

A *CorrectionHistory.Org* excerpts presentation of a highly-dedicated & highly-decorated retired Deputy Warden's memoir, covering his 22-year career in the NYC Dept. of Correction, served mostly on Rikers Island.

*"You can judge the character of a person by how they treat someone who can do nothing for them."*

*(Author Unknown)*



*I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.*

*(Matthew 25:36 NLV)*



THOMAS COPPOLINO



Author name, cited quotations and Xulon Press logo above appear on book's title page. Author photo, squib excerpt and ISBN # below appear on book back cover.



My name is Thomas Coppolino and I began my career in 1978 in the belly of the beast known as Rikers Island. In my 22 years working on Rikers Island my career was filled with many amazing stories which I will share with you. From my humorous encounters with Mark David Chapman (killer of John Lennon), to the escape of 4 notorious inmates from Rikers Island Hospital....



Open Book,  
 I hope you enjoy reading my story. The book shows a transformed life. The beginning shows some violent things that happened when I was a rookie in HAM but as the book progresses you will see how as I allowed the Lord to lead me, the amazing things that we were able to accomplish together. Read the whole book before making any judgement about it. I believe you will be pleasantly surprised. You have my permission to use excerpts from the book in any way you see fit.

Respectfully,  
 Thomas Coppolino

# Dedications

This book is dedicated to all the Correction Officers of all ranks, and civilian personnel (both active and retired) all over this country. Each of you goes to work day after day under very stressful conditions, in the jails and prisons throughout our nation. You are all very special people ... you

**Image box left:**  
 Author hand-written note to webmaster Tom McCarthy on the blank page facing the copyright notice page in the latter copy of the book.

**Image box below:**  
 A scanned image of the copyright page.

deserve gratitude of the people of this nation. . . .

I also dedicate this book to the thousands of volunteers who go into our jails and prisons in order to bring the Gospel to [those] who are incarcerated in our nation. You are all special people and you will be richly rewarded by our Lord for what you do.

I also want to dedicate this book to my wife and children for their love, patience and understanding throughout the years. Many times I had to be at work instead of at a family function and they rarely complained about it. They knew that there was a price to pay for my being a public servant. Thank you for believing in me in spite of my imperfections . . .

You were all always much more important to me than my career and I love you all much more than you can imagine. Please ensure future generations of our family keep this book as record of a very important period . . . .

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*Rikers Island—Freedom From Within*  
 by Thomas Coppolino Thomas Coppolino

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## Acknowledgments



I am eternally grateful to Jesus Christ for being my Lord and Savior and for loving me so much that He went to the cross for me personally, as He also did for you.

I want to thank my former pastors and dear friends, Fred and Judy Reinglas of SonRise Faith Church in Staten Island, NY. I grew up in the Lord under their guidance and direction. . . .

Thank you, Pastors Tom and Elizabeth McGuinness of “Jesus Is Lord” Church in Long Island NY, for sharing the “Good News” of the Gospel with me and my wife many years ago. These two anointed people led me to Jesus one eventful night over thirty years ago. I would also like to thank my current pastors for their awesome ministry and leadership at my home church. For the purpose of anonymity I am not stating your names, but please know that I love and respect you very much.

Thank you to my Uncle Vinny and Aunt Maryann for inviting us to the McGuinness home that eventful night. Thank you for your love and support throughout the years.

Thank you to my mom and dad and to my mother and father-in-law for being awesome parents, role models and prayer warriors for me and my family throughout the years . . . .

I owe a debt of gratitude to retired Deputy Warden-in-Command James Larkin who sat me down one day in Rikers Island Hospital and set me on a path to success in my career. There were several other bosses that I worked for who were great leaders and great friends and to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. Retired Chief Bruce Sullivan and retired Warden James Kane are two of these men. They were both outstanding leaders and they had the love and respect of their staff. I also want to thank retired Chief of Department Robert N. Davoren for his kindness to me during several critical times in my career.



I want to thank Jim Williams and Chuck Rigby for their friendship and partnership throughout the years as we shared the Gospel message to thousands of incarcerated men and women in the NYC Department of Correction.

**Note: Neither above church-related image appears in the book. They have been placed here by the webmaster as relevant to the text excerpted from its Acknowledgments page. The top left image is a composite of elements taken from a banner illustration on the SonRise Faith Church’s Facebook page. The lower right image is from the Jesus Is Lord Church’s Facebook page.**



## Introduction



. . . . I am sitting here looking around the den, and I see the plaques, along with numerous awards and certificates that are neatly hanging there. Each memento represents a part of my story and helps me realize that I had an amazing twenty-two year career with the Department of Correction (March 1978 - January 2000). Over the years, I have shared many stories with people about my experiences in correction; on many occasions, people have said to me, “You should write a book.” So that is exactly what I have done!

. . . . All of the stories are true and are described to my best recollection. I have decided to use fictitious names for most of the people in this book as well as for myself. As I look on my wall, I see a picture of my Academy class. I remember how we had a big three weeks of training before we were thrust into action on Rikers Island. . . . I vividly remember the eight men assigned with me to the NYC House of Detention for Men as I began my career. Six of us have since retired from the Department, one officer failed his probation, and the other one unfortunately passed away in recent years. It was a very sad day for me when I received that news. He and I had a special deal with each other during our physical training in the academy. He said to me, “I won’t throw you to the ground too hard, if you do the same for me.” We laughed about that often throughout the years. . . . We love and miss you, my friend John Marie.

*To the reader of this book:* . . . . [From] what I have written . . . . I pray that you will realize that, if you have a vision and a goal and work hard to attain that goal, you can reach it, or get very close to it, with God’s help. This book is filled with some graphic stories, some humorous . . . some amazing. . . I tell these true stories in order to illustrate to you the kind of person I was when I started my career. Then I hope you will see the transformation which occurred in my life as Jesus took hold of my heart and soul and changed my life dramatically.



**Note:** Author top row right. March 1978 Academy grads group photo image from CorrectionHistory website. In top-of-page den image, a wood-framed uncropped photo of the grads can be seen displayed on wall right.

## Chapter One

# Escape From Rikers Island



I am gazing at all the Correction memorabilia on my wall as my mind drifts back to years gone by...

Oh my Godhow in the world did they escape from that window!?! This can't be happening! How is it possible for four men to escape from the small opening in that window?

The captain told me that "they cut out one bar from the window frame, greased their bodies and wiggled their way out of the opening." I felt so disgusted and angry that this occurred in the jail where I was working. Thank God, we recaptured three out of the four inmates that same night.

The fourth inmate subsequently was found dead by the Verrazano Bridge several weeks after the escape. The details of this escape which occurred sometime early in the 1980's now penetrate my memory.

On the second floor of Rikers Island Hospital, there was one group of cells used as a security tier. This group of thirteen cells was used for inmates who had committed infractions of the rules and were on lock-in status. It was also used by the Department of Correction to house high-profile inmates, such as cop killers and other notorious inmates who came into our system.

MINUTES  
MARCH 5, 1980 MEETING  
BOARD OF CORRECTION

Peter Tufo chaired the meeting and Sherry Goldstein served as secretary.

The escape of February 24, 1980 was also discussed. Using a hacksaw blade, four inmates cut through the bars on the outer window in 1B of Rikers Island Hospital. Two of the four inmates turned themselves in to authorities after the plastic bags they wanted to use to float on burst in the water. A third was sighted by correction officers walking on the water's edge and was apprehended. The fourth, Peter J. Donahue, is still at large. It is believed that he greased himself with vaseline and floated across the river on a plastic garbage bag.

The use of correction officers armed with shot guns to patrol the perimeter of HDM was discussed. Mr. Smith reported that the officers, who had been trained by the FBI in the use of firearms five years ago, were armed with double 0 buck shot.

**Because of its relevancy, the webmaster has added to this presentation the above NYC Bd. of Correction March 1980 meeting minutes' reference to the inmates' February 24, 1980 escape and recapture.**

At one point, we had four notorious inmates housed on that tier for security reasons. These inmates were very observant; they studied the strengths and weaknesses of the officers who worked in that housing area. . . . These inmates took advantage . . . They managed to cut one bar from a window utilizing a

jeweler's saw. The four inmates then greased their bodies and escaped through that window. Several hours later a count was conducted and we discovered that four inmates were missing.

When we discovered the escape, all of Rikers Island went on lockdown status. All the facilities on Rikers Island dispatched teams of correction officers to "beat the bushes" and search for the inmates, hoping to catch them before they fled the island.



A few of the inmates made it to the water and attempted to swim across. As they were swimming, they discovered the very rough currents around Rikers Island. They obviously decided that it was better to be recaptured than to be dead. So

**The webmaster has added to this presentation the above Rikers Island Hospital image from the Correction History site. The image is from the website's presentation of the September 1980 NYC DOC report *JAILS FOR THE 80s*.**

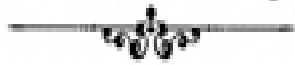
they swam back to the island. We captured three out of the four and we returned them to our facility. After interrogating the inmates involved, we found out that they had been cutting the bar on that window for some time. The inmates had managed to fill in the metal by using toothpaste with added coloring so that, when we made a visual inspection, we did not notice that the bar was cut.

When I saw the small space that they used to escape, it blew my mind. They cut out one bar; then they tied bed sheets together and lowered themselves to the ground. At that time, Rikers Island did not have double fences with razor ribbon surrounding the facilities like it does today. It was easy for these four to hit the water without being detected. That could not happen today because of the current security set-up of the Island.

We still had one very serious issue with which to contend. The investigation into the escape revealed that a jeweler's saw was used by one of the four inmates to cut through one of the metal bars on that window. A jeweler's saw is a thin piece of abrasive metal that looks like a small thin bracelet. We searched time and time again but could not find the jeweler's saw. We felt that the jeweler's saw was hidden somewhere in the facility, but we could not find it. I personally searched many areas of the jail looking for it. It was making me and many of my fellow officers crazy. I don't remember who came up with it, but one of my fellow officers thought of this great idea. . . .

## Chapter Two

# How It All Began



In the late 1970s, I was one of eighteen men who were graduated from New York City Department of Correction Training Academy which was located in the Old Tombs on White Street in Manhattan.

Just before graduation, the captain assigned to the training academy looked us in the eye and told us that we all looked “damn sharp” that day. Each of us was anxiously waiting to find out where we were going to be assigned. We all were very aware that there were some wild places where we could be assigned. One of the things we had heard a lot during our training was the statement: “Just hope that you don’t get assigned to HDM” (NYC House of Detention for Men).

We could hear a pin drop as the captain walked over to the podium. “The following correction officers have been assigned to the House of Detention for Men on Rikers Island,” he announced. He called out the names one by one and then the captain called my name. He said, “Thomas Coppolino—HDM!” I said, “Oh, my God.”

So, we all reported to our new commands as brand-spanking new “rookies” with shiny new shields and shiny new shoes. So that you can better understand what a rookie officer experienced walking into this environment, let me paint you a picture of what it was like to work in HDM in 1978.

Some of us rookies tried to get slick, so we each took our shiny new shield and lit a fire under it. We held our shield over the fire so that the carbon from the smoke would darken the shield and we would look like we had some time on the job. That would fool the inmates, right? Wrong!!! We didn’t fool anyone with that trick!

. . . . HDM was a jail consisting of all cells and no dormitory housing units. A typical cellblock had 240 cells. We had seven cellblocks set up in that manner. There were 120 cells on one side of the cellblock and 120 cells on the other side.

So now picture this: here comes this brand-new officer, Coppolino, who has lived in a nice middle class, 99 % white neighborhood all his life, and he is now assigned to Two Block, the B post. I look into the cellblock and see a large group of inmates hanging out on the gate trying to get the attention of the A post officer who is basically ignoring them. So guess where I am going to have to patrol? That’s right! I am behind the gate all by myself with 120 inmates.

The inmates see a new “jack” (rookie officer) coming in to work the cell block with his shiny new shield. You can see the gleam in their eyes. My heart is in my mouth, but I’m trying to act cool like I had time on the job, but the inmates know better. They are smirking at me and thinking to themselves: “Fresh meat. Let’s see how we can screw with his head.” I say to myself, “What the hell did I get myself into? I am crazy for taking this job.” I am standing with my back to the wall as the inmates move all around me.



**The above *CorrectionHistory.Org* image of the former House of Detention for Men (HDM), originally the Rikers Island Penitentiary, and currently the James A. Thomas Center (now closed) has been added to this book excerpts presentation because of its relevancy to the chapter’s text.**

I remember standing there and hearing a loud BANG! I am very startled as the inmates start laughing at me. The inmates have taken an empty milk carton, put it on the floor, and stepped hard on it, making a noise that sounded like a small caliber gunshot. They are very amused by that. I am not so amused.

Now as you are reading this, you are saying to yourself, “He must have had at least a night stick or something to protect himself, right?” Wrong!!” All I have is my memo book and my whistle!!!

So now you must be thinking, “He must have some kind of alarm on him, right?” Wrong again!!! The only thing I have going for me is my wit and my intelligence. OK, now you may be saying to yourself, “What will he do if they attack him or start a fight with him?”

With that picture in mind, let me tell you why and how we were able to survive. If one of us was to get assaulted or was fighting with an inmate, an alarm would sound and every officer who was not on a fixed post would respond to the area, ready and willing to do battle. All inmates who were involved in the incident would be dealt with severely.



**The above image, from the author’s Facebook transmission plugging his book, shows a portion of a cell block in the facility which has had various names through its decades: Rikers Island Penitentiary, HDM, and JATC. The facility is now closed.**

Imagine being an inmate try to squeeze into a cell that is closed in order to try to get away from the riot squad? The officers responding to an alarm were referred to as “the riot squad”

If you were an inmate in a housing area when the riot squad arrived on the scene, it was not the place you wanted to be. I will just leave it to your imagination what happened when the riot squad arrived on the scene. In those days, we had alarms sounding all day long, mostly for inmate-on-inmate fights, but we did

have occasional assaults on staff. Each day we had many incidents where we had to suit up (put on a helmet, riot vest, and baton) and respond to alarms. I quickly figured out why they said in the Academy, “You don’t want to be assigned to HDM.”

### **Rookie Tests, Trials, and Tribulations**

Looking back, I can vividly recall working the visit post for many hours a day. Rookies were given a variety of post assignments in order to learn every aspect of the job. One such post assignment was to strip search inmates when they returned to the jail from the visit area. We would line them up, five at a time, and have them strip completely naked. We made them run their fingers through their hair, open their mouths, and talk to make sure they were not hiding anything in their mouths.



We had them lift up their private parts so that we could look under them. We had them turn around to look at the bottom of their feet. We then made them squat and spread apart their buttocks. Numerous times balloons with drugs or razor blades would fall out of their anal cavities. I am not telling you this to gross you out; I just want you to get a feel for what it was like to be an officer in HDM or in any jail in our agency. . . .

One day I was assigned to a post in one of the housing areas and the inmates were told to lock in their cells for the afternoon count. Many of you have watched prison movies on television and you see a correction officer walking in a cellblock and all the inmates are locked into their cells. That is not even



**Added to this excerpts presentation, from the CorrectionHistory.Org website, the above image shows "the wheel" being operated to open or close cell doors.**

close to reflecting how it really was. We locked the inmate population out of their cells early each morning and only locked them back in during count times or if we had an emergency situation. They were locked back in for the night at 11 p.m. So, in actuality, they roamed around the housing area most of the day and night . . . .

Getting back to my story, the A post officer announced over the paging system the following: 'A and B side on the Lock in, A and B side on the Lock in' (that was the command for the inmates to go to their cells to be locked in). The inmates knew that there would be consequences if we locked the cells down and they were caught outside their cells.

I began to lock everyone in, but I was only able to lock in five of the six tiers because one row of inmates kept

jamming their cell doors so that I could not close them.

The way we used to open and close the cells on a tier was, as follows: There was a big wheel that you would have to spin to the left or right in order to open or close an inmate's cell.

Sometimes inmates would jam the cell door by putting some object in the path of the closing door so that it would not shut correctly. I was yelling at this group of inmates to stop messing with me, but all I was hearing was laughter. They were having fun messing with the rookie. After struggling for a few minutes, I finally was able to lock them in. I then said to them, "So you want to play games? Let's see who laughs last."

After the institutional count cleared, it was time to lock them back out of their cells to go into the dayroom in order to eat their evening meal. When we locked them back out of their cells, we did it one tier (20 cells) at a time so that they could go to the dayroom to be served their meal. I locked everyone else out, but I saved the troublemakers for last. When it came time to open their cells, I kept playing with the wheel saying, "Oh no, the cells won't open. They must be jammed. I guess I need to call maintenance."

I waited awhile until there was just a small amount of food left; then, I opened their cells, saying, "I guess the cells are working now." They got very little to eat that night. They were very mad and probably wanted to try and kick my butt, but they got what they deserved. They got "what their hand called for" as we used to say. I explained to you earlier what would have happened to them had they tried to put a hand on me. I never had trouble locking them in again and the word got around not to mess with me.

After a short time, the inmates got to know an officer's program and they would know how we each worked and basically what they could or couldn't do when we were working. Generally, if we were fair, we would not have that much trouble from the inmate population. As a matter of fact, if we were an officer the inmates respected, often times they would take care of unruly inmates for us. The troublemaker would end up getting his butt kicked, all his belongings would be packed up in a large blanket, and we would soon send him to the clinic for medical treatment.

When our shift was over, we would change into our street clothes and a bus would be waiting in front of the jail to take us to the employee parking area which was located on the other side of a control building.

We all had to exit the island through this control building. Only the brass (Captains, and above) were able to drive their cars directly to the facility. Nobody could leave and go home until the institutional count had cleared.

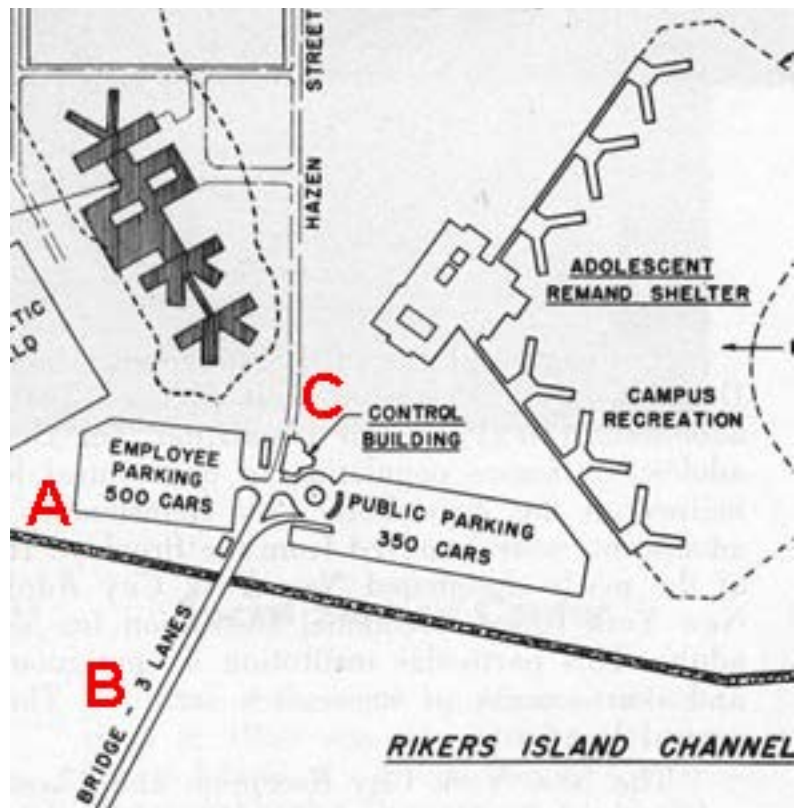
Occasionally, I would be changed out of my uniform and seated on the bus and the captain would come onto the bus and say, "Coppolino, get back inside! You are stuck for a double shift, go take post whatever." That was always a wonderful feeling!

### Working the Day Tour

So now, after approximately six months of working rotating shifts ("the wheel") in all different housing areas and numerous other areas of the jail, I was called to the personnel office to see the personnel captain. He asked me if I would consider working the day tour on a steady basis in housing area 1A. Very few people liked to work in that housing area and I will tell you why.

Housing area 1A did not have as many cells as the other housing areas, but it had a mixture of the following classification of inmates: mental observation, detoxification, homosexuals, and Punitive Segregation ("punitive seg" inmates are people who have disciplinary issues and lock out of their cells for only one hour per day). It was a wild place to work, but the brass left us alone. I thought about it and tried to figure out why the personnel captain asked me to consider this post. Then I figured it out.

I was working in 1A one day with one of the steady officers who obviously had some pull in that jail. One of the mental observation inmates was giving this officer a very hard time. He could have easily taken care of the situation himself, but I intervened and physically taught the inmate a lesson (read



A detail from one of the Rikers Island maps on the Correction History website illustrates the author's text references to the Control Building (C) and DOC employee parking (A) situated near the Rikers Island bridge (B).

between the lines!). Afterward, this officer said to me, “Coppolino, I like the way you handle yourself; would you like to work in this housing area steady?” I said, “Sure,” and a few days later I was offered the position by the personnel captain. I don’t know this for a fact, but I think this officer had something to do with my being offered the steady post . . . .

## Passing My One-Year Probation

I passed my one-year probation and then, after several more months had passed, I was once again called in to see my personnel captain. He told me that there was an opening in Rikers Island Hospital (RIH) for a correction officer. I had an uncle on the job who was a good friend of that personnel captain. My uncle worked in Rikers Island Hospital in the office. I thought about it for a little while before saying, “Yes.”



**Why chain link grill across the bars of this punitive segregation cell? The author’s “one more story about cellblock 1A” in the text on this page provides one answer. His experience was not unique.**

Going to RIH would mean going back on the wheel (rotating shifts) and losing my day tour, but I wisely agreed to the transfer. Several weeks later a teletype was issued announcing transfers in the Department and my name was on it to go from HDM to RIH. I remember seeing the teletype posted on the wall and someone wrote “What a hook” next to my name. A hook meant that you had someone looking out for you. RIH was a preferred assignment. . . .

I have one more story about cellblock 1A . . . . I was making a tour on the top tier in cellblock 1A where we housed the Punitive Segregation Inmates. As I was walking past one of the cells, an inmate attempted to grab me from behind from inside the cell. If he had grabbed me by the neck, he could have strangled me against the cell bars. I broke away, looked around, and saw that it was one of the inmates who were locked in their cells for making homemade knives. He was shouting at me, “I just wanted some water.”

I was livid and I began calling for the other officer to come up and open the cell so that I could beat him down. The officer working with me that day was a rookie and he would not come up and open the cell. Had it been one of the steady officers who worked with me, we would have beaten him down severely. I began screaming at this inmate, “You want water? I will give you water.” I ran downstairs, grabbed the fire extinguisher, and emptied it all over him and the contents of his cell. I was screaming obscenities at him and threatening to beat the hell out of him

When I think back on the situation, I know that it was better that we did not open the cell because I would have had a lot of explaining to do about opening the cell when the inmate was locked in. . . . Fighting with an inmate up on the third tier would not have been a smart thing to do. In many instances we acted on instinct and emotion as opposed to common sense.

The captain came to the area and convinced me to squash (not report) the incident. The fact that it was my last day at HDM made me agree not to report it. In the approximate year-and-a-half I spent in HDM, I learned the job better than in any other place I could have been assigned. I will always be grateful that I did my probation in that command. . . .

## Chapter Three

# Rikers Island Hospital



RIH was a much different facility than was HDM. The building consisted of seven floors, with only five floors that actually housed inmates. The second and third floors each had a total of fifty-two cells. The fourth, fifth, and sixth floors each consisted of fifty hospital beds in a dormitory setting. Medical staff was assigned to all five housing units, and we worked closely with them on a daily basis.

For each inmate feeding, the food wagons were brought up to each floor where inmate workers plated each meal and served it to the inmates — under our supervision, of course. I was pinching myself for weeks, thinking I was dreaming because of how easy it was to work there as opposed to working at HDM . . . There was not a bad post assignment in this whole jail.

### The Dangerous Assignments

The jail did have some potentially dangerous post assignments. We had our share of violent incidents but much less than at HDM. On the third floor, we housed mental observation inmates who could not be housed in a dorm setting. Many of these used to cut themselves with razors and mutilate their bodies in order to gain attention. They'd swallow batteries, small light bulbs, and other foreign objects . . . We had to keep a close watch on them in order to make sure they did not attempt committing suicide. On one occasion, an officer on the third floor was grabbed from behind and an inmate was choking him. Thank God another officer saw this happening and had to use a great deal of force in order to get the inmate to let go. That incident could have had fatal results . . .



**Rikers Island Hospital, which opened with the island's Penitentiary in the mid-1930s, eventually became the North Infirmary Command (NIC) above.**

Mark David Chapman was housed at RIH during his trial period. After the murder of Beatle John Lennon on Dec. 8, 1980, Chapman was sent to RIH and was housed on the second floor. All the other inmates on that tier were moved out, and the Department decided to implement a one-on-one watch on him.

This meant that each shift there would be one correction officer assigned to watch him on a one-on-one basis. His cell was located approximately in the middle of the tier (thirteen cells) and a television was set up right outside his cell. There were two chairs set up out by the television, one for him and one for the officer. On numerous occasions, I was assigned to watch him and we had some interesting conversations. I remember him saying to me, "I wonder who is going to play me in the movie." I always kept the conversations short and never asked him why he did it or anything along those lines.

One thing he used to do would drive me crazy. We would be watching a television show; he would leave something on for five to ten minute and then change the channel. After he did that over and over again, I finally yelled at him, "Will you stop doing that and leave one show on?" He said to me, "I'm sorry, Officer," and he left on one show.

That same evening I was coming to the end of a sixteen-hour shift and I was sitting in a comfortable chair. I had apparently dozed off a little and he tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Officer, you better wake up; the captain will be here soon." That was not one of my finer moments! In the summer of 1981 he was convicted of the murder of John Lennon and was sentenced to 25-years-to-life in New York State Prison.

## Chapter Four Beginning My Walk With God

During my first few years at RIH, I made the worst financial decision in my life. I was wiped out financially and was forced to take a second job for a short time. My wife was getting depressed over it and I just kept telling her to

trust me and I would get us out of the financial mess into which I had gotten us. It was also during this time, because of other things I did, that there was a great strain on our marriage. I thank God for my uncle who worked with me at RIH and knew what I was going through. He and his wife, my Aunt MaryAnn, had recently turned their hearts over to the Lord. They asked us if we wanted to go with them to the home of Pastors Tom and Elizabeth McGuinness for a marriage blessing.

We sat around this big table in their home when Pastors Tom and Elizabeth began to speak to us about the



**Michelangelo's *Creation of Adam* copy, believed painted by an inmate, was one of scenes photographed after JATC (ex-HDM, ex-Penitentiary) closed on Rikers Island. The image appears in a series on [CorrectionHistory.Org](http://CorrectionHistory.Org)**

love of Jesus and what He did in their lives. I sat there like a little sponge and soaked it all in. Several hours later he asked us all to join hands as he asked us if we would like to accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. He asked us to repeat what I now know to be the “sinners prayer.”

When he asked me if I wanted to accept Jesus into my heart and I said “yes,” I felt a wave of peace come over my body. I knew without a doubt that I had been touched by God and that my life would never be the same again. . . . I began to turn my life and my heart over to Him one day at a time. . . .

I went back to work a changed person. My friends thought that I had flipped out because I no longer wanted to listen to their dirty jokes or to look at dirty pictures. They didn't hear me cursing anymore and my whole approach to how I responded to alarms was different. You see, prior to being touched by God, when the alarm sounded I was always one of the first officers on the scene, eager to throw a punch or a kick, trying to knock someone out. I was known as someone who had heart and was not afraid to throw down. I was proud of that at

the time, but now my focus had changed. Now when an alarm rang, I responded with the intent to control a situation and make sure that nobody got hurt. If I had to throw a punch or two to make that happen or to help protect someone in a violent situation, I had no problem doing it. . . .My friends did not understand the “new” me and sometimes it was difficult to relate to them.

When I look back at that time in my life, I remember that when they were together as a group, my friends would make jokes at my expense, but that it didn't really bother me much because of my newly-found love for God. They never really crossed the line. It was just good-natured fun to them . . . . Some of my closer friends respected how I felt, and, when they had a problem in their lives, it was me that they came to for prayer. As long as we prayed in private, it was okay.

My prayer each day would be,

‘Lord, use me today to touch someone’s heart.  
Help me to let them know you are real.’”

Day after day, God honored that prayer. People would come to me with prayer requests for loved ones or situations in their lives. We would pray earnestly and get great results. I would hear wonderful testimonies as I still do today. God always got all the glory as the mighty healer and I was just an instrument . . . . I also let them know that they had the same access to God that I did and that Jesus loved them and wanted to be a part of their lives.

### **God Was Changing Me!**

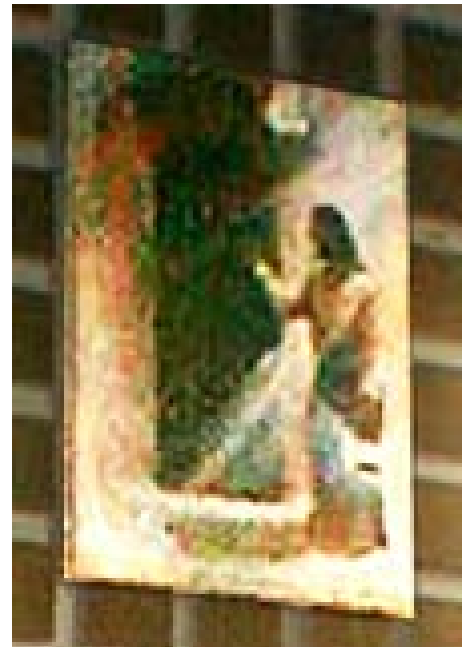
Here is one story to show you how God transformed my heart and my mind. There was a volunteer who used to take [public transit] from Brooklyn and travel two-and-a-half to three hours each way, once each week, to meet with a handful of inmates to share God's Word with them. Prior to my experience with God, I used to make fun of her. I used to say to her, "Don't you have anything better to do than to waste your time to come here for these guys? Why don't you go to some hospital and visit sick kids or something?" She would just smile at me, understanding that I was just being a jerk. I remember one day she came to the housing area where I was working to try to recruit some inmates to whom she could speak. I treated her in my usual mocking manner. As she was leaving, she turned to me and said, "Would you like to say the sinner's prayer?" I had no idea what she meant by that, but I said it anyway. Even

though I said the words and didn't really mean them, I believe God planted a seed in my heart that day.

It was a year or so later, after my experience with God, that she came to the jail one night and looked depressed . . . her daughter was giving her a hard time about coming to Rikers and that the last few times she had come, hardly anyone came to meet with her. She began to question whether or not she was doing the right thing. . . . I knew that, if she got the same results, she would probably not return.

I prayed, "Lord, if it is your will that she continue to come out here and share your Word with these men, then fill this room tonight." I then called the housing areas and asked the officers to announce that she was here. She had the biggest crowd that night that I had ever seen meet with her. Just before she started sharing with them, our eyes met and we both smiled at each other knowing that God had answered our prayers. I know some of you may be thinking to yourself that the inmates just wanted to be with and look at some woman. She was an older woman who had a lot of inner beauty! She did not concern herself with outward beauty; she let God shine through her countenance.

Let me tell you another story that happened during this period . . . . I was talking to some of the inmates on the fifth and sixth floors. Most of these inmates were wheelchair-bound and seemed very depressed. In many cases, they felt that they had done too many bad things in their lives and that God would not forgive them for their sins. . . . I went home that night and prayed, asking God to give me something to show these men that He loved them also. When I was a young child, I had had a talent for poetry so I said to God, "Lord, use the talents you gave me for your glory and help me to reach these men who feel hopeless." I sat down and God gave me a poem which I called "The Judgment." [In] the poem I wrote:



**A version, possibly by an inmate artist, of William Holman Hunt's famous "Light of the World" painting of Jesus knocking on a door without an outside handle is a scene photographed after JATC (ex-HDM, ex-Penitentiary) closed on Rikers Island. The scene series is on [CorrectionHistory.Org](http://CorrectionHistory.Org)**

I dreamt that I was locked in jail and Satan met me there.  
 He said to me, "Hello, my son, it's nice to see you here.  
 You're going to have such fun with me;  
 don't worry -- there's nothing to fear."  
 Satan had me in his grip and was tightening up the noose.  
 Then I fell to my knees and cried to Jesus. 'Lord, please come and cut me loose.  
 I've made a mess of everything; please come into my heart,  
 I'm sorry for the life I've led; please give me a new start.  
 Just give me one more chance, Lord; I promise not to fail."  
 Then I looked up and saw His face, and He said, "I'll pay your bail."  
 He took me out of darkness, and he brought me into light.  
 He made me a new creation, and then I knew I'd be all right.

The scene switched to the courtroom, with Satan as the D. A.  
 He said, "This man's a sinner and now he'll have to pay."  
 But Jesus was my lawyer, and He looked up at the throne.  
 He said, "Father, please forgive him, for he's my very own. . . .  
 Then Jesus said, "Wait, Father! Satan can't take him away.  
 I died for him on Calvary; his debt has already been paid."  
 The Father said, "You're right, Son; I can see his lamp is lit.  
 The evidence is all against him, but still I must acquit.  
 You've prepared for him a mansion; no longer shall he roam.  
 The verdict is NOT GUILTY All right, Son, take him home."



After writing this poem, I made arrangements to bring my church choir to Rikers Island Hospital to put on a service for the inmates. After we were finished singing and sharing God's love with them, I recited the poem. It had a profound effect . . . . One inmate drew me a wonderful picture of Jesus [see image left] and the inmates made me a card which many of them signed. . . The poem was copied by the chaplain and spread among the rest of the chaplains to use in their jails.

### **Praying with a Grieving Widow**

There was another time when a female officer who worked with us lost her husband suddenly and unexpectedly one night. She was very distraught about it and, when she finally returned to work after the funeral, she kept to herself and did not want to talk to anyone about it ... One particular day she was assigned to the sixth floor at the same time that I was assigned to the elevator post. I always carried a small pocket edition of the New Testament and Psalms in my pocket . . . .

I took this little Bible out and prayed the Lord use me that day to speak to her spirit. I prayed, "Lord, please give me something from your Word that will comfort her and give her peace in heart." I opened the Bible, looked down at the page and the first passage I saw was from Psalm 18, verse 6: "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even into His ears." . . . [Coincidence?] There are no coincidences with God.

**Chapter Five**  
**Correction Officers Emergency**  
**Response Team**

Sometime around 1980, prior to my spiritual awakening, I was accepted into a special unit that was newly formed in the Department of Correction. It was called the Correction Officers Emergency Response Team (C.E.R.T). Except for a small group of officers who were permanently assigned to this unit, it was made up of officers and superior officers from all over the department who special training and were on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. We carried pagers with us at all times, as well as emergency equipment in our cars, so that we could respond quickly to an emergency situation in one of the jails. We received special training, usually at Harts Island in the Bronx . . . .

One time we had a training exercise in which a female officer was posing as a hostage. My squad was told to knock down a wooden barricade so that we could rescue her. I was the first officer in line to hit the barricade as hard as I could in order to knock it down. As I ran into this wooden barricade, a nail was sticking out of the wood and impaled my left palm, almost going through to the other side. I received some first aid and then finished the day's training, going back to Rikers Island to finish working a double shift. I did not call in sick at any time for this incident.



Image from [CorrectionHistory.Org](http://CorrectionHistory.Org)

On most occasions, we responded to different facilities on Rikers Island and the borough jails to conduct [surprise] searches in an attempt to reduce significantly the amount of weapons and drugs in the jails. On one occasion, we responded to one of the borough jails which had had a rash of assaults on staff. This was the first time we had gone to this jail for a search. We wore blue jumpsuits as opposed to the regular uniforms . . . the inmates were laughing, saying "Look at those clowns in those jumpsuits."

. . . . We went from one floor to the next, searching the whole jail and meeting a great deal of resistance. So, naturally, we had no choice but to use appropriate and reasonable force to accomplish our mission. Quite a few inmates ended up in the hospital that day and . . . the inmates were not laughing at us anymore. . . . that jail became safer for both inmates and staff as a result of that mission. . . .

### **Transporting High Security, Notorious Inmates**

We also were utilized to transport high-security, notorious inmates to and from court or a hospital. . . . it was a harrowing experience. For security reasons, I will not reveal all the details of how we conducted this particular transport, but I will share my small part in it. I was one of several officers who rode in a van with the purpose of providing firepower should our convoy encounter any problems. We were trying to prevent an escape should we be ambushed by people trying to help the inmate escape.

We traveled through the streets and highways at high speeds with our horns and sirens blaring so we could get through without stopping. We were all carrying loaded shotguns. If the vehicle had to stop for any period of time, we each flung open the doors, jumped out of the van as we cocked the shotguns, until we were called back to continue the drive. It was very stressful, to say the least. I remained in the unit about three years and then had to resign because my commanding officer at RIH told me that, if I remained in CERT, I would lose my steady post at RIH. I had a critical assignment at RIH and the Deputy Warden felt that CERT was utilizing me too often for training and call-outs.



## Chapter Seven

### My Success Began with an Ice Cream Truck

[Because] I had made a very bad financial decision that had a devastating effect on my finances for a couple of years, I actually took a second job for a while working security at Shea Stadium for Met and Jet games and at Madison Square Garden for concerts and other events. . . .one night the ice cream truck arrived on our block with bells ringing and

music playing. Angelo Campanella owned this ice cream truck and everyone in the neighborhood called him Chubby. My [7 year old] daughter ran over to me yelling, “Daddy, Daddy, Chubby is here! Can we have some ice cream?!” I put my hand in my pocket and I had no money. I knew that my wife had no money either on that day. Angelo was a wonderful and caring man and he sometimes gave us ice cream for free. I am sure he would have given us ice cream for free that day if I told him that I had no money, but my pride got in the way.



**A grayscale version of the above color image appears in the printed book with caption “Chubby’s Ice Cream Truck. Maria Campenella .” Color version is from the author’s Facebook promo for the book.**

As a matter of fact, his daughter Maria Carnpanella still operates that same ice cream truck and she is well-known as “Maria the Ice Cream Girl” on the streets of Brooklyn. As a matter of fact, on October 5, 2014, a street in Brooklyn was renamed in “Chubby’s” honor. Twenty first avenue and seventy seventh street is now known as Angelo “Chubby” Campanella Way.

. . . . I said to my daughter, “No, sweetheart, you can’t have ice cream today because I have no money. The disappointed look on her face was like a knife in my heart. I went inside my house that night and cried like a baby. It ended up being a turning point in my life. I spoke to God and asked Him to get me through this

hard time, telling Him that I would do whatever it took never to be in a situation like that again.

Shortly after this happened, I decided that I would make it my business to have a successful career and eventually retire as a warden. I had heard that sometime in the following year there would be a promotional test for captain. I went to work and I spoke to Deputy Warden James Larkin who was the commanding officer at RIH at the time. I said to him, “Tell me something, boss, why are you sitting in that chair today? Please tell me what do I have to do to get where you are ?“ He said to me, “Do you really want to know?” I said, “Yes, sir, I do.”

I don’t remember the exact words that he said to me, but they were something along these lines: “You need to get hold of all the updated departmental information which you need to study for this test. This includes the rules and regulations, minimum standards, consent decrees, departmental memorandums and orders, etc. You need to study it all over and over again with urgency. You need to attend Captain’s Classes and totally engross yourself in the whole studying process.”

. . . . He also was a Christian man and told me to keep God involved in my studies. He told me not to neglect my family and to ask my wife to allow me the time to be by myself for this next year in order to

prepare for this test. He said it would pay off for the rest of my life. He told me that, when the time came to take the test, I would then be able to walk into the test with all the confidence in the world, knowing that I would not only pass the test but I would also be at the top of the list.

Several years before this, I had taken the captain's test and had scored a 68, with 70 being a passing score. I had not applied myself that time and the results showed this. This time, though, I took the advice I was given by this wonderful man and I followed it to the letter. I added a component to what he told me that I



**The above photo of Deputy Warden James Larkin, right, who is mentioned prominently in this chapter, appeared in the March 1983 NYC DOC employee newsletter with this caption: "DEPUTY WARDEN James Larkin, rear, is cited in recent Departmental ceremony on Rikers Island for efforts in founding Employee Assistance Program. Warden Thomas Murray reads citation." The story, photo, and caption appear on *CorrectionHistory.Org***

believe made me even more successful. . . . When I first began to read through all the material I listed above, I spoke the words audibly into an audio cassette player and recorded each session. By the time, I had read through all the material, I had amassed over twenty two cassette tapes. After that, each time I was in my car driving back and forth to work or wherever, I listened to the information. . . .

. . . . Each time before I would prepare to study, I [also] would begin by quoting the scriptures, which are God's promises to us . . . . You see, I made Jesus a part of whatever I was doing. . . . It was the night before the test . . . To my dismay, I could not sleep and I twisted and

turned in bed for hours . . . . I arrived at the classroom and prayed very hard for God to help me stay awake and do well on the test. I took the test, and I instantly knew that I did very well because the answers were jumping off the page at me.

After the test, we were able to take our answers home with us. . . .when the real answer key finally came out. I only got two questions wrong. . . . When the actual captains' list finally did come out, I was number 10 on the list. So my prediction of being in the top ten did come to fruition! But let me tell you, it was no accident that I did so well. I followed the advice of a successful man who had already achieved what I wanted to achieve. I worked very hard to be at the top of that list and it paid dividends for the rest of my career. Thank you very much, retired Deputy Warden James Larkin!

Those of you who are in similar situations in your lives should learn a lesson from my experience. Find someone who is where you want to be in your life and ask that person how he/she got to be in that position. If it is possible, do what he/she did. Work very hard and keep God involved every step of the way. There is no reason why you can't achieve the same goal. Successful people set goals, develop a plan of action, and work very hard to achieve these goals.

## Chapter Eight Promotion to Captain



In July of 1987, I was promoted to Captain and assigned to the Correctional Institution for Men (CJFM) on Riker's Island. This facility housed inmates who were sentenced to one year or less. CJFM was also a large facility. It consisted of cell, dormitory, and modular housing areas. When I was first assigned there in

1987, there were approximately 3000 inmates being housed there. A few years later, due to a court decision (The Fisher Case), the census dropped significantly.

When we had completed our training for captain, five of us were assigned to CJFM. We had a bunch of characters in this group, me being one of them. I remember that on the first day or two of being new captains, two of my fellow captains wound up getting involved in a physical altercation with inmates in the lower corridor of the building. In those days predatory inmates would roam the lower corridor and would attack inmates coming out of the commissary to steal their goods. Two of my fellow new captains,



A grayscale version of the above color image appears in the printed book with caption "Promotion to Captain". Color version is from the author's Facebook promo for the book. Photo was taken in front of his front door in Brooklyn that day.

Joey and David, had heard this and were determined to stop this nonsense from happening. They decided to patrol that area and, when they saw inmates trying to rip off others, they got physical with them.

One of the Assistant Deputy Wardens (ADWs) chastised them for getting physical and reminded them that they were no longer correction officers; they were supervisors. Captain Joey took off his shield and told the ADW, "Here—keep it! I am not taking this crap." We talked Captain Joey into remaining as a captain and he ended up being one of the best captains that had ever been assigned to that command. He and his partner earned the nickname "Killer Bees."

. . . . As captains, one of our responsibilities was to be an investigator. Whenever an incident occurred in one of our areas of responsibility, we had to conduct an investigation . . . . we had to gather evidence, take statements from inmates, gather reports from all staff who were involved in or were witness to the incident, gather medical information, and then tie it all together and conclude what had transpired. I remember one of the first incidents I had to investigate was an inmate slashing. I was called to the housing area and, when I arrived, I saw an inmate with his

face cut open. It was pretty gruesome. I made sure the inmate received immediate medical attention, and then I conducted my investigation.

I must have done an excellent job with this investigation because at the next staff meeting the commanding officer Warden Gavin told me in front of everyone at the meeting something like this: "Don't get a swelled head, Coppolino, but that was a very good investigation you did on inmate Smith." Warden Gavin was a good boss and was well-respected . . . . Soon afterward he was promoted to Division

Chief and we had a new commanding officer — Warden Scully. I had seen Warden Scully from time to time years before when we were both members of the Correction Officers Emergency Response Team (CERT), but we really did not know each other. I was really surprised when one day I was in the corridor at CIFM and Warden Scully walked over and said to me, “One day soon you will be one of my key people here” . . . .

After working approximately six months as a housing area captain, I became one of the key captains for Warden Scully, just as he had told me I would be. I also worked closely with Captain Philips on many important projects which were taking place and were essential in changing the face of CIFM. Projects,



such as integrating the Division of Parole into CIFM in our command and integrating the High Impact Incarceration Program into CIFM . . . . We also were tasked with getting the facility into compliance with a federal court order (The Fisher Case) which dealt with many issues.

I was the inmate assignment captain tasked with making sure that inmates were properly housed in the correct housing areas according to their classification. This was an enormous task and we had to meet a strict deadline. We did an excellent job in completing that mission. As a result, Captain Philips, Captain Rafaldo, and I all received departmental recognition for our work in getting the jail into compliance with the court order.

**The webmaster has added to this presentation the above Correction Institution for Men (CIFM) image from the Correction History site. The image is from the website's presentation of the September 1980 NYC DOC report *JAILS FOR THE 80s*.**

Later on, I also became the administrative captain and learned a great deal about the administrative component of the jail, a fact which served me well later in my career when I became a deputy warden. Warden Scully was the best warden I ever worked for . . . . He quickly learned the strengths and weaknesses of his captains, putting us in the right job assignments based on our abilities. He trusted us to do the right thing and did not over-manage. He allowed us to make our mistakes and learn from them without coming down too hard on us.

I remember on one occasion, a housing area was acting up pretty badly. I was one of a group of captains who supervised the officers as we conducted a search of the area. The officers were angry and they really went too far during the search, destroying many of the inmates' belongings. When the Security Deputy Warden found out about it, he was very angry at the captains for allowing the situation to get out of hand. He conducted an investigation and decided to write all the captains up on charges.

When I look back on it, he was right and we did let the situation get out of hand. We did not use force on anyone and nobody got hurt, but we were wrong. Warden Scully told the Security DW to give him all the write-ups and he would handle the situation. The warden called us all into his office as a group and chastised us for letting the situation get out of hand. Instead of serving us these charges, he held them in his desk and told us that, if there were ever a repeat performance, the charges would be submitted as well as any further action that needed to be brought against us. Warden Scully knew that we were doing a great job for him and he did not want to take the heart out of us by submitting the charges.

. . . . I remember working hand-and-hand with Captain Philips, who was a brilliant captain and the warden's right-hand man. Captain Philips and I spent many hours putting together operational plans and presentations for the warden as he led our jail in many accomplishments. . . . We had three awesome correction officers working for us in our administration office. Officers Nadene Dunnivant, Sagio, and Rosco spent countless hours with us putting together programs which Warden Scully presented to the senior staff from Central office . . . .

CIFM had now become an excellent command. We even won the Unit Citation which was given to the best-run facility in the Department under Warden Scully and Chief Gavin. . . . As you can imagine when you work closely with a group of men and women on a day-to-day basis in a law enforcement setting, you form a special bond with them. One of the reasons I believe that CIFM became such an efficiently-run facility was the fact that we had steady personnel assigned to each shift. The jail ran primarily on three shifts: 11 p.m. to 7 a.m., 7 a.m. to 3 p.m., and 3 p.m. to 11 p.m.



**The above image of Rikers' Correctional Institution for Men, renamed the Eric M. Taylor Center in 2000 to honor a retired Chief of Dept., is added here from *CorrectionHistory.Org***

Each tour ran efficiently but I must recognize the fact that the 11-7 tour had a great crew of captains led by an awesome ADW named Danico . . . . This past year I attended a reunion of people from CIFM and, when ADW Danico arrived, we could see the men and women light up and greet him with such great affection, something that he so justly deserved. . . .

### **The 7 to 3 Tour**

The other group of special officers and captains I want to talk about is the 7 to 3 tour. We had a group of captains that were a bunch of characters. There were five or six of us who were very close and used to play jokes on each other all the time. We all worked very hard and got the job done, but we also found the time to do some crazy things to each other. . . .

One time Captain Edwaldo played a joke on me also. I used to park my car pretty close to the front of the building. One day I went outside and walked over to my car, only to realize that there was a cinder block wall several feet high blocking my car from getting out of the spot. I don't remember what I did to him to deserve that, but I am sure I deserved it. No big deal—I just got some inmate workers to remove the block.

. . . . We had a Captain Sasco who was a great guy and worked with us for several years. He was quite a character and I liked him and respected him very much. When he worked with us, he worked the toughest post we had for a captain which was the North Side. The North Side housed many of the worst inmates in the jail. He took no nonsense from any of them and often got involved in physical altercations. I have a lot of respect for him for many reasons, such as the following. One year when my children were small, I was scheduled to work on Christmas Day.

Captain Sasco knew that I was upset and said to me: "I will switch days off with you so you can be with your wife and kids for Christmas. I have no family to spend it with." You see, one of the drawbacks to working in the Department of Correction is that many times in a person's career he will be forced to work weekends and holidays and miss many family functions. I will never forget that kindness . . . .

As I said before, I was quite a character in those days. Let me tell you about my famous “Jail House Rap Song.” Every day in CIFM we would conduct a search in one or more of the housing areas of the facility immediately after the 7 a.m. roll call was completed. When we entered a dormitory housing area to conduct the search, we would get all the inmates out of their beds and line them up in two rows facing the red door in the back of the housing area. The Security Captain would then give the inmates a speech about how we would be conducting the search and what they were to expect. I heard this speech over and over again day after day . . . . The security captain would tell them:

“There will be no talking and no smoking during the search. You will get strip-searched in the bathroom and then you go back to your bed. We will then search your bed, locker, and all your belongings. If you interrupt with the search, you will be removed from the area.” One day right before a search I took a little notebook out of my pocket and started writing in it. The tour commander ADW Jamaica saw me writing in my notebook and said to me in his Jamaican accent, “Captain Coppolino, what are you doing?” I said to him, “I am writing a rap song for the search, boss.” He walked away scratching his head.

It took me about an hour to write this crazy song. I then performed this rap for some of the other Captains and they loved it. I spoke to Captain David, one of the “Killer Bees”, and we practiced reciting it several times. The following morning we went into housing area 6 Main which was an area where we kept many of the troublemakers in the jail. We got all the inmates out of their beds and put them into the dayroom. Many of them had just awakened and they were wondering what was going on. I said to them: “Captain David and I have just finished training on interpersonal skills and we would like to share it all with you today.”

The officers and inmates are looking at us with strange looks on their faces. Captain David and I started to recite the following while swaying back and forth.

Now listen everybody, this ain't no joke  
We are here for a search, no rap, no smoke  
You get out of bed and you face the red door  
If you give us any trouble, you'll be on the floor  
You get searched in the bathroom; then you go to your bed  
If you come out the wrong time, you'll get smacked in the head  
When we search your bed, don't try to act tough  
And if we find any contraband, just pack your stuff  
When were done with the search, you sit down again  
If you talk or get up, you'll be in the pen  
In the pen will be a mean Italiano  
And when he is done with your fingers, you'll never play the piano  
So listen everybody and take my advice  
Just comply with the rules and we'll try to be nice.

After we are finished, we just walked out of the housing area as the inmates and the officers remained with a stunned look on their faces, their mouths open. Seeing the look on their faces was priceless. I remember doing it again on an actual search and it was pretty humorous. For weeks afterward, I heard inmates in the corridors say to each other, “Look! There is that rapping captain.” The officers loved it, and years later I found out from an officer that she was a rookie on her first search when I recited it during the actual search. I was told that, when she went home that night, she told her mom, “Hey mom, this job is pretty cool! The Captains do rap songs on the search too funny!”

## Serving Others

One of the housing areas we had on the North side of CIFM was One Main. This housing area was used for inmates who were convalescing after a medical procedure. It was also used to house inmates sentenced to very short sentences who were famous celebrities. . . . In [Chapter Four], I told you about my writing a poem called “The Judgment” and reading it to the inmates who were very touched by it. One particular day I was making a tour of inspection in One Main when I saw a piece of paper hanging on a concrete post in the housing area. As I walked closer to it, I realized that it was a copy of my poem “The Judgment” written three or four years prior to that day. I looked down and saw an inmate lying in bed. There was a wheelchair next to his bed. He was obviously one of the inmates who had been at RIH when I read the poem to the group. We looked at each other, he looked at my name tag, and we just smiled at each other. No words needed to be spoken between us. That was a confirmation to me that my poem had stood the test of time and was still blessing people many years after I wrote it. It is so awesome to see how God can use a person when he opens his heart to Him and gives his talents to Him in order to glorify God.



**Graphic pen sketch of  
Fresh Start program  
founder & director  
Barbara Margolis, who  
also was founding  
member of group that  
launched the website  
*CorrectionHistory.Org***

CIFM had many excellent programs for inmates. One of the programs we had was called the Fresh Start Program which was a culinary arts program. In this program a group of inmates was selected to participate in a program during which famous chefs would come to CIFM in order to teach culinary arts to these chosen inmates. Programs such as these were put into place so that some inmates would be able to leave our facility to get a job instead of returning to society just to go back to a life of crime. Each time a group would complete its training we would have a graduation ceremony and invite the inmates’ families to share in their accomplishment.

I remember that one time we took a group of inmates in this program to a restaurant in NYC, so that they could observe an actual meal being prepared in a kitchen by culinary staff. That was the first time anyone had ever done anything like that in the history of the department. We took a big risk that day but everything went like clockwork and we returned to Rikers with no issues at all. I applaud people like Barbara Margolis, the program director, who try to make a difference in people’s lives. I also applaud the open-

mined chiefs, wardens and program staff who allow programs like this to take place.

## The Annual Christmas Show

Another thing I remember very well was our annual Christmas show at CIFM. Inmates and correctional staff would perform skits, sing songs, and provide entertainment for the staff and our families. We were allowed to bring our families to CIFM on that occasion to see the show. A good meal would be provided for us all, and our families were given a tour of certain areas of the facility. On several occasions, I dressed as Santa for the children of the staff. Each year, I would also perform a Christian song and remind everyone that Jesus was the reason for the season. I reminded all to take time out of their busy lives to reflect upon the real reason we celebrate Christmas. It is the birth of our Lord and Savior, and we should make it more about Jesus than about Santa.

. . . . when you step out and do things for Christ, such as sharing a word, singing a song, saying a prayer, etc., you never know whose life you will touch. . . .

## Chapter Nine Correction Officers for Christ

In the mid-1980s, I was contacted by a correction officer from AMKC named William Green. He told me that he, Mark Robinson, and Jerry Greene had come up with an idea to start a group called

“Correction Officers for Christ.” He told me that the NYC Police Department had a group called “Cops for Christ” who had been doing wonderful things in the NYPD.

He asked me if I wanted to join him and the others in establishing this group. I was happy to be a part of this undertaking. Shortly after I joined the group, a wonderful man of God named Harrison Stukes became an integral part of our team. We recruited more Christian officers and formed our first executive board. Some other names that come to my mind and whom I remember well are Ralph Raia, Salvatore Diaz and Freda Holmes.



**Correction Officers for Christ members display their origination's banner during various public events such as parades and city prayer walks as well as at religious services and monthly meetings.**

We began to meet and talk about what we were going to do, and what we were going to try to accomplish. We received some guidance from “Cops for Christ” and then we put together a document

which became our bylaws. We asked for a meeting with Departmental officials and presented them with our vision.

We were subsequently recognized as a fraternal organization of the department.

We then formed our first executive and advisory board. It was our desire to provide a place for correction staff of all ranks, including civilian staff, to be able to get together both on and off the job and also in the communities, to worship together, and to fellowship with each other.

We had awesome advisors in COFC. Warden William Cogdell and Deputy Warden Willie Nixon were two of them. They were wonderful men of God and were a source of inspiration and guidance for us. Chaplain Winston Cato was also a great help to us as we went about touching lives for Christ. I am sad to say that Warden Cogdell has gone home to be with the Lord, but our loss was Heaven's gain.

I vividly remember our going as a group to many churches throughout the five boroughs. We had prearranged with the pastors of these churches for them to introduce us and then we would take over the service. We went to these services in our full-dress uniform. The service usually began with our president, Correction Officer Green, speaking to the congregation. He would explain to them who we were and what we were all about. He then would introduce me and I would come on stage and sing this wonderfully moving song that always brought everyone to their feet. They would dance in the aisles and praise God with a great deal of exuberance.





**Correction Officers for Christ**  
President: Yvette Hamilton  
Vice President: Steven Bell  
2d Vice President: George Davis

Most of the churches we went to were in Harlem, Bedford Stuyvesant, and the South Bronx. Many of the people who attended these churches did not hold police or correction officers in high regard because of their distrust of law enforcement. It was our hope to change their mindset and to get them to realize that all law enforcement officers were not bad people.

After I sang, some of us gave testimony and then one of us would preach the Word. We had several ministers in the group who were well able to preach a wonderful message to these congregations. At the end of the service, a group of us would invite people to come up and pray with us, and they did. I believe that God broke down many walls during these services, and people began to realize that something good was happening in the Department of Correction.

The Correction Department also allowed us to have special services for staff and inmates in many of the jails in our system. Bible studies were allowed to take place in the jails on a weekly basis. Soon it became

much easier for staff, both uniform and civilian, to express openly their love for God and not to feel that they would be ridiculed for that love.



**By careful scheduling pre-arrangements, Correction Officers for Christ conduct periodic prayer services at DOC facilities.**

We had a great run for along time and COFC is still operating in the Department. The current president is Yvette Hamilton. They still have monthly meetings and special events throughout the year.

I am proud to say that I was one of the pioneers in making this a reality. It was Correction Officer William Green’s vision, but I, along with several other special men and women, helped make it a reality.

I would be remiss if I did not also thank former Correction Commissioner Catherine Abate and former DOC Office of Public Information director Thomas McCarthy for their help in the initial success of our organization. Catherine Abate has recently gone home to be with the Lord and we were all greatly saddened by that news. Tom McCarthy is still going strong and is very much a part of correction history.

## Chapter Ten Promotion to Assistant Deputy Warden (ADW)

In December, 1989, I was promoted to ADW. There were 11 of us who were promoted at that time and were sent to the Training Academy for several weeks for training to become an ADW. The ADW position is a significant rank in the capacity of tour

commanders in a jail. Some ADWs are in charge of special units. An ADW, or tour commander, is in charge of each tour. Once the warden and deputy wardens leave the facility for the day, the ADW is the highest-ranking officer and is in charge of the jail. It is also the last rank [up the NYC Correction chain of command] for which successfully passing a Civil Service Exam is required for promotion . . .

After my training was over, I was promoted and assigned to the Rose M. Singer Center (RMSC) on Rikers Island. RMSC was a facility that housed all female inmates. This was a new experience for me. I had never worked with female inmates before. I found it very easy to work with the women because of the



Rose M. Singer Center image from *CorrectionHistory.Org* website.

type of personality I have. I could see how some hard-headed, inflexible person would find it hard to work there. RMSC consisted of the main facility on Riker's Island and two satellite commands, one on Wards Island in the Bronx and the other called Forbell located on the Brooklyn and Queens border.

There is one story I will never forget about RMSC. It was New Year's Eve in 1989 . . . . During the 3 to 11 tour, I gathered all the staff together and told them that, since it was New

Year's Eve, I would let the inmates see the ball drop at midnight instead of locking them in at 11 p.m. I told my officers to give them a few minutes to wish each other a "Happy New Year" and then to lock them in. We had roll call at 11 p.m. and I told the midnight tour officers and captains the same thing. Shortly after midnight, the captains reported to me that in several housing areas none of the inmates had locked in. I said to myself, "Oh boy, what did I do?" I gathered my captains and we went from one housing area to the next to make sure everyone locked in. When we arrived at one housing area, the women were running around the housing area, being all emotional, and hugging each other. This was certainly a time when I thank God that He gave me His wisdom and that I was wise enough to be flexible.

All the captains and officers were now looking at me for guidance. I started talking to the inmates. One inmate told me something that I had never heard before: "All we want is for a man to step in our cells and then we will lock in." So since I was standing next to her cell, I looked around and tried to figure out if this were some kind of trick . . . .

I decided to step one foot into her cell and immediately back. I stepped back out and she ran into her cell and closed her cell door. I then told my captains to do the same thing. Each time they stepped into a cell and right back out, the inmate would go right into her cell. A few minutes later all the inmates were locked in. We eventually had all the inmates locked in without having to use force of any kind. I found

out later that there was a tradition that it was good luck for a woman if a man were the first person to enter her home in a New Year and the cell was each inmate's home at that time. You can't make this up!

. . . . I worked in the main building for several more months, and then I was assigned to Forbell. Forbell housed approximately 300 inmates and it was a great place to work. That jail was even easier than Rikers Island Hospital . . . .

While working at Forbell, I used to share my faith often with whoever wanted to hear about God. I was never the type to shove my beliefs down anyone's throat, but, if an opportunity presented itself, I would share from my heart. There was a female Captain who worked with me who was searching for God. We had many conversations together about the love of Jesus and about all the amazing things Jesus did for me in my life.



**The 338 Forbell Street three-story, red-brick building, which formerly was operated as a NYC DOC women inmates jail, now serves as a shelter for homeless men.**

Several years later we were at a meeting with people from

Correction Officers for Christ. Captain Clarkson was speaking to the group . . . . While giving her testimony, she stated it was my sharing God's love with her that led her to her relationship with Christ.

. . . . All of you out there who have experienced God's love in your life must never be afraid or ashamed to share it with someone who is open to hearing about our awesome Lord. It could make a world of difference in someone's life and it could even determine where they will spend eternity.

To those of you who may be reading this book [and] may not have a relationship with Jesus Christ, let me take this opportunity to let you know that He has proven to me that He is real, over and over again.

That is one of the reasons I am writing this book.

*If you can read all these stories and believe that very thing that happened to me was all just a coincidence, I hope you will reconsider such thoughts. Jesus Christ is alive! He is seated at the right hand of the Father and He wants to have a relationship with you. If you would just humble yourself and reach out to Him, He will fill a void in your life and give you a peace that surpasses all understanding.*

## Chapter Twelve

# The High Impact Incarceration Program

I worked as the [CIFM] warden's executive assistant for several years, but then a new opportunity presented itself to me and I felt a

tug on my heart to pursue it. I had a great job as an ADW which was a very low risk and powerful position that many people would have loved to have. Many people thought I was crazy to want to give that up to do something different.

In October of 1990, the Department began a program called the High Impact Incarceration Program (HIIP). HIIP was the first urban inmate boot camp program in our nation. HIIP was a 60-day program for city-sentenced inmates and technical parole violators. During a typical day in the program, inmate participants would wake up at 4:45 a.m., followed by military marching drills, educational and counseling sessions with both individual and group counseling, and work details either on Rikers Island or in the different boroughs of the city, depending on what phase of the program they were in at that point.

We used to coordinate with the borough presidents to see where we could clean highways, do graffiti



removal, clean benches, and perform other such projects for our city. This was the part of the program where the participant would do something positive in order to give back to society. Uniformed personnel worked closely with civilian counselors in each housing area to accomplish this mission.

The program was designed to allow inmates to take responsibility for the crimes they had committed and to give them an opportunity to change their lives. The HIIP compound was located on a piece of land outside the

main jail directly behind the recreation yard. The HIIP compound had four housing units consisting of approximately 200 inmates, a dining structure, and an administrative trailer. The inmates were housed in Sprung Structures, which are rigid aluminum frames covered by a heavy duty plastic fabric.

Warden Scully was given the task to integrate this program into CIFM. He then asked Captain Philips and me to develop an operational plan for that purpose. Our program was to be modeled after the Shock Incarceration Programs which were in operation in the New York State prison system. We visited a NY State Shock Incarceration program in Lakewood, NY to see how it actually operates. We spoke with the warden and staff to get their input before writing our operational plan. Their program lasted six months, as opposed to ours which would only be two months long. It was a humongous task.

Captain Philips and I wrote the operational plan, along with institutional orders, under a pretty tight deadline. We were able to get it done on time with much-needed help from Officers Dunnivant, Sagio

**A grayscale version of the above color image appears in the printed book with caption "HIIP Drill & Ceremony." Color version is from the author's Facebook promo for the book.**

and Roscoe in administration. There was another major component of the program headed up by the Deputy Commissioner of Program Services of our Central Office. A great deal of coordination was needed by the uniformed staff and by our Central Office in order to make this plan become operational.

While we were working out all the logistics and developing the operational plan, there was a group of handpicked staff that was sent to the Marine Corps training center located in Quantico, Virginia. These



A grayscale version of the above color image appears in the printed book with caption "HIIP ADW with Ernest Thomas of TV show *What's Happening*." Color version is from the author's Facebook promo for the book.

men and women were to be the trainers for our officers and civilians who would become the drill instructors and counselors for the program. The department then interviewed many applicants and selected the staff to attend a three-week training program at Camp Smith in Peekskill, New York. Those selected became the first staff members of this new unit.

Once the program started, I immediately saw how our staff could turn an undisciplined group of inmates into a cohesive group; this blew my mind and I envied those officers.

The first Executive Officer of this new unit was my good friend ADW Rafaldo who is the same ADW who was on duty with me during the inmate stabbing/barricade incident I wrote about earlier [in Chapter Eleven not excerpted]. ADW Rafaldo was an ex-Marine, as were many of his staff, and he was an

excellent choice for that position.

ADW Rafaldo was also a no-nonsense boss who took great pride in everything he did. I loved the way he never held his tongue and always said what was on his mind. He put his heart and soul into making this program successful and deserves a great deal of credit for its success. He did a great job in leading the unit for several years until he decided to retire in 1993.

Once ADW Rafaldo decided to retire, something in my heart stirred and I just knew I needed to replace him. Although I am not an ex-Marine, I did have some military experience. I had completed eight years in the National Guard and five years in the Army Reserve for a total of 13 years in the military.

I explained to Warden Kane and Chief Scully that I wanted to be involved in something positive in the department. I wanted to be involved in a program that would give inmates a chance to change their lives if they were tired of leading a life of crime. The decision was made to let me take over the unit once ADW Rafaldo retired. At that time the program needed another influx of officers because of attrition.



**Above image of then Queens Borough President Claire Schulman watching HIIP inmates removing graffiti from public building is from the Correction History website presentation on HIIP.**

The department decided to select additional officers to interview for the program. Once the selection process had been completed, it was necessary to provide training for these new officers and counselors.

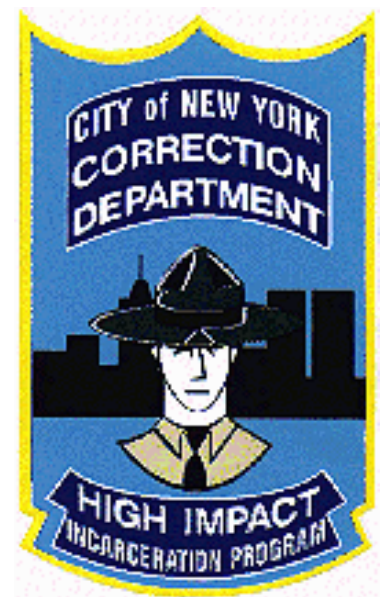
Because of fiscal restraints, the department decided not to provide the training at Camp Smith but instead utilized the Training Academy. When this new training cycle began, I decided to go through the training with the officers and counselors. I had to take off my ADW Shield and become a recruit again. The trainers were officers who would be working for me and they did a good job of not showing me any favoritism during the training. They also wisely decided not to treat me too badly! So, we all graduated HIIP Training and, thus I began another new adventure in my career. My tenure as the Executive Officer for HIIP was a very rewarding time in my career. It had many challenges, but just as many rewards. I felt like I was doing something that made a difference and I was very proud of that.

We welcomed many visitors from all over the world who came to see how we were making this program work so successfully. Delegations visited us from Russia, China, Japan, Denmark, and several other countries, in order to see what we were doing at HIIP to make this program such a success.

At our graduation ceremonies, we brought in graduates from the program who were back on the streets and successfully living their lives. We also had many well-known speakers who would attend HIIP graduations. . . .

After the ceremony was over and the men were back in their housing areas getting ready to be discharged, I would put them in a circle and just talk to them, not as their commanding officer but man-to-man. I actually took my shield off my shirt while talking to them. I do not remember my exact words to them, but it was something along the following lines: I told them that God had done many great things in my life and that, if they really wanted a chance to succeed, they needed to make God a part of their everyday life. I told them that it was my experience that God exists and so does Satan. . . .

On numerous occasions members of the media would come to the HIIP Compound to do a news story. Both the print media and the network news stations often related stories about our program to the public. The HIIP program was always good press for our agency, as opposed to the more normal negative press over some violent incident.



The commissioner came to visit us on numerous occasions and he was always very impressed by what he saw. . . . So, time continued on and the program was going well as far as I could tell. One day the Deputy Commissioner for Programs visited the unit. He came into my office and closed the door. He told me that a decision was being made to downsize the unit and make changes that I felt would ruin the program. He said that the commissioner was too upset to tell me himself, so he was there to deliver the news to me. I was very upset with the news and told him I wanted no part of a watered-down program. The deputy commissioner was also upset and empathized with me.

### **Promoted to Deputy Warden**

. . . . I believe that the commissioner wanted me to be promoted based on the job I had done at HIIP and that maybe he had some guilt regarding his plan to alter the program . . . .

It was an uneventful day in the early 1990's and I was sitting in my office at the HIIP compound when the phone rang. I picked up the phone and heard the following: "Are you Thomas Coppolino?" I said, "Yes, I am. Who is this?" He said, "This is Police Officer Morales. Don't worry; everything is alright, but I am at Coney Island Hospital with your wife and daughter who are in the emergency room. They were injured in a car accident and your wife would like to talk to you."

My wife got on the phone and was crying in a panic-stricken voice, "Please get over here as fast as you can." I was in shock and very shaken as I told her I would be there as soon as possible. I was too upset to drive so I asked one of my officers to drive me . . . . On our way to the hospital, I was praying earnestly.



Every day I would [read and say] parts of Psalm 91 . . . . I would then leave my home with an assurance in my heart that there would be angels watching over my wife and children. So, as we were racing to the hospital, I was very nervous because we live in a fleshly body and we are influenced by what we see and hear. [But] I remained steadfast in prayer, believing God that everything would be all right. We arrived at the hospital and I rushed into the emergency room.

I saw my wife and my 16-year-old daughter immobilized and strapped onto gurneys. My heart was in my throat as I

heard my wife's cries. After they endured numerous hours in the emergency room, we found out that my wife needed arthroscopic surgery on her knee and my daughter had a broken ankle.

I include a picture of our car [*above*] so you can see what I am talking about. The whole front end of the car was smashed in, almost up to the front windshield, and the rear of the car was smashed in, almost to the back seat. My younger son wanted to go with them that day. He would have been in the back seat, but he stayed home. "Thank you, Jesus!" The windshield and windows in the middle of the car remained intact and unbroken. Emergency personnel had to remove [my wife and daughter] from the car using the Jaws of Life [cutters].

I absolutely believe that there were angels with them on that trip . . . .

## Chapter Thirteen

# The Anna M. Kross Center (AMKC)



In January 1995, I was promoted to deputy warden (DW) and was assigned to the Anna M. Kross Center (AMKC) as the Deputy Warden of Facility Operations.

AMKC was, and probably still is, the largest detention facility in the nation. Because of its massive size, with 40 housing areas spread over 40 acres, AMKC had four DW's assigned there as opposed to three which was standard for a smaller command.

AMKC housed over 2400 inmates at capacity and most of the time we were at or near capacity. The warden at AMKC was Warden Kane, the same warden I had worked for at CIFM when I was an ADW. A short time before I was promoted to deputy warden, Warden Kane had been transferred to AMKC.

AMKC had its share of violent incidents when I first got there, but, as the years progressed, that number significantly decreased. The mental health center for the department was part of our command. Mental health inmates were involved in a higher percentage of violent incidents than the general population. That was a major contributing factor to the significant number of violent incidents which took place at AMKC.

One of the things I remember the most about AMKC at that time was the fact that we had a great group of ADWs, or Tour Commanders, assigned there. They took charge of incidents in a very professional and effective manner. I used to observe them closely when an emergency situation occurred. I was very impressed by the way they staged people throughout the building so that, if a second or third wave of a response team were needed, the staff would be closer to the area and could provide a quicker response to the incident. I believe that our ADW's were the best in the business, a fact which was very important in a command such as AMKC. We also had excellent captains and officers assigned to that facility. . . .

## Chapter Sixteen

# Prison Fellowship



During my time as a Deputy Warden in AMKC, God allowed me to bring in many ministries which touched the lives of the inmates. One time I arranged for the founder of Prison Fellowship, Chuck Colson, to come to AMKC to address the inmate population . . . . I am sure many readers of this book will remember when former President

Richard Nixon got caught up in the Watergate Scandal. Several of his closest aides were sent to federal prison. Chuck Colson was one . . . . While Chuck was in federal prison, he made a promise to God that, when he was released, he would not forget about his fellow prisoners and their families.

After his release, Colson founded The Prison Fellowship ministry which eventually grew into the largest family of prison ministries in the world. Prison Fellowship is still a thriving ministry which has visited in excess of 1050 Correctional Facilities over the years, reaching over 700,000 inmates with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Over 56,000 of these inmates claim to have allowed God to touch their lives and have become changed men and women . . . . Only God knows how many of these inmates were really sincere and changed their lives for the better . . . . whatever the real number is, this world is better off because of it. When we have these inmates locked up, we have an opportunity to get their undivided attention. For the people who want to examine their lives and possibly make a change, we need to have programs and positive role models. We need to bring people into these correctional facilities, people who have walked in their shoes and are now successful members of society — to show them that it is possible to change if they want it badly enough . . . . I want to thank all the volunteers that go to the prisons and jails in our country. You are all very special people . . . . While I was doing the research for this book, I was saddened to learn that Chuck Colson had passed away in 2012. I am confident that when he eventually came face-to-face with Jesus, our Lord told him, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."



## Chapter Seventeen The West Facility

After spending several years at AMKC, I was transferred to the West Facility and assumed the position of Deputy Warden for Programs. The West Facility was a relatively small command which also housed the Communicable Disease Unit (CDU) for the Department and was opened in the fall of 1991. It was a 940-bed facility which housed 800 general population inmates and the Communicable Disease Unit which housed 140 inmates.

The CDU was constructed of Sprung Structures, rigid aluminum framed structures covered by a heavy duty plastic fabric. Inside these Sprung Structures each housing unit contained specially designed air-controlled [for] inmates, both male and female, with contagious diseases. These units were state-of-the-art and very expensive to construct. Each unit consisted of two sections, an outer section and an inner section. The outer section contained negative air pressure which escaped through a ducting system that drew the air out through the upper levels.

Whenever one of these cells was opened, staff members who worked in the area were required to wear special masks in order to protect themselves. Medical staff was assigned, along with the correctional staff, to each housing unit. The CDU was built primarily to house inmates with tuberculosis, a growing problem in the agency at that time.

While at the West Facility, I held the positions of DW for Programs, DW for Admin-istration, and Acting Warden. I brought in many programs to the West Facility during my time there. One program which I helped to bring into our department was called "Starting Line."



A grayscale version of the above color image appears in the printed book with caption "Banner High Ministry Team." Color version is from the author's Facebook promo for the book.

In 1998 I was approached by people from Prison Fellowship who wanted to bring this program into the New York City Department of Correction. I had already developed a relationship with people from that organization through their involvement with the Banner High Crusades described in Chapter 14 [from which this website presentation did not excerpt any passages].

Starting Line operated along the same lines as the Banner High Outreach Program which had performed in our prison several years earlier and was sponsored and run by Prison Fellowship. Starting Line conducted prison outreach programs twice while

I was at the West Facility and it was also a great success each time. Under my leadership, the Department integrated a Substance Abuse / Program, an Urgent Care Center, and a Mobile CAT SCAN Unit into the West Facility. I was heavily involved with each of those projects and wrote the procedures integrating them into the West Facility. My time at the West Facility was, for the most part, a good experience. My frustrations all had to do with [promotion] politics and nothing to do with the jail itself. Everything was going well and we had no issues to speak of at the facility.

## On the Way to Becoming a Warden

It was sometime in 1999 when I was told to report to our Central Office to meet with a high-ranking official of our agency. . . . He told me something like this: “Congratulations, DW Coppolino, you are going to be promoted to Warden in the near future.” . . . I would be either the third or fourth person who would be promoted to warden in the next few months. . . . Shortly after, the promotions started to happen. . . the first [set of warden] promotions . . . the second [set] . . .the third [set] . . .but not me . . . more months passed and we again heard promotions were being made to warden . . . The announcement was made and, again, it was not me. . . . more months went and the department was again promoting people to warden . . . . but again I was not one of them. . . . at that point I was about to give up. It would have been much better if I had never been told months before that I was to be promoted.



**The above grayscale image appears in the printed book captioned “Volunteer Award from Prison Fellowship.”**

. . . . the uniform and civilian staff of the West Facility knew that I was very disappointed [though] I did not share any of that information with them . . . I went back to work and continued to do my best, as always. One morning I got a call from the nursing supervisor of the Communicable Disease Unit. She told me that the unit staff had an issue which they wanted to discuss with me.

. . . When I arrived, all the medical staff working that day were present and there was a cake on the table for me. They told me to sit down because they had something to give to me.

They presented me with a letter, which they read to me, and a wonderful plaque. I still have that plaque hanging in my home office to this day.

The letter [in part] said the following: “. . . thank you for the cooperation and support that you have given to the Communicable Disease Unit of the West Facility. It would have been impossible to provide the high level of care without your help. . . . Besides all the services that you have so graciously given us, you have always offered additional help when needed. We want to thank you for giving of yourself. We think particularly of your lovely voice which helps to make our memorial services so beautiful. . . .”

The plaque to the “Acting Warden” said: “For your dedication in helping us in the provision of quality care to our patients. For your warmth, compassion, meekness and humility toward us. -- St. Barnabas Staff CDU/West Facility October 1999”

During my twenty-two years on the job I have received numerous awards and letters of appreciation from high-ranking officials in our agency. That letter and plaque from the medical staff at the West Facility meant more to me than any other award I have ever received. It was genuine and heartfelt and very special to me . . . .

That was God’s way of using people to put His arms around me to console me and to lift my spirits. . . . There must have been some unfinished business to be done by me in that facility that I was not aware of at that time. Imagine that! God did not consult me when He was planning things.

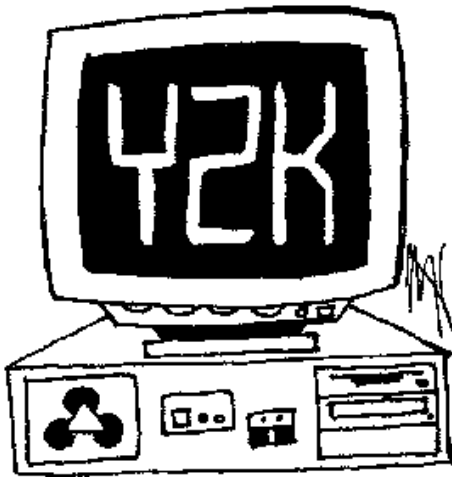
## Chapter Eighteen

# Riding Off Into the Sunset

It was December 1999 and once again promotions were being made. A teletype came out and it was announced that a group of us were being promoted. The teletype stated that the promotions would become effective sometime in January 2000. . . . My name was on that teletype to be promoted to Deputy Warden in Command. It was not what I had hoped for but it was a step in the right direction. I was happy. . . . It was rumored that I may become the commanding officer of the North Infirmery Command (NIC), formerly known as Rikers Island Hospital. If that were to happen, my career would have gone full circle. I would have then become the commanding officer of the same jail where my successful career journey began . . .

The department allowed a commanding officer to have several of his or her key people transferred with him to a new assignment. I told Officer John Paone from the West Facility that he would be coming with me, that he could be my driver and work directly for me. He was ecstatic . . . .

It was December 31, 1999 and all the commanding officers were required to spend the night in their commands until we were all sure that there were no Y2K issues and that everything was normal in our facilities. That night and the next morning passed by without incident, and the big Y2K scare was finally over. I drove home and it was New Year's Day 2000.



The above image from the Y2K scare period has added here by the webmaster.

When I arrived home, many of my family members were at my house for the holiday. The women are starting to cook and the men were getting ready to watch football, a New Year's tradition. I sat on my couch and noticed a strange feeling in my chest. I tried to ignore it several times, but I finally told everyone that I had been having this feeling in my chest for the past few weeks.

My oldest daughter said to me, "Dad, you should go to the hospital to check it out." I thought about it for a few moments but dismissed the idea. . . . after a few minutes, the strange feeling in my chest returned. So I said to my wife, "Let's go to the hospital and check this out." We got into our car and drove to the emergency room of a local hospital. They took an EKG and I fully expected them to find nothing wrong.

. . . . When we got the results of the EKG, the doctors told my wife and I that they saw an abnormality on my EKG and were admitting me. I was stunned and scared and felt like crying. I had to stay in the emergency room all that night and the following day.

I was subsequently transferred to another hospital where they performed the angiogram and found that I had two major arteries severely blocked, one 90 percent blocked and the other, 85. I received five stents in my heart. The doctors told my wife that I had something they called the widow-maker. We were very fortunate that we had come to the hospital when we did and did not ignore it any longer, or I could have died. I then decided at that time that I would retire from the job.

. . . . While I was in the hospital, my wife spoke to [John Paone's] wife and told her what happened. John's wife rushed outside to look for her husband who was on a ladder taking down Christmas lights from his roof. She told him that I was in the hospital with heart problems and was probably going to retire. He almost fell off the ladder. He saw visions of his new post fading away. Later he had to go to my house and

pick up the official car I had been driving to turn it back to the Transportation Division. It broke his heart to have to do that! My wife and I socialize often with John and his wife. They have become great friends. . . . For many years, I had harbored resentment for several things that happened to me during my tenure as a deputy warden — events which I did not reveal while writing this book. It has taken much prayer and soul-searching to put it all behind me. . . . I now choose to focus on the good memories and cast aside all the hurts and disappointments.

. . . . I am sure that I am not the only person who was ever told something that never came through in regard to promotions. I now also believe that maybe God allowed that to happen to me because during that time my focus started to be more about being promoted than about ministering to people. . . . I realized that my promotion to Deputy Warden was a result of wanting to make a difference in people's lives . . . . Looking back now, I also realize that I became very consumed with getting promoted and, although I never backslid in my faith in any way, my zeal for ministry was put on the back burner . . .



The above public domain image depicting Jesus saving a sinking Peter has added here by the webmaster.

### **Keep Your Eyes on Jesus**

When Jesus walked on the water, Peter called out to him and asked Jesus to let him walk on the water also. Jesus told him to step out onto the water . . . . Peter also began to walk on the water and did not sink because he kept his eyes on Jesus. The moment he allowed the wind and the waves to take his eyes off Jesus, he began to sink. But, Jesus reached down and lifted him up and back onto the boat. If you are a man or woman of God and want to succeed in your life, keep your focus on the Lord. Do not be consumed by the wind and waves of life. . . . “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matthew 6:33 NKJV) . . . .

### **Live Fully for Jesus Every Day**

. . . . If you are a Christian that means you need to be Christ-like. Is it easy to forgive? Absolutely not! I know. I struggle with that daily. If you want to have a real relationship with God, forgiveness is not an option; it is a necessity. . . . seek to have a relationship with Christ . . . . Share your heart with Him daily, pray without ceasing, and read His Word as much as possible. Reach out and touch someone today with the love of Christ. If you want love in your life, sow love. If you want prosperity, give generously, not only with your money, but also with your time. . . . Give of yourself without expecting anything in return . . . . Always remember that God's Word is His promise to you. If you truly believe that, He will do what His Word says He can do. Your faith activates God to move in your life. I pray daily for God to keep His angels in charge over my family as it says in Psalm 91 and I highly recommend that you do the same.

So now that I have come to the end of this book, I pray that I have encouraged someone out there to begin your own journey to success. Someday I hope to be reading your story!

*Lord, I ask you to pour out your blessings upon all persons  
who have taken time out of their lives to read this book.  
May the peace of God which passes all understanding be with them all.  
In Jesus' name, Amen.*