

Second Act Stories (www.secondactstories.org)

Episode #27
 Meet The Man Who Sends College Students To Prison:
 James Farrin's Second Act
 (11/18/2018)

Who	Audio Segment
Law and Order Intro	<p>"In the criminal justice system, the people are represented by two separate but equally important groups: The police, who investigate crime, and the district attorneys, who prosecute the offenders. These are their stories."</p>
Andy Levine	<p>The television series "Law and Order" has been wildly successful. It ran for 20 seasons and 456 episodes.</p> <p>But this crime drama ignores what happens to people when they enter prison. Today's podcast takes a look at a former corporate executive who at the age of 72 started a program to help incarcerated people find a fresh start. And the experience breathed new life into him as well.</p>
	<p>INTRO MUSIC</p>
Andy Levine	<p>Welcome to Second Act Stories, a podcast that looks at people who have made major career changes and are pursuing more rewarding lives in a second act. I'm your host, Andy Levine.</p> <p>In this episode, we're going to meet an incredible man named Jim Farrin. Ten years ago, Jim helped start an organization called The Petey Greene Program. In a nutshell, the program brings volunteer students from colleges like Princeton, Harvard, Brown and Columbia into prisons to serve as tutors. They help prisoners get a high school diploma or GEDs. And in some cases, they even help prepare them to attend college.</p> <p>Jim is 82 years old today. By his own admission is working as hard as he ever has. And he's never been happier. But we'll start 60+ years ago during his time as an undergraduate at Princeton University which has a central role in this story.</p>

James Farrin	Well, I went to Princeton in 1958 more as a tennis player than a student. I enjoyed Princeton very much and when it came to senior year, all of us have to write a thesis and I was determined not to write the fifteenth biography of Benjamin Franklin and so I was looking around for something that was in the realm of politics but very different and I found a virtually unknown judge in Colorado named Judge Benjamin Barr Lindsey who was very unique. He veered from normal judging He said, "Andy, I'm sending you to this prison and I want you to go by train. Here's the ticket. Here's another five dollars for the taxi when it arrives there to take you to the prison. If you violate that trust, you are going to put your entire life in jeopardy, but if you do this, you will have learned something very important for where you're going and how you will come out, trust." And amazingly enough, he had a higher percentage going on this basis than he did sending them with an armed guard, where about 8% escaped. So that made a tremendous impact on me.
Andy	Jim graduated from Princeton in 1958 and headed to the west coast to the Stanford Graduate School of Business. And that's where he met his wife.
Jim	People always asked me, "What did you major in, Jim?" and I'd tell them, "I majored in Mary Anne." Her middle name was Majors and I spent a wicked amount of time courting her. And on this day, we have been married 58 years and 5 months, but who's counting? We have eight grandkids and five wonderful kids.
Andy	After Stanford, Jim had a stellar business career as a top executive working for companies like Colgate-Palmolive and the Mennen Corporation. But after a long, globe-trotting life, he ended up back where our story started.
Jim	Mary Anne and I went to 9 overseas countries in 17 years, about two years a pop, and finally came back to the United States, and to New York City and she told me that, "I've followed you all over the world, now you got to follow me somewhere." And I said, "Well, where do you want to go?" She said, "I want to go to divinity school." I've picked out the school that I'm going to go to." I took a deep breath, I said, "I wonder where I'm going to end up." "Princeton, I'm going to the Princeton Theological Seminary."
Andy	The full circle, right?
Jim	Full circle. And we've been here for 14 years, so that's how it all started.
Andy	So Jim is back in Princeton and managing a very successful consulting practice when he received a telephone call from a fellow Princeton classmate named Charlie Puttkammer.

Jim	<p>He said, "Jim, you've got more energy than anybody in our class. I would like you to help me run a program which will take Princeton students into the prison to help the people who have made a mistake and are incarcerated improve their reading, writing, and arithmetic." I said, "Charlie, I can't do that because I've got this consulting business, but if you wanted me to serve on a board, I'd be happy to do that. It sounds like a great cause."</p>
Andy	<p>And that probably would have been the end of it. But later that day something happened.</p>
Jim	<p>My wife was at the first reunion of the theological seminary she had graduated, which is an amazing accomplishment at age 68. And she was sitting across from somebody at the first reunion of her class at the seminary. And she said, "What do you do?" to the person next to her. He said, "I'm the chaplain supervisor at the Albert C. Wagner prison." And she said, "My gosh, my husband was just asked to join a program." So we both heard that message and thought God is calling us to go down there and check this thing out.</p>
Andy	<p>And so Jim went to the Albert C. Wagner prison in Bordentown, New Jersey later that week.</p>
Jim	<p>I'll never forget it, I met the big, tall strapping guy. His name was Albert Kandel, still a good friend. He was the administrator aka, the warden at Albert C. Wagner. As I walked in he said, "You're gonna do it, Jim." I said, "Wait a minute, I'm just here to check it out. What do you think I'm gonna do?" "You're gonna bring Princeton students into this prison."</p>
Andy	<p>Now, teaching is a difficult job. But a single person teaching a group of prisoners – many who are barely literate – is a nearly impossible job. So Jim thought maybe a group of college students – working with prisoners on a one-to-one basis – could actually work.</p> <p>Jim called back Charlie Putkammer. And he told him, "I'll do it." And he went to the Princeton campus to see if he could get students interested in the idea.</p>
Jim	<p>Once we found out that nobody was doing what we are doing and we decided to make it a program of tutors, I went and tried to recruit people to be in the first pilot group. Very challenging and the Pace Center, a great organization which was helping me recruit said, "Hey, Jim, you know, I've got you in a tiny classroom, but don't feel bad if you don't get this organization off the ground." Princeton students are already so busy.</p> <p>And then we cut to three weeks later, and we were in Frist classroom 302. There were 45 people in the audience who wanted more information about this program and Albert Kandel and myself were at the door, and he started to tear up. He said, "Jim, I think we've got a program."</p>

Andy	So this was back in 2007, 2008?
Jim	2008.
Andy	So at that point, you knew you had a program?
Jim	At that point, we knew we had a program. Yup.
Andy	Erich Kussman was in the Albert Wagner Correctional Facility in 2008. And he was among the first prisoners to receive tutoring from the Petey Greene Program.
Erich Kussman	Well, I grew up in Plainfield, New Jersey. And my mother was a drug addict. I didn't have a father. So, and Plainfield is an impoverished community, a lot of drugs, a lot of people just struggling to get by. And I fell into a lot of the wrong crowds. And, you know, to fast forward, some years later, I wound up incarcerated for getting into a bar fight.
Andy	Erich was serving a twelve-year sentence when he first learned about the Petey Greene program.
Erich	While I was serving my time, I was introduced to the Petey Greene Program. And it was a new program at that time, in 2008. And they were looking for inmates to volunteer for the program. And, you know, I just wanted to get out of my cell. I was like, "I'll do it. Why not?" So I went down there, and at this point of time, I didn't have a GED, no high school education, dropped out in ninth grade.
Andy	Ninth grade?
Erich	Ninth grade, yes.
Andy	Wow. Okay.
Erich	And I remember asking one of the tutors, "Well, why are you here? How much are they paying you to come in here, to be in prison?" And her name was Julia, and she said, "Oh, they don't pay me. I volunteer." And that struck me as odd. Why would somebody want to volunteer their time to come into a prison? So, you know, just based on that, I was like, "All right. If they're volunteering and staying committed to their time, I'll give them 100% of what I got."
Andy	Erich got his GED after eight months in the program. And when he was released from prison in 2013, he went on to get a bachelors degree from Pillar College in Newark, NJ. But here's the amazing part...
Erich	And right now, as you may know, I study at Princeton Theological Seminary, which I graduate in May with my Masters in Divinity.
Andy	You must be a very non-traditional student there, I would think.

Erich	Yeah, very non-traditional. People come from all over the world to study at that seminary. It's the top theological school in the country. And, you know, people coming from the Midwest, there are people coming from Korea, Japan, England, Scotland. They're here. And here I am, a scrappy kid from Plainfield, you know, being able to grace these halls that, you know, a lot of great theologians walked.
Andy	Erich will graduate next year and will become a minister with the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America. What a great second act story for another day. But let's get back to Jim Farrin. I asked him about Petey Greene, the man who inspired this organization.
Jim	Petey Greene was actually formerly incarcerated in Washington, DC jail who had a tremendous personality. And lo and behold, Charlie Puttkammer was the one that helped him establish himself Petey Greene who became a very famous radio talk show host in Washington, DC and he kept a lot of people from going to prison because he's telling them about how bad it was, "Don't make the mistake I did." And when he passed away in the mid-70s, they had one of the biggest funerals they've ever had for him. He was a tremendously influential figure and certainly for Charlie Puttkammer.
Andy	So in 2008, 10 years ago you test this program with a group of 23 Princeton students and that's been really wildly successful since then. Can you just talk about the growth and how you've built it from Princeton to beyond Princeton?
Jim	Well, I started by doing everything. I was Ma and Pa Kettle and not good at either Ma or Pa. And then finally it hit me. I said, "Why am I doing everything myself?" And I thought, "I'm gonna ask if anybody would like to join me and help me among the students, and become a student leader." And three people popped up and one of them was Joe Barrett, and the other was Shaina Watrous, and the third was Walter Fortson who actually came from outside not inside Princeton. And the first thing they told me is, "Hey, Jim, we're gonna take one job away from you." And I said, "Okay. Which one?" "Recruiting." "Oh, come on. Don't take that away. I love that job." "We'll double it if you give us a chance." And I thought, "You'll never do that." Well, they did more than double it in the first and I was slow to wake up to the fact that a guy who is in his mid-70s is probably not the best recruiter of kids that are 19 to 21.
Andy	And as the program has grown, Jim has continued to give-up many of the day-to-day responsibilities of the organization.

Jim	I had my second realization again coming from a job from somebody who is working with us in New York. And he said, "Jim, you can't do it all. You got too many people reporting to you." I said, "Why? I love this work." "You need to bring in a chief program director." And we interviewed and found a young lady called Jess Weiss. She was a Titanic force to standardize, to get us organized, and to expand the program, and she came aboard in early 2016. And in two years just did an incredible job expanding it to the point that right now, we have this year, 2018, we will have 1,200 volunteers in 29 colleges and 44 facilities. And we work with 2,000 people who are incarcerated. And the program has just taken off. I look at this as God's program.
Andy	I know you've attended some of the graduation ceremonies in the prisons when people get their GEDs. What is that like for you?
Jim	Oh, boy, what a great question. It's almost lifechanging. I mean, when you get in there and you see these people coming down the aisle with their tassels and their full graduation gear, and they look up on the right, it seems to always be on the right side and they say, "Mom, I got my GED." And there's hardly a dry eye in the place. And it's very, very powerful because they know it... What's so great is that the statistics back it up. If you take two courses in prison, two courses, doesn't matter which two, you reduce recidivism by 43%. That is an amazing statistic. It's amazing what education can do. It's a way of really breaking these chains.
Andy	But what I'm hearing you say is it's certainly helping the students on the inside, the incarcerated people. But is it having an equally powerful impact on the volunteers?
Jim	Exactly, exactly. Equally. To me, it's the beauty of the program that it's really two-tiered and they're both important. Because we're bringing people from school that they're graduating, that really understand the criminal justice system.
Andy	How is that different than, say, your corporate life and what you did in the earlier part of your career?
Jim	Boy, it's tremendously different. The huge difference is when you're working you feel you are doing good for society that you are helping to give back in a way which has tremendous influence and is such a great need in our country at this point. This whole criminal justice system so badly needs to be reformed, so badly. And if you feel you're doing something to help, for one thing we're positively attacking what I think is gonna be the number one civil rights issue of this century.

Andy	So last year, the American Association of Retired Persons named you as one of five individuals to win the Purpose Prize which is a very, very prestigious award among nonprofit organizations. How did that make you feel?
Jim	Oh, gosh. I receive the news of the award when I was up in Alaska with my wife on a trip and I looked at the e-mail coming in on my iPhone, and I just started crying. I thought, "Oh, my gosh. This potentially could do such good for our program." So, what really hit me, and it's been very helpful, large cash award of \$50,000 which I gave back to Petey Greene. So it was an amazing experience and I was so gratified that...we have five kids, that three of them managed to get to that award in Chicago on very short notice. And it was the proudest moment of my life. But it was on behalf of Petey Greene.
Andy	I wanna take in a little bit of a different direction. What advice would you give to someone considering a second act or similar to what you've done with your life with Petey Greene?
Jim	In brief, I would say, don't you dare miss it because particularly if you are choosing a second career which is helping people or giving back, there just is nothing like the feeling that you get when you get up in the morning and say, "Hey, I'm gonna help some people who really need help today." It is a far deeper sense of joy and particularly purpose than you could ever get just kind of continuing in the current career path. And with my changed background, you could say, I'm a tremendous advocate for others to push off the diving board and jump in to something different. Because you will only...if you choose a purpose in doing that and to be closer to a large purpose, you will never regret it.
Andy	If you had to contrast your life in corporate America for the number of years you did that with your life today, I'm not trying to say one is good or one is bad, but how are they different?
Jim	In corporate America, it's more of a rat race to try to either hold your position or move into another with, in a lot of cases, forces that you can't really control and you get satisfaction from doing that. I did. But it's nothing like the feeling you get when you're helping. Nothing like it. It's just...it's a totally different ballpark.
Andy	If my math is right. You're 82 years old today.
Jim	You're a smart man, Andy. Eighty-two and a half. Proud of it.
Andy	Do you feel strong and willing to...you know, would you be doing this for a long time as long as you can?

Jim	Well, the organization I'm with, the Petey Greene program, which I started 10 years ago has already presented me a succession plan. So they're thinking that I might change my current role in two years. I'm gonna work like heck to try to give it the best two years I can and maybe go beyond. But I'd like to always stay working for Petey Greene.
Andy	Is there kind of a sense in America "I have my education stage, I have my work career, and then I have my retirement. And in retirement I'm gonna play golf, I'm gonna be in Florida," whatever it might be. You've taken a very different path than that. And just, is there a lot of kind of older Americans that were missing the value that they could bring to the country by not engaging in the kind of things that you're doing?
Jim	You said it. It's beautiful. They're missing it totally if they don't and just as an aside, my role model through my life was my dad who got to be a Rear Admiral in the United States Navy and ran shipyards of thousands of people. And when he got to be 65, he stopped it cold. He said, "Jimmy, it's over. I'm gonna go down to Florida and relax and enjoy life." He passed away, I think somewhat prematurely in his early 80s and I kinda went to school on that and said to try to do something dramatic. I went into the dictionary and ripped the page out that says retirement because why in the world should you stop working if you love it. And particularly if you're doing something to give back, it makes no sense.
	OUTGOING MUSIC

Andy	<p>As I think back on my discussion with Jim Farrin, and with Erich Kussman, I find a couple of important lessons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) The Power of an Idea...Jim and Charlie Putkammer, developed a simple but brilliant idea. Let's take college students at some of the best schools in the country. And let's ask them to go into prisons once a week and volunteer to tutor incarcerated men and women. They tried it out at Princeton University. And it worked. And today 29 colleges and universities are part of the program. And it just keeps growing.2) Age is just a Number...At 72 years of age, Jim Farrin took a leap off the end of a diving board and he started this amazing program. Ten years later, he's working harder than ever and loving every minute of his job.3) And Finally, Everyone Deserves a Second Chance...People like Erich Kussman made some bad decisions early in life. But it doesn't mean they can't turn their lives around with a little help and some education. <p>My special thanks to Jim Farrin and Erich Kussman for sitting down with me and allowing me to tell you about The Petey Greene Program. You can learn more about the organization at www.PeteyGreene.org. And if their story moves you, I hope you'll click on the "donate" button on their website and help support them.</p> <p>We hope you'll keep listening. There are many more second act stories just around the corner.</p>
------	---