

**To: Spring 2020 Restorative Justice Group #24**  
**Title: TRUST**

I was excited to begin my first Restorative Justice Circle in early March, but as fate would have it, after our first meeting, the circles were suspended because of the Coronavirus outbreak. I understood but was disappointed because I was really looking forward to participating in what I anticipated would be one of the most positive experiences of my life as it related to prison and prisoners. My first experience in the circle, interacting with the men who were incarcerated, was a confirmation of my expectations. Because the circles were suspended, I began receiving these papers written by different people who had been volunteers in the Restorative Justice program, and I was in awe due to the thoughtfulness, insights, and faith, hope and humility expressed in the articles that I read. I was so humbled in fact that I believed that I had nothing to offer. I could always use, as an excuse for my own perceived inadequacy, the fact that I only participated in one introductory circle. To an extent, I still believe that but am willing to trust that someone might be interested in what I have to say.

When I was about six or seven years old, I was hanging out on the stoop of our house when my uncle came for a visit, which he often did. He was a big, burly Irishman who liked his drink and who was my favorite family relative. On this particular day, I stood up to greet him from the top step. The interaction went like something like this:

Uncle: *Hey, buddy, come on and jump.*

Me: *Naw.*

Uncle: *Come on. You afraid of somethin'?*

Me: *Ya. I'll jump and fall on my face.*

Uncle: *Hey. Come on and jump. I wouldn't let anything happen to you.*

Me: *Naw. Ain't gonna happen!*

Uncle: *What's the matter? You don't trust me? You think I'd let you get hurt?*

Me: *Aah. OK.*

So, I jumped, and my uncle stepped aside. I fell on my face after which he picked me up by the collar of my shirt, gave me a huge hug, and said, "Never trust nobody!" That message was a powerful reminder throughout many years of my life. I was leery about letting people get too close or about making a fool out of me. Of course, I still trusted my parents and brothers and, surprisingly enough, my uncle, but I vowed never to allow myself to be put in a situation where I was vulnerable again. That still, small warning in the back of my head remained until I was about thirty years old when I met my wife to whom I've been married now for forty years. My beliefs were not instantly transformed by any means, but I was able to slowly work toward learning to trust others once again. I wasn't naive or incautious about relationships, but I was able to overcome, to a great degree, the instantaneous mistrust of others that I had carried for so long.

I learned a couple of things in the process. First, in order to establish any kind of relationship, trust is the key ingredient, and in order to trust, one has to be willing to take a risk, and in my case, a huge risk. Second, I became a teacher at age 42 and, based on my experiences, I understood that I could develop the best, most interesting curriculum in the school district, but if I did not have the trust of my students, then all of that knowledge was useless. I spent practically the first month of classes attempting to build trust among the students themselves, among the students and me and vice versa, which did not endear me to administrators who wanted to see me teaching the subject matter from day one. My overriding philosophy was that teaching was approximately 75-80% about relationships. If those relationships were strong, then the learning and discipline would come naturally. It seemed to work for me throughout my teaching career, something for which I will be ever grateful.

So, here I am once again, in a sense, back to my original sense of inadequacy, but willing to take a risk and trust that someone might benefit from a simple story.

~ Mr. Kolb, Restorative Justice volunteer