

A NEW KIND OF HARD TIME

We begin a new series featuring those who left years of mainline for "the other side" Page 16

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View the photo gallery of some our country's amazing birds for National Bird Day Pages 17-19

To Our Readers

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

JAMES BALDWIN WROTE: "Despair: perhaps it is this despair which we should attempt to examine if we hope to bring water to this desert." He writes of unspeakable loneliness, wondering if anyone can feel what we feel.

To change ourselves, to change the world, Baldwin says we need courage ... to not place things above people, to not choose "safety" at the expense of justice. "The moment we cease to hold each other, break faith with one another, the sea engulfs us and the light goes out." Keep the light of hope alive. Send us your stories: Submission guidelines on pg. 3.



Peer Support Specialist Program mentors at work. Clockwise from bottom left: Jerry King, Moises Tejeda, Jacob Robles, Trevor Heard, Sean "Sharif" Neal, and Robert Yim. (J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)

Peer Support Specialist Program Rolls Out In California

By Jesse Carson, Editor-in-Chief

IN LATE 2023, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) and the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) rolled out the Peer Support Specialist Program at five institutions. The program trains incarcerated individuals to provide support to their peers in the form of orientation, informing patients of upcoming off-site medical appointments, and help signing up for groups or requesting medical services. Beyond these relatively mundane tasks, peer support specialists also discuss compliance with substance use treatment plans, preparing for parole, and dealing with the challenges of prison. They can provide group and one-on-one assistance with goal setting and personal development as well.

"There's a lot of stigma about mental health [treatment]," said Mule Creek's chief support executive A. Altschuler, "But this is just peers." Altschuler serves as the operational policy advisor for the prison, and is part of the team of custody and health care staff overseeing the program since it came here this summer.

Peer support specialists were selected after screening and interviews, and received six weeks of training from subject matter experts followed by two weeks of on-the-job training.

It is expected that the program will be at all institutions by the end of 2025.

Peer Support at the Valley State Prison

By Tomas Rodriguez, Valley State Prison

THE FIRST COHORT of the Peer Support Specialist Program (PSSP) at the Valley State Prison (VSP) wasted no time in establishing several innovative programs to assist the incarcerated population. In June 2024, PSSP began the Orientation Program and RAC-ATTACK.

The Orientation Program facilitates the dissemination of important information for newly arriving incarcerated people within 30 days of arrival to the institution. This includes general information about program expectations, open line for counselors, canteen hours, yard schedules, clothing and laundry needs, library access, the availability of rehabilitative and recovery groups, educational programs, sports leagues, jobs, vocations, religious services, etc.

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(from Peer Support, pg. 1)

The RAC-ATTACK is a PSS program designed to encourage residents to participate in rehabilitative achievement credit (RAC) programs. RAC-ATTACK is an opportunity to reach out to the population and empower them to participate in life-changing programs, like nurse-led therapeutic groups, anger management, victims impact, Alcoholics and Narcotics Anonymous, and Criminals & Gangmembers Anonymous, to name a few.



Poly Sanchez and Trevor Heard. (J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)

If you are at VSP and have questions or wish to sign up for groups, please submit a CDCR GA-22 Form to the Peer Support Specialist Program.

CMF and the Rise of PSSP By Zoan Shipp, California Medical Facility

IN DECEMBER 2023, the California Medical Facility (CMF) started training incarcerated individuals to work in the Peer Support Specialist Program. Since the beginning of the program, those who have gone through the extensive training came to learn invaluable, transferable, job-related skills. We also learned to work in conjunction with staff in support of the population.

“As a result of identifying a few of my current values, I was able to learn a little more about my personality type and how my personality meshes and blends with the world,” said Marlon Walker-Walkek of the first cohort.

“The PSSP have truly been a life saver for me. The insight and compassion I’ve developed through our many hours of training for six months have saved me and changed me,” said peer support specialist Chris Caldwell.

“The Peer Support Specialist Program has given me a lot of insight that helped me navigate dealing with my biases when they surface,” said Anthony Cook, another PSSP volunteer at CMF.

“I’m a Peer Support Specialist at CMF,” said Joshua Ochoa. “It’s an honor to have the opportunity to be part of this program, and also to be in the position to help others through my lived experiences.”

“I want to thank everyone involved for making the PSSP possible for everyone here at CMF and for the rest of the other prisons in the near future,” said David Mills. “The PSSP had made a significant change in my life.”

This writer would like to give a special thanks to Correctional Officers Briggs, Brown, and Cribbs. These officers have been fully supportive of the PSSP.

Here at CMF, I’ve met a lot of condemned individuals who transferred from San Quentin. The PSSP with condemned peer support specialists David Mills and David Ghent have begun playing a key role in helping the condemned adjust. We created the Condemned Acclimation Process for the condemned in the enhanced outpatient program (EOP) population, but it is now being considered for all of our condemned residents.

Change is difficult for most people, especially old-school convicts and correctional staff. For those who may not see it, prison is changing for the better. It’s moving away from warehousing convicted felons to focus on rehabilitating them. And, we’ve only just begun.



Poly Sanchez, Sean “Sharif” Neal, and S. Ortez, Subject Matter Expert. (J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)

Corrections:

The article “AB 1186 Addresses Restitution” in the December 2024 edition analyzed an earlier version of the legislation that did not reflect the final amendments to the bill. We apologize for the misleading information provided in the article. Please see the article on page 8 of this edition for a more accurate analysis of the bill and its effects.

The article “Our Stories Matter” on page 19 of the December 2024 edition incorrectly stated that the author received his BA degree in 2024. He will receive it at the end of the spring 2025 semester.

The views and opinions expressed are those of the contributing writers and do not necessarily reflect those of the facility or the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

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MULE CREEK POST MISSION STATEMENT AND STAFF

The *Mule Creek Post's* mission is to present content and messaging that encourages rehabilitation and pro-social values, and enhances a sense of community, creativity, and positivity.

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California Model



We Are the California Model

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

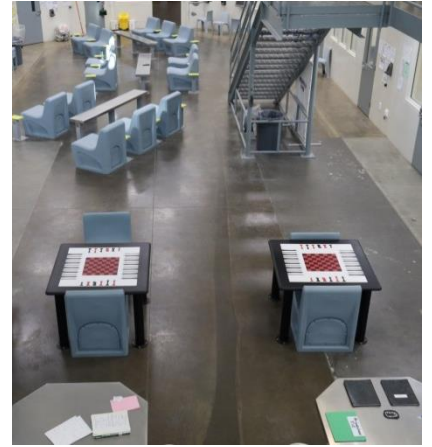
THE CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT of Corrections (CDCR), along with the California Correctional Health Care Services (CCHCS), are implementing the California Model in a commitment to making the living and working environment in California prisons better for all. The emphasis is on improving safety and wellness while helping incarcerated individuals prepare to become better neighbors when they return to their communities.

In an effort toward integrating reader involvement in this forward-thinking process, the *Mule Creek Post* invites readers to share stories regarding the new model to appear in future issues. How is the on-the-ground transition impacting your facility? Are you noticing changes? What are your expectations and ideas on improving staff-prisoner relations? To make the vision of a more humane prison system become a reality it will take all of our best ideas and efforts. We welcome your involvement and input.

CDCR Secretary Jeffrey Macomber visited the facility in late September and informed us that the new model is being implemented statewide, incrementally. As a staunch advocate for program improvement, Macomber says that fostering environments conducive to communication, rehabilitation, and reentry — California Model priorities — are goals to reduce incidents of violence and increase the wellness of all CDCR and CCHCS employees.

The four pillars are:

1. **Dynamic Security:** Promoting positive relationships between staff and incarcerated people through purposeful activities and professional, positive, and respectful communications.
2. **Normalization:** Bringing life in prison as close as possible to life outside prison to ease transitions and adjusting to life in the community upon release.
3. **Peer Support:** Training incarcerated people to use their lived experiences to mentor and support their peers and expanding existing rehabilitative programming.
4. **Becoming a Trauma-Informed Organization:** Improving the practices, policies, and culture of the entire department by educating staff at all levels to recognize impacts of trauma, and ensure safety of all staff and incarcerated individuals.



A view of the dayroom at the Mule Creek State Prison, Facility E, inside Building 19. Tables and chairs are only the beginning. (Photo by J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

Change within the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation does not happen overnight; however, since Gov. Newsom's announcement in March 2023 heralding in the new California Model, anticipation has been high. The ideal of the new model is based on the Norwegian incarceration system, a much less restrictive environment than U.S. facilities. Newsom wants to incorporate the best practices from Scandinavian countries like Norway, which has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the world (around 20%).

Macomber says that staff training is going well, and he expects California Model training will be ongoing in all facilities in 2025.



(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)



Residents make optimum use of the new tables for serious education and a serious game of chess. (J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)



(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

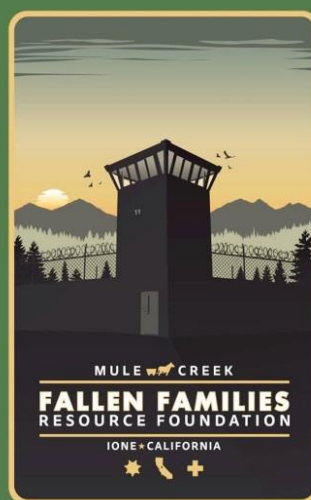
Fall 2024 Costco Food Sale Results

Amador Cty. Girl's Softball	\$10,000
Amador High Booster Boys Basketball	\$2000
Amador High Booster Boys Baseball	\$2180
Amador Cty. Little League East	\$6800
Lincoln High School Booster Wrestling	\$7488

The Mule Creek Fallen Families Resource Foundation helps correctional officers and their families who are going through difficult times.

For more information, contact one of the following staff members:

- Lt. J. Austin (President)
- Sgt. M. Rhode (Vice President/Treasurer)
- Lt. B. Campbell (Communications Chair)
- Officer M. Vanni (Sergeant-at-Arms)
- J. Greathouse (Secretary)
- Dr. L. Forester
- Sgt. J. Villanueva
- CCI M. Mendoza
- Officer P. Gonzalo
- C&PR R. Steele
- Sgt. E. Broussard



MULE CREEK POST Submissions

Freelance writers, staff, and others may submit articles or material to the *Mule Creek Post*, % MCIC AW's Office, P.O. Box 409090, Ione, CA 95640, or by interdepartmental mail if living at MCSP. Submissions may be edited for length and content and become the property of the *Mule Creek Post* (authors retain intellectual rights to original material). When submitting legal news articles, include source material documentation. Include your name, CDC#, and address.



Suicide Prevention Poetry

By Matthew Nall,
Mule Creek State Prison

FACILITY E HELD a poetry contest to bring awareness to suicide prevention. The idea is to open platforms for the voices of our community, and for those with mental health and substance abuse issues. People like me. I am 27 years into serving multiple life sentences.

At times, I used to feel overwhelmed with self-hate and toxic shame. Knowing I am responsible for murder and other unspeakable violence was a heavy weight to bear. Often, I contemplated suicide. Through recovery, clarity came, allowing me to see, to believe hope and change are possible. Opportunities for amends are realistic through events like this contest.

Thoughts inspired action; ideas came to life. Staff support, however, was an obstacle. My search led me to Ms. J, our awesome Facility E librarian. She pledged sponsorship, chronos, and even judging. Her commitment gave me positive reinforcement, allowing me a path to make this contest a reality.

The level of hard work, talent, and professionalism in every submission made my heart proud. I'm truly grateful to not have the task of judging or choosing the piece that best represents Facility E. Each submission reflected someone's willingness to promote positive change and community. Criteria required a 300-to-600-word entry, and additional tips on topics like mental health awareness, suicide prevention, recovery, or self-care.

My thanks go to every participant for creating positive awareness. This year's winning submission was written by Michael Goldsberry, entitled, "My Friend's Stay." His effort reflects true change and living amends.

If you are feeling suicidal, please seek help — fill out a Form 7362 Request for Health Care Services. You are not alone.

As We Walk Forward Together

By O. Rick Bridges, Feature Reporter
with Fred Munch, Post Columnist
and Nicholas Boyes, Mule Creek State Prison

WITH SUMMER WINDING down the gentle slopes of Ione's hills, it was a great day for a walk. The cool delta breeze was heaven sent, and lent comfort and ease of contemplation to the seriousness of the moment. The buoyant mood was dignified, reflective, and hopeful as, once again, we'd arrived at the annual Suicide Awareness Walkathon.

The walk began with a sober admonition. "If you are having a mental health crisis, talk to a peer support specialist, even in the middle of the night," said S. Ortez, subject matter expert for the Peer Support Specialist Program. "They are on call. If you know someone who is in crisis, refer them to a peer support specialist. Reach out to this group if you need any help. Your conversations with them are confidential, except where notifications are mandated by applicable laws. Each is familiar and will explain any exceptions to confidentiality when you meet with them. They are, as I, trained and certified."

"Since I've been here in 2013, I heard of at least five suicides at Mule Creek State Prison," said peer support specialist Sean "Sharif" Neal, reflecting on his experience and training. "Mental health must be taken seriously. Sometimes all it takes to maintain hope is for someone to lend an ear. We want to create a safe environment to get help. When men in crisis lose hope by failing to get the help that they need, it can lead to some tragic consequences."

"Death has an impact on everybody when it's close, and suicide is unpredictable," noted Omar Azeez, who, as the walk began, found himself focused on prevention as he shared his thoughts. "We all can strive to be aware and present when people speak to us. You can be proactive by making or listening to music to reinforce joy. Music is medicine."

"What I would say is that if a person's thoughts are followed by emotions of doing something harmful to themselves, stop. Stop!" exclaimed Gregory English, a Juvenile Diversion Program participant who combines recovery with faith. "Be still, and know that God has a purpose in your life. Psalms 46 says, 'Be still and know that I am God.' Our God is a God of hope. Don't let go of the rope of hope."

Marc Holland walked to express his gratitude. "This means the most to me because of my suicide attempt in 2011," he said. "If it were not for the kindness and thoughtfulness of the [Department of State Hospitals] staff, I would not be walking here today." Anthony Chavez agreed, humbly stating, "I'm here to prevent suicide, something that I have experience with."

"I'm here today, willing to walk as a way of advancing suicide awareness," said Wes Mitchell, a California State University, Sacramento student whose walk focused on community support. "If you need help, tell a friend. Don't hold it in."

"I'm walking for my little cousin Skye, age 28, who died from suicide a couple of months ago," said Bernard Smith, whose walk focused on family. "When I seen this, I thought that I'd support it. Mental health is serious. Please reach out to one another."

"I'm just joining in to support a worthy cause," said Larry Myer.

"I'm walking to give back to my community to help individuals get through troubled times," said Keith McRorie, who viewed his walk as a sacred obligation of living amends.

In his comments after the walk, Ricky Harris was reflective. "Participating in this walkathon for suicide prevention not only gave me the opportunity to participate in a worthy cause, it gave me the inspiration to walk more daily to improve my health," he said. "Thank you to the Mule Creek peer support staff."

With a glance of satisfaction, peer support specialist Mike Owens stood in summation of the day. "I'm proud of the turnout," he said, "and hope that means there are people willing to show up for one another. There is help all around."

Also braving the noonday sun, were 60 Facility D residents who walked over two miles for suicide awareness on Saturday, September 14. A pair of mental health staff oversaw the event after their arrival from facilities A and C, where hundreds joined the walkathon aimed at ending the stigma around male suicide.

First in line to register was Frank Lopez, 53, who has been wheelchair-bound for the past three years due to rheumatoid and osteoarthritis. Having trained for the event, this tenacious resident was determined to join the others for the next hour using hands and feet for a "rollathon." When finished, Lopez was covered in sweat and smiling with pride. It was an admirable feat, an affirmation of resilience and hope for us all.

If you or someone you know needs help, contact the National Suicide Hotline 988, Badge for Life, or BLUE H.E.L.P.; or tell a staff member immediately.



The Wordsmith

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

THIS MONTH'S FIRST word is *irregardless*. Many people use it, and it can even be found in some good dictionaries. But be warned: *irregardless* is not an acceptable word in American English. Many teachers will not accept the use of this word. One dictionary defines *irregardless* as "probably a blend of *irrespective* and *regardless*, nonstandard: regardless."

Use of the word *irregardless* is fairly widespread in speech. The most frequently repeated remark about the word is that there is no such word. There is such a word, however. It is still used primarily in speech, although it can be found from time to time in edited prose. Use *regardless* instead.

Irregardless is not generally accepted because it is a double negative. The prefix *ir-* means "not," and when combined with the following word, *regardless*, negates or cancels the meaning of *regardless* — which is: "despite everything (else)."

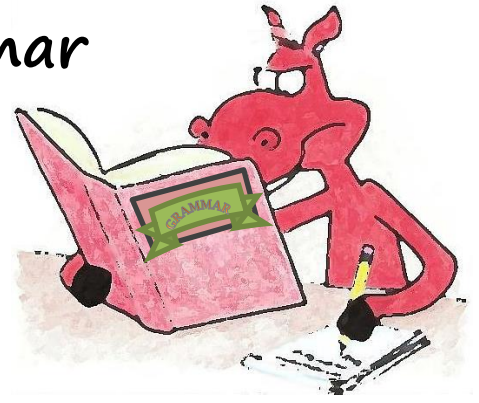
Some college instructors and professors are adamant about not using *irregardless* in submitted work, so actively exclude this word from your vocabulary; otherwise you may get a grade lower than you expect. It really comes down to this: Write what you mean, not merely what you intend to say.

Our second word is *irredeemable*, and is included to show how it can be used correctly. *Irredeemable* is defined by one dictionary as "not redeemable or being beyond remedy; hopeless." So, in this case, the root word *redeemable* is positive and is turned into a negative by use of the prefix *ir-*. Use of the prefixes changes the root words into its opposite meaning.

Sources: *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*; *Dictionary of Word Origins*.



Big Red's Grammar Guide



GOOD WRITING BEGINS with the basics. Here in my grammar guide are more things a writer should know. This month, we'll begin a discussion on writing and revising.

If you're like many writers, the hardest part of writing is getting started. I'll share some approaches for organization and ways to get you moving in the right direction. In the **prewriting** stage, you can use one or more of the following to help you think clearly and keep track of your ideas.

1. **Freewriting.** This is one of the most effective ways to cultivate ideas. Begin by writing your topic at the top of the page. Now write anything related to your topic — words, phrases, or complete sentences, whatever comes to mind. Set a time limit of about 10 minutes. Don't be concerned with spelling or punctuation. Don't erase. Don't stop. Just keep your pen moving. At the end, look over what you've written and cross out what doesn't work.
2. **Questioning.** Begin by asking the six questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how? Who was involved? What started it? When did it happen? Where did it happen? Why did it happen? How did it end?
3. **Clustering.** Here you'll use circles and lines to connect your thoughts. Begin by drawing a circle in the middle of your paper and writing your topic inside of it. Then start thinking of random words or phrases associated with your topic. As you think of something, write it in a separate circle and connect it to the main idea with a line. As you think of ideas that are offshoots of the new circles, draw other circles, write the new information in them, and then connect them. If you get stuck, ask yourself one of the six questions above.
4. **Outlining.** An outline is a blueprint to help organize thoughts in a logical way. The ideas you generated in freewriting, questioning, and clustering can now be organized in an outline to shape your formal writing.

Next month, we'll talk about the first draft.

Sources: *Grammar and Composition*, 4th Edition, Prentice Hall, 1990; Susan Thurman, *The Only Grammar Book You'll Ever Need*, Adams Media, 2003; *The Associated Press Stylebook 2017*, The Associated Press.

The Uncaged Writer

The CCWF Paper Trail

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter



THE CENTRAL CALIFORNIA Women's Facility (CCWF) at Chowchilla held its journalism guild graduation and unveiling of the first edition of the *CCWF Paper Trail*, on Wednesday, September 18. The initial publishing is included within a three-paper print edition of the *San Quentin News*, which also includes an insert from the *Mule Creek Post*.

CCWF Paper Trail editor Amber Bray says they publish once a month in print as a *San Quentin News* insert (and digitally on the GTL tablets and Edovo). The first issue is limited to eight pages, with hope to expand soon. They started with six editorial board members, and will add reporters and writers as they go along. Bray says the paper has "amazing photo capabilities and will be incorporating more photos in future issues."

Many at the *CCWF Paper Trail* have written for different publications. Bray says, "One of our editorial board members has editing/journalist experience, but the rest of us have needed the journalism guild class to gain experience and understand how to best write different types of stories."

Its mission statement reads: "*CCWF Paper Trail* is a pioneering publication that serves the largest women's prison in the world. It engages with community, promotes hope, creates positive solutions, and amplifies voices rarely heard." The publication's focus is to showcase individuals at the CCWF, shine a light on the things that happen within the institution, and to find solutions for problems that face the population.

Bray says, "Administrative involvement is positive; the supervisor is Public Information Officer Monique Williams, with whom we have an amazing working relationship. Lt. Williams and all of administration are supportive of the *Paper Trail*."

"We function with volunteers and meet in the media center once per week
(continued on page 6)

(from *Uncaged Writer*, pg. 5)
 to try to work on our paper,” Bray says. “Pollen Initiative has been tremendously helpful in providing assistance with layout and other tasks while job positions are created and we all learn our positions. Our major hurdles are not being able to work on the paper daily. A newspaper is unprecedented at CCWF, so we are all learning as we go to ensure it is successful.”

Outside submissions are accepted, limited to 350 words, and may be edited for content, clarity, and length. Articles should be newsworthy and pertain to the prison populace or the criminal justice system. Letters to the editor should be short, clear and to the point and they will not publish material that is offensive, racist, sexist, or derogatory toward any group.

Submissions may be sent to: Pollen Initiative, P.O. 1493, Alameda, CA 94501.

The website is at CCWFpapertrail.org. Those who want email access to the *CCWF Paper Trail* can fill out a “Contact Us” digital form on the website.

Like Fighting a Forest Fire

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

HISTORICALLY, THE UNITED States Forest Service put out every forest fire it encountered. After all, fire is dangerous, destructive, and deadly. It made sense to put out every fire, no matter the size, source, or location.

Over the last 150 years in the American West, the result of this approach is fuel in the forests has built up to the point that small manageable fires are no longer possible. In addition, the fires that take hold turn into raging infernos, creating massive destruction that requires a huge amount of resources to extinguish.



(science.nasa.gov)

our emotional self as to the forest: we build up too much emotional fuel. When it ignites, it goes off in a massive conflagration and burns so hot that we have no control over where it goes or who gets hurt.

For many of us, we kept our feelings bottled up. The only emotions we were allowed to show are anger and rage. One time or another, many have allowed ourselves to go into a blind rage, letting ourselves go so far into anger that we

can see and feel nothing but anger and rage. Then we are stuck there until the fuel, stored up over years, burns away. However, we can begin clearing some of the heavy brush and dead material that crowds the forest, keeping light from reaching the forest floor and fueling those massive wildfires that wreak such havoc. We can do the same in our emotional lives. Each of us can go inside ourselves, take a little piece of anger or rage, and allow for a small, controlled burn (just like the Forest Service), a burning designed to clear out dense, heavy fuel, leaving only clean ash and fertile ground behind.

In *Guiding Rage Into Power* (GRIP), this process is called “Sit-

ting in the Fire,” where we get to sit with our strong emotions, giving them the opportunity to burn themselves out, leaving only ash, which no longer holds any potential to burn and, as a result, cannot create harm for ourselves or anyone else.

Doing this can be deceptively simple. After all, one only needs to sit with a determination to allow whatever is going to happen to happen, and feel the feelings arise, allowing them to grow to fruition, and then naturally recede, all on their own, without any direction or interference from us.

The results that can come from this burning in such a controlled and non-harming manner can be reaped in so many areas of our lives, from our relationship with ourselves, to our job performance, and can even help to strengthen our friendships, and those long-term connections we have with the people we love...



An editorial meeting at the CCWF Paper Trail. (Courtesy of CCWF Paper Trail)



Submissions by incarcerated writers can be sent to:

Prison Journalism Project
 490 43rd Street #360
 Oakland, CA 94609

Follow the Prison Journalism Project (and prisoner-written stories) on social media:

on Twitter and Instagram:

@prisonjourn

on Facebook:

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PEN America Prison Writing Program



588 Broadway, Suite 303
New York, NY 10012



By Sean "Sharif" Neal,
Post Columnist

Chess is perhaps the most noble game in the world, played by millions across the globe in search of mental dominance over their opponents.

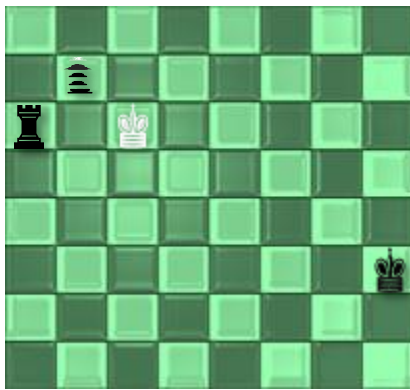
The exact origins of chess vary, some attributing its beginnings to ancient Persia and India as a means of formulating battle strategies. However, today's chess has evolved to attain a loftier goal: elevating the human mind.

Chess teaches critical thinking and problem-solving. In some states, chess is being explored as a cognitive rehabilitative tool that assists the incarcerated in developing patience. This improves decision-making skills such as thinking through options rather than making hasty decisions.

In short, chess is the proverbial "art imitating life," as the quality of one's life ultimately depends upon the type of decisions one makes.

Below is a game played by two grandmasters in 1875 England. The game, which should have been won, ended in a draw.

With white to move next, can you see how to win this game?



Submit your answer to the Mule Creek Post. Solutions will appear in the next issue.



Chess, © 2022 Franklin Lee, Pencil (detail)
(Photo by H. Kim, Media Specialist)

Opinion: Honor Advanced Directives

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist



IT MIGHT COME as no surprise that life in prison is full of restrictions and limitations. For some, the limits put on them while incarcerated are untenable, and they live in a state of struggle while constantly fighting, trying to figure out some way to beat the system, while others seem to live within those same restrictions without issue, waiting until they are released to begin living as they wish they could while inside prison walls. One of the areas restricted is in how incarcerated people are listened to (and respected) in regard to advanced directives or "Do Not Resuscitate" orders ("DNR's").

In the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), every person not deemed mentally incompetent or suicidal can make the decision to refuse medical treatment that would prolong life or bring them back from the edge of death. Incarcerated people, however, are in the unique position of effectively being treated differently than people who are not in custody.

There is a process for submitting a DNR to CDCR custody and medical staff, as well as a place in each incarcerated person's file where such notices are posted. This is all well and good; however, the actual implementation of any such directive leaves something to be desired. When an incarcerated person is in medical distress, such as having no pulse, correctional staff are directed to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) until medical staff arrive. Responders then take over, using escalating lifesaving measures and continuing to do so until a senior medical staff member is present and can then implement an advanced directive — if one is on file. Sometimes this procedure violates an advanced directive already on file, as it can take a senior medical staff member up to 20 minutes to arrive at the location of a medical emergency.

Everything that medical and correctional staff do in response to an incarcerated person in medical distress is right, proper and correct — unless a DNR is on file and in effect. At that point, there has been a request made by the incarcerated person to *not* perform specific lifesaving measures, and that request should be noted and respected much sooner than the 20-or-so minutes it takes.

As a result of there being no effective means for advanced directives to be followed, numerous incarcerated people have had their wishes (and directive) ignored or not followed because they are unknown. There have been any number of suggestions to address this; one seemingly easy fix would be to include some notation on an incarcerated person's state-issued ID card that make note of a DNR on file. And, when noticed, that directive can be followed.

Another would be to remove the requirement that a senior medical staff member be on site when lifesaving measures are stopped. When the incarcerated person's file is accessed in the clinic, before senior medical staff embark to the location of the incarcerated person, if an advance directive is discovered, that information be communicated to correctional and medical staff present and lifesaving efforts be stopped, thereby respecting the request of the incarcerated person.

The Nosy Neighbor

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

I SAT IN my single cell in the 3300 section at L.A. County Jail, reading the latest issue of *Audubon Society*, a conservation magazine. The cover story was about rehabilitating injured sea otters. A neighbor returning from court walked by my cell, glanced in, then continued on down the row without comment.

Later that evening, the same guy shouted loudly from 50 feet away, "Hey, Cap! Let me read your car magazine; I got nothin' down here to read." I replied I was sorry, but didn't have any car magazines. Agitated, he yelled back, "That's bull! I saw you readin' a car magazine when I got back from court, man." The tier was now totally silent.

"Nathan, I don't have a car magazine," I said loudly. "That's bull, man; you lyin'. Shoot it down to me." Irritated, I again shouted I had no car magazines as Nathan escalated muttering expletives. "Dude, I saw it; it's about those German highways, man. Don't lie to me." Then I got it: I focused on the word *Audubon* on the cover of the magazine; the guy down the tier mistook *Audubon* for autobahn, a high-speed German highway system associated with fast cars. Not wanting to embarrass Nathan too badly, I had a passing officer run the *Audubon Society* publication to the fool. A few seconds later, I heard Nathan muttering again. After about an hour, he passed the magazine back to me without comment.

CA Relaxes Restitution

By Jamel Walker,
Mule Creek State Prison

AFTER LONG-AWAITED relief for many incarcerated people and their families, the California Legislature amended the law requiring payment of restitution to the California Victim Compensation Board. Effective Jan. 1, 2025, Assembly Bill (A.B.) 1186 prohibits the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation from collecting the balance of restitution fines more than 10 years old from incarcerated people's trust fund accounts.

Introduced Feb. 16, 2023, A.B. 1186 originally sought to remove juvenile courts' authority to require minors to pay restitution to victims. The bill instead authorized the court to "Order the minor to make amends by participating in a restorative justice program." The impetus for the bill was a study by Dr. Alex Piquero, director of the Bureau of Justice Statistics, which found that "Due to targeted policing of Black and Brown communities, youth of color are more likely to be ordered to pay restitution and at higher amounts." Moreover, the Legislature found that the majority of youth cannot afford to pay restitution; crime survivors rarely see any compensation for harm they may have experienced; and costly collection practices required millions to be spent recovering just 21% of direct restitution orders.

After several amendments, the final version of the bill amended Penal Code §1465.9 to include all incarcerated individuals, and "Upon expiration of 10 years after the date of imposition of a restitution fine pursuant to Section 1202.4, the balance, including any collection fees, shall be unenforceable and uncollectible and any portion of a judgment imposing those fines shall be vacated." However, direct orders to victims remain enforceable and collectible.

Any incarcerated person who has served more than 10 years of their sentence will have the remaining balance of their restitution fine vacated. This will be evident upon review of one's trust account statement.

The Long Walk Home

By Ricky Ortega
Post Columnist

It was a gloomy day in October 1983 when I was sentenced to life without the possibility of parole. The walk from courthouse to jail was through a dark tunnel about a quarter-mile long. Those serving life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) called it "The Long Walk Home," where the silence of cold walls is broken only by the rattle of leg chains across a concrete floor. Visions of the past flashed through my mind; visions of a life left behind, and the life I had to face.

LWOP inmates are met with a choice on that long walk home; with nothing to lose, they could self-destruct, or they could use their lives to make amends and take a turn for the better. This series of articles takes a closer look at some of those LWOP prisoners who are prime examples of doing just that, making something out of nothing.

Steppingstones

"The Lamb will shepherd them and guide them to springs of waters of life."

AS A CHILD, my dad would often take me hiking through the Sierra Nevada. It was a mystical place where I learned to appreciate the sights and sounds of nature.

One day, we came across a flowing stream nestled between giant oak trees that painted the sky as high as the eye could see. The water was crystal clear, and although it couldn't have been more than a few feet deep, he must have noticed my concern about crossing to the other side. Sensing my fear, he kept walking along the edge of the water until he found a trail of steppingstones that would lead us to safety. As he took my hand, we walked across this trail of adversity, showing me how to navigate through my fear, one step at a time. When we reached the other side unscathed, he took some stones and skimmed them along the surface of the water. As we watched them dance across the stream, he explained that these rocks would form new steppingstones for others who would try to cross to the other side.

Luke Scott was arrested Dec. 18, 1987, and sentenced to life without parole (LWOP) at the age of 24. Early in his prison term, job and educational opportunities were rare due to his LWOP status and the custody risk within the institution. But this didn't hinder Scott from creating his first steppingstone in his long and arduous journey. He landed jobs in the Prison Industry Authority in dental prosthetics construction, meat cutting, and fabric products. The steppingstones began to emerge.

However, it wasn't until 2010 when he envisioned a career in education that the future began to take shape. Life-without-parole offenders were finally permitted to take part in college educational programs and Scott wasted no time. With no hope for parole, he earned associate degrees in social and behavioral sciences, business, American studies, the humanities, sociology, interdependent studies, liberal arts (with an emphasis in psychology), and liberal arts (with an emphasis in mathematics).

Scott then pursued a bachelor's degree in communications and graduated in 2023. He is currently attending the master's program through California State University, Dominguez Hills. His rehabilitation portfolio is just as impressive, with certifications in Alternatives to Violence, NA, AA, victim's awareness, New Options for Wellness, anger management, denial management, Realize, and GRIP. When asked to describe what has motivated him throughout his prison term, he reflected, "I am humbled by the opportunity, invigorated by the passion to succeed. Each new achievement is a lesson and a chance to empower another's future. The promise to carry a totem torch of integrity helping, compassion, and nonjudgmental behavior is now engraved in the steps I am leaving behind for others to pursue and I persevere beyond the obstacles of incarcerated time. Education has provided the multicultural awareness for effective communication. It brings forth an enlightening form of community building and liberation."

For some, life without parole is a perilous journey to nowhere. It's a continuous battle against the mind and its ability to hope for something more than just a dream made of concrete and steel. But as Scott explained, "Sharing the techniques of self-efficiency and autonomy with each soul searching for stability, I take another stride atop prior stones of guidance."

"The Long Walk Home" is a search for the pathways of hope and the motivation to find life in a spirit of desolation. Thanks to my father, I often find incentive in the marvels of nature, searching for steppingstones in the currents of bleakness. They are the footprints that those who served life without parole have courageously left before me, and the steppingstones that I will leave for others, leading through the waters of life.



(FreePik.com)





By Richard "Lonewolf" Legan,
Post Columnist

THE HERB WILD betony (*Stachys officinalis*) can be found along mountain streams and rivers. It has been used to treat headaches and stomach problems, but it also has sedative properties. In addition, it has been used for indigestion, anxiety, and as a cleanser for the digestive system. It was even used by early Anglo Saxons as a charm herb.

So next time you look at a plant, you might ask yourself, "I wonder what that's used for?" They are man's gifts from the Creator!



Wild Betony (First-Nature.com)

Richard Legan is the author of *More Valuable than Gold* published by *Wild Willpower*, available at RichardLonewolfSurvivalSchool.com. He has been teaching on this topic for nearly 40 years. The information in this column is for educational purposes only. In no way is this column intended to diagnose or treat any ailments.

This is our last installment of "Earth Mother's Secrets," as Richard paroled earlier this year and we have run through our reserves. We want to thank Richard for his passion, expertise, and dedication to providing a column for our readers since 2018. It has been educational, enlightening, and joyous. Thank you, Richard. You too are a gift from our Creator.



By Fred Munch, Post Columnist

Tree Hugging and Too Much Food Trash

BACK-TO-BACK hurricanes dominated news in early October with scenes of unprecedented destruction: submerged homes, washed-out highways, entire towns swept away by raging rivers, and millions left without power or drinking water for weeks. Hurricanes Helene and Milton combined caused an estimated \$100 billion in damage. Like Beryl before them, these massive storms were enhanced by climate change; the extra heat from global warming is absorbed by ocean waters and supercharges storms with extra energy and increased evaporation. The water temperature in the Gulf of Mexico was a record 80 °F when the hurricanes were forming and making landfall. The hallmarks of climate change were on full display: radical amounts of rainfall at two inches per hour, stronger winds of 125 mph, longer lasting and more frequent weather extremes.

Here at Mule Creek, October began with another heat wave. It was projected to last two days, but ended up blazing away for 10 as Sacramento Valley set a new record for the number of days over 100 °F.

Methane (CH₄) is a driver of warming because it traps 80% more heat than carbon dioxide (CO₂), making it the most potent greenhouse gas. According to Earth Science Data, CH₄ emissions rose faster over the last five years than ever before and caused 30% of warming. A record level of methane in the atmosphere measured in April at 1,931 parts per billion. At this rate, the limit set by the Paris Climate Accord of 2.7 °F above the pre-industrial average will be surpassed. If it reaches 5.4 °F, disasters unlike anything before are expected.

Fortunately, we have a powerful ally in the fight to keep the Earth's air healthy. Through photosynthesis, trees breathe in CO₂ and emit life-sustaining oxygen. Even though 90% of the original forests are gone, the ones left can hold an estimated 861 gigatons of CO₂, an amount equal to 100 years of greenhouse gas emissions. Because living trees keep carbon stored away, forests can play a major role in slowing climate change.

A recent study revealed that trees absorb methane through microbes in their bark, single-cell organisms that rely on CH₄ for their energy. Scientists in the study discovered tree bark has the potential to absorb as much as 55 million tons of methane per year. Vincent Gauci of the University of Birmingham wrote, "Trees are more useful than we've given them credit for. Our findings have implications for forest protection, restoration and reforestation."

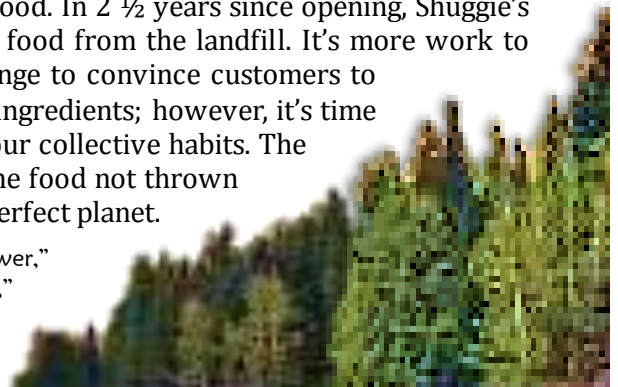
The burning of fossil fuels is the main source of methane; another is food waste. Some 38% of the U.S. food supply goes uneaten and gets thrown away. "Addressing food waste turns out to be one of the biggest climate solutions of them all," writes F.J. Foley, director of climate think tank Project Drawdown.

To see this problem up close, take a look inside the trash barrels at the chow hall. On the 4,200 trays served each meal at the Mule Creek State Prison, let's say there is a half-pound of waste from each one. That means one ton of waste is generated each and every day. When it's taken to the landfill and begins to rot, methane is released which, in turn, creates more warming.

In 2022, the restaurant industry alone produced 10 million tons of food waste, and 70% came from what was left on diners' plates. Smaller portion sizes and better ordering could help reduce this amount.

Here is a novel approach to this problem. A couple in the Bay Area opened Shuggie's Trash Pie, a restaurant born with the idea of using less-than-perfect ingredients that are normally discarded by the food system, items such as dairy products close to the expiration date, weird animal and fish parts like halibut cheeks, produce that didn't sell at the local farmers' market. As chefs, they're part of a movement of sustainably focused restaurants that are committed to changing consumers' views of food. In 2 ½ years since opening, Shuggie's has diverted 41,000 pounds of food from the landfill. It's more work to prepare meals and it's a challenge to convince customers to pay for dishes with imperfect ingredients; however, it's time for a broad cultural change in our collective habits. The trees we plant or protect and the food not thrown away can help to preserve the perfect planet.

Sources: "Tree Bark, Climate Superpower," *Popular Science*, July 2024; "Shuggies," NPR, Sept. 14, 2024; "Records Levels of Methane," *LA National*, Sept. 10, 2024.



Emotional Contagion

By Jason Davis, Lead Reporter

PRISONS ARE OFTEN associated with being negative, stressful, and violent. A typical view of the carceral landscape is of people dealing with a constant battle of past trauma, shame, fear, and denial, all the core negative thinking and emotions. Prisons then become the breeding ground for this cycle of negativity and the contagious effects of emotions.

There are many people though, who have found a way to bring a positive outlook on life despite their surroundings. A beacon of light in the darkness, hope, and reason, these men affect the people around them by bringing happiness and encouragement. Happy people affect those around them, and happiness has also shown a ripple effect.

While in the six-man rooms, classes, dining hall, or while walking laps around the track, these can be great opportunities to be ambassadors of positivity. We all have the power to influence those around us; it is your choice whether to foster a positive or negative environment. Though it is happening below the level of our conscious awareness, we are sharing our emotions with others all the time. Nonverbal cues and personal interaction are not necessary for emotional contagion to occur.

There have been many studies on the effects of emotional contagion, including in sales, corporations, the Farmingham Heart Study, evolution, social media, automatic mimicry, and in social anxiety. The unconscious spread of negative emotions has been directing human societies for millennia.

In *Mind to Matter* (Hay House, 2018), Dawson Church cites researchers:

A massive experiment with 689,003 Facebook users found that emotional contagion doesn't even require contact between people. Entire groups of people can come into emotional coherence, and their brain waves change, potentially generating a huge combined field.

Emotional contagion is present in groups, too. It can influence group dynamics and can lead to improved cooperation, enhanced task performance, and decreased conflict. "Emotional contagion, through its direct influence on employees' and work teams' emotions, judgments, and behaviors, can lead to subtle but important ripple effects in groups and organizations," says Sigal Barsade, author of several influential studies of emotional contagion. Positive emotion and mood in a team member, especially the leader, enhances the performance of the whole team. However, a stressed leader will degrade the performance of everyone around them.

The feelings we experience when our brainwave patterns are affected by emotional contagion are real. We have a spike in stress-related beta waves and a drop in alpha waves. It takes a strong mind to remain unaffected by the mass hysteria around us. We cannot easily discern an emotion given to us secondhand from one arising within our own neural network.

One piece of advice is to foster the positive effects of emotional contagion by deliberately connecting with people. Practice smiling at others and offering help.

Sources: Dawson Church, *Mind to Matter: The Astonishing Science of How Your Brain Creates Material Reality*, Hay House 2018; Sigal Barsade, "Emoticontagious." *Velocity*.

Splintered Personality

Conscious Evolution through Intentional, Responsible Choice

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter



ASPLINTERED PERSONALITY has many facets. We may be loving and patient, vindictive, charitable, selfish, cheerful, or angry. These are all parts of self and each has its own particular aspects, values, and goals. If we are not conscious of all these differing aspects, that portion which is dominant will win out over all the other parts. Its intention will be that which the personality uses to create its reality. Whatever we choose, whichever thought or action is an intention, an aspect of consciousness that is brought to action or thought.

For example, your house is burglarized and the burglar is caught. The charitable part of self may want to give the burglar another chance, but if the vindictive part is dominant, you will press for arrest and charges filed. We can't consciously choose our intentions until we become conscious of the differing aspects of self. If we are not conscious of these differing aspects we may want to say or do one thing, but find we are saying or doing something entirely different. We may wish to release some painful pattern or bad habit of reacting, yet experience it repeating again and again.

The personality seeks to create what satisfies it, parts that are dominant, safe, familiar, and well-established. Evolution to higher self requires conscious choice between opposing parts of self. This is the foundational element — the point of choice.

These choices we make create our world. With an understanding of we reap what we sow, an example is if we operate from a paradigm of anger, we create anger in our environment and our world revolves around anger. If we operate from compassion, we create a karma of compassion, and our world is filled with empathy and kindness.

Whether we are aware of this dynamic or not, we are still creating our world in every moment with every choice. Conscious self-evolution through intentional choice advances the multisensory personality. We cannot satisfy every personality desire. For instance, we may want more money and a richer lifestyle, which conflicts with that part which empathizes with the poor and suffering. We may wish to recognize the beauty in others, while conversely want to use others for our own purposes and gratification. Satisfying one need leaves the other out. Fulfilling one aspect leaves another deprived.

A conscious awareness of the different parts of a splintered personality allows us to choose which aspect we wish to follow or develop. When we engage the higher principled aspects, we cultivate and tap into authentic power. We may ask ourselves, "What do I want to create in my life?" Then, we may make choices that more readily produce results that align with intent. This is responsible choice based on clarity and wisdom. Higher frequency energy is accessed through love, empathy, forgiveness. The choice of intentionally implementing these higher frequencies is the path that leads to authentic power.

A splintered personality is discontented. One moment it may be content, in another, feel anger, jealousy, or fear. If we are choosing consciously, we may make choices which align with higher self, and choose with wisdom and clarity.

Source: Gary Zukov, *Scab of the Soul*, 2008

SPORTS AND RECREATION



Breanna Stewart (www.linkedin.com)

WNBA Championship

By Edward Garcia, Mule Creek State Prison

NEW YORK LIBERTY fans collectively held their breath as Breanna “Stewie” Stewart approached the free-throw line with seconds remaining and down by 2. The team’s only native New Yorker, Stewart was brought in from Seattle and had not disappointed. During her first year, she and her teammates put together a run that ended shy of a championship, losing to the reigning champion Las Vegas Aces in the 2023 WNBA Finals.

Picking up right where they left off, the 2024 Liberty remained the number one team throughout and found redemption in facing — and eliminating — that same Las Vegas team lead by MVP Aja Wilson.

Nevertheless, Napheesa Collier and the Minnesota Lynx were the bane of the Liberty, winning three out of three in the regular season. They seemed to be the only team capable of competing with the Liberty and proved it by being 2 points up in the final seconds of this championship series. It seemed like déjà vu as Stewie toed the line, having been in almost the same position a couple of nights before in Game 2. Then, her unsuccessful last-second free-throw attempts failed to secure the game and, as a result, she now had the burden of their championship dreams and entire season resting upon her shoulders.

If it had been any other player, New York fans probably would have publically shamed

her on social media. But New York is a basketball town, and their favorite daughter was a basketball girl. So, they holstered their itchy fingers and kept faith that Stewie and the Liberty would live up to the moment — and they did. Sinking two, the New York Liberty sent Game 5 into overtime where they secured the victory over the Lynx, thus earning the right to be crowned 2024 WNBA Champions.

Congratulations to Breanna Stewart and the entire New York Liberty team.

Facility D Summer Pickleball Results

By Nemo Burgos, Post Reporter

TOP SEEDED LUIS Savaria and Chevo Martir, along with substitute Hector Bautista, defeated Cameron Byars and Nemo Burgos 2-1 in the finals of the 2024 Facility D Summer Pickleball League. Savaria and Martir entered the playoffs with an 8-1 record, their only loss to Byars and Burgos to finish the regular season.



With Martir unavailable for the playoffs, Bautista entered as a substitute. The final was a rematch of the Winter League final, which Byars and Burgos won. Savaria and Bautista proved too powerful in the deciding doubles’ match, defeating Byars and Burgos 11-5. In earlier singles’ play, Savaria defeated Byars 11-3, and Burgos defeated Bautista 11-4.

In the semifinal, Byars and Burgos defeated second-seeded Tiffany and Miller 2-1. The other semifinal had Saravia and Bautista defeat Mike Simons and Yamamoto 2-0 by sweeping the singles.

Second-seeded Yamamoto and Padgett defeated third-seeded Dauphin and Balarezo 2-1 for the Division A Championship. Dauphin and Balarezo upset top-seeded and defending champions Avalos and Martinez in the semifinal. Yamamoto and Padgett defeated Coats and Mattei 2-0 in the other semifinal.

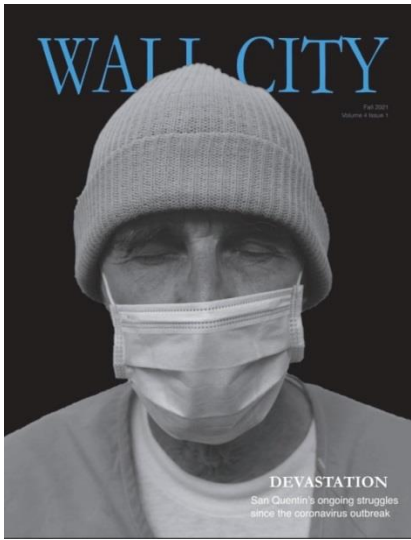
Division A MVP went to Luis Savaria. Beside leading his team to the championship, he went 10-1 in singles and 10-1 in doubles. That makes him a triple MVP: He was MVP for basketball, soccer, and pickleball.

Division B MVP went to Yamamoto. Rookie of the Year went to Joseph Miller. Miller went 7-1 in singles and led his team to the playoffs. Not bad, since he had never played pickleball and came from basketball just to try it out.

Once again, Facility D pickleball was able to field two divisions and 18 teams of over 60 players. That’s a 200% increase over 2023. Thanks again to Redemption Serve and Mimi Loucks for the generous donation of brand new paddles and balls.

(all photos by J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)





Rattle magazine, which is distributed by Prisoner Express, is always open to submissions by incarcerated poets and writers. If you would like to submit your work or have questions, you can write:

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Why Incarcerated Voices Matter

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

THE RISE OF mass incarceration in the U.S. amplifies the need for an aggressive defense of free speech in prisons. The vast number of Americans incarcerated — 2.2 million, with poor and people of color suffering disproportionate rates of imprisonment — means prison censorship affects marginalized groups the most, reducing their ability to take part in the public forum. This results in those most impacted by mass incarceration having the least say in the discussion.

Free expression rationales featured in U.S. Supreme Court law support the claim that prison speech is an important function of the First Amendment. These are the rationales: the marketplace of ideas, democracy legitimation, the checking value of free speech, and self-fulfillment. The marketplace of ideas does not operate as it should when the government prevents prisoners from joining in public discourse, particularly in matters relating to criminal justice and mass incarceration.

Black Americans are incarcerated at five times the rate of whites, and Latinos at 1.4 times the rate of whites. As mass incarceration issues such as harsh sentencing practices, the over-policing of urban areas, and inequity in penal policies along racial and class lines become important matters for public debate, those impacted the most are the least heard in the discussion. Race and class often correlate with opinions on social issues, particularly social justice issues centered on mass incarceration. Excluding prisoners' voices from the conversation warps and constricts public discourse on these issues that impact marginalized populations the most.

The "marketplace of ideas" theory states that unrestricted debate results in the revelation of truth, and is generally adopted by the U.S. Supreme Court in its decisions, continuing to impact law and scholarship. Conversely, censorship prevents the finding of truth by repressing free discussion. If the intent of the marketplace of ideas is to discover truth, then the voices of the incarcerated are among the most vital views to consider when debating incarceration-related issues. The "checking value of free speech" theory holds that the First Amendment's main function is to "protect the press when it exposes governmental abuses of power." Because one of the most important aspects of prisoners' speech is to address conditions of confinement and reveal prison maltreatment — an important matter of social concern — suppression of these concerns prevents open dialogue and hampers discovery of truth. Stifling criticism impedes fair and open discussion and leaves the public in the dark regarding issues such as overcrowding, violence, rape and sexual assault, inadequate healthcare, and exposure to toxic environments.

"Democratic legitimation" theory contends that free discourse is necessary for a democratic government to function, and is entitled to staunch First Amendment safeguards. Justice Brandeis wrote in the 1927 *Whitney v. California* decision that "The greatest menace to freedom is an inert people, that public discussion is a political duty; and that this should be a fundamental principle of the American government." The U.S. Supreme Court recognizes Brandeis' opinion as "classic formation" of democratic legitimation theory.

The "self-fulfillment theory" aspect of free speech protects individual expression — the realization of a person's character and possibilities. In the process of developing opinions and beliefs, molding character, and realizing one's human potential, freedom from censorship remains a foundational requirement. Justice Marshall wrote in *Procunier v. Martinez*:

The First Amendment serves not only the needs of the polity but also those of the human spirit — a spirit that demands self-expression. Such expression is an integral part of the development of ideas and a sense of identity. To suppress expression is to reject the basic human desire for recognition and affront the individual's worth and dignity.

Eliminating the voices of the confined from public debate threatens the legitimacy of our system of free expression by imposing insurmountable obstacles to free speech, especially those voices most needed to be heard regarding mass incarceration issues. With California's push to implement the new California Model, a more humane prison model, perhaps the hope for progress remains alive. However, without participation and a thorough listening to of the voices from within the walls of the state's and the nation's penitentiaries, the brutality and inequity of mass incarceration will persist.

Sources: "Locked Up, Shut Up: Why Speech in Prison Matters" *St. John's Law Review*, 2018; *Turner v. Safley*, 482 U.S. pp. 78, 84-85 (1987); Nicole B. Godfrey, "Suffragist Prisoners and the Importance of Protecting Prisoner Protests," *Idea Exchange*



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We cannot think our way into new ways of living. We have to live our way into new ways of thinking.
— Richard Rohr

12 Tips for the Board, Pt. 1

By Maya Emig, Post Columnist

I WANT TO touch on a few areas that are important to be aware of, especially when preparing for your comprehensive risk assessment (or “psych eval”) and for questions the commissioner and deputy commissioner may ask you at your suitability hearing.

First, since everyone in state prisons has access to self-help programs through Edovo, I encourage all of you to make it a habit to do self-help programming every day. Make it part of your daily routine. Give your attorney the access code number so that they can pull up your history. The commissioners will look at your score and how long you spend on each lesson. Do this consistently and incorporate the information you are learning to help understand yourself and your criminality more. With my recommendation to do Edovo daily, I am reminded of great athletes who consistently put in the time. Set your daily goals and achieve them — whether at the beginning of your day, before you sleep, or somewhere between. You are investing in yourself; as I have said before, it will pay off in dividends.

Second, when you sit down with the evaluator to do your comprehensive risk assessment, you will be asked several questions about your child and adolescent development and about your home environment growing up. You must examine all aspects of your life, as you unravel your criminality and figure out how you became the person who committed the crimes you were convicted of. This is where a broad understanding of domestic violence comes in. The different types of domestic violence include physical, emotional, psychological, financial, and sexual. If there was domestic violence in your home environment, you should disclose it. I encounter clients who sugarcoat their childhood because they do not want to speak negatively about their family members or admit a dysfunctional dynamic or a toxic living environment. My advice is to discuss the dysfunction in your home and the trauma you suffered. Take that a step further and disclose any trauma you suffered outside of your home by people who were not in your immediate family.

Third, do a full examination of your commitment offense. I have read some comprehensive risk assessments that say, “Detailed accounts of the offense can be reviewed in the record via Probation Officers Report (POR) or appellate decision, if applicable,” and then provide detailed paragraphs describing the official version. This is followed by “Examinee’s Account of the Commitment Offense” wherein the clinician quotes what my clients have said about their account of the crime. Please review your POR and the statement of facts in any appellate court decision. One of the challenges that comes up a lot in my preparation of clients is that their rendition of the crime does not align with the official version. Clients tell me that they are “not going to lie just to tell the board what they want to hear.” I don’t want you to lie, but I do want you to take a 360-degree view of the crime from all parties involved. I tell them when two people talk about an event, the truth is somewhere between their two versions. I also remind my clients that memories change over time. Although that memory may feel like it is the truth, each time you recall a memory, it morphs just a bit, and years or decades later, what feels like a concrete memory has changed. This is especially true when you add in your internal biases, denial, and the need to see yourself favorably.

Fourth, please do your Olson review! It’s one of the things that each panel will look for when preparing your case, because you have inherent rights associated with being offered an Olson review. Take advantage of being offered a review of your file. Read your POR, read any police reports associated with your crime, go through your arrest and disposition report to familiarize yourself once again with your criminal history, read your rules violation reports. I encourage you all to spend time doing an Olson review because there is a wealth of information and refreshing your memory is a good thing because things get lost with time.

Fifth, if you have a substance abuse history, understand how that played a role in your criminality, how it affected your relationships, and I encourage you to internalize your programming. My clients often tell me about certificates for classes they have taken, but when I ask them questions about what they have learned from the classes or what Step 4 is, they cannot tell me. I am usually told they cannot remember the steps word for word, so then I ask them to tell me broadly what the steps are and how they have worked them. It’s then that they admit they don’t know the steps. **KNOW YOUR STEPS!!**

I have more areas for you to focus on in the next article.



AN INMATE'S GUIDE TO NAVIGATING
THE PAROLE SUITABILITY
PROCESS IN CALIFORNIA

36 STRATEGIES of SUITABILITY

BY JOSEPH R. HAYTAS

“Think Free”

IF YOU WANT freedom, develop the spirit of freedom. When you came to prison you were likely infected with teenage rebellion and came from anti-social environments. You developed a self-image that maintained the way you wished to be perceived in order to be accepted by your peers. To do otherwise, to try to do the “right thing” would be to risk acceptance, and risk failure. So, you lowered self-expectations about who you were and what you could be.

The group you associated with gave you something to belong to and provided a false sense of security. The institution and authority that tried to change you created an internal resentment. Rules, discipline, and demands reinforced your rebellion. Perhaps you began to realize the gang culture was an artificial construct that hurt others, promoted criminal activity, was a path to more prison time and not how you want to live.

Like everyone else you have free choice. Once you choose to think freely you are closer to the day you will be reunited with loved ones and breathe the air of freedom. Freedom is a state of mind. It is the opportunity to live your life as you want. Others have obtained their freedom and didn't possess anything that you don't have. The only difference is that they chose to concentrate all of their efforts upon things they can control and used that control to remove self-imposed restrictions and complications.

You have that opportunity, but you must make the important decisions yourself. No one can tell you how to live or what you must do to be free. You must give yourself permission to expect more of yourself than anyone else expects in your job, programs, or education. If you approach these or any endeavor with the perspective that your life depends on your effort and success, you may be amazed at the results.

Joseph R. Haytas is an attorney and the author of 36 Strategies to Suitability.

Break Free of Negative Thoughts

By Jason Davis, Lead Reporter

IT IS EASY to dwell on the past, spending time in our heads thinking about what could have been and things we have lost. Such thoughts can lead to negative emotions like depression, loneliness, anxiety, and boredom. Although you may be unable to change a stressor, you are able to change your reaction to it by learning to recognize, challenge, and change negative self-talk.

Feeling sad or depressed is a normal reaction to unpleasant events, but you can take steps to prevent these unpleasant feelings and cope with unpleasant situations. The first step is to identify the thoughts that lead you to feel depressed or sad. The second step is to learn to manage those feelings in a different way than you did in the past.

To control negative feelings, you can learn to recognize when your self-talk becomes negative. Negative self-talk is any statement to yourself that would qualify as criticism, a putdown, or even an insult if someone else said it to you. If you frequently make such negative statements to yourself and dwell on them, they may lead to depression, sadness, worry, and low self-esteem.

Another technique you can use to address negative self-talk is called “thought stopping.” The first step of this of this procedure is to recognize unpleasant thoughts and the feelings or emotions you associate with them. The second step of the thought-stopping procedure is to stop repetitive thoughts.

1. Recognize unpleasant thoughts and negative self-talk.
2. Interrupt repetitive thoughts or self-talk.
3. Make a positive and accurate statement.
4. Relax.
5. Solve the problem or address the issue that brought about these unpleasant thoughts and negative self-talk.

An important step in the process of learning to regulate your feelings is communication of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors; this is an essential prerequisite for healthy emotional functioning. The Cleveland Clinic's Wellness Program says that 95% of our thoughts are repetitive and 80% of them are negative. Most of us are trapped in the cycle of negative thinking with no idea how to escape.

Negative self-talk is often an automatic reaction to stressful events. Paying too much attention to your internal chatter can allow it to sap important cognitive resources that could be put to better use. In fact, research shows that attempting to minimize or ignore thoughts and emotions serves only to amplify them. See your thoughts and feelings for what they are: fleeting sources of data that may or may not prove helpful.

Scientific evidence shows that simple, straightforward mindfulness practice like this not only improves behavior and well-being, but also promotes beneficial biological changes in the brain and at the cellular level. So, be mindful and responsive to your thoughts — not acting on every thought or resigning yourself to negativity — but responding to your ideas and emotions with an open attitude, paying attention to them and letting yourself experience them.

When you unhook yourself from your difficult thoughts and emotions, you expand your choices. You can decide to act in a way that aligns with your values. Remember, it is impossible to block out difficult thoughts and negative self-talk. Developing emotional balance is no quick fix; it takes time.

Source: Jamie S. Hughes, Mary K Gourley, Laura Madson, and Katya Le Blanc, *Stress and Coping Activity: Reframing Negative Thoughts, Teaching of Psychology*

“Guerrilla” Prayer Circles at MCSP

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

Guerrilla: One who engages in irregular warfare, especially as a member of an independent unit.



(H. Kim / Media Specialist)

ON SATURDAY, SEPT. 28, 2024, the SUM Bible College & Theological Seminary program at the Mule Creek State Prison held a day of festivities that included 25 custom motorcycles ridden by members of Soldiers of the Cross (SOTC), an evangelical group from Modesto — with barbecued hotdogs and live entertainment — attended by incarcerated residents of facilities D and E as well as various CDCR staff from Mule Creek and beyond. By any measure, the day was a

(continued on page 15)

(from *Guerrilla Prayer Circles*, pg. 14)

smashing success and gave the Mule Creek population a chance to mingle, with food, music, and fellowship.

"It was like a day in the park," said Terry Prince, the In-mate Advisory Council chairman on Facility D.

Throughout the morning, members of SOTC engaged residents in small prayer circles, praying for support, encouragement, and counsel for any number of challenges faced by those on the inside and out.

SOTC members come from different backgrounds; some have direct experience with incarceration from serving one or more prison terms, while others have spent the occasional weekend in county jail, and others who have been on formal probation as well as ministering to the recently released. There was also a portion of SOTC who had no experience inside prison walls at all.

"I thought there would be a lot more craziness, or maybe even violence," said one SOTC member, while others were reluctant to engage because they were overwhelmed by the sheer number of incarcerated people around them.

Throughout the morning, guerrilla prayer circles broke out as incarcerated people and SOTC members got together and prayed for those present to be relieved from the spiritual sickness that is the human condition.

Two weeks later, the day was still being talked about on the yards. A good day was had by the incarcerated population, and many are looking forward to the next chance to engage with other residents, staff, administration, and outside organizations in such a relaxed and informal manner.

Special thanks to the staff and administration at Mule Creek, as well as the Secretary Jeffery Macomber, Warden Patrick Covello, Community Resource Manager Jason Ross, and all the custody and non-custodial staff who helped to make this day a success.



Are There Disposable People?

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

IN MUCH OF the world, there is a move toward disposable products; this can be seen in fashion, fast food, and even major sports. Fast fashion has a place in the market, using cheap and quick production methods to produce clothing designed to be worn a few times before becoming threadbare, or falling out of fashion. Fast-food restaurants have replaced paper and cardboard with plastic and Styrofoam. And, while there is a trend away from some of the most egregious uses of plastic, there is still a movement toward disposable items in the marketplace.

NASCAR builds tracks and tears them down after one weekend of racing, spending millions of dollars in the process. The NHL will create a hockey rink in the middle of a football stadium, play one game, and then dismantle it. Even the U.S. Olympic Committee builds temporary swimming pools for qualifying and then demolishes them.

This same attitude is held about the homeless who are often seen as a nuisance or even dangerous. In some communities, protests have arisen because those without a permanent home found space to live near schools and playgrounds. In many cities, there are homeless people who have jobs but do not make enough money to pay rent or a mortgage. Others are too physically or mentally unwell to be employed, and in places without low-income housing, mental health treatment, and other social services available, people without a permanent address can be viewed as disposable — people who can be disenfranchised, tossed aside, and moved along.

When we as a society label someone as "homeless," an "ex-con," or "mentally ill," essentially we take away their humanness because they are now a category, not a person who is formerly incarcerated, without a home, or living with a disease. The words we use matter; if we do not see and refer to someone as a person first, we have effectively turned them into a thing and give ourselves and others permission to treat them not as a human being but as objects to be dealt with.

The Surfrider Foundation posits: "We all live downstream," and, ultimately, this is true. What we do today flows downstream. Putting off dealing with an uncomfortable or distasteful situation today often results in exasperating the situation, making it more difficult to deal with tomorrow.

People are not disposable, no matter their station or situation. If we choose to allow some to fall through the cracks, get left behind, and struggle for fundamental safety needs, we are not only failing them but future generations as well.

Memorial Poem

On the day when the weight deadens on your shoulders
 And you stumble,
 May the clay dance to balance you.
 And when your eyes freeze behind the grey window
 And the ghost of loss gets into you,
 May a flock of colours,
 Indigo, red, green and azure blue
 Come to awaken in you a meadow of delight.
 When the canvass frays on the currach of thought
 And a stain of ocean blackens beneath you,
 May there come across the waters a path of yellow moonlight
 To bring you safely home.
 May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
 May the clarity of light be yours,
 May the fluency of the ocean be yours,
 May the protection of the ancestors be yours,
 And so may a slow wind
 Work these words of love around you,
 An invisible cloak
 To mind your life.

—John O'Donahue

Vignettes

Letters from Home

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

vignette [vin-yet'] *noun*: a descriptive historical sketch

I RECEIVE DETAILED weekly letters from a retired former coworker who lives alone and is confined to a wheelchair. Larry spends his dreary days writing letters to his old first-responder contacts. Every day he listens to radio scanners broadcasting live action from fire and police agencies all over the Los Angeles County area. In his letters to me, he loyally documents significant police chases, fires, and unusual vehicle wrecks that he thinks may interest me.

The area's huge Angeles National Forest is chaotic on weekends and, on one busy Labor Day, Larry overheard a deputy sheriff on the mountain run a license plate and issue a citation to a motorcycle rider for an expired registration. Less than 30 minutes later, a California Highway Patrol unit pulled over the same motorcycle for excessive speed on the winding road. Another citation was issued to the unfortunate rider.

About 20 minutes later, a frantic emergency broadcast got Larry's attention: "Motorcycle down, with injuries, and a snakebite victim" — a very weird dispatch. Many units responded and between police, firefighter, and paramedic frequencies, Larry pieced together what happened.

The same oblivious biker apparently continued terrorizing the mountain roads and took a sweeping turn at 70 mph. The bike dropped, sending the rider on a wild slide atop the travel-slickened asphalt, directly toward a guardrail.

A paramedic, talking to the emergency room on his radio, said the Kawasaki bounced off the rail; the guy managed to dodge the spinning bike, flattened himself onto his back, and slid under the metal barrier unscathed, the dense roadside vegetation cushioning the man's ultimate impact. Unfortunately, an angry four-foot rattlesnake also occupied the chaparral and immediately bit the unlucky rider on his wrist. He survived, but on this Labor Day, the rider shoulda' just stayed home.

A New Kind of Hard Time

Making the decision to "drop out" from mainline population to PC/SNY/NDPF is not an easy choice, and many individuals resisted the move for up to several decades. This series explores the reasons individuals chose to remain in the stressful and toxic environment for as long as they did; what prompted them to change; what the actual process looked like for them; and what they see as the benefits and drawbacks of being on "the other side."

My SNY Story

By Marty Williams, Production Editor

WHEN I CAME to prison in 1989, there was no such thing as a Special Needs Yard (SNY). There was only "PC," or Protective Custody, reserved for prisoners who had been attacked over case factors, drug debts, and sometimes sexual orientation. It wasn't a choice an individual could just make. There had to be violence against the individual, the individual had to identify as a victim, and the victim had to identify their attackers. Once you were there, there was no turning back.

It never occurred to me or anyone else I knew to view PC as an option to mainline prison. There was a stigma attached to being a victim, being a rat, and being too weak to survive the traumas and realities of doing time. You bought the ticket, so ride the ride. I was in Old Folsom until 1993, a real prison, a real old-school Level IV with old school rules, politics, and boundaries. As a lifer, I could choose to forgo a lot of nonsense and do my own time, which I did. But I also had to survive in a world of racial ground rules, violence, distorted masculinity, drug culture, fear, and complex rules that kept me vigilant to the point of trauma exhaustion. Then I moved to New Folsom, 'B' Yard.

While equally violent (if not more so), and drenched in even harsher rules and scrutiny, there was also a subculture of men finding themselves in winding self-guided subterfuge; artists, poets, holy men and teachers, committed to insight long before groupspeak and board strategies. I was still an idiot asleep in meth and prison rules, but I was welcome in this new subculture.

And I began to grow up.

I had the first racially integrated rock band on the yard ... ever. I got looks, but no mouth. I walked the track with other colors, other religions, other ideologies. I walked with Muslims, skinheads, gangsters, nerds, and monsters. I was a shaman with feet in many worlds. I found my people in the art, music, and poetry community. I found my faith, my first friend, my calling to a future self.

After about 25 years on Level IV mainline, CDCR did realignment. While great on paper, it tore lifers away from carceral communities, jobs, and purposes. It's just prison, right? Starting over again on active Level III yards seemed okay to some — unless you were white and came from 'C' Yard of New Folsom, which would result in one being targeted for violence. By now, SNY had become an option. No longer "PC," it was just ... an option. Kids were coming right out of reception to SNY, never touching a mainline at all. It was already a new world.

I entered the new world in 2014, along with many guys I had known over the years. Fearless guys, guys who had put in work during their decades in prison, betrayed by both the prison culture and the system that enabled it. I spent years afterward struggling with the concretized self-image of a "dropout." Unlike PC, you didn't have to get stabbed; you didn't have to tell; you didn't have to have a bad case. You just had to make a choice.

I'm still going to die in prison. But I made a choice to be myself, find my people, and maintain healthy relationships outside the walls. My friends aren't determined by race, or ideology, or how down they are. Nor do these things determine my value anymore. Over time, I got over the complicated buyer's remorse of going SNY, even after the move to integrate SNY with general population on Non-Designated Program Facilities (NDPF). Prison sucks enough as it is. If we want violence and ugly, there's a place for that.

At least now, we can make our own places.



Office of Victim and Survivor Rights and Services Opens Remorse Letter Bank

If you are interested in learning how to write an apology letter and having it available to those you have harmed, write to Life Support Alliance and request enrollment in The Amends Project.

Life Support Alliance
P.O. Box 277
Rancho Cordova, CA 95741



LifeSupportAlliance.org



Birds Around the Country

(January 5 is National Bird Day)



American Robin
(Wikipedia.org)



Blue Jay
(AllAboutBirds.org)



Northern Cardinal
(IndianaAudubon.org)



Northern Mockingbird
(AlabamaWildlife.org)



House Sparrow
(AllAboutBirds.org)



Yellow Billed Cuckoo
(ABCbirds.org)

Survival as a Way of Life

By O. Rick Bridges, Feature Reporter

IT WAS ANOTHER fine Louisiana summer. Greg English remembers how carefree it all was; the freshening rain was meditative and contemplative, making the air feel new. He was perched there securely on the front porch with his lovely grandparents, sipping on the casual hospitality of southern comfort in the form of sweet tea. The lawn and flowerbeds were the best on the block. Folks driving by would wave and toot their horns. Some would roll down their window to be seen and heard — English was young, gifted, and black.

Fast-forward several decades: English left administrative segregation at the California Health Care Facility in Stockton, the “Grey Goose” transportation bus taking flight to the desert to land at the Chuckawalla Valley State Prison. There he met the Rev. Bill Carter, who encouraged English to enroll in a collegiate ministry program affiliated with the Harvest Bible University. English knew with a profound sense of finality that this was where he belonged.

Then COVID-19 hit our world. English was moved from the dorms of Chuckawalla into cell living at the Ironwood State Prison. When the pandemic lifted, he was transferred back to Chuckawalla. There, he became the chaplain’s clerk. By the time the prison was closed by gubernatorial decree, he had earned his BA in ministry. As the goose took flight this time, he was headed for the restorative confines of the Mule Creek State Prison.

Simultaneously, his thoughts were transported back to that fateful day in LA decades earlier. A younger English — entering his 20s — had been left to his own devices. His actions were decidedly reckless, selfish, and beyond the dignified and reasonable measures of restraint and control. Drug addiction and alcoholism — reactive fear-based syndromes — had distorted his perception of reality. Removed from the perceptual restrictions of civil society, he resorted to the hustle of low- and street-level criminality where survival was a way of life.

The teenage English was hopeless. He was internalizing what he felt in outward despair, in the overwhelming cyclical roles of victim, perpetrator, and spectator common to the experience of disenfranchised inner-city youth. In this dire context of oppression, shame, incompetence, and powerlessness, he made a litany of bad choices. Finally, he found that he had begun to re-form, first as a nascent alcoholic and drug addict, then as an emergent criminal.

English made what he thought was a sober decision: He decided to carry a gun. In making that decision, he gave himself permission to take a life; he just had yet to realize the depth and breadth of that decision.

On the road to Mule Creek, navigating through the winding roads, the regional water features, rolling foothills, and migrating flocks of birds facilitated a rhythmic and soulful reflection. English had begun to see the scale and the scope of his personal transformation in the beauty and majesty of all that surrounded him. In realization, he formed the slightest features of a smile.

It was and had been a metamorphosis. He was, and had become, reliably, Greg English. He had finally arrived internally at the destination of an intentional and decades-long journey of sobriety, family, duty, friendship, education, ministry, service, leadership, and most importantly grace. He realized and understood all of these things as the person who would arrive at this new and unfamiliar destination.

A sentence of life without the possibility of parole is — some would argue — a sentence that is longer than a man’s life. For English, it has been a long and painful struggle to overcome the foolishness that was once so central to his life. He has come to hold himself accountable for all of his actions, understanding that mending his character includes stumbles and setbacks.

He has become someone who describes himself as deeply remorseful for the shameful and criminal way he lived. The momentum of that course of conduct ultimately led to his anti-social decision to commit multiple armed robberies, and his taking of the life of a Los Angeles Police Department officer who heroically embraced his duty to protect others. That was 1979. No words can adequately express his remorse, he says; his daily actions, in the sobriety of living amends, are his only available remedy.

Together we can do this, one step at a time.



Life Support Alliance provides correspondence courses to prepare you for release and for the Board of Parole Hearings. Write to find out about the **Connecting the Dots, Denial Management, RISE, and Amends Project** courses. Also ask about the **Parole Plan Roadmap!**

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Birds Around the Country



American Redstart
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White Breasted Nuthatch
(AllAboutBirds.org)



Ruby Crowned Kinglet
(AllAboutBirds.org)



Red-Eyed Vireo
(AllAboutBirds.org)



Baltimore Oriole
(AllAboutBirds.org)

Finding My Father

By Marty Williams, Production Editor

MY FATHER LEFT the year I was born. The narrative passed down to me by my mother was that he was immature and terrified of the responsibility of a baby. He was 20 at the time; when I was 20, I probably would have done the same thing. That is, at least, what I've told myself over the years to give him an out.

He never asked for an out. He never asked for anything at all. He never tried to make contact or even check on me; he was a story in my mother's litany of family dramas, a vague outline of a peripheral character in a book. In fact, I didn't even hear about him until I was 9, when my mom and stepfather were going through their first divorce. It was information weaponized to unattach me from a stepfather who wasn't all that invested to begin with. News of my father was just another intrigue in the world of adults, the Olympians conspiring and warring above the heads of mortal children.

As an only child raised by an alcoholic mother, I was expectedly damaged in a variety of colorful ways. But the damage of finding out that I was unloved, that I was the cause of my own abandonment, pretty much became the lynchpin that all my other hats hung on. There grew, and still exists, a space in me that is an image of someone faceless always in the posture of leaving. Over time, everyone I knew or loved would get their faces transposed onto that image, even God. I was developmentally arrested by many things at many stages in my life, but inside I am still a 9-year-old hearing that he is not worthy of a father.

Last year, a friend of mine took it upon himself to find my father through Ancestry.com. There was a solid hit, which led to a book-worth of paperwork covering my father's side of the family all the way back to the Revolutionary War. It's a list of musicians and teachers, of family trees branching in all directions. I have half-sisters from two different marriages, nieces and nephews, all that.

My father? Athlete, musician, and something of a clown. His narrative is one of being run out of town by my mother's parents after I was born. His narrative is remarriage, more children, a divorce, then remarriage, more children. All of his children adore him, a wonderful father, a fun, wise, and loving guy.

Finding my father did not make life better. In fact, it validated a self-belief that I was not worthy of love. I was better off with an abstract idea of an immature loser than a father beloved by the children he kept.

When I found my father in 2023, he'd been dead about a year. No answers now; just an even deeper question. At the age of 64, I still feel like an unwanted little boy sometimes. But I'm thankful that I never had children of my own.

I would hate to leave anyone with such a question.




Awareness Into Domestic Abuse

P.O. Box 5323
Sacramento, CA 95817

AIDAgroup15@gmail.com
AwarenessIntoDomesticAbuse.com

Free Correspondence Course Available

Katarzyna Bialasiewicz / iStock

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If you have news, stories, or information for sharing or if you have questions, please feel free to reach out to us at:

Drop LWOP Coalition
P.O. Box 308
Apple Valley, CA 92307
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COALITION

Birds Around the Country



Purple Finch
(AllAboutBirds.org)



Tufted Titmouse
(AllAboutBirds.org)



Elf Owl
(AnimalSpot.net)



Golden Eagle
(AllAboutBirds.org)



Painted Bunting
(AllAboutBirds.org)



Scarlet Tanager
(AllAboutBirds.org)

Genetic Variations and Environmental Influence

By Philong Huynh, Feature Reporter



WE ARE THE product of both nature and the environment. For example, we have genes for stress hormones that help us cope with prison, except the hormones are not produced or increased until we face stress in the environment prompting our system to start making and assembling all the necessary parts that make up that stress hormone, which, a lot of times, involves the transcription of genes into proteins. Whether and when a gene is expressed is still a subject of research, but evidence so far shows that the environment has its hands in gene expression.

DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) is the genetic material located in the nucleus or center of most living organisms' cells. It's a chemical structure that contains the coding for our genes. A gene is a sequence or fragment of DNA. Humans have about 100,000 genes. Most genes are eventually transcribed by the cell into different proteins that help us function as a living organism. As described below, some genes, however, can sit silent and are not expressed or turned on at all.

DNA has long been described as a molecule whose structure resembles a spiral staircase, with each rung of the staircase made up of the pairing of chemical bases known in short as *A*, *C*, *G*, and *T* (adenine, cytosine, guanine, and thymine, with *A* and *T* pairing together and, likewise, *G* and *C*). The inheritance of these seemingly random and variously repeating sequences of base pairs make our DNA unique. Except for identical twins, no two human beings have identical sequences of all base pairs. It is this difference or variation that is termed *polymorphism*.

Some sequences or fragments of DNA have known functions and are recognized as genes, meaning their proteins are known to have a role in cellular or metabolic function, while others without any known function are known as "junk" DNA. The various repeating patterns of the above four bases along the DNA chain, whether they are part of a gene or not, is termed VNTR (variable number of tandem repeats), which is another name for polymorphism.

Polymorphism of genes is mostly benign, but when it invariably results in deleterious effect like a genetic disease it is called a *mutation* rather than polymorphism. Sometimes, a polymorphism is not quite an outright mutation. It's associated with a higher chance of a disorder like autism, but proof of a higher rate of association is not necessarily proof of causation especially when others in the general population also have the same polymorphism but do not develop autism.

This is where epigenetics come in. *Epigenetics* can be described as a process by which genes are turned on or off. *Epigenomes* are protein structures that sit on top of our genes and influence which gene or when a gene is expressed depending possibly on environmental factors, and that environment may include the environment of the womb as studies suggest. Polymorphism and gene expression, particularly inappropriate gene expression, are at the heart of many research projects on polymorphism and genetic disorder.

Evidence of this environmental influence is found in the 60% concordance rate of autism or autistic spectrum disorder among identical twins. Autism is a strongly genetic disorder, with evidence from a British twin study. *Concordance* is the "occurrence of a given trait in both members of a twin pair." Identical twins, since they have the same genes, are expected to have a 100% concordance rate. If they have a gene for blue eyes, for example, both of them are expected to express that gene and both are expected to have blue eyes. The fact that they don't when it comes to autism-related polymorphism is attributable to something else other than just genes. The twins in the study above that were discordant did not express those genes associated with autism, even though they have those genes. Epigenetics may thus account for the discordance or concordance rate in autism and other disorders that have their basis in genetics, but the mechanism by which genes in one twin are not turned on while those in the other are may be attributable to epigenetics as evidenced by the twin studies.

In short, while polymorphism, through evolution, causes variation or changes in genes, epigenetics is responsible for whether a gene is expressed depending on other influences including the environment.

Sources: National Research Council Report, 1992; *People v. Barney*, 8 Cal.App.4th pp. 798,805; *United States v. Kinkcaid*, 379 F.3d pp. 813, 818 (9th Cir. 2004); *Deribeaux v. Secretary of HHS*, 2011 U.S. Claims Lexis 2430, p. 89; *Harris v. Secretary of HHS*, 2011 U.S. Claims Lexis 1119, p. 11. *R.K. v. Secretary of HHS*, 2015 U.S. Claims Lexis 1953, p. 240; *Psychological Med* (1995); *Dwyer v. Secretary of the HHS*, 2010 U.S. Claims Lexis 86 p. 135.


What's a Gold Medal Worth?

By Al Rice, Copy Editor

DO YOU WONDER just what is the U.S. dollar value of an Olympic gold medal to an athlete? Quite a lot, actually, depending on which country the athlete represents. Here are a few examples (using foreign currency exchange rates of July 1, 2024):

Serbia	\$214,900
Malaysia	\$212,180
Morocco	\$200,525
Italy	\$193,410
Lithuania	\$180,188
Hungary	\$155,000
Ukraine	\$125,000
Kosovo	\$107,450
Spain	\$101,003
Greece	\$96,705
France	\$85,960
Slovenia	\$75,215
Poland	\$64,958
Slovakia	\$64,470
Brazil	\$62,662
Switzerland	\$55,449
Finland	\$53,725
United States	\$37,500
Lichtenstein	\$27,725
Germany	\$21,490
Canada	\$14,608
Denmark	\$14,406
Australia	\$13,340

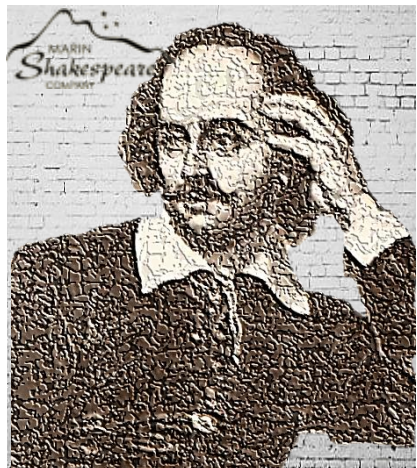
Source: USA Today Sports Research, July 19, 2024



The Prayer Warriors Alliance (PWA) is a non-denominational organization of volunteers who will assist anyone of any faith with research. The PWA charges no fee; return postage (up to 20 pages per request) is paid by PWA. See the July 2023 edition for more information about the PWA.

PWA follows all departmental mail restrictions and guidelines. PWA cannot search for legal or case information or individuals. Donations are gladly accepted.

Prayer Warriors Alliance
P.O. Box 28352
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Psych View

Lockdowns and Safety Issues, Pt. 2

By Daisy Switzer, Post Columnist



SOME INDIVIDUALS BELIEVE in safety in numbers, and affiliate into groups (or gangs) for protection. This is ill-advised, as in most cases such affiliation will become obvious and part of your record; the need for criminal alliance is viewed as negative. If you do associate with gangs, try for subtle associations. Perhaps your circle of choices is small and you enjoy the company of someone who is in a gang. Gang tattoos advertise to the board that you are not ready for relationships with non-criminals and suggest you are comfortable in prison.

Once you are out of prison and have served your parole term, you are free to associate as you please. Unfortunately, by the conviction of a life-crime offense, you have shown that you cannot control your behavior lawfully. Your association with others who are also unlawful suggests you do not care to change your ways.

If you look like a criminal at your hearing, it will be hard to convince anyone you are not one. Beauty may be skin deep, but tattoos are forever. Your tattoos can make you unsafe in the prison setting. Keep tattoos where you can cover them, and where you can cover yourself in case you are in an environment where they do not serve your safety.

Maintaining safety can be challenging, but some manage to avoid trouble. Some go to work daily, conduct themselves rationally, and receive excellent write-ups for doing so. If you want to parole, you need to find a way to make yourself part of this group. Safety concerns can lead to lockdowns. Lockdown makes programs very difficult as no one attends groups during a lockdown, and poor attendance can look bad for parole. Creative individuals are able to report activities even at institutions with frequent lockdowns. There are ways to do things, and people find them.

Daisy Switzer is a psychologist who specializes in criminal evaluations. She was contracted by the Board of Parole Hearings a decade ago to perform forensic risk assessments. Mostly retired now, she contributes her time and knowledge toward a regular column in the Mule Creek Post.

Emotional Intelligence

By Vanessa Nelson-Sloane, Life Support Alliance



ONE OF THE latest buzzwords (or phrases) making the rounds is “emotional intelligence,” but like most new terms, the premise behind emotional intelligence isn’t new, only a new name for an old concept. What is emotional intelligence and why is it important, especially for lifers working on parole suitability? Emotional intelligence, also known as EI, is the ability to understand and self-regulate (manage) your emotions and understand the emotions of others, which sounds a lot like knowing your causative factors, avoiding making impulsive decisions and actions, and showing empathy for others. The following is a brief description of the five pillars of EI and how they apply to parole suitability:

- *Self-awareness:* Understanding your thoughts and feelings and how they motivate your actions (knowing your causative factors, where they began and how they caused your path of actions).
- *Self-regulation:* Being in charge of your emotions and actions in varied situations and environments (knowing your triggers and coping skills and being able to use them appropriately).
- *Decision-making ability:* Making reasonable and responsible decisions and accepting the outcome of those decisions (personal responsibility and rejection of criminal thinking and actions).
- *Social skills:* Building and maintaining healthy relationships, both social and personal (building strong, stable, and pro-social networks).
- *Empathy:* The ability and willingness to see situations from another’s perspective, including how your actions are perceived by others (understanding the victim impact and the lasting effect of anti-social actions).

Researchers maintain success in life is 80% EI and 20% IQ. If true, the best part of the possibility is that EI is a skill you can learn and build. Sounds a great deal like rehabilitation and parole suitability.

Tyson's Got a Bite On the World's Ear Again

By Bob Gay, Feature Reporter

MIKE TYSON, 57, has the ear of the sport's world one more time, but not with his teeth this round. He went up against Jake Paul, 27, in a sanctioned heavy-weight bout scheduled to go eight two-minute rounds. Instead of the usual 10-ounce gloves, the gladiators battled it out in 14-ounce gloves; standard fights feature three-minute rounds and 10-ounce gloves. Keep in mind that Tyson holds a 50-6 winning record with 44 knockouts, while Paul has a 9-1 record with six knockouts.

Why the heavier gloves, less rounds and shorter rounds? Perhaps it was a balancing act leaning towards a fair fight. Perhaps it was to even the odds in Las Vegas and other gambling centers of the world. Azim Spicer, Tyson's brother-in-law, said, "I think they call [it] a compromise."

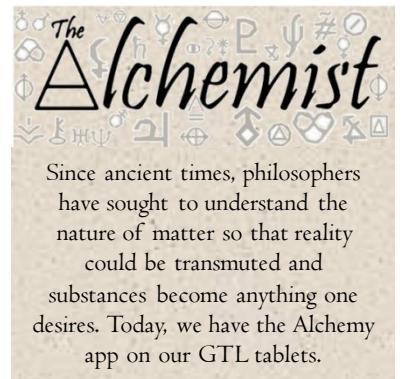
Whatever the reason, Tyson's camp said they were happy with the rules. No doubt Paul's side was pleased with the heavier gloves in hopes they would soften the devastating blows Tyson is famous for delivering. Those explosions that left indelible marks on the faces on his opponents are, no doubt, a concern.

According to Yahoo Boxing, Dec. 6, 2024: "Tyson, 58, lost to Paul in a listless unanimous decision in November as AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. The record-breaking fight was watched by more than 65 million households on Netflix and generated \$18.1 million in ticket sales."



The premise of the game is simple: Beginning with four elements (air, earth, fire, and water), combine them with one another (or themselves) to create new substances. For example, the combination of earth + fire = lava, or air + air = wind; then you can go further, adding lava + water to make stone and steam. There are 390 possible results in the game. Have fun!

AS WE CLOSE out our series on the Alchemy app, here is a list of all 390 elements in the game. Good luck!



Tup, Air, Airplane, Albert Einstein, Alcohol, Alcoholic, Algae, Alien, Aluminum, Ambulance, Aquarium, Arable, Arms, Ash, Ashtray, Assassin, Australia, Avian Flu, Baby, Bacon, Bacteria, Bar, Barbeque, Bat, Batman, Beach, Bear, Beast, Beaver, Bee, Beer, Beetle, Beetroot, Belarus, Berry, Bicycle, Bird, Bitumen, Blood, Boat, Boiler, Book, Borscht, Bow, Bread, Brick, Brickhouse, Butterfly, C3PO, Cactus, Camel, Cancer, Car, Caramel, Carbon Dioxide, Carmine, Cart, Cat, Catdog, Caviar, Cement, Cemetery, Ceramics, Champagne, Chariot, Cheese, Chicken, China, Chocolate, Christmas Tree, Cigarettes, City, Clay, Clock, Cloth, Clothing, Cloud, Coal, Coca-Cola, Cochineal, Cocoa, Coffin, Coin, Combustion Engine, Concrete, Continent, Copper, Corpse, Country, Crop Circles, Dam, Desert, Diamond, Diet, Dilemma, Dinosaur, Doctor, Dog, Dough, Dr. Zoidberg, Dragon, Dust, Earth, E-book, Ectoplasm, Egg, Egypt, Electric Eel, Electric Ray, Electricity, Elephant, Energy, Ent, Explosion, Faberge Egg, Farmer, Fat, Feather, Fern, Finland, Fire, Fire Elemental, Firearms, Firefighter, Firefly, Fish, Fisherman, Flour, Flower, Flu, Fondue, Forest, Fossil, France, Frankenstein, Fried Chicken, Frog, Fruit, Fugu, Gasoline, Genie, Germany, Geyser, Ghost, Ghostbusters, Glass, Gold, Golem, Grape, Grass, Grave, Grove, Gunpowder, Hen coop, Hero, Honey, Hospital, Hot Chocolate, Hourglass, House M.D., Hunter, Hut, Hydrogen, Ice, Iceland, Idea, India, Iodine, iPhone, Island, Italy, Japan, Jedi, Juice, Kama Sutra, Kangaroo, Kerogen, Kilt, Knife, Lamp, Lance Armstrong, Lava, Lava Golem, Lava Lamp, Lawnmower, Leech, Library, Lichen, Life, Light, Lightbulb, Lighthouse, Lightning Rod, Lightsaber, Lime, Limestone, Livestock, Lizard, Lobster, Locomotive, Man, Manure, Mario, McDonalds, Meat, Mentos, Mermaid, Metal, Metal Golem, Mexico, Microchip, Milk, Mirror, Mite, Mold, Molotov Cocktail, Money, Moon, Moss, Motorboat, Motorcycle, Mouse, Mud, Mummy, Museum, Mushroom, Music, Obesity, Old Man, Omelet, Oxygen, Oxyhydrogen, Ozone, Panda, Paper, Pearl, Peat, Penguin, Penicillin, Perfume, Petri Dish, Petroleum, Philosopher's Stone, Philosophy, Phoenix, Phone, Pie, Pig, Piggy Bank, Pillow, Pinocchio, Pizza, Planet, Plankton, Plesiosauria, Poison, Poisoned Weapons, Pressure, Prisoner, Pterodactyl, Quark, Quetzalcoatl, R2D2, Rain, Rainbow, Reed, Robin Hood, Robot, Romania, Ruby, Russia, Rust, Sailboat, Sailor, Salamander, Salo, Salt, Saltpeter, Sand, Sandstorm, Santa Claus, Saudi Arabia, Sauna, Scarab, Scientist, Scissors, Scorpion, Scotch Whiskey, Scotland, Sea, Seed, Sex, Sex and the City, Shells, Sick, Silicon, Silk, Silver, Sith, Sky, Skyscraper, Smoke, Snail, Snake, Sniper, Soap, Sodawater, Soldier, Sound, Soured Milk, Spinning Wheel, Stake, Star, Star Wars, Statue, Statue Of Liberty, Steam, Steam Engine, Steamer, Stone, Storm, Sugar, Sulfur, Sun, Sunflower, Sushi, Swamp, Sweater, Swine Flu, Swiss Army Knife, Switzerland, Team, Tequila, The Beatles, Thread, Thunderstorm, Time, Toast, Tobacco, Tool, Totoro, Tractor, Transformers, Transistor, Transylvania, Tree, Turtle, Twilight Saga, Typhoon, UFO, Ukraine, Uncut Diamond, Undead, United Kingdom, USA, Vampire, Venice, Venus, Vicodin, Vinegar, Vodka, Volcano, Vulture, VW Beetle, Warrior, Water, Weevil, Werewolf, Whale, Wheat, Wheel, Whey, Wind, Wine, Wire, Wolf, Woman, Wood, Wooden Ship, Wool, Worm, Yarn, Yoda, Yogurt, Yoshi, Zombie, Zoo.

**4400 Market Street
Oakland, CA 94608
info@womenprisoners.org**

**California Coalition for
Women Prisoners**

Criminal Offender Reform Establishment (CORE)

This group of educators has created customized course materials for incarcerated people to assist them in their process of rehabilitation. The courses are available via correspondence, and charges only for shipping and handling costs. CORE offers the following courses:

- Mind Makeover:** Changing your thoughts to change your ways
- Biological Blueprint:** What qualities you inherited to become who you are
- Self-Awareness:** Nurture your good qualities and eliminate the negative ones
- Goal Gaining:** Setting your goals and making them achievable
- Perspective Personified:** Seeing the world through more eyes than only yours
- Dreaming in Color:** Making your dreams a reality

CORE
P.O. Box 1361
West Sacramento, CA 95605
Email: CORE.educators@gmail.com



Helpful Organizations

Dear Walter: *How hard is it to find places to help you on parole?*

THERE ARE MANY organizations and people out here trying to offer us help. Sacramento County set up a forum at the main library in August with booths for organizations that help the community and ex-offenders. Especially people like us trying to navigate this new world. I even got a library card that's good for all libraries in Sacramento. Right now I need help with computer skills and phone operations; I think the prohibition on inmates learning how to use a phone and computer to go online is a big problem. We are lost until we overcome this issue.

During my search for help transitioning, I hit the jackpot recently. An organization called Asian Resources Inc. has two offices close by, and they hold free classes for older and underserved community members for computer. The internet is complicated for long-term inmates, and this is the ticket. My house manager is sending emails to the other transitional houses about this discovery so we can get everyone involved who needs this help. I am very pleased with the services.

By the way, the BPH holds monthly meetings and allows public access and comment, where all commissioners are present. I will be attending so I can advocate for better understanding of our issues and learn as much as possible to clarify the path forward for us.

The person responsible for the house where I live was a former Mule Creek resident, Marvin Schlaak. He runs the entire program, and is a great success story. He has spent thousands of dollars of his money to make the experience a pleasant one for the residents.

Walter Lewis served 45 years of an 18-years-to-life sentence before being released in 2024 under the elderly parole process. He is currently on parole in the Sacramento area. Write to Walter with your questions about parole: Mule Creek Post, % MCIC Associate Warden, attn.: Ask Walter, P.O. Box 409090, Lone, CA 95640

12 Consejos Para la Junta (Pt. 1)

Por Maya Emig, Post Columnist

Traducido por Fabián García, Spanish Reporter

QUIERO HABLAR DE algunas áreas que son importantes tener en cuenta, especialmente cuando se prepara para su evaluación integral de riesgos (o evaluación psíquica) y para las preguntas que el comisionado adjunto puede hacerle en su audiencia de idoneidad.

En primer lugar, ya que todos en prisión estatal cuentan con acceso a programas de autoayuda a través de Edovo, los aliento a todos a que adopten el hábito de realizar programas de autoayuda todos los días. Háganlo parte de su rutina diaria. Denle a su abogado el número de código para que puedan consultar su historial. Hágalo de manera constante e incorpore la información que está aprendiendo para ayudarlo a comprenderse a sí mismo y su criminalidad de mejor manera. Con mi recomendación de realizar Edovo diario, recuerdo a los grandes atletas que dedican tiempo constantemente. Establezcan sus metas diarias y cúmplalas, ya sea al comienzo de su día, antes de dormir, o en algún momento intermedio. Están invirtiendo en sí mismos; como he dicho antes, ara sus frutos.

En segundo lugar, cuando se siente con el evaluador(a) para realizar su evaluación integral de riesgos, le harán varias preguntas sobre el desarrollo de su niñez y adolescencia, y sobre su entorno familiar en el que creció. Debe examinar todos los aspectos de su vida, a medida que desentraña su criminalidad y descubre cómo se convirtió en la persona que cometió los delitos por los que fue condenado. Aquí es donde entra en juego una comprensión amplia de la violencia doméstica. Los diferentes tipos de violencia domestica incluye física, emocional, psicológica, financiera, y sexual. Si hubo violencia doméstica en su entorno familiar, debe revelarlo. Me encuentro con clientes que endulza su infancia porque no quieren hablar negativamente de los miembros de su familia, o admitir una dinámica disfuncional en su hogar y el trauma que sufrió. Lleve eso un paso más allá y revele cualquier trauma que haya sufrido fuera de su hogar por parte de personas que no eran parte de su familia inmediata.

En tercer lugar, haga un examen completo de su delito de internamiento. He leído algunas evaluaciones de riesgo integrales que dicen, "Los relatos detallados del delito pueden revisarse en el registro a través del Informe de Oficiales de Libertad Condicional (POR) o la decisión de apelación," si corresponde, y luego proveen párrafos detallados que describen la versión oficial. Al continuar encentraras "Relato del Examinado del Delito de Compromiso" donde el medico cita lo que mis clientes han dicho en cual quiere decisión de apelación tribunal. Uno de los desafíos que surge mucho en mi preparación de los clientes es que su interpretación del delito no se alinea con la versión oficial. Los clientes me dicen que "no van a mentir solo para decirle a los comisionados lo que quieren escuchar." No quiero que mientas, pero si quiero que adoptes una visión de 360 grados sobre el delito desde todas las partes involucradas. Les digo que cuando dos personas hablan sobre un evento, la verdad está en algún lugar entre sus dos versiones. También les recuerdo a mis clientes que los recuerdos cambian con el tiempo. Aunque ese recuerdo pueda parecer como la verdad, cada vez que evocas un recuerdo, se transforma un poco; y anos o décadas después, lo que parece ser un recuerdo concreto ha cambiado. Esto es especialmente verdadero cuando le sumas tus prejuicios internos, tu negación y tu visión positiva de las cosas.

En cuarto lugar, ¡haga su revisión de Olson! Es una de las cosas que cada panel buscara al preparar su caso, porque usted tiene derechos inherentes asociados con que le ofrezcan una revisión de Olson. Toma ventaja de que le ofrezcan una revisión de su archivo, lea su POR, lea todos los informes policiales asociados con su delito, revise su informe de arresto y disposición para familiarizarse una vez más con sus antecedentes penales, y lea también sus reportes de violar los reglamentos. Los aliento a todos a que dediquen tiempo a hacer una revisión de Olson porque hay una gran cantidad de información y refrescar su memoria es algo bueno porque las cosas se pierden con el tiempo.

En quinto lugar, si tiene un historial de abuso de sustancias, comprenda como eso jugo un papel en su criminalidad, como afecto sus relaciones, y lo aliento a que internalice su programación. Mis clientes a menudo me hablan de los certificados de las clases que han tomado, pero cuando les pregunto sobre lo que han aprendido de las clases, o que es el 4° Paso, no me lo pueden decir. Usualmente me dicen que no pueden recordar los pasos palabra por palabra. Luego les pido que me digan en términos generales cuales son los pasos y como los han trabajado. Es entonces cuando admiten que no conocen los pasos. ¡CONOZCA SUS PASOS!

Tengo más áreas en las que puede centrarse en el próximo artículo.

Turmeric Benefits

By Bob Gay, Feature Reporter

THE DEPARTMENT OF Mona Gastric Animal Sciences in Poland states there is a growing popularity in the use of nutraceuticals — herbs like turmeric — used in the prevention and alleviation of symptoms of many diseases in humans and dogs. Turmeric, (*Curcuma longa*) which is grown extensively in Asia, belongs to the family of *Zingiberaceau*. The most important pro-health effects claimed are anti-inflammatory, though the report also states it assists in prevention of cancer, and helps with mood swings and depression as an antioxidant. Turmeric is used all over the world as a functional food because of its health-promoting properties and is one of the most popular medicinal herbs.

“Turmeric was introduced to me by my family and it has brought me great comfort,” said 70-year-old Mule Creek resident Quintin Macalingay about his success with the herb in easing pain.

According to the Polish research team’s 24-page report, the main chemical ingredient of turmeric is curcumin. In recent years, much attention has been paid to the use of curcumin in medicines to treat and alleviate the symptoms of diseases related to stress, inflammation, and various types of cancer.

Many years of research have shown that curcumin inhibits the development of diseases. It also acts with a neuroprotective effect on brain injuries and diseases of the nervous system by reducing total cholesterol. The curcumin effect also positively affects diabetes in humans by improving insulin sensitivity and reducing complications associated with cardiovascular disorders.

“I first learned of turmeric from my grandmother. She has been using it for joint pain for years, buying it across the counter in her local drug store,” said Mule Creek resident Aaron Elliot, 36. “I use it to alleviate my joint pain from my workouts.”

When consuming turmeric, one should keep in mind that it is harvested much like any other raw material (wheat, barley, or

rye). It is subject to the common contaminations of chemical and biological hazards that could affect the health of the consumer.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration give turmeric a “Generally Recognized As Safe” (GRAS) status. Certain substances receive this designation, meaning that the use of this substance as a food additive is recognized by experts as safe for health.

Body aches? Joint pain? Depression? These terms describe many prison-related maladies, so turmeric may be just the relief you need. One Mule Creek resident stated, “I’ve been using about a quarter of a teaspoon of turmeric, mixed with half a cup of Kool-Aid, first thing in the morning. I can feel like a cripple rising from my mattress, yet within less than an hour of drinking my turmeric cocktail, I can move freely without pain.”

Turmeric is available from Walkenhorst’s in the spice section, and it’s really cheap. Why not give it a try next quarter?

The information in this article is for educational purposes only. In no way is this information intended to diagnose or treat any ailments.

Mindfulness in Everyday Life

By Jason Davis, Lead Reporter

PAUSE LONG ENOUGH to actually feel the present moment, to see it in its fullness, to hold it in awareness and come to know and understand it better — that is mindfulness. Only then can we accept the truth of this moment of our life, learn from it, and move on. Instead, it often seems as if we are preoccupied with the past, with what has already happened, or with a future that hasn’t arrived yet. If we are not present for many of these moments, we may miss what is most valuable in our lives and fail to realize the richness and depth of our possibilities for growth and transformation.

As we begin to understand how our body reacts to situations with this awareness, we learn to release tension and calm ourselves in stressful situations. Most of the time we are only partially aware of this inner tension — if we are aware of it at all. We are only partially aware at best of exactly what we are doing in our lives, and the effects our actions and, more subtly, our thoughts have on what we see and don’t see, what we do and don’t do.

Despite considerable research into stress and anxiety and seemingly innumerable approaches to stress management and reduction, stress is an unavoidable fact of life. We all live with uncertainties, difficulties, illness, aging, death, and an inability to fully control life events. We often don’t feel comfortable within ourselves or don’t know how to connect with one another, and we often feel estranged from the natural world.

It’s no wonder our stress is rising. Our brains get overwhelmed; the pace of life and bombardment of information can leave us susceptible to frustration, worry, panic, self-judgment, and impatience. It is no surprise that many people become so worried or depressed that they are given medications to help balance them out. While medications can sometimes be essential for health and well-being, it is also important to cultivate inner resources for dealing with stress, pain, and illness.

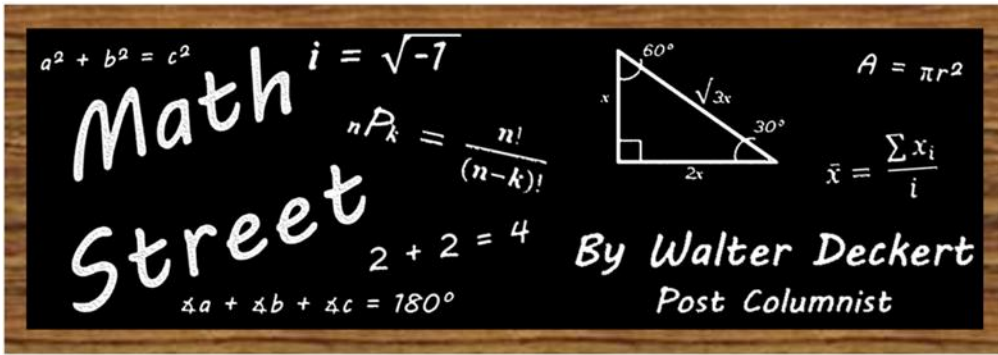
The World Health Organization reported that 264 million people around the world suffer from anxiety disorders, a 14.9% increase since 2005, and the National Institute of Mental Health reported that approximately 40 million American adults suffer from anxiety disorders. Stress and anxiety affect physical health and have been associated with numerous medical conditions, including cardiovascular disease, cancer, and reproductive disorders. This underscores the urgent need to find alternative ways to cope with stress and anxiety.

Weaving mindfulness into your everyday life will not only help reduce stress and anxiety, it will also guide you to a life of greater compassion, health, peace, and well-being.

In the words of St. Augustine (399 AD), “[M]en go forth to marvel at the heights of mountains and the huge waves of the sea, the broad flow of the rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the orbits of the stars, and yet they neglect to marvel at themselves.”

An all-too-common example in Western culture is getting caught up in the material world that we forget about love, compassion, and generosity. The antidote is mindfulness, a simple and direct practice of moment-to-moment observations of the mind-body process of constant change; you can begin to acknowledge all aspects of experience — pleasure and pain, fear and joy — with less stress and more balance.

Sources: *Wherever You Go, There You Are*, Hachette Books, 1994; Bob Stahl and Elisha Goldstein, *A Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction Workbook*, New Harbinger Publications, 2019.



Let's see how that would work with a distance, time, and rate problem:

I walk at a 2.5 mph pace (okay, I'm fudging it a bit!). Gabriel Espinoza can run an impressive 4.5 minute/mile, or approximately 13.333 mph. Let's say I am on a hike. Gabriel comes to visit and finds a pardon on my doorstep (yeah, I know that isn't

The Chase

THE VERY MENTION of word problems can cause many mathematics students to go catatonic. You know the problems: A train travels east at 100 mph and a car travels west at 15 mph; what is the cost of tea in China?

Of course, this isn't a real word problem; it's nonsensical. But, sadly, students of all ages scratch their heads at word problems and view them all as nonsensical. However, just a bit of organizing can help make these problems less daunting. The key is to have an approach, a model.

My model uses bits and pieces of other models, so there is nothing sacrosanct about it. If you have a different way, that's great. Just use some method of organizing all the information. Here are my six steps:

1. Determine what it is EXACTLY that the problem is asking us to find and assign a variable.
2. What information do they give us? Are there relationships, times, distances, etc., given in the problem? Give them variable names.
3. What is our best guess? Here we are after just some ballpark estimate so we will know if the answer we find makes sense.
4. Do I know a model or formula that applies to the problem? For instance, if the problem is asking for the area of a rectangle, I know: $A = l \times w$. Will a picture help me understand what is being asked? How about a table?
5. Combine the information (Step 2) with the formula/table/picture of Step 4. Solve the equation.
6. Did I answer the question in Step 1? Does this answer look close to my estimate in Step 3?

how it works.) He knows I have been hiking two hours when he takes off to find me. Assuming we both maintain a constant speed, how far will I walk before Gabriel catches up to me?

1. The question asks for a distance, so I will call it: D .
2. Gabriel's speed is 13.333 mph. We will call that R_G . My speed is 2.5 mph. We will call that R_W . So, $R_G = 13.333$ mph, and $R_W = 2.5$ mph. We also know something about the distance. When Gabriel catches me, we will have gone the same distance.
So: $D_G = D_W$
3. Here we really only need some idea of what the distance COULD be. When Gabriel starts off, I have walked two hours or: $2 \times 2.5 = 5$ miles. So, that is the smallest the distance could be. In another hour, I will only walk 2.5 miles more and Gabriel COULD have covered 13.333 miles; so my estimate would be somewhere between 5 and 7 miles.
4. Distance problems use the formula $D = r \times t$ or, distance = rate \times time. These problems are best with a table with the formula along the top and the hiker/runner on the side:

	D	=	r	t
Walt				
Gabe				

5. Fill in the table and solve:

	D	=	r	t
Walt	D_W		2.5 mph	$t + 2$
Gabe	D_G		13.333 mph	t

(Walt has been going 2 hours more than Gabriel.)

$$D_W = D_G \quad \text{Given in problem: Step 2}$$

$$D_W = 2.5(t+2)$$

$$D_G = 13.333$$

Since $D_W = D_G$:

$$2.5(t+2) = 13.333t \quad \text{Distribute the 2.5}$$

$$\underline{-2.5t} \quad \underline{-2.5t}$$

$$+5 = 10.833t$$

$$0.462 \approx t$$

So $t = 0.462$ hours. Gabriel catches me in just under a half-hour; but that is NOT the question (See Step 1). So we solve for Distance:

$$D_W = 2.5(0.462+2) = 6.16 \text{ miles}$$

$$D_G = 13.333 \text{ mph} \times 0.462 \text{ miles} \approx 6.16 \text{ miles}$$

6. Did we answer the question from Step 1? Yep. If I had stopped in Step 5 when I found the value for t , I would catch my mistake here. Does my answer fit with my estimate from Step 3? Yep.

If you have math-related questions or comments about my column, send them to the *Mule Creek Post*.

My thanks to Gabriel Espinoza, who is one of Facility E's human cheetahs.



Human cheetah Gabriel Espinoza
(H. Kim / Media Specialist)

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Why Read the Classics?

By Rob Sharp,
Feature Reporter



IN THE NOVEL, *The Return of the Native*, Thomas Hardy weaves a ponderous tale about the denizens of Egdon Heath, an English village during the period of 1840 to 1850. Hardy was born in Egdon Heath in 1840, and wrote the story in 1878.

There is a kind of lyricism to Hardy’s writing, and the book is sprinkled with references to Greek mythology that may be unfamiliar to some readers. In addition, it is recommended that a dictionary be kept nearby to help readers keep up with the terms used. There are many Anglicisms — terms not used in American English. There is even a reference to *Domesday*, a book about real estate holdings from England in the Middle Ages.

With all of this said, it is an interesting story of lost opportunities, foolish choices, and tragedy in an around this small English village.

An example of this lyricism is found on page 61:

She held the brand to the ground, blowing the red coal with her mouth at the same time; till it faintly illuminated the sod, and revealed a small object, which turned out to be an hourglass though she wore a watch. She blew long enough to show that the sand had all slipped through. “Ah!” she said as if surprised.

This is an interesting story that the dedicated reader would enjoy and should be available in your facility’s library.



Military Records Repository Fire

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter



A DEVASTATING FIRE occurred in the National Personnel Records Center in Overland, Missouri, on July 12, 1973. The six-story facility housed over 52 million military and U.S. government personnel records. The fire destroyed the entire sixth floor, primarily housing military records, with extensive water damage to all five floors below. The exact cause was never determined.

At the time of the fire, millions of records were on loan to the Veterans Administration (VA), making determination of actual lost records difficult. Specific record periods that are known lost are as follows:

- 80% loss to U.S. Army personnel records up to a discharge date of Jan. 1, 1960.
- 75% loss of U.S. Air Force records up to discharge date of Jan. 1, 1964, with names after “Hubbard, James.”
- U.S. Army Reserve personnel who received a final discharge as late as 1964.
- The bulk of records from the Vietnam era were not affected.

On the morning of the fire, a small number of U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps records from the Vietnam era, normally stored on the fifth floor, were transferred to the sixth floor for processing and were lost in the fire.

According to a report on the fire provided by Patrick Merrill, a re-entry specialist with the Department of Veterans Affairs, “Every effort has been made to lessen this impact [the fire], but there are situations today where delays occur and difficulties result. ... The millions of records maintained by the VA are now used constantly to provide information to persons whose records were destroyed in the fire.”

There were no duplicate copies of any of the lost military records and none copied to microfilm. With the lack of accurate documentation and information, an exact accounting of the losses was difficult. Extensive water damage to fifth floor records resulted in some documents being unrecoverable, thus, military veterans from early in the Vietnam conflict still experience difficulties retrieving their military records. World War II veterans’ files were also destroyed, but few applicants for copies of records are still alive.

A great deal of effort and money was spent in restoring burned and water-damaged records beginning in 1974. Recovery struggles were ongoing into the 2020s, using infrared technology that can read blackened paper.

Should any incarcerated veteran experience difficulty obtaining military or medical records on their own, the two very effective veterans counselors listed below can assist with your needs.

SOFIA MARTIN DEL CAMPO

(Veterans Claims Analyst)
CalVet CDCR Liaison

Oakland District Office, Veterans Service Division
1301 Clay Street, Room 1130N
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(510) 301-6913
www.CalVet.ca.gov



Sources: Wikipedia, “Nat’l Personnel Records Center Fire,” 2024; *The American Archivist*, Vol. 37, Number 4, 1974.



PATRICK MERRILL

HCRV Re-Entry Specialist

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- 🌐 NVF.org



Prison Hacks

In-Cell Food Storage

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

hack [hæk] *verb*: a way to make tasks easier; a shortcut

HAVE YOU EVER seen a TV news report during a heat wave and the reporter shows a thermometer indicating the pavement temperature hitting 125 °F or more? Bare human feet and pet paws blister at these levels. What happens if you place a bag of your canteen on the hot cement while waiting for your block door to open? If there are batches of honey buns, cinnamon rolls, tortillas, or candy bars on the bottom of your canteen bag, these are likely damaged, rendered inedible, or mold will soon appear. Chocolate candy bars turn to a powdery consistency and tan color, all due to excessive heat from the searing pavement.

Printed on many food packages is a "Use by" or "Best by" date. The reason for these indicators is to denote the expected peak quality of the item, not a warning of imminent spoilage. Chips remain edible for weeks after a "Use by" date; however, if you buy a honey bun with a "Best by" date a week away, the product may have sat on a loading dock in 95 °F for a few hours before moved indoors to your canteen, thus its shelf life is affected. Use these tips as purchasing strategies and for food storage in your cell:

- Signs of potential poor handling and storage before you buy a food item, especially bakery products: The item is compacted; the wrapping should not be crushed against the icing. The thickness is normal in appearance, not like a pancake.
- For bakery products, tortillas, candy bars, cookies, and even open bags of chips, store these items in your locker. Lockers are generally cooler, have good air circulation, and are easier to organize with freshness in mind. Stockpiling perishable food items in plastic bins under your bed requires rotating fresher items, like chips, to the bottom, pulling the older to the top to be used first. Always use the oldest first. Same goes for meat products. Use a marker and write the purchase date on your purchases.
- When buying at the canteen, check the "use by" date on products. You have the right to

refuse an expired or questionable product. If a pouched meat, fish, or prepared product appears to bulge, double check the expiration. Bulging generally indicates possible expiration age or deterioration. After the "Use by" date passes, the quality and flavor will deteriorate; bulging appears (except for chips, where extra air is injected to cushion contents from jarring).

Strangely enough, store tortillas and bakery products directly on the concrete floor, likely the coldest part of your cell. Never allow your perishables to rest against the outside wall of your cell. In many desert prisons, the 100+ °F outside temperatures keep this outside wall warm to the touch. Tortillas can form green mold in 24 hours.

How to Write a Screenplay

By Daniel Larson, Feature Reporter

SCREENPLAYS ARE FUN and rewarding. To start, write about something you know about, like a personal experience. You can use this simple fill-in-the-blank sentence: "This is a story about a _____ who _____."

Screenplay format tells your story with pictures, not words. You're writing for the screen. Words describe the scenes. Dialogue is used to convey information, fill in some blanks. Today's screenplay is a three-act play.

If you're writing for yourself, or hope to sell a script for fun and profit, you're writing a "Spec Script." You leave out the camera angles, music, scene numbers, and FX of that shot from outer space. Spec scripts are your story in the preferred form and format. A reader will have your script first. They are the people who have to love your story first.

When you look at your page, does it have too much ink? Readers like white space. Make it look as clean as possible. Keep it simple. Each page should read in about a minute.

Writing is divided into three parts: slugline, exposition, and dialogue. The slugline is an old newspaper word. It's the bold headline on page one: "RED SOX WIN!" The slugline is used to change locations, scenes, and time. It keeps your story moving forward. The slugline is for the camera operator. It tells if they are shooting inside or out, location, and day or night. A slugline will look like this:

INT-RESTAURANT-DAY.

The next part of your play is exposition. It belongs two places below the slugline. Exposition is for the director. It describes what characters are in the scene, and briefly what is going on. Most books will tell you there should be no more than two paragraphs of exposition. In screenwriting, a sentence is a paragraph. So get used to condensing, stay away from gerunds (*gerunds* are verbs that end in "ing," they tell you the verb is weak). So, don't get used to condensing; *love* to condense. See the difference? Less is more in this area.

Dialogue is written in three parts: character cue, wrylies, and character speech. Your character name is also the character cue and always capitalized. Character dialogue should always tell the reader something they do not already know. Dialogue should never repeat itself. Once something is said, it's said. Good dialogue moves the story forward. It is edited speech, lean and communicating facts, only interestingly.

The wryly is rarely used. Directors like to be the ones to give stage direction. Wrylies can provide helpful tips to the reader and can also serve as a beat. A wryly looks like this:

Character: CHARLES
Wryly: (Coughs)

Writing comes from your creative urge. To get practice as you begin, write what are called "set pieces." These are standalone scenes, interchangeable, very movable. Save them. The day will come when you'll be glad you wrote that scene about a penguin selling car insurance to sharks.

Keep your play at 100 to 110 pages. Act One is about 22 to 25 pages. It shows life the way it was. Your first 10 pages must capture the reader's attention so they want to know what happens next. Act Two is about 60 pages. This is where all the big stuff happens. Act Three is your resolution. You tie up loose ends and resolve the growth of your heroes as they muscle their way through Act Two.

Work on your story every day. Keep paper and pencil close at night. While you're asleep, your muse is hard at work trying to save the heroes from the mess you've gotten them into. Trying to remember that great idea in the morning is a lesson in frustration.

When you finish your screenplay, you are way ahead of those who quit, or are still talking about it. With a completed screenplay, you are in the thin air of accomplishment. Remember, before Jack could make that emotion-filled speech to Rose on the headboard in the ocean, someone had to write it. Good luck.

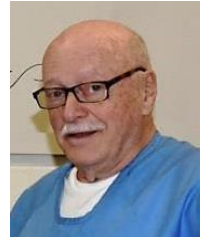
Business & Finances



Leah Ward-Lee



Carolyn Warren



R. Von Villas

ENTREPRENEUR'S WORKSHOP

By Leah Ward-Lee
Post Columnist

Stop Procrastinating

ONE THING I used to believe about myself was that I was a procrastinator. Indeed, people who are important to me reinforced that belief. Then I watched a TED Talk about procrastination by Tim Urban, whose "Wait But Why" blog explores procrastination.

He describes it with hilarious illustrations that looked to have been drawn by a fourth grader. Both brains had a Rational Decision Maker who is depicted with a steering wheel like one would see on a ship; however, the procrastinator's brain also has an Instant Gratification Monkey. Every time a procrastinator starts to do something that's necessary to keep his ship on course, the Instant Gratification Monkey takes over, grabs the steering wheel, and replaces it with an activity that's fun and completely non-productive but quickly produces a visible result.

When deadlines approach, the third character living in the procrastinator's brain, the Panic Monster, takes over. This character scares the Instant Gratification Monkey back up into his tree so the Rational Decision Maker can take over long enough for the activity to be completed, typically at an irrational pace.

Leah Ward-Lee is an international consultant for the airlines and aerospace industries, activist, social justice advocate, and entrepreneurial trainer. She volunteers for Defy Ventures, a prison entrepreneurial training program, and provides pro bono counseling for aspiring small business startups.

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Build & Protect Your Credit Like the Pros

How to Open a Bank Account

By Carolyn Warren, Post Columnist

IF YOU DON'T have a credit history, start by opening a checking account at your local bank. I prefer a small to midsize bank over the Herculean giants: Bank of America, Chase Bank, and Wells Fargo Bank. Personally, I was able to get better banking terms from my regional bank, and I expect that you will, too.

Go in person to open your bank account so you can make sure you'll receive decent customer service in the event that you ever need to speak with someone face-to-face about a situation. Learn about the checking account choices. Your goal is to deposit enough cash and maintain that balance so that you don't pay a monthly fee. Banking fees are an unnecessary waste of your hard-earned money.

You will need checks to go with your checking account. The checks that banks sell are unnecessarily expensive. I recommend getting five to 10 free temporary checks and then ordering checks from one of the many cheap check printers, such as Walmart, VistaPrint, Costco, Sam's Club, SuperValueChecks, or other online check printers.

If you have enough cash and income to open both a checking and savings account, you may earn better interest on your savings that way. If not, then open only a checking account and keep a sufficient balance to avoid annoying fees. Once you have a bank account, next open a credit card.

Carolyn Warren is the author of Amazon's bestselling Repair Your Credit Like the Pros, Repair Your Credit Like the Pros: Deeper Dive, and Get the Mortgage You Want Like the Pros. She is passionate about saving people money and helping people reach their dream of home ownership.

The Financial Corner



By R. Von Villas,
Post Columnist

THE MULE CREEK Post was established in January 2018, and our first issue contained my column, "The Financial Corner." That was seven years ago, and I am proud to say the Post and I have assisted many to prepare for board, parole, and a fresh start. The same holds true for incarcerated people doing life or life without parole. Will you be financially stable if you can no longer work? Would \$50 to \$100 or more a month make a difference in how you do time? In either scenario, you can reach your goal, on your own from prison, for your financial future with just a little sacrifice now.

Each month I will present stocks I believe are undervalued and have good long-term potential, the risk-versus-reward aspect of each stock, and the advantage of dividends. The stocks selected offer dividend reinvestment plans (DRIPs). I look for stocks that require a minimum investment of as little as \$25 to \$50, and charge no fees to invest. In about 30 days, you can own your first dividend-paying stock, and you can do it from prison through a DRIP.

So, what is a share? What is a dividend? Simply put, a share of stock represents ownership in a company. Let's say a company wants to expand its operation and needs additional funds. They can offer shares of their company stock to the general public to raise the needed funds. To entice new investors a company can offer quarterly dividends to its shareholders. Basically, it's like offering a reward for your investment in their company. There are about 700 different stocks you will be able to choose from, many of which will be researched in future articles.

Next month we'll talk about: What is a dividend reinvestment plan? How does it help me financially? In the meantime, for additional information, go to the Free dashboard on your GTL tablet; in the Facility Information app, find the "Newspaper" tab and check out the Post in 2022 and 2023. You'll find my column on pages 15 or 26. Check out those stocks I've recommended for research.

All stocks reviewed are for research only. The research was done to give you information about a stock you may be interested in. You must make your own decision to the quality of a stock, and if it meets your long-term financial goal. For transparency, I will tell you if I own or have owned any stock mentioned.

Financial Corner Tracking Stocks (From Sep. 9, 2024 to Jan. 6, 2025)

● Apollo Comm. Real Est. Fin. Inc. (ARI)	\$10.30	→	\$8.97	-12.9%
● Baxter International Inc. (BAX)	\$38.96	→	\$29.50	-24.3%
● Comerica Inc. (CMA)	\$54.87	→	\$62.48	+13.9%
● CVS Health Corp. (CVS)	\$57.75	→	\$45.77	-20.7%
● Lumen Technologies (LUMN)	\$5.84	→	\$5.66	-3.1%
● Pfizer (PFE)	\$28.56	→	\$26.59	-6.9%
● UGI Corp. (UGI)	\$23.97	→	\$28.63	+19.4%
● Wells Fargo & Co. (WFC)	\$54.00	→	\$71.31	+32.1%

Creative Arts Program

By three methods we may learn wisdom: first, by reflection, which is noblest; second, by imitation, which is easiest; and third, by experience, which is the most bitter.

—Confucius

Creative Crossroads: The Senryu

By Jason Davis, Lead Reporter and Steven R. Waters, Mule Creek State Prison

THE ART OF poetry can help us articulate our pain and anger in constructive ways, helping us to find our purpose in life as well as to find meaning in suffering. Creative writing is cathartic, a safe way to express anything we may have bottled inside. A small group gathers every Tuesday in the Facility E hobby room with Lara Gularte, poet laureate of El Dorado County, to engage our creativity through prose and poetry. June was a month filled with exploring traditional Japanese forms of poetry including haiku, senryu, and haibun. This month we will define the senryu. If you are interested in writing senryu, there are some basic facts to know first.

The senryu is a three-line Japanese poetic form that focuses on human nature, generally with an ironic or darkly comedic edge. Senryu, pronounced (*SEHN'-ryoo*), is similar to the haiku. Haiku and senryu tend to have the same structure; the first line traditionally has five syllables, the second line has seven syllables, and the third line again has five syllables.

Aside from the 17 syllables, the main characteristic of the form — in the words of the scholar Makoto Ueda — is that the senryu poet “keenly studies various aspects of the human condition and reports his findings in a humorous way.” In short, the haiku is nature; the senryu is on the foibles of human nature.



Cypress, 16th century, Kanō Eitoku, 67 in x 181.3 in, color on paper with gold leaf, Tokyo National Museum. (Wikipedia.org)

Here are a few examples from Gularte’s Creative Poetry class:

It is wonderful
Dear, how far along are you.
Grandma that’s my beer gut
- Wilson

I am intelligent
However, my best character trait
Is my humility.
- Patrick G

From a safe distance
Bonfire is spectacular
Oh crap! That’s my house.
- Wilson

Looks intelligent
But looks can be deceiving
Fools sometimes fool us.
- Lily

The darkness veils
Many creatures of the night
Do you hide there too?
- Lily

If you are interested in joining the writers on Tuesdays — under the guidance of Lara Gularte — then send an Inmate Activity Group Request (Form 2016) to the CRM for Creative Writing or Poetry. The only requirements are being open to trying new things, and participation by sharing your work. Bring pen, paper, and imagination. You might surprise yourself.

Leave the damn door closed
Stop letting in idiots
Better it were flies
- Lily

Decomposing flesh
Lies quiet beneath cold earth,
Feeding bright tulips.
- Dmitri

She raised me this way,
Question, how old are you?
And you still blame your mother.
- Patrick G.

Buzz about, small fly
With so few poos to land on
I will not swat you.
- Dimitri



Courtesy of Lara Gularte

No Place to Mourn

Only numbness reigns
Over walls of regrets
Over waves of guilt
Over life finished
Of unending hurt
Of love never gained
Of imagined wealth
Of ventures that failed
Of stories and tales.

When sudden end fell
And being turns to dust
And tears mix with water
In a prison shower
Stands a captured creature
Depleted of pride
And replete with shame
In utter lacking
Weak, needy and tired.

There’s no place to hide
Except in the shower
When tears mix with water
And memories poured
And nightmares relived
And a child covered
And covered his ears
But he could still hear
Venom and smashed flesh
Mama lied half-dead
As tears mixed with fear.

But terror and fear
Was of no close match
For a love carried,
Heavy to the womb,
Bled and birthed in pain
Raised, taught, and cared for
Enough to pick up
And escaped oceans
To the U.S. of A.

There have always been
Just the two of us
Now one dead, one alone

With no place to mourn

—Philon Huhn



(Harvard Health)

Finding Refuge in Recovery

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

TAKING REFUGE IS not new. Often, addicted people have done so through external things like possessions, drugs, alcohol, and violence. Most seek security and physical satisfaction with another person, and we move from one situation to the next looking for satisfaction. While some situations offer temporary relief, seeking refuge in physical possessions and transient pleasures merely deepens confusion instead of ending it. Each gets to determine if our experiences are beneficial. If we take refuge only in agreeable sensations or emotions, attachment can intensify and often we become disenchanting, in part because we expect lasting satisfaction from base, ephemeral pleasures.

Taking formal refuge starts with turning inward and discovering the potential we have as human beings. This discovery can generate tremendous zeal for the development of our in-born wisdom-energy. One way of describing perfect, complete wisdom is Buddhahood. For some the word *Buddha* brings forth a mystical image, but it's just a word meaning "one with a totally opened mind."

Formal refuge can be a commitment to living a life of recovery through the 12 Steps, religiosity, or finding a way to serve the greater good by abandoning self-serving desires. We've all felt hopeless, helpless, and incapable of improvement, but we should never underestimate ourselves. The historical Buddha was once more confused than we are, but by discovering his latent wisdom-energy he attained enlightenment. All living beings, including you, have the innate capacity to attain the unsurpassable clarity that is enlightenment.

By cultivating understanding and developing wisdom, we can benefit others and ourselves. No matter how the world changes and fortunes fluctuate, our inner world can remain stable and balanced when fortified by profound understanding. Wisdom brings unflinching happiness, unlike temporal objects of

refuge that bring brief, unsatisfactory moments of pleasure. Recognizing that though we are not enlightened, the seed of enlightenment is within us.

Wisdom means understanding reality. Meditation and prayer are not wisdom, they are merely tools for reaching inner wisdom. If you meditate all day without understanding, you could achieve precious little. Refuge or enlightenment through wisdom is a personal experience that each of us can only elicit from within ourselves. There is a bell within each of us and we are the only ones who can use it to awaken and activate our dormant wisdom. But because our mind is often occupied with the self, many of us live in anger, jealousy, or despair when things do not go as we expect. Practicing wisdom means ringing that inner bell and clearing away the refuse that clogs our minds; the attachment, aversions, partiality, and addictions that haunt our dreams. By making bell-ringing a daily practice, we can take refuge by allowing inner wisdom to regulate our lives.

True spiritual friends support one another in their practice, and promote each other's growth in knowledge and awareness. We need support, because as human beings we can be influenced by the environment and people around us. If I used to be a heavy drinker and stopped years ago, then a friend says, "What a hot day! Let's have a drink somewhere." And I go with him, and then again the next day and the next, I could find myself back in active addiction. In friendship, we often confuse attachment with affection. My friend shows his affection for me by suggesting we go drinking. If I decline he might feel rejected, so I give in. This is how friends can bring us down. They don't use threats or force, but use affection, clinging, and attachment. It is essential that each of us develop a wisdom-eye that with practice can distinguish love from attachment and allow us to see the difference between what is beneficial and what is harmful through relying on wisdom rather than emotion.

For many, this impulse to take refuge comes from a desire to develop our mind and cultivate wisdom. Taking refuge in wisdom is an inner experience and can't be measured by outward behavior alone. There are many who hold no specific religious or philosophical views, but who have — in a quiet and simple way — taken refuge in wisdom.

Taking refuge is not complicated, but it would be a mistake to think it is easy or that we can sit back and let someone else do the work for us. The historical Buddha said, "You are responsible for your liberation." What saves us from confusion is wisdom. If we take refuge while fully understanding the meaning of doing so, our wisdom can grow and, by itself, fill us with the energetic determination necessary to follow the path to liberation.

Once we have formally taken refuge, we then have the opportunity to be responsible for our behavior, because now we get to consciously watch our mind and examine the inner processes of action and reaction, often through asking, "What is my mind doing now? What impulse is arising?" Or, by taking the time to observe how others react when you utter empty, unnecessary words, or when you talk without understanding what you are saying, for example. Many learn that words are powerful, and that physical communication has a strong effect on others; posture, movement, and facial expressions communicate meaning along with words. Since most of our problems involve other people, it is important to be aware of our impact on others and do our best to avoid creating harm.

This process of action and reaction is sometimes called *karma*. Karma may seem like a technical or philosophical term, but it is nothing more than the consequences of our actions, also called experience. Karma can give us an idea of what result to expect from our actions. For example, if all we do is meditate, while making no attempt to control our behavior and our scattered mind, wisdom could elude us. If instead we use discriminating wisdom to create the best internal condition for achieving our aims, we can invite greater wisdom into our lives.

It is our own dissatisfaction that can impel each of us to take formal refuge; for many this happens when we realize that clinging to daydreams and physical possessions has never brought lasting joy. Others before us found out that to get rid of dissatisfaction and gain understanding we must take refuge in wisdom: the path to inner freedom.

If taking refuge means relying on wisdom, why do we have formal refuge? The answer might be that taking formal refuge can remind us of just how critical it is to consciously take refuge, because it marks our arrival at a crucial insight into our nature. In our pasts, many of us sought security in temporary pleasure, but now we have the opportunity to determine that: "From this moment on, rather than taking refuge in ephemeral fictions, I take refuge in my own pure, clear wisdom-energy, setting out on the path to liberation." The conscious and intentional action of taking refuge can strengthen this determination.

Are you a GRIP graduate preparing for release, with questions about reentry, etc.?

GRIP's reentry coordinator position is open; contact BonaFide at (415) 659-8406



THE BACK PAGE | What you need to know about

CHINESE ZODIAC

生肖



Sources: Wikipedia; World Almanac and Book of Facts (2021); World Book Encyclopedia (2017)

The Chinese zodiac is a 12-year cycle that assigns each year an animal and its associated characteristics. The zodiac is deeply connected to the Chinese lunar calendar, which doesn't count years in an infinite sequence but rather names years in a repeating 60-year cycle corresponding to five repetitions of the zodiac. Also known as the Sheng Xiao (*shēng* = "birth year", *xiào* = "likeness"), the Chinese zodiac is popular in many East and Southeast Asian countries including Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, Nepal, Bhutan, Cambodia, and Thailand.

The Chinese calendar is more properly called lunisolar, as it follows both the lunar phases (12 per year, at about 354 days) and the solar year (the time to return to the same position relative to the sun, 365.25 days), and so always begins in January or February of the Gregorian calendar.

The zodiac took shape during the Han Dynasty (206 BC to AD 220), during which timekeeping was formalized into a 12-year system. Combined with the 12 Earthly Branches (地支) and the 10 Heavenly Stems (天干), the cycle was increased to 60 years. Since the Earthly Branch characters were easily confused (such as *hai* 亥 and *shi* 豕 "pig"), people replaced them with animals to form a chronological symbol system. According to legend, the Jade Emperor held a contest to decide which animal would be first in the zodiac; each was assigned their turn in the zodiac according to the order in which they completed the race, with the rat coming in first.



Zodiac carvings on ceiling of Kushida Shrine, Fukuoka

Traditionally, the year in which a person is born (and the animal with which one is associated) influences one's personality, career, marriage, compatibility, and fortune. In addition to those assigned by year, there are also animal signs assigned by month ("inner animal"), day ("true animal"), and even hour ("secret animal").

Year	Gregorian Calendar		English	Animal		Yin/Yang	Associated Element	Heavenly Stem	Earthly Branch	
1	1/5/1924-1/23/1925	1/2/1984-2/19/1985	Rat	shǔ	鼠	yang	wood	甲	子	zǐ
2	1/24/1925-2/12/1926	2/20/1985-2/8/1986	Ox	niú	牛	yin	wood	乙	丑	chǒu
3	2/13/1926-2/1/1927	2/9/1986-1/28/1987	Tiger	hǔ	虎	yang	fire	丙	寅	yín
4	2/2/1927-1/22/1928	1/29/1987-2/16/1988	Rabbit	tù	兔	yin	fire	丁	卯	mǎo
5	1/23/1928-2/9/1929	2/17/1988-2/5/1989	Dragon	lóng	龍 / 龙	yang	earth	戊	辰	chén
6	2/10/1929-1/29/1930	2/6/1989-1/26/1990	Snake	shé	蛇	yin	earth	己	巳	sì
7	1/30/1930-2/16/1931	1/27/1990-2/14/1991	Horse	mǎ	馬 / 马	yang	metal	庚	午	wǔ
8	2/17/1931-2/5/1932	2/15/1991-2/3/1992	Goat	yáng	羊	yin	metal	辛	未	wèi
9	2/6/1932-1/25/1933	2/4/1992-1/22/1993	Monkey	hóu	猴	yang	water	壬	申	shēn
10	1/26/1933-2/13/1934	1/23/1993-2/9/1994	Rooster	jī	雞 / 鸡	yin	water	癸	酉	yǒu
11	2/14/1934-2/3/1935	2/10/1994-1/30/1995	Dog	gǒu	狗	yang	wood	甲	戌	xū
12	2/4/1935-1/23/1936	1/31/1995-2/18/1996	Pig	zhū	豬 / 猪	yin	wood	乙	亥	hài

Year	Gregorian Calendar		Animal	Element	Heavenly Stem
13	1/24/1936-2/10/1937	2/19/1996-2/6/1997	Rat	fire	丙
14	2/11/1937-1/30/1938	2/7/1997-1/27/1998	Ox	fire	丁
15	1/31/1938-2/18/1939	1/28/1998-2/15/1999	Tiger	earth	戊
16	2/19/1939-2/7/1940	2/16/1999-2/4/2000	Rabbit	earth	己
17	2/8/1940-1/26/1941	2/5/2000-1/23/2001	Dragon	metal	庚
18	1/27/1941-2/14/1942	1/24/2001-2/11/2002	Snake	metal	辛
19	2/15/1942-2/4/1943	1/12/2002-1/31/2003	Horse	water	壬
20	2/5/1943-1/24/1944	2/1/2003-1/21/2004	Goat	water	癸
21	1/25/1944-2/12/1945	1/22/2004-2/8/2005	Monkey	wood	甲
22	2/13/1945-2/1/1946	2/9/2005-1/28/2006	Rooster	wood	乙
23	1/2/1946-1/21/1947	1/29/2006-2/17/2007	Dog	fire	丙
24	1/22/1947-2/9/1948	2/18/2007-2/6/2008	Pig	fire	丁
25	2/10/1948-1/28/1949	2/7/2008-1/25/2009	Rat	earth	戊
26	1/29/1949-2/16/1950	1/26/2009-2/13/2010	Ox	earth	己
27	2/17/1950-2/5/1951	2/14/2010-2/2/2011	Tiger	metal	庚
28	2/6/1951-1/26/1952	2/3/2011-1/22/2012	Rabbit	metal	辛
29	1/27/1952-2/13/1953	1/23/2012-2/9/2013	Dragon	water	壬
30	2/14/1953-2/2/1954	2/10/2013-1/30/2014	Snake	water	癸
31	2/3/1954-1/23/1955	1/31/2014-2/18/2015	Horse	wood	甲
32	1/24/1955-2/11/1956	2/19/2015-2/7/2016	Goat	wood	乙
33	2/12/1956-1/30/1957	2/8/2016-1/27/2017	Monkey	fire	丙
34	1/31/1957-2/17/1958	1/28/2017-2/15/2018	Rooster	fire	丁
35	2/18/1958-2/7/1959	2/16/2018-2/4/2019	Dog	earth	戊
36	2/8/1959-1/27/1960	2/5/2019-1/24/2020	Pig	earth	己
37	1/28/1960-2/14/1961	1/25/2020-2/11/2021	Rat	metal	庚
38	2/15/1961-2/4/1962	2/12/2021-1/31/2022	Ox	metal	辛
39	2/5/1962-1/24/1963	2/1/2022-1/21/2023	Tiger	water	壬
40	1/25/1963-2/12/1964	1/22/2023-2/9/2024	Rabbit	water	癸
41	2/13/1964-2/1/1965	2/10/2024-1/28/2025	Dragon	wood	甲
42	2/2/1965-1/20/1966	1/29/2025-2/16/2026	Snake	wood	乙
43	1/21/1966-2/8/1967	2/17/2026-2/5/2027	Horse	fire	丙
44	2/9/1967-1/29/1968	2/6/2027-1/25/2028	Goat	fire	丁
45	1/30/1968-2/16/1969	2/26/2028-2/12/2029	Monkey	earth	戊

Year	Gregorian Calendar		Animal	Element	Heavenly Stem
46	2/17/1969-2/5/1970	2/13/2029-2/2/2030	Rooster	earth	己
47	2/6/1970-1/26/1971	2/3/2030-1/22/2031	Dog	metal	庚
48	1/27/1971-2/14/1972	1/23/2031-2/10/2032	Pig	metal	辛
49	2/15/1972-2/2/1973	2/11/2032-1/30/2033	Rat	water	壬
50	1/3/1973-1/22/1974	1/31/2033-2/18/2034	Ox	water	癸
51	1/23/1974-2/10/1975	2/19/2034-2/7/2035	Tiger	wood	甲
52	2/11/1975-1/30/1976	2/8/2035-1/27/2036	Rabbit	wood	乙
53	1/31/1976-2/17/1977	1/28/2036-2/14/2037	Dragon	fire	丙
54	2/18/1977-2/6/1978	2/15/2037-2/3/2038	Snake	fire	丁
55	2/7/1978-1/27/1979	2/4/2038-1/23/2039	Horse	earth	戊
56	1/28/1979-2/15/1980	1/24/2039-2/11/2040	Goat	earth	己
57	2/16/1980-2/4/1981	2/12/2040-1/31/2041	Monkey	metal	庚
58	2/5/1981-1/24/1982	2/1/2041-1/21/2042	Rooster	metal	辛
59	1/25/1982-2/12/1983	1/22/2042-2/9/2043	Dog	water	壬
60	2/13/1983-2/1/1984	2/10/2043-1/29/2044	Pig	water	癸

Information in the above table is not repeated when it is constant throughout the 60-year cycle. For example, the Goat is always associated with *yin* and *wèi*, regardless of the period; the element and the heavenly stem, however, rotate through the cycle.

In this article, if the simplified and traditional Chinese characters are not the same, the simplified appears first followed by the traditional (e.g., 龍 is the simplified Chinese and 龙 is the traditional Chinese for *lóng*, "dragon").



Tang Dynasty-era ceramic figurines of calendar animals. From Left—Tiger, Dragon, Snake, Monkey, Rooster. (Musée Cernuschi)