

A Tale of Three Norfolks

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It was the best of times, it was the not so good of times, and it is the worst of times. My apologies to Charles Dickens and his faithful readers for borrowing from his much acclaimed and beloved novel -- A Tale of Two Cities. Like Dickens, I wish to offer a comparison between philosophies. Unlike Dickens, however the points of my comparison are not separated by geography, but instead by three eras of time: 1982, 1998, and 2023.

In 1982, the Massachusetts Department of Corrections, after a stint at the maximum security prison in Walpole, assigned me to the medium security prison called MCI-Norfolk. I remain there today, some forty-one years later. Over four decades, I have witnessed the radical transformation of Norfolk. A prisoner who entered Norfolk with me in 1982, then left, only to return in 2023 would not recognize the prison today aside from the outward appearance of certain buildings. Much has changed at Norfolk, and not for the better.

Shortly after my arrival in 1982, some fellow prisoners who had been at Norfolk for several years offered me a bit of advice. Don't "get stuck" at MCI-Norfolk. Their reasoning was that Norfolk in 1982 offered so many meaningful programs and work opportunities that I could easily become "too comfortable." I took the direction and worked diligently not to become trapped at Norfolk. In 1985, I had earned clearance to work beyond the wall, OUS (Outside Under Supervision). I drove a pick-up truck for the Maintenance Department transporting workers and supplies to and from various work sites and buildings both inside and outside the wall.

In 1982, my hard work paid off and I was approved for a transfer to lower security. My move, however, was soon rescinded due to a change in the political landscape that resulted in all those serving life without parole being removed from minimum security facilities and returned to medium security prisons. I, like many others, was a victim of then Governor William Weld's desire to reintroduce prisoners to the "joys of busting rocks."

To understand the seismic changes the years have wrought, one needs to consider what MCI-Norfolk was meant to be. In 1927, land was granted to the Department of Correction (DOC) to build a prison on nearly one thousand acres. The DOC appointed Howard Gill, a Harvard sociologist, to develop the new prison and serve as superintendent. Gill's vision was not to build a typical prison, but one in which rehabilitation would be the focus. Gill said the goal was to build men. While a traditional prison wall surrounded the facility, the interior of MCI-Norfolk simulated a college campus. Dormitories were placed on the east and west sides of Norfolk's grassy quadrangle. Administrative buildings sat at the north and south ends.

Gill named the new prison the Norfolk Penal Colony, with the emphasis on Colony. Gill's vision included an Inmate Council elected by the prisoners and comprised of various elected committees. The purpose of the Council was to allow prisoners to participate in the administration of the Colony. In 1931, the administration and prisoners at the Norfolk Prisoner Colony created a constitution detailing the duties and responsibilities of the Inmate Council and its committees. The constitution remains in force in 2023, but, like the rest of Norfolk, it has undergone several significant changes.

When I entered Norfolk, I was overwhelmed by the availability and breadth of programs -- educational, vocational, and religious -- as well as work options. On my first weekend at Norfolk, I attended a meeting held in the CSD, a building managed by the Community Services Division where programs were held. The gathering, focused on promoting the DOC's various minimum and pre-release facilities, reminded me of work fairs I had attended before prison. Each table had flyers and photographs of the different facilities along with representatives to answer questions. In much the same way work fairs were populated by companies seeking to attract employees, the minimum and pre-release facilities were recruiting prisoners who wanted to move to lower security.

On that first weekend, I also walked around the quad and Norfolk's two recreational fields. The yards were filled with people playing softball, handball, and basketball. Some teams consisted of two groups of prisoners, while others included players from the outside community. I watched boxing in Norfolk's outside boxing ring and observed runners circling the prison's two tracks, one on the West Field and one on the East Field. And, I noticed prisoners playing bocce and handball on courts located between the housing units. The biggest surprise of my initial walk, however, was the many felines hunting mice or lying under several of the shrubs or bushes planted around the buildings. While the cats were pets of individual prisoners and kept the mice at bay, the cats could do nothing about the legions of cockroaches which infested all Norfolk's buildings.

Like other new arrivals, I was initially housed in an Orientation Block. After a short stay, I was assigned to a unit named 4-3 located in the prison's Four Block. The outside of Norfolk's housing blocks did not look much like traditional prison buildings. Each of the three unit buildings that made up a housing block looked somewhat like an English row house. The originality of the

housing units was not reserved to the outside. When I moved into 4-3, I discovered that I would not be living in a cell, but in a single room -- a norm that would become a luxury by 2023. There were no bars on the windows. The door was wooden with a single rectangular window. And, to my surprise, the doors were not locked.

My room came furnished with a bed, desk, chair, and stand-up locker. I quickly obtained a foot locker on wheels to augment my furniture collection. The foot locker had been built by a prisoner in Norfolk's Avocation (Avos) program who sold it to me for cigarettes -- the medium of exchange in 1982. Avos was a program where prisoners owned and operated businesses inside the prison wall. In addition to making foot lockers, prisoners ran sewing avos, furniture avos, leather avos, ceramic avos, and jewelry box avos. There were even barbershop and laundry avos. A gift shop at Norfolk sold products made in avos to outsiders and staff. In 1984, I purchased an avo of my own through the program and began building model ships.

Room decor was not limited to items available through avos. A friend invited me one day to his unit to show me his room. In 1982, the Colony was wide open. One could go in and out of any unit in the facility. All that was required was to sign an entrance and exit sheet. When I visited my friend, I could not believe my eyes. He had an easy chair and chest of drawers that he had purchased from a furniture making avo. But what really surprised me was his five foot long fish tank complete with fish, rocks, plastic castles, and other accessories commonly seen in fish tanks on the outside. The large tank held the place of pride in my friend's room.

In my second week at Norfolk, I secured a job as a clerk in the Industries Furniture Shop. While waiting to begin work, I proceeded to investigate what other programs were available. I started at the school. In 1982, any prisoner

could go unannounced to speak with the School Counselor, Sr. Mary or the principal, Carlo Gerimini. I discovered that as a college graduate, there was little to be offered, but Sr. Mary asked if I would like to work in the school as a clerk and tutor. I declined as I had already accepted a job in Industries. The allure of the school, however proved to be too much to resist, and within two years, I had accepted a position in a federal program to teach Adult Basic Education at night in the school.

In addition to education, I discovered many other programs operating at Norfolk. Radio Free Norfolk (RFN) taped interviews with prisoners that were broadcast on a local radio station at a time reserved for RFN. Prisoners produced and published a newspaper called The Colony. And, the print Shop created all forms of printed materials.

Norfolk also boasted numerous religious programs for all dominations. As a practicing Catholic, I could attend weekly Mass, Bible studies, and Cursillo -- a four day retreat. I could also receive private spiritual direction from an outside priest and deacon. Many of the religious programs were led by a flock of volunteers. One non-religious program was Fellowship in which prisoners and outside volunteers met weekly for counseling and discussion groups. And, at Christmas, the Catholic volunteers, Fellowship, and the Salvation Army each donated Christmas packages to every prisoner.

Shortly after my arrival, I was introduced to the Lifer's Group, an organization dedicated to those serving life and long term sentences. One of its programs was the "Awesome Convict Art Players." The troupe staged various plays, one of which was "The Man of La Mancha." The renowned actor Richard Kiley came to Norfolk to rehearse the actors. The production received rave reviews in newspapers and on television. The players even went "on tour" to other prisons in Massachusetts.

Norfolk in 1982 also had an Art program, furloughs, and band concerts held inside the CSD auditorium and outside in the West Field. To help maintain and grow family relationships, many groups, including the Lifer's Group, hosted picnics for families and friends where they were able to enjoy a more relaxed environment than the crowded visiting room.

In 1982, families and friends could drop off packages on a prisoner's birthday, for Christmas and one other time during the year. The packages could contain food stuffs, tobacco, and other things a prisoner could not buy in the prisoner-run canteen. There were few clothing restrictions at Norfolk, so family and friends could drop off items like sweaters, jeans, and shoes. Family and friends could also deliver books and appliances, including televisions, radios, or cassette players.

Norfolk's relaxed and collegial environment in 1982 meant that it was treated as place of privilege within the prison system. One had to earn one's way to Norfolk by demonstrating good, positive behavior in higher security. As difficult as it was to be assigned to Norfolk, it was very easy to be shipped out to a less desirable medium security prison or even to higher security. Those who broke the rules would quickly find themselves in a DOC vehicle heading out of Norfolk. While the response at Norfolk would typically be fast and firm, punishment was reserved solely for the person who broke the rules. The authorities refrained from punishing every prisoner at Norfolk for the sins of one.

Norfolk was celebrated as being different and complex. Administrators from the superintendent on down tended to remain in place for years, which ensured continuity of policy and program implementation. Correctional staff, who were not yet referred to as guards, wore civilian clothes and did not carry handcuffs on their belts. Everyone understood that the centerpiece for Norfolk in 1982 was the programs. Administrators made sure that the CSD was open and busy seven days a

week -- morning, afternoon, and night. Everyone also remained focused on the goals of rehabilitation and movement to lower security with increased privileges and responsibilities, including those like me, serving life without parole. For lifers, the benefits of Norfolk and lower security were key components in pursuing the ultimate prize -- a commutation -- which was a viable reality in 1982.

- 1998 -

During the late 1980's and into the 1990's, the DOC underwent significant changes, especially at Norfolk. Governor Weld not only wanted to reintroduce prisoners to the joys of busting rocks, he also wanted to convert Massachusetts prisons into models of how tough-on-crime prisons should operate. The first step in this conversion was to transfer the DOC from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Public Safety. No longer would the DOC be managed by the same people who oversaw mental health and public health. Instead, the leaders who ran law enforcement agencies like the State Police were in charge. Rehabilitation as the goal of the DOC turned into punishment. There is an old adage about incarceration: Prisons are for confining the punished or for punishing the confined. Under Health and Human Services, it was the former. Under Public Safety, it became the latter.

The effects of the change became starkly visible in short order. Correctional personnel became prison guards who traded their civilian clothes for police styled blue uniforms in the spring/summer and military styled black uniforms in the fall/winter. Not only were guards in uniform - mandated by a new Commissioner of Correction who complained after visiting Norfolk that he could not tell his people from the inmates -- the guards now carried walkie-

talkies and handcuffs on their belts. The guards union embraced the philosophical shift and adopted a new motto: "We walk the toughest beat in the state." Many believed the saying to be hyperbole, save the guards themselves, especially given the rigors that faced other members of law enforcement, such as the State Police and local police departments.

Pundits also egged on the changes. Conservative columnist Howie Carr, who later admitted to a journalist that his sole intent was to sell newspapers, regularly stretched the truth beyond the breaking point when talking about the state's prisons. A case in point concerned the Norfolk "golf course." Howie Carr repeatedly lambasted the DOC claiming that he had learned that a golf course existed inside the wall. Carr embellished a few tuna cans planted in a small patch of grass into a full nine holes. A quick look at an aerial photograph of Norfolk would immediately reveal the absurdity of the deception. But Howie Carr never let facts get in the way of good story when he spun tales about the DOC coddling inmates.

By 1998, the philosophical fences erected by the DOC at Norfolk were joined by rows of chain link metal fences to restrict prisoners' movements and to seal off some areas completely. As the new fences came in, out went many of the connections to the outside world. Gone were team competitions and family picnics and OUS. Two Christmas packages were eliminated so that only the one donated by the Catholic volunteers remained. Not only were the packages from the Fellowship program eliminated, the entire program was terminated. The cats, who served as the prison primary means of keeping down the mouse population, were gone. The cockroaches were gone as well after the institution underwent a full fumigation. Mice, however, had returned once their nemises had been evicted. Restrictions were placed on clothing and applicances. The DOC strictly enforced new rules governing how many clothes

a prisoner could possess and what colors a prisoner could wear. Families were barred from providing prisoners with items. Instead, the DOC required prisoners to purchase all canteen, clothing, and appliances from private vendors who charged high prices in order to pay commissions ranging from 14% to 17% to the department on every item purchased.

Wooden furniture and fish tanks disappeared almost overnight, as did quality programs like Radio Free Norfolk and The Colony newspaper. The shuttering of these programs didn't just affect people inside the wall. For example, one casualty of RFN closing was the termination of the Lifer's Group's "Reading for the Blind" program where lifers and other prisoners used RFN equipment to record selections from publications like "The Harvard Business Review" for the Massachusetts Association for the Blind.

Avos and other building programs, such as the Lifer's Group Toy Program that donated toys to local homeless shelters that had been built from scratch by prisoners, were eliminated due to a new DOC regulation that prevented prisoners from using tools without supervision. The prohibition included even basic items like sandpaper. In addition to ending toy donations, the DOC cancelled the many 10K charity runs the Lifer's Group once hosted to raise funds for organizations like St. Francis Children's Hospital. Thus, opportunities for lifers and other prisoners to give back to society in some small way were almost completely eliminated by 1998.

What, if anything, was new in 1998 compared to 1982? The DOC launched a new identification system to label and track prisoners. All prisoners were required to wear a photo id affixed to their shirt whenever they left their unit. The id displayed a prisoner's most recent mug shot, a DOC identification number, and statistics like height and weight. The DOC also added scores of new prisoners. Every unit at Norfolk filled up, forcing the

DOC to install two-man bunk beds into many of the prison's once ubiquitous single rooms as the population raced toward 1,500 -- more than twice what Norfolk was designed to accommodate.

On the plus side, Norfolk opened a new gym and visiting room to handle the prison's booming population. The visiting room included new vending machines from which prisoners and visitors could purchase food and snacks to share. The vending machine fare represented a culinary luxury after the ending of outside packages. There was also an Ice Cream Shack where the Lifer's Group sold ice cream and cold soda from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The Lifer's Group used profits from the shack to support the group's various programs. While the DOC inhibited many of the charitable activities in the prison, the Lifer's Group successfully fought to use some of the proceeds from ice cream sales to support worthy causes in the community, such as The Alderson House, an organization that provided housing and other services to families who had to travel long distances to visit loved ones incarcerated in West Virginia.

In 1998, the school was still accessible and remained busy. In addition to traditional basic education and high school equivalency classes, both Boston University and the University of Massachusetts offered college courses. Through vigorous course work, a prisoner could obtain a Bachelor Degree in Liberal Studies and a Master's Degree.

Religious programs also remained strong in 1998 despite the DOC's push to punish. In the Catholic community, we continued to celebrate big events like Holy Week, Baptisms, and Confirmations. Cursillo retreats continued, as did many inspirational groups. Protestant, Jewish, Islamic, and Native American communities also celebrated events sacred to their beliefs. As always, a corps of outside volunteers was ever present for all religious services and programs.

By 2023, Norfolk had emerged from the pandemic lockdown for over a year. Little, however, returned to pre-COVID normal. Programs were resumed, albeit on a limited basis. Of the five senior administrators, three were new with no experience or knowledge of what Norfolk had been designed for or how Norfolk operated, but all sought to make their marks by introducing change. I felt that we in the Lifer's Group were starting all over as policies and programs which had been previously the norm were now questioned.

The first taste I received of the new Norfolk came with dismantling of the Lifer's Group Education Discussion Group (EDG). Pre-pandemic, the EDG classes had been taught in a dedicated room (208) in the school, both day and night. In addition, a computer had been given to the Lifer's Group on which course materials were prepared. EDG classes included: critical writing, advanced math, Spanish, financial literacy, and physics. The EDG concept was that prisoners would participate in classes, even without grades or good time credits, just for the pleasure of learning. The classes were taught by members of the Lifer's Group. Combined attendance for both day and night classes varied from 110 to 120 prisoners per school year.

Shortly after the lockdown, I received a notice to go to the school and met the Head Teacher. She told me that all of the EDG material was to be removed and that EDG classes would no longer be held in the school. When I entered Room 208 to begin assembling the vast amount of EDG materials, I noticed that the computer no longer sat on the desk. I asked where it was as I wanted to print out copies of the materials contained in the hard drive. The Head Teacher shrugged her shoulders and told me that "someone unknown" from the Central Office had taken it and she had no idea who or where it was. She also indicated that she was disinclined to pursue the matter any further. Neither the computer nor all of the

material has been recovered. EDG classes are now reduced to one class held in the CSD and meeting only twice a month.

The second taste came with a memorandum posted by the new Deputy of Security -Glenn Mattson. For the first time in the forty plus years I have been at Norfolk the school was out-of-bounds without a pass. The memo read: "Please be advised there are no walk-in office hours for the head teacher in the [school]. Without a staff appointment to report to room 201, you will be out of place. Letters requesting confirmation that you are on the waiting list will not be answered...Failure to comply with this directive may result in disciplinary action." The school rather than a bastion of learning had become a fortress. No longer is the school a sanctuary where prisoners can go for a few hours and be lifted above the daily or nightly rigors of the prison routine.

I and other members of the Catholic community have felt the sting of the decreases in programs and, particularly, the loss of dozens of volunteers. Attempts to revive Cursillo have proven fruitless. Other programs such as a Bible Study and small groups offering spiritual guidance, replete with volunteers, are no more. And, instead of ten or more volunteers sharing Mass, we are down to three. All of these losses have resulted in the withering of a once vibrant community.

What is new in 2023? We have been given a tablet with a great deal of educational programs. We can order canteen items on a separate tablet. Included on that tablet, if one pays \$16 per month, are games, music, sports, news, podcasts, and CNN and NPR news reports. While the tablets represent our entry into the world of hi-tech, we have no access to the Internet nor can we possess laptop computers, as can prisoners in other states.

New also in 2023 are cameras. Over two hundred cameras have been installed in housing units, all other buildings, and on the facades of all buildings.

While the cameras are not placed to observe us in our rooms/cells, the cameras do monitor and track all movements and actions outside of cells for both prisoners and guards.

Another development in 2023 has been the intrusion of the Central Office in the running of Norfolk. Decisions from the mundane to the complicated now must be approved in the Central Office in Milford MA. A case in point that I have encountered involves guest speakers at Lifer's Group meetings. While I as chairman of the Lifer's Group cannot officially invite a person(s) to speak at one of our meetings, I do encourage anyone who might like to address our members to contact the Director of Treatment to obtain clearance and to schedule a date. Those decisions, prior to 2023, had been made at the institutional level. Now, the Central Office has to approve every speaker. The Central Office merely duplicates what had been completed at the institutional level. All that is added is delay. For instance, I was not notified of the last guest speaker being approved until 3:30 pm on the day of the meeting, a mere two and one-half hours before the meeting began. Our time for preparation was obviously severely curtailed.

Another example of Central Office dictates involved punishments. Recently, a guard was assaulted at MCI-Shirley by a prisoner using a piece of weight-lifting equipment. Even though there had never been such an incident at Norfolk, the Central Office ordered all weight-lifting equipment as well as softball bats be removed from all prisons. The policy of punishing individual prisoners for their own acts has devolved into punishing all prisoners for an illicit act of one.

By 2023, the DOC has closed several minimum security and pre-release facilities. The occupancy rate as of March 27, 2023 was less than 50% for those minimums and pre-releases still in operation. As a result, opportunities for prisoners to step down in an ordered process for re-entry into society have been

curtailed. And, lost is the incentive for transfer to lower security and the resultant motivation for positive behavioral change.

In 2018, in response to the burgeoning elderly prison population, the legislature passed and then Governor Charlie Baker signed into law - an action he later regretted as the worst decision he had made as governor - which allowed for the release of prisoners on parole, regardless of their sentence structure, who were terminally ill or so incapacitated that they were no longer a threat to society. The decision to approve a prisoner for a medical parole was placed in the hands of the Commissioner of Correction. By 2023, scores of debilitated prisoners have had to resort to court actions in attempts to compel Commissioner Carol Mici to administer the law as it was written and intended. Some court cases have been successful; most have not. Legislation has been filed to remedy the abuses prisoners have regularly encountered.

In late 2022, the guards' union continued to complain about the DOC's being soft on prisoners. The Boston Celtics were scheduled to come to Norfolk and play a basketball game with a prison team. After the game, the Celtics players were to meet with prisoners to discuss prison reform. Members of the guards' union went online protesting the visit as coddling prisoners, even going so far as tearing up Celtics memorabilia. As a result, the DOC cancelled the game, claiming they "could not ensure the protection of the players." Why scores of correction personnel would have been unable "to protect" a few basketball players, who would have been in no danger, nor was never explained.

As former Governor Francis Sargent opined in the early 1970's: "The old way does not work, has not worked for years, will not work, for we are dealing not with animals born to be caged, but human beings born to be better." The DOC of 2023 needs to heed those words and reverse its return to the "old ways."

How Did We Get Here From There?

Several changes over time have reduced Norfolk from a prison that was a goal for prisoners due to programs and relaxed environment to its present state of being just like other prisons in MA. In fact, that has been the stated objective of the Central Office since the lockdown was lifted, i.e., to make all prisons the same. Once achieved, the Central Office will discover that what has been lost is the incentive for prisoners to change and to prove themselves in order to be transferred to a prison like Norfolk of old. In addition, homogenizing all prisons will result in treating prisoners not as incarcerated persons, but as fungible commodities, thereby diminishing hope and purpose which had been motivating factors for positive change in past years.

The winds of change began to blow in 1987 when then Governor Michael Dukakis was running well ahead of George H.W. Bush in the race for the U.S. Presidency. Then, Willie Horton, a first degree lifer, failed to return from a furlough. He was later arrested in Maryland for assaulting a couple in their home. George Bush's campaign leaped on this incident, primarily because Willie Horton was black and the couple was white, as did the Lawrence Eagle Tribune which received a Pulitzer Prize for their year long unrelenting coverage. Governor Dukakis was portrayed as weak on crime. He lost the election in 1988, the same year that William Weld was elected as Governor of MA.

As noted before, Weld's first act was to transfer the Department of Correction out from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Public Safety. A new Commissioner of Correction was then appointed and the philosophy went from rehabilitation to punishment almost overnight. Under Weld, "confining the punished" became "punishing the confined."

Since 1998, many productive, rehabilitative programs have disappeared, including those designed to promote family relationships, a critical factor in

in helping prisoners stay out of prison once released. No one in the DOC appears to see any value in rehabilitation. Witness that in the Fiscal Year ending on June 30, 2022, the DOC spent in one year over \$761.5 million and 62¢ of every dollar went for employee expenses, while 2¢ went for programs for prisoners.

Many family members have been so mistreated in the visiting process that they simply have stopped visiting. Family members are subjected to intrusive searches, have to wait for hours, and are prohibited from normal signs of affection. Telephone rates are extremely high, in part due to the commissions paid by the provider to the DOC. Prisoners are prohibited from sending money to family members to help out with everyday expenses. All mail is photocopied so prisoners do not receive the actual cards or letters a family member may send.

The pandemic and resultant lockdown gave the administration at the institutional level and in the Central Office the opportunity to discard or radically change those programs and procedures which were considered too liberal. As chairman of the Lifer's Group, I wrote to the superintendent at Norfolk seeking to meet with him and his administrators, along with leaders of other groups in Norfolk, to discuss programs moving forward. There has been no answer nor any consultation.

This is an ongoing problem at Norfolk. Administrators and correctional staff see little or no value in engaging in any give and take with prisoners regarding decisions. This is not to say that I or any other prisoner has all the answers nor any delusions as to who runs Norfolk. But, it is to say that prisoners do have input which can make the implementation of change go more smoothly. Even in 1988, administration personnel from the superintendent on down regularly met with groups and received feedback on the climate at Norfolk. What we have now is decisions being made in Norfolk and in the Central Office which are often ill-thoughtout and unnecessarily oppressive. One example involved safety razors which

had been sold in the Canteen since 1982. One or two prisoners in solitary obtained razor blades and used them to slash their wrists. Rather than investigating how those prisoners obtained the blades, the Central Office decreed that as of a certain date, all blade razors possessed by prisoners had to be turned into Property. The DOC added that all prisoners had henceforth to use electric razors. The problem, besides punishing all for the acts of two, the DOC had not arranged for enough electric razors for all prisoners and did not for many weeks.

As noted earlier, the drive to homogenize all prisons in MA may make life easier and less complicated for administrators, but it will also destroy the important differences among prisons and the opportunities to provide incentives to change behavior. Other states provide certain programs in only particular prisons, like college programs or learning vocational skills. Prisoners have to earn their way to the prison which offers the specific program the prisoner desires to engage in.

In 1982 and even in 1988, a prisoner at Norfolk who incurred disciplinary reports would be transferred to higher security or laterally to a less desirable medium security facility. In 2023, hardly anyone is transferred out. The result is that while losing some privileges which can be regained over time, there is no fear of being sent elsewhere. It is one reason why the Norfolk of 2023 is beset with more physical violence, drugs, and alcohol consumption. The administration has failed to stem the flow of drugs despite taking draconian measures regarding visits, mail, and the sending of funds to family members.

Will the Norfolk of 2023 ever return to the Norfolk of 1982? Sadly, the chances seem slim and none. In order to return to 1982, Governor Maura Healey, the legislature, and the Department of Correction will have to do an about face on criminal justice issues. The erosion of Norfolk from 1982 to 2023 did not happen

overnight. Rather, it was a slow, but unyielding decline. Central to that process was the cessation of seeing prisoners as incarcerated persons who had the ability and drive to grow and to become productive citizens through programs designed to meet individual needs.

A former DOC administrator, Christopher Mitchell, championed the belief that prisoners would change when forced to take programs which they do not feel they needed nor wanted. If a prisoner refused, he or she would lose privileges such as housing, job, and participation in other programs. He could not have been more wrong and Norfolk as well as other prisons are the worse for it. In the opinion of this prisoner of forty-six years, the decline will continue until this philosophy is reversed.

This reversal, if it is ever to come, must begin by making corrections personnel, from the Commissioner Carol Mici on down, accountable for their actions. It is the height of hypocrisy to punish prisoners for their bad acts when DOC personnel go unscathed for theirs. For instance, why has the Commissioner remained in office and the Superintendent at Souza-Baranowski - Steven Kenneway - allowed to retire undisciplined after approving setting attack dogs on prisoners whose arms and legs were shackled leaving them defenseless? The responsibility for overseeing the DOC and taking actions where abuses occur rests with the legislature, Governor Maura Healey, and the courts. All have one thing in common. They have failed. A place to begin would be to install an oversight committee under the auspices of the court and with the authority to effect change. Until the legislature, Governor Healey, and the courts reverse their present courses and take action to change the philosophy and attitudes of the DOC, I fear we will never return to the halcyon days of 1982.