

*Jeffrey Beard**Dan Stone*

CHANGES IN THE WIND

First announced, in early December, the then-imminent and now accomplished departure of Dr. Jeffrey Beard as Secretary of CDCR. Beard, in office for almost exactly 3 years (appointed Dec. 27, 2012) was long considered by many observers to be the personification of Governor Brown's efforts to comply with the 3 federal judges' population cap order, announced that effective Jan. 1, 2016 he would be leaving. This missive, we suspect, was delivered as he was on his way to the airport to catch the next flight back to Pennsylvania, from whence he came.

Pundits had long theorized that as soon as CDCR reached and seemed able to maintain population levels in line with the judges' orders Beard would be headed east, as he never appeared to firmly 'settle' in California, nor become invested in the state's prison population. The department did, in fact, reach that population cap, 137.5% of design capacity or about 113,720 inmates, in February, 2015, about a year ahead of the court-mandated deadline. And the population level, while fluctuating, has remained under the cap level, last reports on Dec. 15, 2015 set the number of inmates in state-run prisons at 112,510.

This is an opportunity for Governor Brown to replace Beard with someone who truly has an investment interest in improving the state of California prisons and corrections policy, a forward-thinking and tenacious individual who knows the California prison system and the player and stakeholders in the game, including parolees. Who will replace him remains unknown, though many names are being batted about. We're not going to add to the speculation, though there are some we could enthusiastically support, and other we would just as earnestly oppose.

Announced earlier this fall, and possibly more impactful for parolees, was the departure of Dan Stone as Director of Division of Adult Parole Operations (DAPO). Stone, appointed in 2013, retired at the end of October. Replacing him, at least in the interim, will be Bobby Haase, Stone's next-in-command.

Stone had been approachable, helpful and interested in how lifer parolees were faring. He was forthcoming, as much as possible, on questions we asked and willing to consider suggestions and options. For the past year Haase has been sitting in on LSA meeting with Stone, and has exhibited the same characteristics. We hope that will continue during his tenure in the head chair, whether temporary or permanent. Whoever is appointed to fill Stone's spot, we will undoubtedly offer comments at a confirmation hearing.



*Back row: Chris Stewart, David Sloan, Eldra Jackson III, Aldo Romero
Sitting: David Kwaitkowski, Keith Chandler, Joseph Ancira, Eric Taylor, Daniel Silva
Front: LSA Office Manager Robin and mascot, Maggie*

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION! D2G IS UNDERWAY

Filming is at last underway for From the Date to the Gate, LSA's pet project to provide a heads-up to those lifers granted a date and not yet released, on some of the potential and unforeseen challenges awaiting them. Still a work in progress, D2G is a big undertaking for a small group, but our first foray into the world of filming produced such great substance, we're determined to pull it off. We've acquired some camera and sound equipment, computer software for editing, and a bit of training and have jumped in with the proverbial both feet.

At our first filming a group of paroled lifers, out from 10 years to 8 days (talk about a newbie!) gathered to share their biggest surprises, first impressions, words of wisdom with each other, and eventually, via DVD, with those still inside. Real lifers, talking to real lifers about real life—no middleman, no psychobabble, no hidden agenda, just real stuff, straight from those living it.

Often amusing, frequently poignant, and always open and honest, their observations on first days out, coping with a new world and what it takes to reenter that world will, we believe, make for interesting

and helpful viewing for the lifers we hope to see coming home in the next year. A teaser from the first rough cut: technology was unanimously named the biggest immediate challenge, followed, to the possible surprise of some, by changes in relationships, either familial or amorous.

We're now editing the first filming day, which will provide the introduction to our purpose, with more in-depth discussions on critical areas to be filmed in coming weeks. No premier date as yet been set, but we're working as quickly as practical, and we'll be keeping our readers up to date on the progress and when they might be able to see the results. It's a big job, but somebody has to do it.

We'll be doing more filming on special areas in coming months and hope to tap into the wisdom and experience of more paroled lifers in the coming months.



LOOKING FORWARD, LOOKING BACK

As this year draws to a close it's a chance for us to look both forward and back, to what is coming and what has been. Our great and sincere thanks to all the paroled lifers for your help and support. We'd like to think that someday we would work ourselves out of a job, but it appears that's not to be, at least in the foreseeable future.

Much has changed in the past year and as LSA looks forward to our sixth (!) anniversary of creation and work, looking back makes us realize how far we've come. When LSA was born the parole grant rate, under we must note, a different administration, very different parole board and attitude, was about 12%. Although figures for 2015 are not yet complete or released, from what statistics are available, and from conversations with sources, the grant rate for parole hearings is now consistently over 30%, with the rate at some individual institutions (Level II primarily) close to 50%.

In 2014 over 900 parole grants were given and we expect to see about that same number this year. A far cry from the old days; when Gray Davis was governor only 8 lifers were released in his 5 years in office.

So things are changing, and continue to change. And LSA has been a part of this. We are, in fact, a recognized stakeholder, firmly seated at the table for discussion and change. And we are the ONLY consistent voice for lifers in these discussions. When we began lifers were a 'too hot to handle' political topic. Now, as more agencies, individuals, even politicians, recognize the character of lifers, their potential for change and giving back, lifers, reentry and rehabilitation have become a new 'hot topic' and growth industry. All of which we find vaguely amusing.

It's been a long and interesting journey, one that isn't complete yet, but that continues to show great progress and potential. Lifers are coming home, you're proof of that.

And you're coming home to a much changed world, one you, and your families, need help in negotiating and adjusting to. And thus our mission has expanded, to assist paroled lifers and their families, as well as those still waiting release. We're a small group, but our voice is large. Numbers wise our staff is small, but in tenacity, passion for our mission and knowledge, we're huge.

All of this takes support, and for those of you who have supported LSA, with contributions and assistance, participation and advice, please know you have our sincere thanks.

The fact that we received donations from prisoner groups at several institutions continues to let us know we're on the right track. New legislation, starting a few years ago with SB 9, through SB 260 and continuing this year with SB 261, have made a huge impact on how hearings are held, the number of grants given and the prospects for long-serving inmates. The implementation of elderly parole, increased consideration of medical parole and the direction of the 3 judge panel have all impacted parole. With the recently increased, even on a national level, attention on sentencing reform we hope to see even more progress in the coming year.

Our wish for everyone in the coming year—Peace, Freedom, more lifers home, more and greater success for paroled lifers.

LIFER FAMILY SEMINARS IN 2016

Seminars for lifer families are one of the many ways LSA extends support and education to lifers and their supporters. We are setting in motion tentative plans for a half dozen seminars throughout the state in 2016. And one of the most popular and effective segments of those meetings are the paroled lifers who come to share their stories with the families.

While we realize travel passes can sometimes be an issue (but hopefully one that is becoming less difficult), we're extending an open invitation to all paroled lifers to come participate, speak or just hang out and enjoy the fellowship of kindred souls, when one of our seminars comes your way. We'll keep you informed of when and where, you let us know you'll be there. We'll even feed you lunch.

And we can guarantee this pro-social activity (that phrase sound familiar from travel pass requests?) will be one you'll enjoy and will leave you with a feeling of giving back and satisfaction. Below is our working list of dates and areas for seminars in 2016.

January (late)/February (early)—Southern California/Los Angeles/Orange County
March—Sacramento
May—San Diego/southern region
July—Northern California/Bay Area
September—Northern Los Angeles Area
October—Fresno/Bakersfield area