

Finding Freedom in Prison—The Weldon Long Story

How do you find freedom in prison? I invite you to read the story below as written by Weldon Long. I had the profound pleasure of meeting him in person recently...here are my thoughts after meeting him and reading his book.

I was inspired and thrilled to meet Weldon Long, the author of *The Upside of Fear*, at a meeting focused on strengthening families. I've loved and endorsed his book and I'm convinced that he has a very special mission in life. He's such a handsome and pleasant person, and it was a very emotional experience for me as well to visit with him and know the kind of influence he can have, particularly with people who have been in the same kind of situation he was in, and to see his courageous and thrilling path to freedom, prosperity and family happiness. We were both emotionally connected, and I am profoundly grateful to God for his exemplary life and desire to serve God's other children. I pray to God for his dear wife and son and other children that they might have. I felt an instant love for him.

Weldon Long's story:

On June 10th, 1996, my father died and my life changed forever.

At the time I was in federal custody on mail fraud and money laundering indictments – it was my third time in prison. In fact, I was a career criminal, high-school drop-out, homeless alcoholic. I had abandoned my three-year-old son and broke every promise I had ever made.

I was the personification of the bottom of the barrel.

In the days following my father's death, the regret and remorse of a wasted life crushed me. For the first time in my life I saw myself for what I truly was, and I was sickened by what I saw. I knew I had to change.

But there was a small problem: I didn't know where to start. That's when I found the book that changed everything. In a small room that served as the facility's library I found a copy of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* written by Dr. Stephen Covey.

As I began to read the book I felt a sense of excitement I had never before felt. I felt as though Dr. Covey was speaking directly to me. For the first time in my life I began to seriously consider the values that had governed my life, and I realized that I had not been breaking the universal principles of success – I was breaking myself against them. The personality ethic had governed my behavior as I pretended and faked my way through life. My only hope was living my life according to the character ethic described by Dr. Covey.

After reading *7 Habits* I set out to rebuild my life and become a man I could love. Moreover, I resolved to be the father to my son I had never been. Over the next 7 years as I served my third prison sentence, I began to see the fruits of implementing the 7 habits. I began to take responsibility for my responses to whatever came my way in life. I began to visualize how I wanted my life to be years in the future. And I began to get my priorities straight.

By the time I left prison in 2003, I had earned my BS in Law and an MBA in Management. Within six months of getting out my son was living with me, and within a year I had married the most amazing woman I had ever known. Within three years of getting out my new wife and I owned the largest residential HVAC company in Southern Colorado. And within four years of getting out of prison my wife and I owned a beautiful home on Maui. I had completed my transformation from Prison to Paradise by implementing the things Dr. Covey had taught me through those lonely prison years.

Today, my wife and I have successful companies and my son, who is now 16, is a happy, outgoing teenager with a bright future ahead of him. I have written a book about my journey called *The Upside of Fear*, which outlines my twenty year cycle of prison, poverty and addiction and how I broke the cycle. My hope is that others will learn from my story and come to realize the dreams really do come true – if we work for them.

My story would be amazing if it ended right there, but there is even more... way more.

In addition to writing, I do motivational and inspirational keynotes as a professional speaker. Recently I delivered a presentation to a group of Colorado Springs' business leaders and professionals. Just before I began my presentation a man in the front row stood up and announced that Dr. Stephen Covey would soon be in Colorado Springs to address a small group. He said that if anyone was interested in attending the upcoming event to see him before leaving.

Dumbfounded, I heard the voice of the host introduce me, and as I stood before the audience I couldn't believe what I had just heard. It was all I could do to stay focused on my task at hand and deliver the message I had prepared.

After my presentation I spoke with the gentleman who had announced Dr. Covey's visit to Colorado Springs. He invited me and my family to attend the event and offered to get a copy of *The Upside of Fear* to Dr. Covey. As it turned out his daughter was Dr. Covey's personal assistant. I could hardly believe my ears.

A month later I sat in the audience as Dr. Stephen Covey spoke. As I listened to his words I thought back to the time thirteen years earlier when I read *7 Habits* in a dark, lonely place. I couldn't believe the man whose words saved my life stood just a few feet away from me.

At the conclusion of Dr. Covey's presentation a line formed as audience members approached the stage to shake the hand of the man who had no doubt impacted them all in some way. I approached the opposite side of the stage and took the opportunity to thank the man and his daughter who had made this special night possible for me and my family.

As we discussed the impact of hearing Dr. Covey live, I was approached by someone from behind. I turned to see the face of the man who had changed my life. There, no more than a foot in front of me, stood Dr. Stephen Covey.

I was speechless.

"I really enjoyed your book, Mr. Long," Dr. Covey said.

"I, uh, I really enjoyed yours too. It saved my life," I stammered. Seeing my nervousness, Dr. Covey softly smiled.

Suddenly I was overcome with emotion. I couldn't believe the man who wrote the words that transformed my life was right there. I tried to speak, and I am sure I said something that made absolutely no sense whatsoever.

Suddenly he reached out and put his arms around me, and I began to weep.

It was one of the most profound moments of my life. The man whose words had comforted me in the darkest hours of my life was now comforting me again – this time the way a father comforts a frightened child.

For the next several moments, as I began to regain my composure, Dr. Covey told me I had a "Divine Destiny" and that I would have the opportunity to help others with my story. I thanked

him for all he had done for me and my family. We shook hands and he quietly moved on to greet others in the crowd.

I stood there with my family and friends in circumspect silence. I thought about how my life had changed, and I was grateful for everything I had learned and the wonderful life those lessons had brought me.

A few days later I learned that Dr. Covey had agreed to write an endorsement for my book. The endorsement read:

"This book comes from a magnificent person who learned the lessons of life out of profound prison experiences. Despite the harsh language, Wally Long is a true diamond in the rough who produced this inspiring and illuminating account of the path he took to freedom and prosperity."

Stephen R. Covey

I read the words and couldn't believe the generosity of a man who had sold millions of books and is one of the most influential leaders of our time. The endorsement was written on June 10, 2009, exactly 13 years to the day my father had died and I set out on a journey to change my life.

I guess dreams really do come true.

Weldon Long – Author, *The Upside of Fear: How One Man Broke the Cycle of Prison, Poverty, and Addiction.*

Response to "Finding Freedom in Prison—The Weldon Long Story"

1. Victor Says:
[July 21st, 2009 at 1:23 pm](#)

It's funny, I've read the 7 Habits and I didn't have the same reaction. Hopefully, for the sake of my family, I don't have to hit rock bottom or lose my father before I get it.

I would like to thank Dr. Covey for doing what he does.

May God bless you all...

2. [Arun](#) Says:
[August 19th, 2009 at 12:17 am](#)

It is amazing.

I read the 7H, could not understand, attended workshops, could understand a little bit, read other books of Dr. Covey, joined Franklin Covey South Asia, started training others on 7H.

My days, weeks, months, and years are pledged to 7H.

May we have the strength to pursue this inside out journey....