

Change Agent
p. 3

We're 80% of the way to our Summer Fund Drive goal. See p. 2.

\$67,542
in reader support

Thank You!
Compassion is Empathy + Responsibility.
Accept No Substitutes.

Please join us in the "fierce urgency of now." Make your gift today.

\$85K
\$70K
\$60K
\$50K
\$40K
\$30K
\$20K
\$10K

\$1

VOL. 15 NO. 28
JULY 2 - 8, 2008

REAL CHANGE

On the Bridge: Pt. 2

Life on the Inside:

In the second installment of a three-part series, Bret Hugh Winch enters state prison, where he battles hallucinations and is buoyed by friendship...see Page 5.



Photo by Joel Turner

Churches Unite Against Torture

Religious leaders join activist Jorge Quiroga, who survived months of interrogation in an Argentine prison...see page 4.

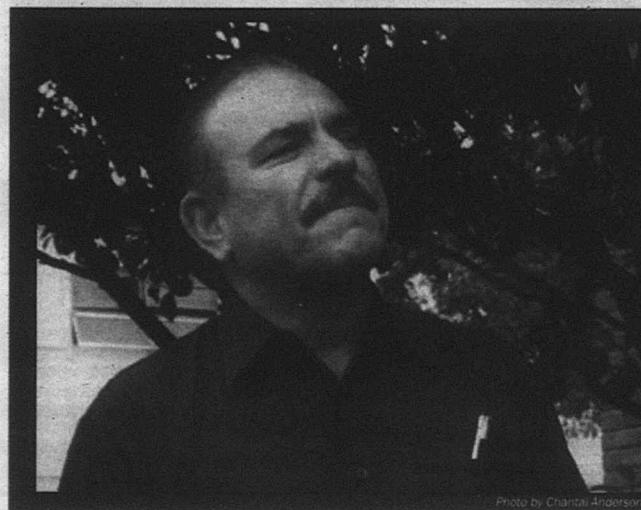


Photo by Chantal Anderson

Right = Wrong?

Blogger Arianna Huffington, armed with one liners, takes on the Right. And the media...p.11

Your vendor buys this paper for 35c and keeps all the proceeds. Please purchase from badged vendors only.

What led Bret Hugh Winch to the Aurora Bridge last October?

The second installment of a three-part series finds Bret doing time in state prison for a sex offense. There, while awaiting sex offender treatment, he battles with hallucinations but is buoyed by a new friendship

The Man who Stood on the Bridge

Pt. 2: Waiting, on the inside

By ROSETTE ROYALE, Staff Reporter

The police station receives the call at 10:17 a.m.: A male says he's going to kill himself. The station's mapping program shows the Aurora Bridge.

And standing on the bridge, a man. Bret Hugh Winch. It's Oct. 17, 2007.

Within seconds, the station dispatches a cruiser. The three officers inside race to the scene.

Seen from a distance, the bridge resembles an overturned silver crown. Construction began in 1931 and since then, more than 230 people have leapt to their deaths from the Aurora Bridge. This makes it the nation's second most sought-out bridge for suicide by jumping.

Arriving at the half-mile long bridge, the first cruiser. It's 10:18 a.m.

One of the officers locates a man on the ledge. He wears a light blue hat and a hoodie. The officer estimates the man to be 24 years old. He's right.

Below him, cars drive by. He tells his friend on the phone about them. They look so small. He plans to jump on one of them.

There's not a lot of room to stand on the ledge. Barely 7.5 inches. Bret grips the rail with one hand. With the other, he holds a cell phone to his ear.

Some 130 ft. below his feet lies the blacktop of N. 34th St. Along Aurora Ave. runs a pedestrian walkway. To get close to Bret, the officer must step upon it. Slowly, he approaches.

But why: Why does Bret plant his feet on the western ledge of the Aurora Bridge this morning? And how long ago did he lift one leg, then the other, over the rail? Three minutes? Four? Five?

People will wonder. Only one person knows.

Barely two minutes have passed since the call came into the station. But there's not a lot of time left.

By 10:22 a.m., under a mostly blue sky, the ordeal on the bridge will come to an end.

The Bluebird.

That's what prisoners call the bus that ferries them from one jail or prison to another. The Bluebird came calling for Bret Hugh Winch at the Cowlitz County

Jail on March 22, 2002, bound for the Washington Corrections Center in Shelton, 85 miles away. With his wrists cuffed, his ankles shackled, and these restraints connected to a longer chain about his waist, Bret, dressed in an orange jumpsuit like all offenders during movement, boarded the bus. Then off it flew.

He had a hard ride. Other prisoners on the Bluebird wanted to see Bret's paperwork, they were interested in his charge. But he kept silent. Perhaps experience had taught him why.

The year before, the then 18 year old had been convicted of child molestation in the first degree. On the totem pole of criminal offenses recognized even among criminals, nothing sits lower than child molestation. Nothing.

In prison, those convicted of such crimes can fall victim to assaults, both physical and sexual. Standing 5'5" and weighing 135 pounds, Bret must have been well aware he'd be an easy target for harassment. It had already happened in the jail he left.

Bret's charge carried a standard sentence ranging from 62 to 82 months. But a judge had granted him an alternative sentence — one designed specifically for sex offenders — involving six months of incarceration and adherence to a list of 20 conditions, including outpatient sex-offender treatment. Break the conditions, suffer the consequences.

Not long after receiving the alternative, he failed to maintain a job. Unable to afford treatment, he stopped attending. He had contact with the victim's family, to whom he was related. He played basketball with two teenagers boys when he was supposed to avoid minors.

Those broken conditions, and others, none of which were sexual in nature, led the judge to revoke Bret's shortened sentence. He ordered him to serve 66 months in state prison. That day on the Bluebird marked the start of his five-and-a-half-year term.

As Bret sat chained to another prisoner on a bench inside the Bluebird, he kept mum about his charge. But his refusal egged the other prisoners on. They hounded him the whole ride. When he arrived at Shelton — that's what prisoners call the prison — he was terrified the other riders would hurt him. Or kill him. "They were going to beat my ass," he told prison officials.

Shelton, encompassing 400 acres, has four different facilities, one of them the Intensive Management Unit (IMU). The



Vehicles traveling south on the Aurora Bridge. A few feet beyond the lamppost in the foreground, Bret maneuvered over the rail to the barely 7.5-inch ledge. Photo by Joel Turner

unit has a mix of medium- and maximum-security cells. Because of the threats Bret received on the Bluebird, he was put on administrative segregation, a sort of corrections center limbo where you wait to be moved somewhere else safe. Prisoners on ad seg stay in their cells, alone, for 23 hours a day. Everyone calls it the Hole.

The Bluebird prison bus came calling for Bret Hugh Winch at the Cowlitz County Jail on March 22, 2002, bound for the Washington Corrections Center in Shelton. He had a hard ride.

Bret had been there only a week before he underwent psychiatric evaluation. He'd already undergone an evaluation at Western State Hospital shortly after his crime, where, even though they put Bret in the "low average range of adult intelligence," the facility viewed him fit to stand trial. As a child, he'd undergone treatment at a psychiatric institution. Or maybe it had been two institutions. Bret wasn't sure. And he'd been prescribed a host of medications.

Bret had told friends in the months prior to entering prison that he suffered from schizophrenia. He heard voices. They told him to hurt himself. And, he'd said, he'd been diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Yet his evaluation in prison determined he had "unspecified psychosis" — a diagnosis that acknowledged Bret's psychotic states, but couldn't pinpoint their origin. After his evaluation, he stayed in the Intensive Management Unit for another six weeks.

Murderers, rapists, arsonists, thieves, assault-and-batterers, pushers, pimps: all state criminals, except for Death Row inmates, go to Shelton for initial processing and classification. Not long after Bret joined the rest of the population, he worked as a porter, doing his best to keep away from physical harm. Mentally, however, he struggled, and his moods gravitated from one pole to another.

In the prison chapel one afternoon, Bret encountered a guard. The chapel was closed, the guard told him, so he had to leave. Where's your ID card? the guard asked. Bret wouldn't hand it over. Instead, he mouthed off. He got tossed back into the Hole.

There, hallucinations overwhelmed him. He pressed his call button. I'm seeing and hearing things in my cell, he

BRET, Continued from Page 5

told a staff member. She ignored him. Again and again, he laid his finger on the button.

"The dead people [are] getting mad at me," he said over the speaker, "and telling me to—"

A sergeant kicked the cell door. Stay off the button, he told him. Bret tried to explain what was happening, but the sergeant laughed. For repeatedly hitting the call button, he was written up for staff interference.

Having witnessed his vulnerability and mental health struggles, Shelton transferred him, some 10 months after his arrival, to another prison, Monroe Correctional Complex, 35 miles northeast of Seattle. Like Shelton, Monroe has a number of separate institutions — five, in this case — on several hundred acres. Aboard another Bluebird, Bret set off for Monroe and the two-hour ride. Destination: the Special Offender Unit, where they house mentally ill offenders.

Many prisons, in light of shrinking mental-health services on the outside, have become, in effect, de facto psychiatric hospitals. Human rights advocates estimate the nation's prisons house three to four times as many mentally ill people as psychiatric hospitals.

In Washington state, offenders with mental health disorders often find themselves in the Special Offender Unit, a 420-bed facility designed to keep vulnerable populations at a remove. Trouble was, the vulnerable, housed together, often targeted their own. This is where Bret landed.

On the inside, inmates communicate to the higher ups by using a kite, a standardized slip of paper dropped into designated boxes. Officials reply on the same form. In mid-April 2003, someone slipped an anonymous kite into a sergeant's box: A prisoner had threatened Bret's life.

The sergeant called Bret into his office. For your own safety, the sergeant told him, we're going to place you in administrative segregation. Bret didn't want to go.

Perhaps he feared his recent experiences would replay themselves: that, alone in a cell, he would be unable

In the Hole,
hallucinations
overwhelmed him. He
pressed his call button.
"The dead people [are]
getting mad at me," he
said over the speaker,
"and telling me to—" A
sergeant kicked the cell
door. Stay off the button,
he told him.

to silence his hallucinations, that he couldn't refuse their demands. Hearing about his imminent move, Bret, seated in a chair in the sergeant's office, yelled and cried.



A portion of the Aurora Bridge, as seen from below, near N. 34th St. Stretching 898 ft., it spans a small section of Lake Union. Photo by Joel Turner

This discussion is over, the sergeant said.

But Bret wouldn't budge. I'm not going, he said. Prison staff came and, after placing him in a hold and cutting off his prison uniform, placed his rigid body in a wheelchair. They rolled him to a cell.

Day turned to night, nighttime shifted to dawn. By the evening, his hallucinations grew in strength. Bret tried to get staff members' attention. He pressed a call button. When someone showed up, he found Bret squatting on the floor of his cell. A cord from a house phone had been pulled into the cell.

Take the phone cord off and give it to me, an officer ordered. Bret complied. They took him to the prison hospital, where he was placed on suicide watch.

For refusing to leave the chair in the sergeant's office, and for using the phone cord, he was given 20 days of disciplinary segregation. Nearly three more weeks in the Hole.

And then...he and trouble seemed to part ways. Once he mixed back in with the general population, his interactions with staff weren't marked by such aggression. His mental illness and their symptoms stabilized.

Mental-health professionals say this can happen: that even serious mental ill-

ness, aided by treatment, can be mitigated by long stretches of relative calm. For certain individuals affected by psychotic episodes, however, periods of hallucinations or suicidal thoughts may return to pierce the bubble of serenity. Even so, perhaps Bret found hope in the future.

Back when he'd pleaded guilty to child molestation, he'd requested the judge send him to Twin Rivers, another facility at Monroe. Twin Rivers houses one of the state's sex offender treatment programs, known to offenders and prison officials as SOTP. Sex offenders expressing interest in the program must submit an application.

Bret applied soon after entering prison. He already knew he'd been accepted, but offenders enter treatment 12 to 18 months before their release. Bret was still looking at a couple years' wait. He'd enter SOTP soon, but when precisely, he didn't know. One day.

In the meantime, Bret kept in contact with the outside. Word from his mother was that things were bad at home. Much like it had been when Bret lived with her and his stepfather. She did her best to send him money, which allowed him to buy official prison goods, like radios.

But each time he received money, the prison deducted 20 percent off the

top to pay for incarceration, 10 percent for a prisoner savings account to be paid out upon release, and 5 percent for a Victim Compensation Fund. (Though the mother of Bret's victim had already told police, "That Victim Compensation Fund you all talk about never helped me.")

He made collect calls to the pastor-and-wife couple who had helped him when he'd been kicked out of his home after his sex offense charge. Their phone bill went sky high. When he mentioned that the voices still spoke to him, they counseled him to pray to the Lord, to ask for His help.

But at some point, his devotion toward Christianity waned and he felt drawn to Wicca, a religion that, depending on one's viewpoint, is a recent creation or an ancient practice. The energy of the feminine balances that of the masculine in Wiccan beliefs, and human sexuality — a gift from the Goddess — is praised.

In his cell, he kept vessels used in the pagan practice, and one day, when he returned, he found the door open: His store had been stolen. Bret had debts he owed to another offender, for fixing his radio, and, without the money, he was in a bind. To pay off the balance, Bret relinquished one of his Wiccan tools, a smudge bowl — used for the burning of sage, a cleansing herb — to stay in the black.

Smudge did little, however, to cleanse the prison of those who preyed upon him. Threats continued. The staff considered placing him in ad seg again.

Just as a kite had warned of a threat on his safety, Bret passed a Sept. 2003 kite on to the records department, requesting information about an incident that occurred in July. Records personnel wrote back that no reports involving that time period were in his file.

There has to be a record, he kited back: "I was raped in F Unit."

He hadn't wanted to press charges at the time, he wrote, due to fear of retaliation from the alleged perpetrator. But three months after the fact, he'd changed his mind. "Please contact the appropriate agency and inform them that I wish to file felony criminal charges for the crime committed against me."

Maybe Bret had been emboldened to speak out because he had heard what took place shortly after his rape: in September 2003, in a unanimous vote, Congress enacted the Prison Rape Elimination Act. A 2004 review of criminal records by the Bureau of Justice Statistics discovered more than 5,300 acts of sexual violence had been reported in the nation's adult correctional facilities.

But those numbers, as human rights advocates assert, represent a fraction of prison sexual assaults. For Bret, the prison superintendent forwarded his assault allegations to the Intelligence & Investigations division. Whether further action was taken is unknown, but Bret told friends no charges against the alleged rapist were ever filed.

Bret would report no other assaults, sexual or otherwise, while in the Special Offenders Unit. Other than a fighting match in Dec. 2004 that resulted in him

BRET, Continued from Page 6

serving seven days in isolation, he remained infraction-free.

And then, the news the 22-year-old had been waiting for: He'd be going to Twin Rivers in January 2005. After waiting close to three years, Bret would begin sex offender treatment.

Finally, it seemed, he faced a brighter future.

From where Bret stands on the Aurora Bridge on Oct. 17, 2007, Queen Anne Hill rises to the south. To the north, the buildings of Fremont stretch into the distance.

Immediately to his right, a white tower crane reaches skyward. With its looming presence, it could be the mast and jib of a ghostly ship devoid of sail.

In front of him, open air. Directly behind him, a waist-high rail. Bret holds onto it with one hand.

Can he feel the cool metal that's exposed through the rail's chipped paint? Does his body sense the concrete ledge vibrate from the vehicles passing along Aurora Ave.?

And his mind? How is his mental state? Does he hear the voices? Are they issuing their commands? And the visual hallucinations. Can he see—

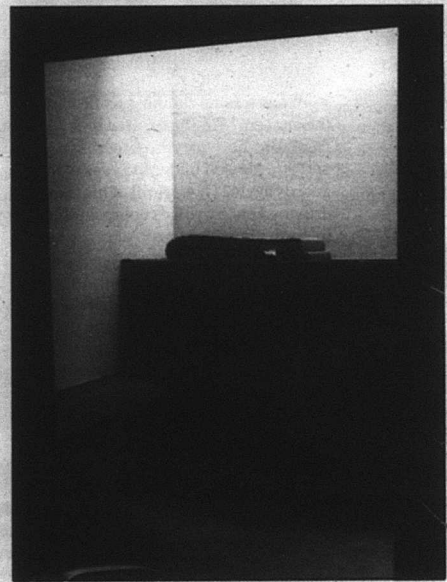
The officer. He treads the pedestrian walkway. He moves to within 30 ft. Twenty. Fifteen.

BOOKS Don't come closer, Bret tells him. The officer obeys.

The Aurora Bridge spans a thin section of Lake Union. People have leapt into these waters before. Even though there's no water below Bret, the police station dispatches two divers. The time, 10:20 a.m.

Two minutes left.

Bret keeps hold of his cell phone. He's called a friend to tell him he's on a bridge. Which one? Bret won't say. But there's a large crane nearby.



An empty cell at Twin Rivers. Bret stayed in a similar cell, with a cellmate, on A Unit, C Wing while taking part in the Sex Offender Treatment Program. Photo by Rosette Royale

Almost 130 feet below him, running perpendicular to the Aurora Bridge, N. 34th St. The occasional vehicle passes beneath him. On the bridge, at some point, police stop all southbound traffic.

The officer can tell Bret's upset, so he wants him on the safe side of the rail. He attempts to talk him back. Bret doesn't respond. Instead, he tells the officer about himself.

The Department of Corrections considers me on escape status...I'm a sex offender...I'm homeless...I'm unemployed.

But his name: that he will not say.

Below him, on N. 34th St., cars drive by. He tells his friend on the phone about them. They look so small. He plans to jump on one of them.

His friend asks him not to do it.

But Bret has made up his mind. That is what he will do.

Ignore the double rows of chain link fence topped with razor wire and the armed guard keeping watch in the fortified tower, and Twin Rivers, home to the Sex Offender Treatment Program, brings to mind a community college campus.

On its western border, four cream-colored housing units, trimmed in marine blue, act as dormitories for roughly 800 medium-custody prisoners. Set along the eastern boundary, a prison library, infirmary, dining hall, chapel, and gymnasium. Running alongside these communal areas, a blacktop walkway stretches north to administrative buildings and south to the Yard, the outdoor recreational area. Prisoners at Twin Rivers — 60-70 percent of whom have been convicted of a sex offense — have given the walkway a nickname: the Boulevard.

When allowed out of their cell, prisoners, either in their state-issued khaki clothing or prison-approved apparel from the outside, and guards, clad in dark blue enforcement uniforms, stroll the Boulevard. Near their feet, blackbirds patrol the grounds for insects. Above them, swallows delight in the freedom of open air.

Bret showed up at Twin Rivers in January 2005, transported from the Special Offender Unit in a white van, ready to start treatment. But he had to wait for a vacancy.

Anyone convicted of a sex offense in Washington state since 1998 can volunteer to take part in the treatment program at Twin Rivers. Space allows for only 200 participants at a time. The program is popular: The five-year waiting list stretches to 1,000 would-be participants. (A much smaller program, for female sex offenders, exists in Gig Harbor.) Active enrollees live together in A Unit, the layout of which recalls a giant hand, open wide.

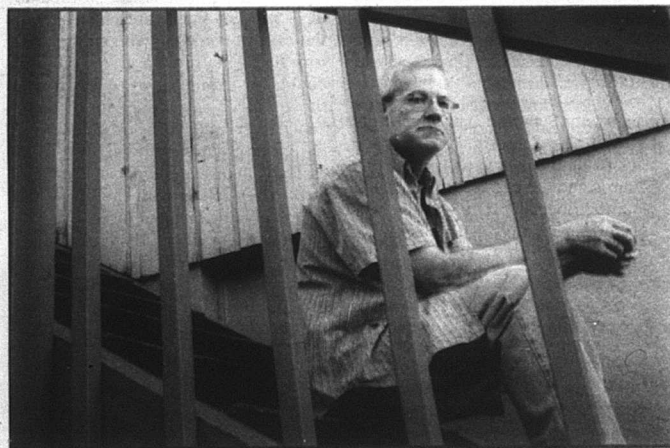
Three dorm wings branch outward from a centralized day room like the extended ring, middle, and forefinger of an open hand. At the points where fingers would join to palm, thick walls of shatterproof Plexiglas reach from floor to ceiling. Imagine the wrist. Here, on an elevated platform, sitting behind another Plexiglas wall, a guard keeps watch on all activities: pool games, channel surfing, daytime showers.

Bret took a cell on A Unit, C Wing, at first playing the "house mouse," sticking close to his cell, too afraid to interact with everyone else. Other offenders

by his wit and intelligence. As he listened while Bret talked. And talked. And talked. "Bret was very happy when Bret and I were together at Twin Rivers."

If the weather proved agreeable, offenders spent free time in the Yard, shooting hoops or walking laps around the track. One afternoon, a group of offenders, taking in the sunshine, hung out on the grass in the Yard. A conversation broke out, topics changing with great ease. Someone heckled McCollum, cracking a joke about his age. Bret laughed.

Come on, McCollum, 54, told him, you'll get your turn. You'll grow old.



The first time Lawrence McCollum met Bret in Twin Rivers in early 2005, he just thought of him as another prisoner. But after their second meeting, their friendship clicked. "Bret was very happy when Bret and I were together at Twin Rivers." Photo by Joel Turner

prodded him to enter more fully into the unit's life and, after some cajoling, he did. In no time, pretty much everyone knew Bret's name.

Not that they called him Bret. Nicknames are popular inside and when prisoners hit upon one for Bret, they based it on a physical characteristic: He blinked. A lot. He would be looking at you, and for no reason, his lids — for a second, maybe a little more — would clamp shut. Practically everyone took to calling him

Grow old? That's not going to happen, Bret said. I'll never see 30. I'm going to commit suicide. It'll be by jumping, he said.

Blinky, which he hated. Lawrence McCollum called him Bret.

They met over dinner. McCollum hadn't been at Twin Rivers long and, one evening, as he scanned the dining hall looking for a place to sit, he spied an open seat. Seconds after he placed his tray on the table, Bret plopped down across from him. The two chatted while they ate. McCollum didn't think much of it.

A few days later, in the Yard, Bret ran up to McCollum: He'd been looking for him. They talked some more. "And we just hit it off," says McCollum. During free time, they became inseparable. Bret taught him cribbage, dominoes, bocce ball, horseshoes. McCollum was struck

That's not going to happen, Bret replied. I'll never see 30. I'm going to commit suicide. It'll be by jumping, he said.

But: What do you do, when someone says he's thinking of suicide? Experts advise to take the threat seriously. Seek assistance. Get help.

Yet the offenders in the Yard treated Bret's admission with nonchalance. Perhaps it was because people say crazy stuff in prison and who can tell if someone's just being funny. And Bret could be funny. Or perhaps the very notion of taking one's own life unsettled them more than the violence they had experienced or witnessed on the outside. Whatever their reasons, none of them made much of Bret's comment.

Yet McCollum couldn't ignore Bret's never-see-30 fatalism. He'd stood next to Bret in the meds line while a nurse watched him swallow down pills, some prescribed to combat suicidal thoughts and depression. He knew that voices commanded Bret to jump, head first, from a tall structure. But would he really do it? McCollum didn't act that day in the Yard. But if a situation ever arose, McCollum swore he'd tell the staff.

He'd do whatever it took.

Intellectually, Sally Neiland knew the sex offenders wouldn't be bogeymen. But still, the men were so nice, they took her by surprise.

BRET, Continued from Page 7

She'd been working with victims of sexual assault — both women and men — for several years when Twin Rivers invited her to speak. They wanted her to dialogue with clinicians about victim empathy. Her plan was simple: just talk to the clinicians and get out. There would be no hanging around.

But when she arrived, clinicians asked her to sit in on a group. She did. As the offenders talked, she watched the men. They weren't scary-looking. And they appeared to be working on making changes in their lives. "It was like being at a PTA meeting that was all men," says Neiland, the current Sex Offender Treatment Program director.

Yet Neiland knows that in the Sex Offender Treatment Program, the men don't sit around talking about bake sales. In groups involving 10 to 14 offenders, each participant addresses his past criminal behavior and its potential causes.

Groups employ cognitive behavior therapy, a form of psychotherapy focused on how one's thoughts impact one's feelings and actions. The therapy also challenges distortions about vulner-

What makes a sex offender? If Twin Rivers is an example, then no black-and-white answer exists.

able victims. A trained clinician facilitates the group.

Treatment also incorporates a practice known as arousal reconditioning. Here, the emphasis is to redirect a participant's usual pathway to sexual stimulation through the introduction of an unpleasant sensation — say, a nauseating smell — prior to the initial stage of arousal.

By program's end, an offender has undergone between 350 and 500 hours of treatment, not including a varying number of one-on-one hours with a clinician. The purpose of treatment is to stop the men from re-offending again — forever. Indeed, only 1.3 percent of those who complete treatment are

convicted of another felony sex offense within five years.

Bret fared well in his treatment group. He got along with fellow members and sought out his clinician for one-on-ones several times a week. Before entering the group, he'd worked with the clinician on an individual plan, which he followed. One of his issues was impulse control: When he wanted something, he would go get it. And boundaries, he had problems setting his own and respecting others'.

Participants confronting mental illness — a low percentage, Neiland says, since most sex offenders aren't mentally ill — present significant challenges. In the case of someone who suffers auditory hallucinations, a group clinician could, for example, write down what those voices say on sheets of paper. Taped to the walls of the treatment room, the other group members, prior to the mentally ill offender's arrival, can familiarize themselves with the challenges their incoming member faces.

Doctors, teachers, lawyers, janitors, Boeing executives, clergy members, cops: all of these people have taken part in SOTP. But what led these men here in the first place? What makes a sex offender? If Twin Rivers is an example, then no black-and-white answer exists.

One third of the men in SOTP have been sexually assaulted. Another third report witnessing abuse in the home. "And the last third report an absence of identifiable trauma," says Neiland. Bret seemed to fit the first two categories.

As for those who offend against children, the causes can be numerous. The act may have occurred because the offender merely had access to the young victim, not because the offender carries an attraction toward all children. "Or they may be emotionally congruent with children," Neiland says, "versus those 'their own peer age.'"

Outside of group, a community of caring people sprang up around Bret, one that extended to staff members, who enjoyed his presence. He could have them laughing in a manner of minutes.

He worked in the kitchen — pay rate, 42 cents an hour — on the lunch-dinner crew. When he took off his food-service cap at the end of his shift, he'd make a beeline for Lawrence McCollum's cell so they could hang out. Numerous times, in their conversations, Bret spoke of the voices or predicted his early death.

On two occasions, he told McCollum he had to do it: He was going to jump from the interior second-floor balcony of A Unit to the ground floor. Then once more he repeated the claim. Why? McCollum asked. Because the voices are telling me to, he said.

McCollum didn't need to hear it a fourth time. With Bret's permission, he went to the sergeant's office. The sergeant declared a medical emergency. A Unit went on lockdown. Medical staff assessed Bret's condition. They escorted him to a hospital within the correctional complex.

What worried McCollum more than anything was that, at the time, Bret had been keeping his appointments in the meds line. He'd seen him take his pills. "If he's doing all this while he's medicating,"

says McCollum, "imagine what must be happening when he's not?"

Bret returned to the unit days later. He told McCollum he was all right. Still, most people knew. Even though he acted happy-go-lucky, they were aware, behind his smiles, his mental state plagued him. Yet nothing could diminish the beacon on the horizon: his release.

In March of 2002, he'd been sentenced to five and a half years. That would have taken him to September 2007. The End of Sentence Review Board, after examining his file and taking into account time for good behavior, determined that Bret could be released in October 2006. They also decided, based upon a point system that factored in his single offense, he'd be classified as a Level 2 sex offender, a mid-level designation.

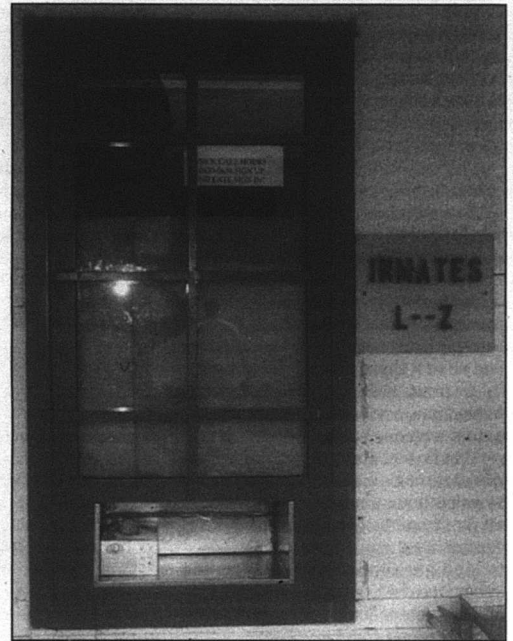
A second committee deemed Bret a good match for a state program that assisted seriously mentally ill offenders upon release. The program even contracted with a building. It seemed perfect, until the committee realized the building sat close to a school, which would have broken one of his release conditions. In short order, the program secured him a small room in one of the few Seattle apartment complexes willing

McCollum had stood next to Bret in the meds line while a nurse watched him swallow down pills, some prescribed to combat suicidal thoughts. He knew that voices commanded Bret to jump, head first, from a tall structure. But would he really do it?

to accept Level 2 sex offenders. McCollum, who had already been released, took pictures of Bret's soon-to-be home, and mailed them to his friend. The room was located in a seedy building on a gritty street on Capitol Hill, near downtown.

His earned release date of Oct. 21, 2006 was finalized. But there was another problem: Halloween. Did it make sense to release Bret on the proposed date, when, 10 days later, the streets could be full of trouble? Not to mention children?

The man chosen to be Bret's parole officer on the outside, Randy Van Zandt, thought not. He felt it best to wait. After reconsideration, officials shifted the date. Bulletins sent to sheriff offices in King and Cowlitz Counties informed law



Every day, Bret stopped by this window — the Meds Line — to pick up his prescriptions. A nurse would watch as he swallowed them. Still, hallucinations plagued him. Photo by Rosette Royale

enforcement Bret Hugh Winch would be released on Nov. 1.

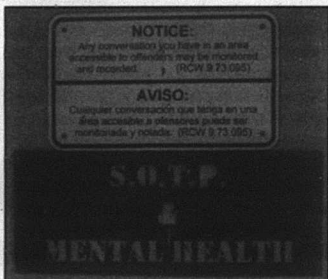
September passed without incident. In October, he completed his Sex Offender Treatment Program, agreeing to outside treatment. When Nov. 1 rolled around, Bret met Van Zandt outside of Twin Rivers' locked doors. It was the first time in more than five and a half years he'd stepped on the open side of razor-wire fences and locked metal doors without handcuffs or shackles. With him, he had two boxes of belongings. Withdrawn from his prisoner account: checks totaling \$42.

What was he thinking as he slid into the car seat? Was he excited to finally be free? Did he worry he might screw up and find himself under the eyes of armed guards again? Or were all of his thoughts drowned out by voices commanding him to hurt himself, overpowered by creatures snarling nearby?

His treatment clinician on the outside, whom he had yet to meet, would claim later that Bret would do a lot better than anyone had expected. Yet, within a year, he would be standing on the Aurora Bridge.

And the last person he knew to see him before he'd clamber over the outside rail would be Van Zandt, the man who'd come to meet him for his journey to Seattle, where the two would take part in a destiny Bret had been predicting for years. ■

To be continued...



A sign adorning the entrance to one of the two buildings that house the Sex Offender Treatment Program (SOTP) at Twin Rivers. Up to 200 offenders participate in the program at a time, which lasts anywhere from 12 to 18 months. Photo by Rosette Royale