

Jack McFadden
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“My Faith Restored”

I wake up around 4:30. I clean and try to stretch out the old muscles but mostly it is time to catch up on paperwork and plan for the new day with the dogs. I walk out to the sound of dogs barking; barking with happiness to see their trainers coming to get them. I watch my Paws For Life brothers put aside whatever is going in their lives to love their dogs, to take care of them in a way that has touched even this old hardened heart. I smile as I watch men debate (yes, argue!) over the best way to brush and groom their dog. I watch men try to convince the guy who passes out dog treats how “their dog needs more” treats, or toys, for this or that very serious reason, all because they love their dog. I have watched men walk miles with their dog who would much prefer sitting and eating a honeybun or candy bar in the cell! Yes, because they love their dog!

I watch men take care of these amazing animals for hours and hours, for no pay. Most of these men, myself included, have LWOP so we are not doing this for pay and we are not doing this to get out of prison. We are doing this because we love these dogs so much that we have dedicated ourselves and our time to helping them grow into dogs that will be adopted into families that will love them as much as we do.

Karma Rescue brings dogs to us that are sometimes abused and neglected in ways that I don't even want to mention. These dogs need love and a lot of attention. It is a lot of hard work; many long hours are needed to bring these dogs back to life and show to them that not everyone in this world will hurt them. I watch not just one or two but every single one of these men in this program get down on the floor with these dogs and show with their actions that they love their new dogs and earn their trust.

I have watched this, round after round, and each time a group of dogs goes out those gates, a part of me leaves with them. I admit, it is HARD watching them go, but it is their time; it is time for them to be free and go to their new homes, where they will be loved for the rest of their lives. I watch my friends and brothers in the PFL program and I have learned that we have not lost our humanity, it is still there, and we just need a reason to let it out. After decades in prison, I have finally found something to dedicate myself to, something bigger than myself, that gives back to the community, as well as helping others save the lives of dogs. I have the opportunity to help train dogs that will someday become Service Dogs for Veterans. Nothing affirms the value of life more than these wonderful dogs, whether Service or friend, and the unconditional love they give us in return.

Those of you who have been in prison for many years understand how easy it is to lose your faith in humanity. The days slowly blur into one long fog that never seems to end, full of stupidity and the boring repetition of prison life. Then Paws For Life came along and my eyes opened up to a whole new world. It now has meaning.