COMPASSION WYOMING

REMEMBER THOSE WHO ARE IN PRISON AS THOUGH IN PRISON WITH THEM

HEBREWS 13:3

COMPASSION WYOMING CHRONICLES

Issue 3/ September 2026 / Quarterly Newsletter

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
Because the Lord has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners.
Isaiah 61:1

"He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me." Psalm 18:19

Psalm 18:19 sounds like release from prison or possibly into a better facility. What are you doing to bring about the Lord's delight? Are you spending time in the word and prayer? Are you forgiving others? Do you have gratitude or an attitude?What did Joseph do when he was put into prison for a crime he didn't commit?



Dan Fetsco,Compassion Wyoming Board Member, coming out of Thyra Thompson building after testifying to Joint Judiciary Committee August 11, 2026

Mission Statement

Compassion Wyoming is rooted in Christian principles of mercy and redemption. We work to facilitate safe and successful re-entry for inmates who have demonstrated genuine change.

We believe rehabilitation is possible, that data-driven policies reduce prison overcrowding, and that public understanding grounded in facts—not fear—creates a stronger and safer Wyoming.

Our mission is to change public perspective through honest communication, historical data, and compassionate advocacy, helping long term inmates pursue a better future with dignity and purpose.

Your Warrior Battling For Change

by Mark Corbett

There are people working to bring about second chances for long-term offenders in Wyoming who have demonstrated a changed heart. University of Wyoming Professor Dan Fetsco understands that not only do we need to share information with the Governor, legislators, and the parole board, but we must also educate the public and the media with facts about recidivism for long-term offenders and the elderly. This is going to take time and many people getting involved. I thought offenders and their families should know what Professor Dan Fetsco has been doing to bring about second chances for Wyoming offenders.

So let us begin:

October 23, 2024: Dan was one of the founding members of Compassion Wyoming Board of Directors.

March 6, 2026: Dan Participated on a panel about life sentences with Ashley Nellis and Tommy Rivera at the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) annual conference in Philadelphia. This conference added to Dan's academic resume and his gravitas.

March 2026—through July 2026: Dan has been making public appearances at book publicity events, and he did a live interview on the Cowboy State Daily. He gives up his time to promote a book to help long termers. A book he gives away the profits from.

April 27, 2026: The Wyoming Paralegal Association had Dan Fetsco speak at their Level Up seminar in Sheridan. Tommy Rivera joined Dan on Zoom

April 30, 2026: Mark Corbett and Steve Watt spoke at the University of Wyoming Law School, delivering the presentation, "Restorative Justice Not Revenge". This event came about because of Dan inviting us to speak previously to three of his Criminal Justice classes at the University. Dan was also part of the presentation.

April 2026: Dan's book "Cutting Life Short: A Second Look at Life Sentences" was published. The book was four years of blood, sweat and tears.



Dan Fetsco Escape from Alcatraz Triathlon June 2026

May 6, 2026: Dan attended a very successful meeting of the Standards and Resolutions Committee of the Association of Paroling Authorities International, in New Orleans. As a committee, they drafted and proposed parole standards with the help of the Center for Effective Public Policy. This is no small thing to be part of a national committee proposing policies for parole standards. I am hoping this will give Dan more gravitas when he makes recommendations regarding Wyoming Corrections

2022-2026: With a generous grant from the Ellbogen Foundation, and in partnership with the Wyoming Department of Corrections, Dan was part of a team of professors that expanded the Pathway from Prison program to a four-year, Bachelor of General Studies degree through the University of Wyoming. Dan was not only one of the people responsible for this program's creation, but taught at the Men's prison in Torrington and Women's Prison in Lusk.



Dan in New Orleans with the Standards and Resolutions Committee for the Association of Paroling Authorities on May 6, 2026

July 3, 2026: Dan had his Father's Wyoming prison number tattooed on his calf inside the Wyoming Bucking Horse "Steamboat" by former inmate Tommy Rivera. Dan's father served time for nonpayment of child support in the 1960's, which is no longer a felony. And there is question as to whether the child was his, as Dan's father was in Vietnam.

July 2026: Dan and Matt Greenberg and received a $50,000 grant from the Ellbogen Foundation to create a multi-disciplinary theatrical production "Second Act" based in part on Dan's book. The presentation will integrate music, art, and other forms of expression from students in both UW's Theatre program and the Wyoming Pathways from Prison program.

We do not have the space in this 10-page newsletter to list everything Dan has been doing over the past three years. I shared just a few of the highlights. Some of the events I did not delve into included: the Governor's prayer breakfasts Dan attended in both 2025 and 2026 with myself and fellow board member Ed Snell, the private meeting with Governor Gordon that Dan and I had in September 2024 to discuss commutations, the meetings at the end of April that Dan attended with myself and two legislators about Second Chances, or the Prison Dog Program documentary Dan is involved with Steve Jimenez. I wanted to give the offenders and their families a sense of Dan's passion for criminal justice reform and the efforts he has been doing.

It Takes a Village

By Mark Corbett

As the editor of this newsletter, I would like to extend my thanks to the four people behind the scenes that help make Compassion Wyoming happen. Michele Brown gives up her precious time off from her full-time job to do our books without charge. Catherine Haskins proofreads the articles when I get done with them. Her command of grammar and punctuation is much better than mine. I sometimes add or alter articles after Catherine has made her proofing—hence the mistakes. Allen Balek and his wife LuDelle are selfless volunteers. Their volunteering for inmates goes back decades. They were with Tammy Akovenko back in 2006 when she started Second Chance Ministries. Allen and Ludelle were packing up hygiene bags for inmates living at the Volunteers of America, taking inmates to the DMV for their driver's tests, and helping to organize the annual Second Chance fundraisers. For years, Allen volunteered to do the maintenance at the Second Chance 3 housing units, which was no small thing. Allen and LuDelle have moved onto helping make Compassion Wyoming a reality. Without Allen, there is no Compassion Wyoming website. He does the maintenance and much of the design. Allen uses his computer skills to make the Newsletter articles fit into a publishing program, while LuDelle handles the creation and constant updating of the mailing lists and folds the newsletters into hundreds of envelopes. You, the reader, receive the finished product, potentially without realizing the hundreds of hours our volunteers put in. I salute our volunteers and acknowledge their Christian selflessness. Update: Allen is back at Second Chance volunteering as well as helping at Compassion Wyoming.



Allen and LuDelle Balek
bringing the newsletter to life



An artist at work: Catherine Haskins with one of her dried flower creations.

A Message from the Executive Director

By Mark Corbett



This picture was taken of me fishing in the Big Horn Mountains on July 10, 2026. This was the first time I went fishing in 50 years. I took 12 hours off. I know I am a real slacker…--going fishing once in 50 years. I don't know how I was able to land this monster of a brookie.

In the first two issues, I shared information about myself and why I formed Compassion Wyoming. While Compassion Wyoming was my idea, it is not something I do alone. There are eight people behind the scenes. As the African proverb says, "If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go with others." Or, as John C. Maxwell stated, "If you want to do something big, you must link up with others. One is too small of number to achieve greatness."

In this issue, I am acknowledging our volunteers, Allen and LuDelle Balek, Michele Brown, and Catherine Haskins; without whom Compassion Wyoming could not exist as it does. I also devoted some long overdue space to Professor Dan Fetsco, an incredible man whom I cannot write enough about in regards to what he is doing in his efforts to improve the Wyoming Corrections/Justice system. He has a heart of compassion a true scholar-athlete and a man of action. Dan is two decades younger than myself and he will be here long after I am gone. In addition to our four volunteers, we have five members on our Board of Directors: myself, Ed Snell, Erin Youngs, Dan Fetsco, and Clint Haskins. We depend on our board to give us guidance and oversight. The board freely gives of their time and finances.

I am 69 years old and only God knows how much time I have on this earth. It was my goal to start an organization that would go on without me. The inmates and their families can rest assured that when I meet Jesus Christ face to face, Compassion Wyoming will go forward.

Not long ago, an inmate wrote me asking me who we are meeting with. I shared with him that I had met with the governor and five legislators to date. Since that letter I have met with a number of other legislators and continue to expand our outreach. Not all of our networking and meetings will make it into the newsletters. Prudence means not sharing everything with everybody. Some of the people me meet with may prefer not to be mentioned, some networking takes time to develop relationships, some ideas take time to implement and to share them too early might prevent their fruition. Take heart--what you don't hear about, may be the most important things happening to bring about change.

I told you change is coming in our first newsletter. I stand by that. I don't know when, but take hope in the fact there are people in Compassion Wyoming and beyond Compassion Wyoming battling for you.

As you know, Compassion Wyoming is Christ centered. When I became a Christian while in prison, my life changed dramatically. I was able to cope with the stress of prison better and make better decisions. I hope if you are not a Christian, that you will seek the Lord. The Lord made a difference in my life in prison and is still making a difference now. If you put Christ and his kingdom first in all things like the Bible says in Matthew 6:33, then "…all these things shall be added unto you." When I follow the Lord, I have peace. When I do not, my life is chaos. Peace is a valuable commodity in prison.

As Christians our hope, our contentment and our trust is in a God who is active, who cares, who is working plans out beyond our understanding and outside of our timing, (Isaiah 55:8-9 is greater than putting our hope and trust in any human or any timeline. Even though it can be frustrating to not see actionable change that frees us from our current circumstances, waiting on the Lord renews our strength and, gives us endurance (Isaiah 40:31). Tand that is where our true freedom through trials and tribulation comes from. We know He is a living and active God who cares about His creation and ultimately desires a relationship with each of us and has plans for our lives that will bring Him glory! As Paul says in Romans 8:28, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." - (Romans 8:28). The Lord sees you and has not forgotten you.

WYOMING'S EXPONENTIAL GROWTH IN ELDERLY PRISONERS

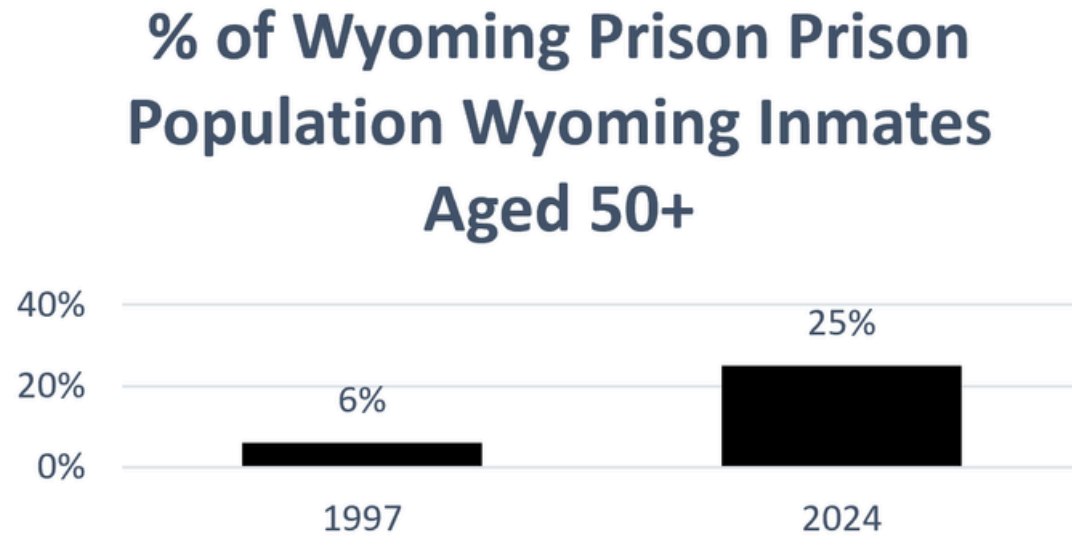


Figure A: 400% increase in inmates of Wyoming prisons aged 50 or older [i]

[i] The Criminal Justice Institute and Wyoming Department of Corrections, Stephanie Kiger, March 22, 2024.

Target Fixation

By Michele Brown

You crash into what you look at. This is the mistake that many new motorcyclists make. Target Fixation: whatever you look at you go toward, not where you want to go but where your eyes look. So, when a rider sees a curb or a rail or another car, they stare at it and then the bike goes there, not because they can't turn but because they are focused on the wrong thing. The bike will go where your eyes go even if your body is doing everything right. You can lean, you can counter steer, but if your vision is locked on danger you're riding straight into it.

Experienced riders do something most people never notice. They force their eyes through the turn. They look where they want the bike to go, not where they're afraid it will. So, the question is, are you looking at the problem or the way out? Because in that split second decision that's the difference between riding through it or crashing into it.

Paul explains this concept in Colossian 3:2. "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth." Paul knew that staring at the problem was not the solution, but raising his sights to heaven was the answer. While in shackles in prison in Acts 16:22-34, Paul and Silas were "praying and singing hymns of praise to God."They weren't focused on their situation; they were concentrating on the One who had the answer to their problem.

Peter, in Matthew 14:22-33, stepped out of the boat and walked on the water. HE WALKED ON THE WATER! Verse 30 says, "But seeing the wind, he became frightened and began to sink." Target fixation. Where you look, you crash.

We can be doing everything right, Bible Study, serving, church, but if our eyes aren't fixed on Jesus, it leaves us empty. When we focus on the problems, the obstacles, we crash. But the writer of Hebrews tells us in 12:2 to "fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of our faith." When we are focused on Jesus, on heavenly things, what is ever lasting and unchanging, we straighten out the curves of life and enjoy the ride.



Note from The Executive Director Mark Corbett: On top of a full-time job, and teaching an adult Bible studies class at church, Michele volunteers to keep the Compassion Wyoming books without charge. She also is an avid biker, riding a Harley and is the mother of an innocent man in prison for a crime that never happened. Michele and her husband drive several thousand miles as often as they can to visit their son.

Responding to Disappointment

Macalia Blackburn #1740

Hello my name is Macalia Blackburn and I have been incarcerated since July 2004 for Accessory before the fact to second degree murder, a crime that has taken the life of my 22-month-old daughter. I was in an abusive relationship as a young adult and had made some really bad choices/decisions. As I did not know at the time that I was a battered woman I know now and have researched and had taken many classes and participated in groups to get an even better understanding of the syndrome. When I was first incarcerated, I acted out and I earned many disciplinary violations. Over the years I began changing my way of thinking. I could not understand why I was acting out the way I was acting and the only thing I could think of was the behavior stemmed from the abuse I suffered at the hands of my abuser. When I went for my sentencing, I was shocked that the Judge in my case did not honor the plea bargain we all agreed to, which was 20 years to life. He instead imposed a 60-year-to-life sentence. At the time of the crime I was 22-years old and suffering from P.T.S.D. from being a severely battered woman. I am now 44 years old.

I have made many changes since I was first incarcerated and continue to still learn and grow as a person. When I first arrived at the Wyoming Women's Center in Lusk, I was a trouble person. Spending the next nineteen months in the east wing, (the hole) I started to grow and learn my behaviors were not just affecting myself, but family and other loved ones as well.

I first tried for a commutation in 2019 and was denied due to the seriousness of my crime and no having enough time under my belt. I was told to try back in five years. Within that time I have become a peer specialist and have had the privilege of working with the youth at the women's center. I did not let my denied response get to me and I kept moving forward. I waited the five years and applied again and was able to get a hearing with the 3-member panel. Though that was pretty rough, I took accountability for my actions. To my surprise I was given a positive recommendation to see the full parole board. I went in front of the full parole board in March of 2025 and was given positive feedback. They sent my paper work to the Governor. To this day, I await and answer of my fate.

I would like others to know what it's like to be hopeful, what it's like to be denied, and what it's like to keep moving forward despite the light at the end of the tunnel being dimmed.

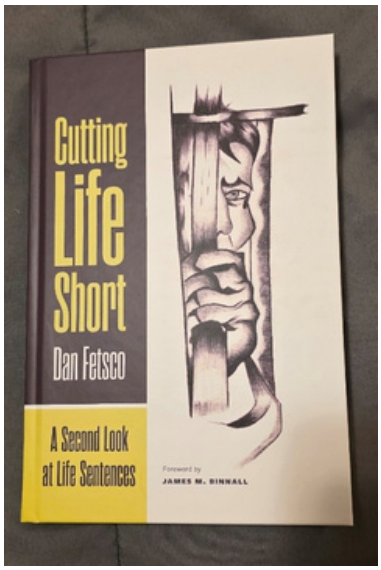
At times it gets hard, but if I keep my eyes on my higher power, I can do all things through He who strengthens me. To be denied only means for me to try harder and don't let anyone take my power. The light at the end of the tunnel may be dimmed but you can always make it brighter. I have the choice to do just that; make my light brighter. My late grandfather had always told us to meet our prayers half way and my prayers are to be with my surviving children and grandchildren.

My way of giving back to the community and my precious baby girl is my becoming a Certified Peer Specialist and helping my fellow inmates to get through their rough times and sharing with them that whatever they are going through they will get through it. God didn't promise days without rain or pain but He did promise to never leave us or forsake us.

My Review of Cutting Life Short: A Second Look at Life Sentences

By Mark Corbett

After 4 years of waiting, Dan Fetsco's book "Cutting Life Short: A Second Look at Life Sentences" is finally out! The book is only available in hardcover for the next year, before going to softcover.



You may order it from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Indigo, Foyles, University Press of Colorado. The book is beyond informative, giving the reader a look behind the curtain on the use of commutations, both nationally and in Wyoming. I was informed the book is already going to be required for a law class at the University of Wyoming. This means future prosecutors, judges, legislators, and maybe even a future governor will be reading this book, which means we will never know the full impact of Cutting Life Short.

The cover artwork was created by a New Mexico inmate.

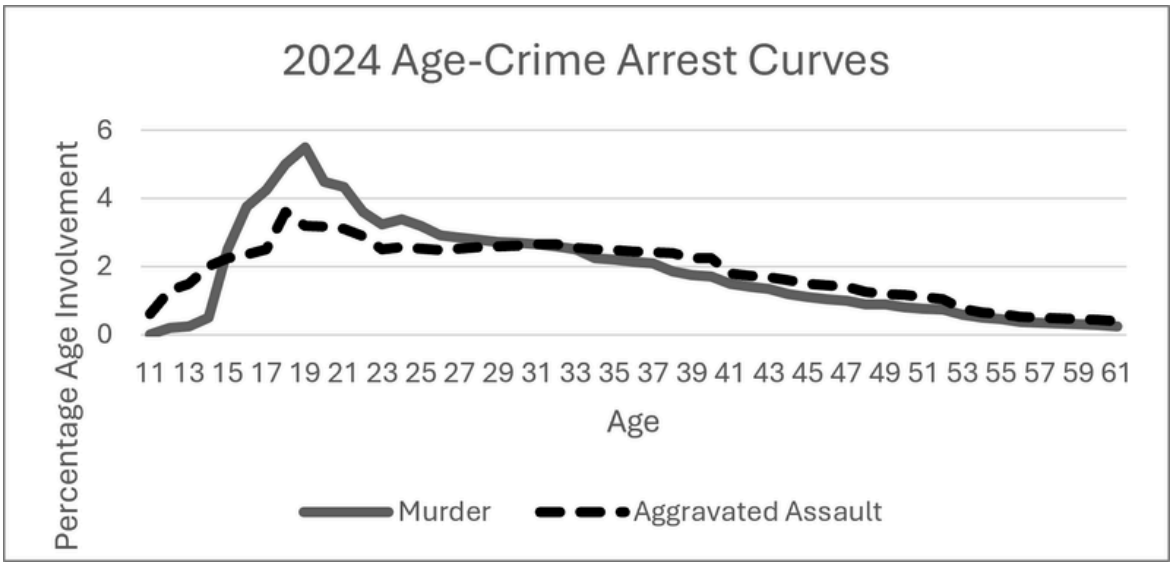
Dan spent 4 years writing this book, requiring thousands of hours, on top of being a college professor with a full load, and raising a family. The author is donating the profits.

The book underwent rigorous academic reviews requiring rewrites that would not have been compulsory by a nonacademic publisher. The research is in depth yet communicated so the layperson can readily understand it.

Dan examines the number of commutations signed by various recent U.S. Presidents, the number of commutations every Wyoming governor has signed since the 1950s, including fascinating stories about the use of commutations in Wyoming, and he profiled 5 inmates (counting myself). The book is eye opening. The statistics and graphs alone are worth the price of the book. To my knowledge there has never been a current or former member of any American parole board that has written a book advocating reducing lengthy sentences for deserving inmates. Dan provides the data to back it up the reasons why Wyoming should be commutating more sentences. I'd like to share a few excerpts from the back cover:

"Cutting Life Short challenges the idea that people who commit murder or other serious crimes are incapable of rehabilitation. The book tracks the growing population of people serving life in Wyoming and the U.S. and explores research that indicates much of the public, including victims of violent crime, support second chances for people who are serving excessive sentences...

Drawing from a decade of experience on the Wyoming parole board, where he witnessed hundreds of rehabilitated inmates denied release despite widespread support from corrections officials and sometimes even victims, author Dan Fetsco advocates creating systematic review processes for lengthy sentences that remove elected officials from clemency decisions, alongside broader reforms like restoring voter rights for former felons and promoting responsible crime reporting over fear-mongering sensationalism."



This graph is Dan Fetsco's book "Cutting Life Short" powerfully shows that as people age their risk for reoffending drops dramatically.

We're prone to want God to change our circumstances, but He wants to change our character….We think that peace comes from the outside in, but it comes from the inside out. By Warren Wiersbe

Note From the Executive Director: This quote from Warren Wiersbe makes me think of something I said for years. If you want to change your externals (your job, your friends, marriage, girlfriend, --and yes even prison) you must change your internals first. **When you change inside, you will change what your outside is.** For me the change is Christ. Ask yourself something and be brutally honest, were you happy before you came to prison? What makes you think being released will give you peace? If you want peace, look to Christ. Compassion Wyoming and others are working on getting second chances for the inmates, only you can change what is inside. By Mark Corbett

May the groans of the prisoners come before you; with your strong arm preserve those condemned to die. Psalm 79:11 NIV

For inmates that will be released in the near future, please have your supporters go to our CompassionWyoming.org website. We have a "Resources" webpage that lists where to get Food, Jobs, AA meetings and Clothing in 15 of Wyoming's communities.

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