanding; he was released the next day.

## Chapter 1: My name is Bob and it's my first day out of prison.

I am on the DOC prison bus right now and I am going to be dropped off in Denver. I have been waiting for this day for six years. The bus pulls onto Smith road. It's a dirty, little, two-lane road made of cracked asphalt and



It has a railroad track that runs along the side. It's my drop-off point. The air brakes screech, the bus comes to a lurching stop, the guard calls my name and I pull my jacket around my state-issued sweats. I look down at my two-dollar, Wal-mart-special tennis shoes and take a deep breath. The guard unlocks the cage that separates the prisoners from the guards. I move to the front of the bus and the guard shakes his head slightly and grimaces, "Good Luck". I glance through the dirty window and notice the dirty snow swirling around on the pavement. It's cold and it's windy. But I am free. I get off of the bus and move to the side where the guard opens the baggage compartment and pulls out two boxes that have my name and number carved in their sides in black magic-marker.

It was a good night. Tom's wife looked at me a little warily, but she made beef stew and home-made biscuits, and I ate like I never had before.

She served big glasses of fresh cold milk and we had ice cream afterwards. We watched a movie, and they gave me a couple of blankets and a pillow to sleep on the couch and they went off to bed. For the first time in years, I went to sleep with a full stomach and a sense of contentment.

"BAM! BAM! BAM! BAM!" Somebody was pounding on the door. It was dark and I was disoriented. I didn't know what to do. The bedroom door opened up and the light showed through, and I saw Tom come through the living room and heard him grumbling. "They never show up on Saturday," I heard him say. He opened the door and two men walked in. All I could see was the badges that they had swinging on their necks. It was Tom's parole officer and his partner.

Things happened pretty fast after that. The officers saw me on the couch and asked for my identification. As soon as he saw the DOC I.D., he had me up against the wall. They arrested both Tom and I and took us down to the City Jail.

I woke up in a hurry and realized I may not be the only thing living under the bridge. Fear and horror overtook me and I knew it wasn't anywhere near five o'clock in the morning, but I could not stay in the cold anymore. I washed off my face in the frigid water of the river and headed to the street to look for an all night coffee shop to wait it out.

I found the Denver Diner and went in to bear the brunt of the stares of the other customers. I read the newspapers and drank coffee until four-thirty finally came and I headed up to the church to meet Tom and what I hoped was a start of a new life.

He was there right at five o'clock just as he promised. It sure was nice to get into a car and warm up. He also brought me a pair of jeans and a flannel shirt. It felt great to put on real clothes, even if they were someone else's. We worked hard that day and I felt like a new man. The boss paid us each \$75.00 in cash, and said he'd see us on Monday.

I had told Tom what had happened the night before trying to get into the shelter, hoping that maybe he could give me a ride downtown by 5:00. He told me to come and hang out on his couch that night and his wife would make us some dinner. Then he would be able to take me downtown in the morning. I felt like I had turned the corner and for the first time I didn't feel the need to look over my shoulder.

He sets the boxes down, closes the baggage compartment and looks at me. A quick smirk crosses his face and he says, "See ya soon" and then hurries to get back inside the warm bus. The door shuts and I am utterly alone. A knot forms in my stomach. I don't know for sure where I am or how to get where I am going. The feeling is foreign after being told what to do, how to do it and when to do it for the last six years.

The bus roars off, belching black smoke and I can feel the words rise in panic in my throat, "Wait!! I don't know where..." The sentence and the words die in my throat, as I almost gave up the last shreds of my manhood for the fear of freedom. I look down at the boxes at my feet. My entire world, all my possessions. A coffee pot, legal papers, some hygiene items, and the backwash of six years of classes that I graduated from while I was in "canoncitycolorado". Not one of those classes I took had this part in them.

I look down the road and I see the sign about a mile down, "HOUSE OF SPIRITS". I was pretty certain that this wasn't a church but it is the only sign alive. Funny that a liquor store would be my first stop. I have my \$100 dollar check that is given to a parolee on his way out the door. I know that I have to see my parole officer within 24 hours after my release and I have to find the place where I am supposed to be staying.

I don't know my way around Denver too well. I'd only lived here about 3 weeks when I got arrested after a bad drugthing/barfight/hit-a-cop kinda night. The year that led up to that "incident" included a bad divorce, followed by losing my job and my family and my swan dive into a bottle.

Now walking down the road I know that I don't have any I.D. except my prison number and picture on a badly laminated 6 year old card. I pick up my boxes and move towards the liquor store. It's starting to get a little dark. We had a late start because of the weather. After a couple of blocks these boxes get pretty heavy.

I didn't realize how much my career in the pen was going to weigh when I packed them. Six years of bad food, little work and low-impact exercise catch up with you pretty quick at my age. I walk up to the liquor store, swallow my lack of confidence, and push my way through the door. The man at the counter looks up from his newspaper, takes me in just one glance and says, "I can cash it for a 10% fee." I'm guessing that he's done this before.

"So you wanna bottle?" he says

I look at him and realize that my hundred dollars had already gotten some serious tread with that \$10 coming off the top.

I got to the clinic and got the paperwork filled out and when I got done it was 5:15, I hustled out to the street. It was almost dark and the temperature had dropped about 15 degrees. I knew that they would only take the first 80 people down at the shelter, so I went and spent \$1.50 out of my \$6.00 to catch a bus downtown.

I was literally running when I came around the corner and my heart sank as I realized that there were 20 people in line ahead of me. I stood there with my hands and teeth clenched and a long slow sound of despair grumbled through the line as lucky number 80 made it through the door. I looked up and saw 15 people ahead and another 5 people behind me.

I asked the man in front of me if there was anyplace else we could stay; he shook his head and said "head for the river, man".

So, that's where I went. I was under a bridge an hour later, close to Broadway and the hospital. I put on all the clothes that I had and curled up under the concrete and listened to the cars full of people with lives pass by overhead, and I drifted off to the most troubled, cold sleep of my life.

Something scuttled over my foot.

I laughed to myself as I pulled out my certificates and work evaluations and tossed them in the trash, sure wasn't gonna need those. I went down to the front desk and asked for a trash bag, which was grudgingly handed over. Packing up hygiene and the few t-shirts and socks was the only thing I could do. I also grabbed the blanket that was on the bed, and left the coffee pot there as a trade-in. I took a quick shower down the hall, since I didn't know when I would get another one.

I pulled everything together and walked out the door for the last time. I dropped the key off down at the front desk and headed off to the shelter to find out what I needed to do to be able to stay there. My nine dollars was burning a hole in my pocket and I needed to eat, so I stopped at a Subway and got a sandwich for three dollars, (no chips and a drink, thank you). The wind was picking up a little and I headed towards the Crossroads Shelter. When I got to the shelter, the man at the front desk said that they would start letting people in at 5:00. He gave me directions to the TB clinic down by the hospital and said that they were doing TB shots for free, but I had to get there by 5:00 when they closed. It was 3:30, so I headed towards the hospital as fast as I could.

“Nah, but I'd love a pack of cigarettes.” I need something to calm my nerves. “Sure,” he said, “That's \$3.75.” I shake my head and hand over the check; he gives me the pack of Camels that I had pointed at and a book of matches. “You got a phone I can use?” He points over to the payphone on the wall out-front. I jealously gather my change and count it carefully. I haven't done this for a long time and the money looks funny--like Monopoly. At this point, I just feel embarrassed. “Man, I just need to get downtown to the 11<sup>th</sup> Ave Hotel.”

He said, “Go back down to Smith Road and about halfway down the street there is an RTD bus sign. You just missed the 6:00 bus, but there will be another one in an hour, just



tell the bus driver that you need to go downtown.” I walked out with my boxes and felt the wind whip around my hands and neck. I found the bus stop. Man, it was cold.

This thin DOC jacket doesn't really work to keep out the cold. My fingers were cold, no gloves. I lit the first cigarette I had had in six years. I looked at my cheap D.O.C watch and did something I do know how to do. I wait. At 7:08, the bus arrived. I get in and notice the fare is

\$1.50. I haven't even got off of Smith Road and I only have \$84.75 left. The bus driver directed me to get off at 17<sup>th</sup> and California and catch a number #10 on Stout Street, to 12<sup>th</sup> and Broadway using the small paper transfer that I got in exchange for my \$1.50.



I get off the bus and suddenly realize how fast the world is moving. The world I had been in for the last six years moves at about 1/2 mile an hour, all the time. Any faster and you might get shot. Personal space is the only thing you have to yourself in the Pen, and it is guarded jealously. Not out here. I find myself holding my breath and frozen in fear to the ground (when did the buildings get so tall and cars move so fast?)

“Sorry, there isn't anything I can do.” So, I left. I stood in the parking lot on Sherman St. in a fog. I didn't know what to do or where to go.

I pulled my change out of my pocket, a little under nine dollars. Looked like I was moving out of my cozy little room, and checkout time was at noon. I moved slowly up the street towards the hotel. It wasn't nearly as cold out today as it had been. The weather was cooperating, mid-forties. The wind was calm but my mind was racing. I needed to get my things, and ...and what? I knew it was time to head to the shelter, there just wasn't anyplace else, but I needed to get a TB card first. I walked down through the alleys to get back to the shelter glancing into the big dumpsters as I did, hoping to find something to carry my stuff around in.

Boxes of belongings are for people who have a place to keep their boxes.

Somewhere in between 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> I saw a strap hanging over the edge of the dumpster and I pulled out a nylon duffle bag. The zipper was broke but the bag was intact with someone else's odds and ends inside. I emptied the bag and moved towards the hotel.

When I got back down to the hotel it was about 2:00, I went into my room and started to go through my things. I certainly couldn't carry all this stuff around with me. I started to toss everything that wasn't necessary for my survival.

I said that I did have experience, but I didn't have anyway to get around. Tom agreed to pick me up at the church the next morning at 5:00. It felt like things were looking up finally. I went inside with the other guys to warm up while we waited.

It seemed like days later when I had a chance to go I in and talk to the tired looking, nice young guy running the program. He asked some questions about where I had been born and then he said they would send for my birth certificate, it was going to take a couple of weeks though. He told me that I could go and get in line for a sandwich at 10:30. He also gave me a hat, a pair of warm gloves and a couple pairs of socks.

It was about 11 in the morning when I got done, so I raced up to the day labor place. The line was long and I stood there for about an hour without seeing any movement, they closed at 1:00 so I didn't really see why I should stay. I thought about some of the things that Rick, my old cellie, had told me, so I thought I should go down to the Parole office and see if they could help me.

I got to the Parole office, and went inside and knocked on the smoked glass two-way mirror. I asked to speak with my parole officer and the receptionist said he wouldn't be in that day. I told her that I needed some help with a place to stay and she said,

Passer-bys rush to get to their designated places. I am invisible to them and I am gripped with indecision. I clutch my bus transfer and look around frantically for the right place to go. The street signs are illuminated street names and I see "Stout Street" ahead. The fear is growing inside and I start to feel panicky. I don't want to go anywhere else. I am afraid that I will get lost. I wait with my boxes for the number 10 and pray I am going in the right direction. I tell the bus driver where I need to get off and he helps me out, a block late after my stop.

I get off the bus and a chill wind blows down my neck like a bad premonition. I have to walk back two blocks and then I see the sign "11<sup>th</sup> AVE HOTEL". I latch on to my boxes, go through the front door and pay \$25 for a room without a private bath (it's \$5.00 extra for your own bathroom). I move up the stairs, unlock the door that has the same number as the key, switch on the light, move inside quietly and then I put the boxes down inside the room after quietly closing the door. I take a look around at my surroundings, sit on the edge of the bed and start to cry.

After a while, a memory stirs and I realize I had seen an Arby's across the street and suddenly I am ravenous. Real food. I go out the door, careful to lock it, and work my way through a group of people who are gathered around the stairs and in the common room. They eye me suspiciously, so I return it in kind and head for the door.

I wait for the light to change green and head across the street. The kid behind the counter asks me what I want. How the heck do I know? After I read the menu over and over, I realize I haven't even made this decision in six years. I order two sandwiches, some potato cakes and a coke. It was \$6.95 (\$6.95?) and I eat slowly. I am king of the world for this one moment and I am going to savor this moment. Then I finish my meal and the real world settles in. I have \$53.00, no job, no home, no clothes and no idea where the hell I am.

It is 9:00 at night and I don't have anyone to tell me when to go to bed. I better figure out how to do it myself.

It's morning. I take a shower and try to wash off six years of prison. I work my way downstairs and after talking to some of the residents, I figure there were some things I needed to do. They told me where the Parole office was, which luckily was only about a mile away from the hotel.

### **Chapter 3: Hi, my name is Bob and it's my first day back in prison**

The cell doors slam shut. Up and down the hall, I can hear the automatic door lock kick in and the sound echoes on and on. I sigh and look down at the scars in the painted concrete.

I just got out a little over a month ago and here I sit again. Most of that time, I have been sitting in County Jail. As I look out the window, I wonder how it all happened so fast. The last thing that made sense was when I was going to the Holy Ghost church to get my I.D.

I remember leaving the hotel and running to the old church to stand in line in the freezing cold. It was about four o'clock in the morning when I got there and I hoped that I would be able to get in and get out soon enough to make it back to the Day Labor place, so that I could make enough money to keep my room for another night.

When I got down to the church, there were already a couple of people hanging out. I asked one of them what time the church opened, and he said not till about 7:30. We shared a smoke and he told me his name was Tom and he had a job, but he was trying to get a voucher for his medication at Walgreen's.

I asked him about what he was doing for work and he said that they had a small crew doing some drywall. It was a short-term job but if I had any experience, it was all under the table and I wouldn't need an I.D.

“You’re the one who’s crazy. There ain’t nothing out here for us. It’s 4 degrees outside and you ain’t got nothin’ except your birthday left and they’ll figure out a way to take that too. See ya pal.”

He puts the plastic inside the bag, rolls it back up and shoves it in his pocket and puts his hand on the door knob. “Look, Bob. No hard feelings. When reality hits, you know where to find me.” Rick walks out the door and I shut it behind him.

I turn off the light and crawl into the bed and curl my body into a ball. I feel like there is a doomsday clock ticking in the world and I have to hurry. There’s just the overall feeling of always being chased. There is something behind me all the time and I constantly feel the need to look over my shoulder to make the feeling stop. I watch the snow fall and hug my knees and feel absolutely paralyzed with fear.



At three o’clock the alarm goes off. I jump up, get dressed and race out of the hotel. I know that I have to get to the church as soon as I can. I have to get an I.D. and then I am going to the DOC place that can help. I can’t be afraid to ask, and I can’t keep doing this hour by hour life stuff anymore.

I pay for the next night at the Hotel (I have \$28.00 left, and haven’t eaten yet today) and head out. When I walk through the door at the Parole Office there is a receptionist behind some glass who takes my name, directs me to a clip board and says “Fill that out” referring to a form that is stuck in a file on the wall. There are several 4 inch pencils on the table in the waiting area and five people sitting around filling out their forms. I just follow along. Every ten minutes or so one of the doors opens and someone would bark out a name. One of my esteemed colleagues would get up and head quietly for the door with their paper in their hand. Then the door shuts and locks tightly behind them. I shivered. “BOB”! I heard the name and looked up to see a young man with a badge on a chain around his neck. He looked at me impatiently and I hurried to get to the door. That meeting took about an hour. He defines my responsibilities. Colorado ID card and Social Security Card, job, one UA a week (\$15 dollars and I need to go to BI and set that up.) Therapy, 3 NA meetings a week, restitution, permanent address, drug classes, anger management, and no association with known felons. Keep your nose clean. Here’s my card. Don’t call after hours unless it’s an emergency. I’ll be by your residence to check on you.

See ya Bob.

He leads me back out to the lobby area and the door slams shut behind me. I tried to appear confident and thoughtful.

My thoughts are racing a million miles an hour and I can actually feel my heart beating in my chest. How? How am I going to get all these things done? I go back to the Hotel and try to get some information from the people who live there. These folks are generally street people who know how to get to resources. I just want to find a job. Minimum wage is \$5.75 an hour, times that by 40 hours and you get \$189.00 after taxes. That means that I have 69 dollars a week to buy clothes, get transportation, and eat. That will allow me to keep my little hotel room at a flat rate of \$130.00 a week. How am I going to pay for UA's and therapy? And that's assuming I can get 40 hours of work a week. I start to realize, I am not going to have a place to live in 36 hours. I pick up some quarters from the coffee shop downstairs, go over to the Arby's and buy a kids meal. I sit at a table and start to go through the Help Wanted section of the paper. Nothing in there for a man with no tools, over 40, with no recent work history, resume or driver's license (or email?). I have to get an I.D. and I don't know how. It's already noon. The day is half over and I am not anywhere near close to being free.

I call the number on the card that the young man at the Parole office had given me. An answering machine picks up and says to leave a message with a number I can be reached at. I DON'T HAVE A NUMBER!!! I want to scream into the phone. I go to the Hotel and ask one of the denizens how I get an ID.

The adrenaline hits my head like a truck, and there is a ringing in my ears.

"What the..." is all I can stammer out.

"A friend of mine dropped this off for me today," whispers Rick. "It's just a little something to help us get back on our feet. I can give you this for \$200 and you can pay me when you make the cash. There's about \$500 worth of dope here and that'll even give you a little something for yourself. We can make this a weekly thing, or more depending on how fast you can get rid of it."

I know my mouth is open in astonishment and the numbers and possibilities click in my head like an adding machine. I stand there in my wet dirty clothes, a 7-11 burrito rapidly cooling in my hand as Rick waits for me to jump at the chance he's offering me.

I take a deep breath. "Are you crazy?" I finally spit out. "I don't know how I'm going to make it out here, but I can't do the prison thing again, and I'm



not ready to give up, you go ahead though and good luck." I go to the door and unlock it.

I have to go get a TB card from the hospital. My head aches from welding and the cold and being hungry. There isn't any medical unit out here to go ask a nurse for some aspirin. I turn towards the dying sun and head to the hotel, plan a stop at the 7-11 for another burrito.

There is a constant churning in my stomach now. I try to thaw out in the lobby of the hotel and I head for the community microwave that's in there to heat up my burrito. I start the oven and then I reach into my pocket and pull out the small package of Advil that I spent \$1.19 on and put the pills in my mouth and dry swallow them. My head pounds and I wait for the "*ding*" of the microwave to tell me that my dinner is ready.

"Hey Bob, how are things?"

I look over and Rick is lounging in his chair.

"Things are cold," I reply. I pull the burrito out and turn to head upstairs.

"I need to talk to you for a minute," he says, and follows me up the stairs.

I open the door of my room and Rick comes in after me. He quietly shuts the door and locks it. My senses are dulled but I know something doesn't feel right. He reaches into his coat pocket and pulls out a small rolled up paper bag.

"Check this out, Bob." He unrolls the bag, reaches inside and pulls out a plastic bag full of white powder.

Someone says if you have your DOC ID you can trade it in at DMV for an ID card. I make my way down there. I go to the phone book to find a number and call. It takes awhile but I finally get directions to the DMV where I can take care of the ID situation. I don't want to spend money on a bus if I don't have to, especially since the transfer is only good for an hour. So, I start to walk. It's so confusing, all the streets and lights and noise and commotion. The buildings look so tall, and I am continually getting my directions confused. 27<sup>th</sup> and Welton is where the closest office is located. When I arrive there is a line out the door. I wait for nearly 45 minutes. Big day for ID's I guess. My turn. I present my DOC ID. The girl at the counter looks at it likes it's the terrorist plot-du-jour and says, "Just wait here." She turns and goes to talk with another Authorized DMV official, and he looks at the I.D. and looks at me and looks at the I.D. whispers something to the girl and walks over.

"I'm sorry sir. We can't accept these any longer. You will have to have a birth certificate, a marriage license or a divorce decree." I'm stunned. Now what? I don't have it in me to argue with a badge quite yet. So I just move towards the door.

Too bad my mom passed away while I was in prison. I don't have any other family and the friends I had when I went in were never really friends to begin with, and they were on the other side of the state. I have about 20 hours to get a life with \$24.00 to my name. I push through the big glass door and overhear a conversation,

“Yep, we are supposed to have 6 inches of the white stuff on the ground by morning.”

And suddenly, I get a glimpse of what the point of no return looks like. The wind picks up and howls through the open door.....

## **Chapter 2: My Name is Bob and it's my third day out of prison**

...I push through the door and head into the wind. It's too late to really get anything else done and I don't have a plan now that all this is falling apart. There's a knot forming in my belly that reaches clear up through my throat, and I pull the thin jacket around me and watch the sky darken. It's just so cold. My stomach growls like an unattended pet. I head back in the direction of the hotel; I have tonight to figure something out before everything unravels. I work my way back up Broadway and to the hotel. I notice the bright lights from the Arby's across the street, but I figure I'd better hold out as long as possible. I push through the door and into the lobby. There's an odor in here that I hadn't noticed before and I can't figure out what it is.

“Hey brother, you lookin' for a little sumpin sumpin to get you through the night?” says a tightly wound voice from a thin young man in the corner.

I recognize the drug dealer language and reply, “Nah, I'm cool.”

“Sure I can,” I say, “I've been welding since I was a little kid.”

“Go ahead with Mr. Thompson here.” I look over and see a slight man with a rat-face who tips his head towards the truck parked at the curb. I nod and make my way over to the old blue pick-up. I get in and Mr. Thompson slides into the driver's seat and heads on down Colfax.

“I only got about two hours worth of work for you,” Mr. Thompson says.

“Oh, that's fine,” I answer. “I'm just grateful to get work, sir.”

Mr. Thompson's normal crew consisted of one guy whose wife decided to have a baby that day. There was a job that had to be done by that afternoon, which was why he came looking for help.

“Don't have any other work for you after today, sorry,” says Mr. Thompson when he drops me back off at the day labor place.

It's three o'clock in the afternoon. I just added another \$15.00 to my bankroll, so at least I won't get kicked out tonight. I need to get down to the church and try to get some help with my ID and some bus tokens, but you have to be down there as early as you have to be at the day labor place. I might have to stay at the shelter if I have to choose between one and the other, and if I'm going to stand a chance at getting in the shelter,

I thought I'd be early, but apparently my version of early is different from the rest of the unemployed. I walk to the end of the line, glancing at the faces of the men who are waiting for the doors to open. I realize I see myself in their faces. Cold, hungry, and desperate, we stand to keep out of the wind. The sky starts to lighten and my stomach grumbles again.

Apparently, you have to know someone at the day labor place in order to go to work. The man in front of me starts to get impatient and grouchy. "Dammit," he says under his breath. "I just need to work enough to eat today and these clowns always give the jobs to their regulars first." Every 15 minutes or so the man in charge of the day labor place comes out, points at a couple of guys, and they go off and get in a truck. "Bet there's a good heater in that Chevy," says the dammit-man, and he shivers.

It's darn near 10 o'clock in the morning, I've been standing here for about 4 hours, and there are still 12 guys ahead of me waiting as well. I went in earlier and registered with the man at the front desk, told him what I could do and he told me to go wait in line. I'm starting to panic. What if I can't even get work at the day labor place?

"BOB!" my knees almost buckle.

I jog up. "Yes, boss."

"Bob, can you really weld?" asks the day labor boss.

"Well, if you change your mind, I'm in room two-oh-three." He tips his head in my direction, and turns to watch out the window, his fingers fidgeting at his drug-war, battle-scarred face, waiting for the next would-be customer to come through the door. He would usually be on the street plying his wares, but it's just too damn cold out.

I haven't gone down that far; I know what getting high means for me. I just got out and I don't want to go back. I start to head up the stairs.

"Hey, Bob, is that you?"

All my senses perk up and I feel my spine turn to Jell-O as I turn to look in the lobby. I don't want to be known. I recognize the face though no name comes to mind. It's a little dark in the lobby and the voice is slouched in a chair in the corner.

"It's me, Rick. Sterling, remember?"

Suddenly I remember the man and the face. He was my celly for a short time while I was in the prison at Sterling a couple of years ago. I recover. "Hey Rick, how ya doing?"

The man stands and stretches out his hand. "Probably 'bout the same as you. I'm here, broke, ain't got nothin' goin on."

"This ain't fun. I'm fixin' to run outta cash here any minute and I can't get an I.D. to get to work, even if I could find a job," I reply.

“Is this your first time out on parole?” Rick asks.

“Yeah, it is.”

“Shoot pal, this is my third go-around and since you’re a pretty good guy, and I know a thing or two about a thing or two that might be able to help you out...

He starts to rattle off names and places where I might go to get some help.

“Let me get a piece of paper and see if this girl at the front desk has a pen. I need to write all this down.”

*(“That’s the only pen I have, you better bring it back when you’re done,” snarls the not-so-lovely girl at the front desk.)*

Thanks man, this helps, I’ll see you around.” I shake Rick’s hand and I head upstairs.

“MY PEN!” screeches the front desk girl and I turn around and walk back to return it. I glance outside and notice that it’s dark. The neon light is on, and I can see the snow starting to flutter down. I climb the stairs and crawl into my room.

My alarm clock screams and rattles on the end table. It’s 4 A.M. I look outside and sure enough, there’s at least six inches of snow on the ground.

*(Can’t the weather guy be wrong in **my** favor, just once?)*

I turn on the light and look at the paper I had written on last night.

Rick told me I could go to the Day Labor place up on Colfax and they would take my DOC ID and let me work. There’s a church that I can go to that helps with birth certificates and I.D.s, and the Department of Corrections has a place called the John Inman Work and Family Center that helps with folks coming back in. Damn, I am hungry. I gotta get some food if I am going to be able to work all day. I make a half-pot of coffee, shave quickly, wash my face in the sink, and put on the same clothes I’ve had on for three days. I quietly walk out, shut the door and lock it. I don’t know if my little home will be my little home by the end of the day and I suddenly feel very lonely.

The girl downstairs tells me there’s a convenience store up on Colfax, and a 7-11 on 17<sup>th</sup> and Pennsylvania. I’m just trying to put something hot in my stomach, and I walk outside to that good morning blast of frigid Colorado wind. Twenty minutes later I am at the 7-11.

My ears, hands and feet are frozen. I go in and buy a \$2.00 burrito and heat it in the microwave while I try to shake off the cold. Twenty-two dollars left. I need to make at least \$3.00 to keep my home for one more night. The day labor joint is about eight blocks away. I peer through the darkness as I walk up Colfax and I see a line out the door. It’s only 5:30 in the morning and 26 degrees outside. The place is tucked into a storefront that looks abandoned except for a few plastic chairs inside.