

Director's Message - Razor Wire, Vol. 5, No. 3, May/June 2001

By Nora Callahan, Executive Director, November Coalition

In my early adult years I wanted to serve people, loved God, and people with those feelings usually head to a church, and I did, then attended Lutheran Bible school in preparation for a life of service. Today, I love God and try my best to serve those people that other people have trouble loving, but this service is not within a church in the strict sense. It strains some of my family relations each time this drug law reform movement takes a leap that the media is covering, and especially if these relatives see or hear my name and our organization mentioned. I figure they ponder what they see as a wasted life. Some of my friends from those early years of life have joined our organization, only to marvel at this point I'm sure because they haven't bought a T-shirt yet! I think they think about the comeuppance in store for me. A couple of my relations were visiting from out of town when two of my grandkids got to fretting about their grandmother going to hell at some day and time that I enter eternity - because I don't go to a church. This was the family drama that set the mood for what became a week of "hell" for me. You have probably heard that expression before - I had a more literal one.

On April 20th, Chuck, Chris, Tina, Mark and I sat in Superior Court in Stevens County, Washington with the father of John "Chewey" Grange, the 26-year old who was convicted of a double-murder, a so-called "drug ring murder" in March - a grisly, execution style slaying. This heavy hearted day John Grange is going to be sentenced, and there would be a lot of family drama and more "hell-talk" to endure.

I didn't go to John Grange's trial. I first read about the case in our local newspapers, seeing what others in their living rooms saw as we opened the morning paper - a frightening mug shot of a giant of a man - and read exceptionally gory details about how these execution-type murders had taken place and why. Two 21-year olds, Nick Kaiser and Joshua Schaefer, were both under federal indictment for drug trafficking, had turned informant, turned up missing, and three months later only some of their remains turned up, high on a mountain logging road about 30 miles from our home office. Two boys barely out of their teens are murdered. Sickened again by the informant system, and studying the picture of the alleged "hit-man", I muttered to Chuck, "These laws are bringing monsters to Stevens County," and tossed the morning paper aside.

I didn't take time to read between the lines, aside from dismissing the ridiculousness of the prosecutor saying that the "hit" was ordered by "The Rainbow Family", an alleged drug ring family. It was this group and other counter-cultural people who first joined and worked with November Coalition, along with people from all walks of life and religious persuasions, from both outside and inside prison walls, enabling us to reach a national audience with national recognition in a relatively short time. I'm not a "counter-cultural person", or part of the Rainbow Family Tribe of Living Light, but they welcomed me into their "family" to listen and work together to educate about the excesses of the drug war. Many of them, as are so many others, working toward drug law reform today.

It wasn't until reading news accounts after John's conviction that I learned Prosecutor Wetle had no physical evidence proving John Grange committed this crime, nor even a customary chain of circumstantial evidence. They didn't even have a weapon. All that Mr. Wetle could offer in evidence was the word of two men facing murder charges. These men said, in short summary, "John Grange did it, and we kind of helped because if we didn't, he would have killed us." In an initial hearing it was determined the murders were committed within the scope of a "drug conspiracy", and so hearsay testimony was allowed, and would be all the jury should need to reach their judgement, according to the Court's justification. In exchange for the original suspect's testimony in court - which everyone apparently had a difficult time following, including jury members - and after John Grange was convicted and sentenced to 63 years in a maximum-security prison, these two informants in this case were sentenced to 12 months in county jail.

Am I the only one who smells a rat(s)? What do we do about John Grange - he's not in the ranks of "non-violent" drug offender?

I'm asking readers to know John Grange like I now do; he's probably not so different than some of you, and you might share some of his attitudes about illegal drugs. And by the way - I don't think that he murdered his friend Nick or Joshua. I see John Grange as a victim of the systematic injustice of the war on drugs.

John didn't have his first girlfriend until he was 21-years old, says he's never so much as been in a fistfight. He learned to be kind and helpful because he was so big that if he weren't kind and helpful, he wouldn't have any friends. In his childhood he bounced from mother to father, from Adventist to Mormon, to knowing that many family relations were "guerilla" farming. His favorite part of childhood was living with his dad back in the late 70's, early 80's when most of the rural neighborhood was growing Mary Jane in the green of Oregon not far from Sweet Home. Family surrounded him, and in this backdrop of childhood during important years of social development, he played in the fields and woods, a happy-go-lucky, gigantic, little kid who knew that just about everyone he loved was growing an illegal crop.

As a young adult John Grange crafted a proven work ethic with an employment history - unlike many of his friends, and he associated marijuana with love and security - not with violence, betrayal or greed. Living frugally, with none of the associated "toys" drug dealers usually own, there is nothing that shows he profited from drug sales, other than an admitted free "bowl" shared by a friend. He bought marijuana for his own use, and would also share a "smoke" with his friends; so he has no condemnation of those who sell quantities of herb for profit. As "Chewey" would tell you, "People buy; people grow and sell."

He got his nickname, "Chewey", when he was 17 years old and working at a camp where inner city kids could 'experience nature'. He was a camp counselor. The kids named him for their big, hairy hero of Star Wars - Han Solo's loveable sidekick, Chewbacca or Chewey as he came to be known. John "Chewey" Grange's last job was working with mentally handicapped kids. "Monster" was used in the proceedings and news accounts. I bought it too when I saw his

picture in the newspaper. No, I didn't go to his trial.

I did go to his sentencing. Before the judge sentenced Chewey, the parents of the murdered 21-year olds used by the police as informants were allowed to talk to the court, and to Chewey. I thought for a while that I was in church, hearing a lot of talk about God, and Jesus and folks being born more than once. But mostly, I heard hell-fire-and-brimstone and wishes that this boy would burn for eternity, "You are a monster," they cried! And Chewey cried. So did his father who was sitting with us. I'm crying and thinking about all this hell-talk, pondering a legal system that leaves justice to languish while this hideous informant system using our children as bait takes its place.

I looked at Chewey when he was getting wished to hell - and I knew that he was already there. This is what hell is made of, and the word fire just a way to describe agony-separation from those you love. And this hell could happen to any one of us - to any one of our children - wished to hell, but sent to prison for life, called and condemned a monster-on the word of another person who is trying to save his own butt.

I do not pretend to know the depths of pain these parents have suffered as a result of this war. I do know that they are now counted in with the innumerable parents who have lost their children to the failed war on drugs.

Through flowing tears, Chewey told the parents, with all of us in the courtroom listening, that last he'd seen their children he was waving goodbye to them as they were leaving the barter faire. His final words at sentencing were not in defense of himself, but for the people he calls his family - the Rainbow Family - who are not a "drug ring family", he tried to explain to the court again, "We don't kill people."

Then he said the following, and I haven't had time to find out who first said it, but this young man can own these words as far as I'm concerned:

"When you find yourself listening to their keys and owning none of your own, you will come close to the white terror of the soul that comes from being banished from all congress with mankind."

Chewey has gone to hell already, as have millions of other victims of the war on drugs. We are looking for folks who will help us bring them back.

Under the crushing weight of a growing system of informants and so-called intelligence gathering, Lady Justice has fallen to her knees. Our fellow citizens are receiving life in prison on the word of a snitch, our children constantly lured by a lucrative, underground economy, then forced by threat of decades of imprisonment to set up their friends, a road of betrayal that leads them to death.

There are two roads before us today. We can fight to lift up Lady Justice, or walk away as she struggles to take her last breaths in this land. I cannot walk away, and I am not alone on the path I have chosen. I believe the time is not far off that masses of people steeled and tempered

by these fires of injustice will stand together to oppose this sham, and shame, of a war on drugs. Our commitment to serve each other as we walk together on this road, demanding an end to the war on drugs is the breath that the Lady needs today. We cannot walk away, as she shudders and collapses, crumbling within a sea of razor wire. Please join our struggle today.