

One Friendship at a Time

by Colleen Rickard

Don offended sexually and went to prison. He has been out of prison for several years now and has a post-prison support group (CoSA). He told his story at a Micah meeting.

After prison Don secured a job working in a warehouse. He had been there for over a year and got on well with his co-workers and employer. The daily activities and regular income gave him security and stability. He was making ends meet. He was on a good track. And he was grateful.

The day came when he saw the posting for a different position in the warehouse. If he could get the job, it would be a step up. So he applied. He was invited to an interview, it went well, and in due time, they offered him the job. It was great news! There would be a little more money to help pay the bills and it would provide opportunity to learn new things, build confidence, hone skills, move forward.



The company is a franchise with head-office in Winnipeg. Its Saskatoon staff had been good to Don and he wanted to give them his best. The final paperwork for the new job was making its way through 'Winnipeg' and a criminal record check was required. Soon after, Don was called to a meeting. He was fired.

I watched emotions cross his face as he spoke - hurt and frustration, defeat and lost hope—and I could feel my own tears stinging. He had made some terrible mistakes, but was trying to do better, to do things right, wanting to do what our society wants - be a responsible, contributing citizen. But said efforts had been summarily dismissed by his employer. How would I feel at this kind of rejection? How does a man feel? How would anyone feel? What would it precipitate deep down inside?

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He told us that his CoSA was helping him through the ordeal. The group rallied around him. They talked with him, listened to him, encouraged him. They helped him deal with anger. One member tried talking to his employer. Another spoke to a local MLA about the denial of a person's right to work. As I write several months later, he continues to look for work.

Don's story is about people choosing to shun another because of past mistakes, in spite of obvious efforts to do better. What's driving this? Fear perhaps. A need to punish? Apathy? Some say that the Winnipeg company couldn't take the risk in keeping this guy on staff, even if it was a warehouse job. Perhaps it wouldn't look good for business, or was too big of a risk for other staff? I can see their line of thinking; many business folks would probably feel and do the

same. But given Don's track record with the company, one still has to wonder about the perceived risk.

In the end... "where is the real risk, the bigger risk?" Shunning produced discouragement and hopelessness and set the stage for potential negative reactions with negative outcomes. An alternative path... one that supports efforts to turn from past mistakes, encourages positive actions, even gives a 'leg-up'... this seems less risky. It sets the stage for hope and change and learning, all of which can build something positive for Don and his community.

Micah's motto to "do justice, love mercy, walk humbly"¹ embraces several teachings. Certainly helping another in a just and caring way, no matter the circumstance, is one of those. The company in Don's employment-story had its reasons for letting Don go and I don't know what they were. What I do know is their actions didn't help Don or my community.



It was sad to hear Don's story. Thankfully, his CoSA could offer friendship to help him deal with the fall-out, in small, caring ways. And that is good for everyone.

¹ The Bible Micah 6:8