

## John's Prison Placement

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I was the coordinator of the Frontier College Corrections program in Manitoba when John arrived in Winnipeg for his College placement at 'Bannock Point' minimum Security prison. It was an experiment. Join a work crew in a prison work camp – live there – and teach evenings with the inmates. It was a tough placement. John survived it which says a great deal about his character. That is where our friendship began – and continued for decades in Toronto – where among other things we shared a passion for football – John was the Argo's fan (predictably) and I was committed to the Blue Bombers.

When John arrived in Winnipeg en route to his prison placement, I met him, then drove him out to the camp. I remember wondering who this young kid was – and how terrified he looked – not without reason. I also remember that he didn't look terrified very often – even in such a 'complicated' placement. There were many stories about tensions with inmates who doubted his loyalty – and guards who distrusted his motives and support for inmates. The prison warden created acute tension for John since he could never figure out why John was there – and why in the world he would do whatever he was doing.

After the first three weeks, John came in for a weekend – to sleep – to eat (better food) – and to renew his energy. That became a pattern: a few weeks in the prison camp – then a respite on my couch, good food and time with friends in Winnipeg.

Years after John returned to Toronto, I was having a tea in Osborne Village and met a man who had been in the camp with John (not voluntarily). He told me that John sat with him night after night for months – until he passed his Grade 11 math. Then he turned to me and asked: "Why did he do that? He must have been kind of crazy – crazy beautiful and wonderful to do that." Then he wandered off not to be seen again...

That was a good summary – a beautiful wonderful crazy guy.