

To Our Readers

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

AS MARCH USHERS in spring, we forge forward into 2024, amid all of its ongoing conflicts and tragedies, with hope for better and brighter days ahead.

On the topic of local newspapers, *Ledger Dispatch* publisher Jack Mitchell says: "The stronger the newspaper, the stronger the community. Newspaper journalism is the highest level of journalism, as once published — there are no edits, no changes, it's set in black and white forever." He warns that, if we are indifferent toward our newspapers, "you will ultimately lose a community resource that has been the watchdog, the trail of insights and the history of your home and family."

We hope you will join us with your continued readership and submissions (guidelines on pg. 3), and keep this newspaper strong.

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Service music being performed in a California prison. (TheNorwichRadical.com)

Prison Seminaries Foundation
Initiates 4-Year College Program at
the Mule Creek State Prison

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

OFFICIALS FROM THE California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, the Prison Seminaries Foundation, and administrators of the Mule Creek State Prison toured the prison Friday, February 23, preparing to institute a four-year higher education program of nondenominational seminary training at the prison, starting on Facility E.

Those touring the prison included Ron Broomfield, director of adult institutions; Tristian Lemmon, associate director; Burl Cain, former warden of Louisiana State Prison at Angola and current commissioner of corrections for the state; representatives from the Prison Seminaries Foundation; former Oregon judge Tom Kohl; several Mule Creek State Prison administrators; and other professors and interested parties.

Proponents of the program explained their goal is to equip incarcerated seminary students — ideally those serving sentences of eight years or more — with the tools necessary to become agents of change within and beyond prison walls. This educational model is designed on an ethos of service, and, in addition to theology training, students learn math, science, English literature, history, leadership, counseling, conflict management, grief and trauma support, and peer-to-peer ministry development. Graduates then can be transferred to other institutions within the state to practice what they've learned. The curriculum is accredited and transferable, offering a Bachelor of Arts degree in field ministry, up to a doctorate. The Prison Seminaries Foundation's West Coast branch is run by Sun Bible College's School of Urban Missions in El Dorado Hills.

The Prison Seminaries Foundation operates in 29 states, in six women's and 23 men's facilities. California would be number 30. Cain, founder of the program, while warden at Angola for 21 years was willing to try anything to get the violence down, especially related to gangs. He started looking at what he needed to morally rehabilitate the inmates, and decided he'd have a seminary come in through the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, focusing on character development. The intent was to be separate from the prison,

(continued on page 2)





THE MULE CREEK POST
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AND STAFF

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(from *Prison Seminars*, pg. 1)
and it worked. As men graduated and interacted with their peers, the culture began changing at Angola. He decided that if it worked there it would work anywhere, and started the Prison Seminars Foundation. During his time as warden, and with the introduction of seminary training, Angola has become one of the safest, most secure, and progressive maximum security prisons in the country.



PRISON
SEMINARIES
FOUNDATION



Commissioner Burl Cain

The Rev. Bob Morris, a regular Sunday morning teacher at Protestant services for various yards at Mule Creek, attempted to initiate the seminary program at San Quentin six years ago. It wasn't the right time. Morris anticipates about 100 applicants for the program; of the applicants, only 20 will be selected for the first cohort. Twenty students will be added each year for three years, until the full complement of 60 students is reached. California's inaugural seminary program is intended to begin in the fall of 2024 with a five-day-a-week schedule (four in-person and one day of video instruction).

Kohl, founder of the nonprofit Paid in Full that provides funding for the program in the Oregon Department of Corrections, travels throughout the penal system speaking on the power of faith and forgiveness. He authored the book *Losing Megan*, sharing the story of the murder of his daughter by a drug dealer. The book follows his journey of grief and eventual forgiveness for the man responsible for her death. The Prison Seminars Foundation will have its first graduation in Oregon this fall. The Mule Creek program will be based on the Oregon model.

Broomfield, former warden at San Quentin State Prison, supports the program and believes it aligns well with the new California Model of forward-thinking rehabilitation. He says that one area of the California Model given high-priority is trauma-informed care, something covered in the Prison Seminars Foundation model. He notes that California Model training — with the goal of reducing violence and incidents involving force, staff assaults, overdoses, self-harm, homicide, suicide, grievances, and self-isolation — is being implemented at eight prisons (Valley State Prison, Central California Women's Facility, San Quentin Rehabilitation Center, Folsom State Prison, Salinas Valley State Prison, California Health Care Facility, California State Prison–Solano, and Substance Abuse Treatment Facility). Staff training has begun at Salinas Valley with an emphasis on the four pillars of the California Model: Dynamic security, Normalization, Peer Support, and Becoming Trauma-Informed.

Speaking about the Prison Seminars Foundation program, Broomfield adds, "Anything that reduces violence, improves lives, helps in the rehabilitative process, and impacts staff and inmates in a positive manner is something the department wants to be a part of."



(TheNorwichRadical.com)

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By P. Covello
Mule Creek State Prison
Warden



A Better Way

THIS YEAR, THE Prison Seminars Foundation is starting classes at Mule Creek, sharing with us its profoundly effective work at changing lives. When Warden Burl Cain began the program, gangs and violence were huge problems at the prison in Angola. Within four years, gang-related issues were almost eliminated in the prison.

This may seem like a big claim, but it has been backed up by research from such prestigious universities as Baylor and Pepperdine. Today, the program is in institutions throughout the country (and the Cayman Islands), changing the prison culture everywhere it goes.

As we train residents to engage with each other in a more compassionate way, and share that training with others, we can't help but see the concept of the California Model enacted right here at Mule Creek.

MULE CREEK POST Submissions

Freelance writers, staff, and others may submit articles or material to the *Mule Creek Post*, % MCIC AWs Office, P.O. Box 409090, Lone, 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.



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:

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Pioneering Women in CDCR, Pt. 2

By Don Chaddock, *Inside CDCR* Editor



WHEN THE CALIFORNIA prison system started during the Gold Rush, the original guards were male; it would take more than a century for the first women to take up as correctional officers. These women blazed a trail for others to follow.

A July 28, 1972, issue of *San Quentin News* described Ilene Williams as if she were a model instead of an officer. The paper wrote that Williams was "an attractive 30 (who) likes horseback riding, tennis and reading." The newspaper also asked why Williams chose to become a correctional officer. "[Because] it was a challenge," she said. By 1972, Williams had been working for the department for five years, with her last assignment as correctional counselor at the California Rehabilitation Center in Norco.



Ilene Williams

According to a letter by Williams, dated September 2, 2004, her career began in 1967: "I interviewed at San Quentin Prison in the early part of 1970 ... and I was selected to get the job. Shortly after I interviewed at Quentin, the George Jackson riot ... occurred. The plan to bring females into San Quentin as correctional officers was delayed for one year. This is why no females were placed at San Quentin until 1972. If the two of us [Williams and Correctional Officer Joyce Zink] had failed, it may have been years before women would have the same upward mobility in the (department) as men."

Williams said that at the time there were no women who wore a uniform in a male prison or institution. So, she helped design the first female uniforms and became the first female correctional officer to wear one. "We wore regular clothes until we got the uniforms," she wrote in her letter. After one year at San Quentin, Williams transferred to the California Institution for Women (CIW) at Frontera as a correctional sergeant. After that, she worked her way up through the ranks. She served as a correctional counselor and a correctional lieutenant, and ended her career as chief deputy warden at California State Prison-Corcoran, where she retired in 1994.

In 1991, Director of Corrections James Gomez recognized her trailblazing efforts: "You had the distinction of being one of the first women correctional officers in a men's prison [San Quentin]," he wrote. "You paved the way for other women employees in the department."

Alongside Williams, Joyce Zink was among the first female correctional officers at San Quentin in 1972. Zink started her career the year before at CIW and transferred to San Quentin, where she worked in the visiting room. She said she felt isolated in the position and thought a more challenging post might be had at Folsom State Prison. She transferred there in 1973, but not to a warm reception. Zink recalled being ignored when she offered morning greetings to her fellow officers. She was later transferred to a gun tower far from the main yard. "I knew it wasn't going to be overnight that I got to go inside (inmate housing)," she said in an article in *Correctional News*, published in 2002. Eventually she was given a position in the largest housing unit.

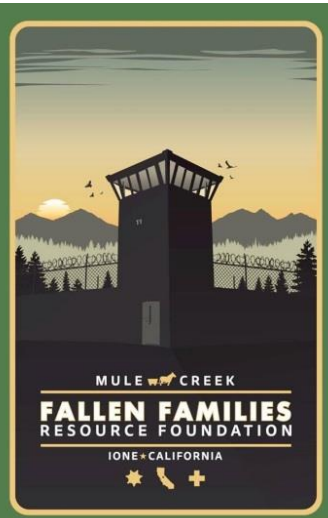


Joyce Zink started at San Quentin

In 1976, Zink was promoted to sergeant and transferred to the Correctional

Training Facility in Soledad, and later to the California Institution for Men in Chino. In the 1980s, she rose to the rank of lieutenant and later to captain after transferring back to Folsom following brief stints at headquarters and San Quentin. She retired as a captain in 2000.

Today, thousands of women fill the ranks at every level. Female correctional officers have promoted to wardens and other executive-level positions.



CIW Graduates Firefighters

By Lt. William Newborg,
California Institution for Women

THE CALIFORNIA INSTITUTION for Women (CIW) recently saw 10 graduate from the three-week Fire Crew Firefighter Academy. They will serve their communities at either Puerta La Cruz or Malibu conservation camps until they parole. Participants in these camps assist with other emergency disasters.

Formerly incarcerated firefighter Jodi Olson, now employed by CalFire, was the guest speaker. Her message is that anything is possible if one puts in the effort.

"About 10 years ago, I made a very selfish decision to drink and drive," Olson recalled. "This thoughtless action resulted in the loss of a precious life and the destruction of a family unit. [It also] changed course of events for my own life." She credits the program with helping her turn her life around. "Thanks to the skills, training, knowledge, and mentorship of the rehabilitation program at Central California Women's Facility Firehouse, I was able to overcome this ultimate low point in my life. Then, I achieved employment opportunities within the fire service. Upon my parole, I was hired as a firefighter with CalFire. I continue to pursue goals within the agency."

"It is because of the hard work that I put into the Firehouse program, and the motivation that I could turn negatives into positive that I was able to achieve these goals. While I can never return their loved one back to them, I strive to honor my victim and their family by living each day with honor and integrity," she said. "It was with complete humility and gratitude that I was able to give back to a pivotal program for my life by being asked to speak at CIW's firefighter graduation class prior to their departure to camp. I hope they can also overcome their past and move forward on a positive life path by utilizing the challenges, experiences, and opportunities that are available to them at the conservation camp."

CalPIA Holds Construction Trades Graduation at Folsom

By Michele Kane, California Prison Industry Authority



IN FRONT OF family and friends, 20 graduates were honored with their construction industry accredited job certifications at the Folsom State Prison. The graduates have participated in the California Prison Industry Authority's (CalPIA) Pre-Apprentice Carpentry, Pre-Apprentice Construction Labor, and Pre-Apprentice Roofing Programs. CalPIA's General Manager, Bill Davison, offered words of encouragement to the gathered graduates at Folsom. "CalPIA is committed and dedicated to you. We want you to succeed," said Davidson, "We are providing you opportunities to prepare for a successful life and career when you leave prison, with the ultimate goal that you never come back."

The ceremony was held inside CalPIA's Modular Building Enterprise. That is where the graduates learned their job skills with the help from trade unions. CalPIA partners with the Valley Roofers and Waterproofers JATC, Laborers Training/Retraining Trust Fund for Northern California, and the Carpenters Training Committee for Northern California. Graduates have the opportunity to sign up with the union once they return to their communities. In addition, CalPIA pays their first year of union dues and provides them with a new set of tools.

"Graduation is a time to reflect on that uphill battle you have faced. It's also a time to celebrate the accomplishments you have achieved," said acting Warden Tracy Johnson. "I applaud each of you and you all should be proud of yourselves." Along with Warden Johnson, Jared Lozano, deputy director of facility support for the department's Division of Adult Institutions, also cheered on the graduates.

A former graduate of CalPIA's Optical Program, Robert Castaneda inspired the audience by sharing his story of success. Castaneda is now a licensed optician with one of the largest prescription eyewear retailers. "I have been in your shoes and have been through the trials and tribulations as you have. I encourage you to take advantage of the CalPIA programs," added Castaneda. "The optical certification I earned at a California State Prison-Solano, allowed me to become a licensed optician. I have been able to purchase a home and live a good life. That is what I want for each of you."

Little Princesses

By Rob Sharp, Post Reporter

FIRST OF ALL, why would I call worker honeybees "little princesses"? Well, they are the all-female sisters and daughters of the hive's queen, so why not? Sadly, most people display an unnecessary fear of honeybees when we should be grateful for all they do for us.

Apis mellifera is the scientific name for the common European honeybee — the name means "honey-producing bee." In truth, they are gentle, dedicated workers for the good of the hive. The queen has only one job, to produce and lay eggs that are the hive's future. Workers act independently, making their own decisions. They do communicate exhaustively with one another through the so-called "waggle dance," as well as through airborne chemicals called pheromones. All members of a hive work for the good of all. Even stingers are there for the defense of the hive more than for any other reason.

Yet, people fear bees, usually without cause. Even those allergic to bee venom do not need to fear bees so long as they don't overreact to their presence. When a bee lands on you, she is simply resting. Swatting your arms about in panic is the worst thing you can do. If you hit the bee, she may well perceive that as an attack and respond with her stinger. When rested she will fly away, so relax, let her trust you to not hurt her.

Beekeepers and others often relate to bees on a spiritual level. In his book *The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran wrote, "Go to your fields and gardens, and you shall learn it is the pleasure of the bee to gather honey of the flower. But it is also the pleasure of the flower to yield its honey to the bee. For the bee a flower is the fountain of life. And to the flower, a bee is a messenger of love." We should be grateful to our bees since more than one-third of our food crops, including vegetables, fruits, nuts, feed crops such as alfalfa, and some grains are pollinated by bees. Then there is the honey. It comes from the nectar that flowers produce to attract the bees to carry their pollen to other flowers. The pollen also provides the proteins the bees need to be healthy. But the pollen has nothing else to do with the honey except when combined to feed the queen its royal jelly.

So, next time a bee comes near, remain calm and think of her as a friend. Don't be afraid.



(PestWorldForKids.org)

The Wordsmith

By Rob Sharp, Post Reporter

THIS MONTH'S FIRST word, *empyrean*, is an adjective from the Greek *ἐμπυριος* (*empyrios*) and was first used in the 15th century. It means "heavenly; of the eternal realm."

Here are some synonyms for *empyrean*: *elysian*, *celestial*, *heavenly*, *bliss*, *eternal*, *kingdom come*, *paradise*, *Elysium*, *sublime*. And a few antonyms: *hell*, *hellish*, *infernal*, *chthonic*, *pandemonium*, *perdition*, *plutonian*, *tartarean*.

Empyrean can also be used as a noun, and was first used this way in 1610. Here are some other definitions:

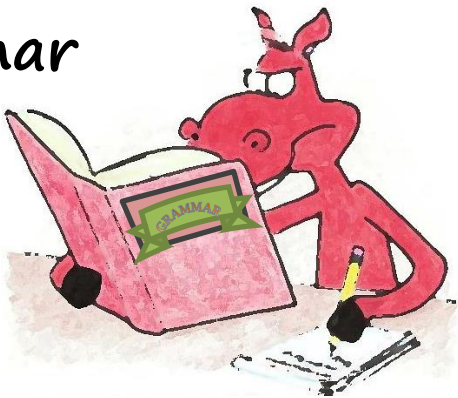
1. The highest heaven or heavenly sphere in ancient and medieval cosmology usually consisting of fire or light.
2. The true and ultimate heavenly Paradise.
3. Firmament, heavens.
4. An ideal place or state

What about the idea of paradise? Well, the word *paradise* comes from the Greek *παράδεισος* (*paradeisos*), which means "enclosed park or garden," and had its origin in the Persian *pairi-daeza*. So paradise would be an earthly place of lush natural beauty. However, it has been hijacked improperly to apply to a heavenly connotation, related to the Garden of Eden. It didn't have that meaning until 11th century English.

Paradise was used in the 8th century in the Koran, but at that time denoted an earthly reward and was later modified around the 12th century to help convince believers to sacrifice oneself to repel the Crusaders. It was also used in Latin around the 10th century as a heavenly place of eternal reward, likewise to encourage crusaders to fight to free the Holy Land.

The word *Elysium* comes to us from the Latin stemming from the Greek *Ελυσιον* (*elysion* derived from *ελευσεσθαι*, the future tense of the verb "to go"). The word comes from the mythological abode of the blessed after death, which followed Platonic teaching in the immortality of the soul following physical death; "The Elysian fields" was first used in 1579 literature.

Big Red's Grammar Guide



GOOD WRITING BEGINS with the basics. Here in the nineteenth installment of my grammar guide are more things a writer should know. This month we'll discuss conjunctions and interjections.

Conjunctions

A **conjunction** joins words in a sentence; that is, it provides a junction between words. Conjunctions are divided into three categories:

1. **Coordinating conjunctions** include *but*, *or*, *yet*, *so*, *for*, *and*, and *nor*. You might want to remember them by using the mnemonic word *boysfan*.
2. **Correlative conjunctions** cannot stand alone; they must have a "relative" nearby, usually in the same sentence. The pairs include *both/and*, *either/or*, *neither/nor*, *not only/also*, and *not only/but also*.
3. **Subordinating conjunctions** are used in the beginning of dependent clauses (words that have a subject and verb but which cannot stand alone as sentences). You may remember that dependent clauses are sometimes called *subordinate clauses*. The most common ones are the following:

after	before	providing that	when
although	even though	since	whenever
as if	how	so long as	where
as in	if	so that	wherever
as long as	in order that	than	whether
as much as	in that	that	while
as soon as	inasmuch as	though	
assuming that	now that	unless	
because	once	until	

Interjections

Egad! You don't remember what an **interjection** is? It's a word that can either express surprise or some other kind of emotion, or it can be used as a filler. Interjections often stand alone. If one is part of a sentence, it doesn't have a grammatical relation to the other words in the sentence; if it's taken out, the meaning of the sentence will be unchanged. Take a look at these sentences:

Hey, what's going on?
Well, I don't know what to say.
Ouch! Did you step on my toe?

Hey, *well*, and *ouch* are interjections. When you're expressing a strong emotion or surprise (as in *Stop!* or *Darn it all!*), use an exclamation point. If you're using milder emotion or merely using a filler (as in *like* or *well*), use a comma. But be careful not to use them too often, if you use them at all. In dialogue, interjections are used more often than in formal writing (where they're used hardly at all).

Next month, we'll begin a look at the basic structure of a sentence.

The Uncaged Writer

Prison Publishing
By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter



WHAT GOES ON within cloistered prison facilities remains a mystery to most of the outside world. While voices of the incarcerated are often silent, writing allows the opportunity to give voice to the voiceless and can be empowering for the incarcerated writer. However, writing and reporting from inside prison walls can be challenging and frustrating. In order to maximize your chances of getting published, utilizing a systematic approach may be helpful. Following are a few proven methods.

The Big Five. Choose five primary publications to contact them for their publishing guidelines. Knowing their specific guidelines and preferences enhances your success. Every month add two new names to your list.

Electronic Submissions. Digital submissions have a greater chance for response.
(continued on page 6)

(from *Uncaged Writer*, pg. 5)

This doesn't mean snail mail isn't still viable. However, if you have the ability to submit electronically you will find your publishing potential rises significantly.

Read and Research. Get copies of your big five and read what they're writing about. Get a sense of what topics and styles they prefer and who their readers are. How can you tie in some of the topics they're writing about so they are relevant to your location?

Unique Angle. Why is your story and perspective of interest and publishable? How does your angle incorporate your unique ability to be the best (or only) person to tell the story? Pay attention to current events and what's topping the news cycle. Then write one topic that incorporates those trends with an angle that highlights your perspective and territory.

The Pitch. Write a two-paragraph pitch that catches the editor's attention with a brief synopsis and catchy title. Explain your angle and qualifications, and why you're the best person to tell the story. Submit electronically (if possible). You don't need to have a completed manuscript or story to begin pitching. Many editors prefer to have a say in the direction of the story.

Get an Agent. If you can secure an agent who is willing to pitch your stories to various publishers, you are on the right track for success. This can be a pro in the business; a caring and supportive spouse, friend, or family member; or any person who believes in your ability. A supportive outside helper can convert your typed stories into email pitches and submissions.

Build a Network. Developing a solid foundational relationship with outside organizations, writers, and publishers enhances publishing potential. Relationships can be built through correspondence, phone calls, and visits.

One distinct advantage incarcerated writers have over their outside counterparts is the ability to live the imprisoned experience they are writing about. A comparison could be made to war correspondents. The best, most effective reporting on armed conflict comes from those intrepid reporters who brave the perils of combat to file stories from the war zone. Bob

Sillick writes in *Editor & Publisher Magazine*, "Reporting on the [prison] system in the United States [is] challenging and often frustrating for even the most respected publications and seasoned journalists. Approaching it like any other beat will invariably lead to dead ends, convoluted and unevenly applied policies and formidable barriers to uncovering the facts and revealing the truth of life inside."

Prison writing also allows the incarcerated to give voice to inside and out the debilitating conditions faced in confinement. Timothy Bradford writes in *World Literature Today*, "In my experience working with writers at the Joseph Harp Correctional Center in Lexington, Oklahoma, prison and justice writing leads to a sense of voice and agency for those trapped inside an often unjust and dysfunctional system. For those on the outside, it provides a better understanding of them as individuals and provokes a willingness to try to fix this system. In this way, we can all become more fully human if we want."

Voices of the incarcerated are a necessary ingredient in a democracy founded on free speech ideals. The marketplace of ideas does not function properly without these voices. Writing and publishing from inside performs a valuable service and heightens the importance of protecting free speech, inside and out.

Living with Regret

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

Chronicler frowned. "You said yourself that there was nothing you could have done."

"I could have," Kovothe said seriously, "and I didn't. I made my choice and I regret it to this day. Bones mend. Regret stays with you forever."

—Patrick Rothfuss, *The Name of the Wind*



HOW MANY REGRETS do you have? What specifically do you regret? This is not about regrets for missing canteen last month, or going to the food sale instead of getting a package. What is asked for here are regrets about things we should have done to ease another's suffering, or things we didn't do that directly created pain and suffering for ourselves or others.

Before we go further, we should define *regret* and how having regrets can affect our lives and the lives of those around us. According to the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, *regret* is "a sense of loss and longing for someone or something gone," and "a feeling of disappointment or distress about something that one wishes could be different."

How often have you told yourself that there is nothing you can do about a certain situation when, in fact, you could do something? But because any action you might take in this situation creates a physical danger, or maybe damages your ego or image, you instead choose to do nothing. How often have you sat by the wayside and just let nature take its course, or justified to yourself or others that someone deserved what was happening to them because of who or what you think they are, or maybe because of something they might have done in the past? These types of regrets can follow us until the ends of our lives.

There is a saying: "I don't regret the things that I've done as much as I regret those things that I didn't do." This is where many people find themselves near the ends of their lives, regretting opportunities not pursued, assistance not given, and chances not taken.

Make no mistake, we are not talking about illegal or damaging activities. We are talking about those times when you could have helped someone, steered someone away from trouble, or lost a chance to have an experience expanding your horizon and enriching your life.

For many, the thing that keeps us from stepping out of our comfort zone and trying new things is fear. A life ruled by fear is a life that is safe, predictable, and boring.

For those of us inside, fear could be the thing that keeps us from fully investigating the attitudes and beliefs that allow us to commit crimes that generated the sentences we serve. Fear might be the thing that allowed us to commit those crimes in the first place; the fear of being singled out from a group as a coward, fear of failing at a life lived in the straight world, or maybe even fear of not being good enough to live up to the expectations of those we love.

So what do you regret? Why do you regret? How can any of us live a life without regret? What is your plan to limit generating more regret? What can you do to ease the regrets you do have? And, what kind of choice do you need to live a life that is complete, without regretting even more damage created and harm inflicted?



Guilty by Association

By Leah Wang,
Prison Policy Initiative

REQUIRING PEOPLE ON supervision to avoid others with criminal legal system contact can actually hinder their success in the community. We found that it is common for probation and parole agencies to impose these association restrictions, tearing apart critical social networks and threatening to lock people up for harmless — and even helpful — interactions.

For the 3.7 million people on parole or probation in the United States, the very people who can best support their success are often unable to help because of supervision conditions that prohibit them from being in contact. Individuals reentering their communities on probation or parole often rely on support networks of family and peers who have been through similar reentry experiences. Though research supports the unique benefits of these social connections, many states actually prohibit people on supervision from this contact, under the false assumption that it will lead people into criminalized behaviors. These association restrictions — sometimes called “no-association conditions” — are isolating and costly to those on supervision. And the stakes are high: Failure to follow association restrictions can result in incarceration.

In prior work on probation and parole, we’ve referred to more widely known, difficult-to-satisfy supervision conditions — like securing employment and paying relentless fees — as examples of why supervision doesn’t work for so many people and too often results in incarceration for technical violations. In this briefing, we add to this work by compiling the most thorough research and data on association restrictions to date. We show that, despite their illogical foundations and documented harms, they are imposed on hundreds of thousands of people (and impact many others) at any given time. If states and local jurisdictions truly want people on supervision to succeed, they should

acknowledge and ultimately abandon restrictions.

In a recent study, researchers found that over half of the 187 supervision programs examined (including parole, probation, and electronic monitoring) in 2023 had some regulations about who people can be around, talk with, or socialize with. But these rules are especially entrenched in parole systems: A recurring census of standard parole conditions revealed that rules related to undesirable associates/correspondence have been used by an average of 30 jurisdictions over each of the six censuses, the first of which was in 1956.

But when we look beyond standard conditions, it’s clear these restrictions are imposed almost universally. According to a 2019 law review article, nearly all parole jurisdictions (50 states, D.C., and the federal supervised release system) have association restrictions, whether they are standard or special conditions that could be imposed at any time by an authority such as parole officer or judge. This valuable survey, which we’ve updated for this briefing, also identifies which categories of people are off-limits for individuals on supervision.

In many states, people on supervision can seek permission to associate with specific individuals in restricted categories — to visit a loved one in prison, for example — by asking their supervision officer or through a more formal hearing. But many may decide that these extra hurdles are not worth it to be told “no” or to have their interactions even more closely scrutinized. Overall, the landscape of association restrictions is highly repressive, leaving people to navigate reentry without valuable support.

The senselessness and cruelty of association restrictions undermine the very purpose of supervision, which includes helping people get the resources and build the relationships they need to achieve stability in the community. Breaking down some of their biggest harms, we argue that:

- **Association restrictions have it wrong and backward.** The idea that someone with even a minor or bygone criminal history will have a negative influence on someone under supervision is unfounded. Evidence shows that the opposite is true: People actually benefit from associating with those with lived experience. Highly regarded reentry organizations often use mutual-help or credible-messenger models employing formerly incarcerated people as counselors and mentors to others navigating reentry. This supportive, non-judgmental model is shown to have positive impacts on both participants and staff
- **The restrictions are vague.** Even when states are clear in categorically excluding whole groups of people, they are comically unclear about what it means to associate with others. Does an interaction with someone’s social media post, sending money through an app, or an accidental encounter at a gas station threaten public safety? According to law professor Fiona Doherty, these restrictions are, “purposefully — indeed, vigorously — unclear.”
- **They force people on supervision to live in isolation and fear.** Many people plan to live with or receive support from family after being released from prison. But such relationships and living options may suddenly be off-limits due to an association restriction, forcing stressful and costly relocation. It may also feel risky to seek answers from their supervision officer. Loved ones, too, are pulled into enforcing and cooperating with these restrictions, impacting many people beyond those with an actual supervision contract.

In some instances, supervision officers either did not or could not remove these conditions. Instead, many reported that they simply did not enforce them. Of course, not all officers use their discretion this way, and the persistence of these rules of supervision means that people will be forced to navigate reentry without the crucial support of loved ones.

If association restrictions go unchecked as surveillance technology expands, state and local lawmakers will continue to trap people on supervision in cycles of incarceration and being free. People whom parole boards and judges have already deemed safe to release to the community should be able to decide with whom they associate and from whom they seek support, housing, or job opportunities. Association restrictions perpetuate harmful assumptions about people with criminal legal involvement, set people up for failure, and should be abolished as a condition of probation or parole.



Criminon offers a correspondence course covering common sense issues designed to broaden insight surrounding rehabilitation and self-awareness. Write for more information:

Criminon West US
P.O. Box 9091
Glendale, CA 91226

The logo for Criminon, featuring the word "CRIMINON" in a stylized, orange, blocky font, with a faint world map in the background.

Families United to End LWOP

FUEL Calls for LWOP Stories

By Geri Silva,

Families United to End LWOP

WE'RE CONTACTING ALL life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) prisoners in California whose commitment offenses happened prior to June 6, 1990. In efforts to pass Senate Bill 94 in the coming legislative session, we are seeking information from those who potentially qualify.

Some of you have had contact with your victim's loved ones or participated in a Victim Offender Impact Dialogue. If you are willing to share information with us, please do so.

It's critical to humanize you through stories. Please describe who you are today, how you got there, and whether you've done work related to the victim(s) in your case.

If possible, please type your story or information and be assured we will not share your story or take any action without your express permission. We appreciate your help. Thank you.

Families United to End LWOP
6109 S. Western Ave #100
Los Angeles, CA 90047

Contact Geri Silva at
(424) 744-1156 or
gerifcp@gmail.com



Rattle magazine, which is put out by Prisoner Express, is always open to submissions by incarcerated poets and writers.

Prisoner Express
PO Box 6556

Ithaca, New York 14851

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.

Falling Leaves

MEMORIES OF AUTUMN include watching Game 7 of the World Series with Grandpa, the aroma of Grandma's homemade cornbread in the oven. I fondly remember her kitchen with the quaint little table for two next to the window. These magical memories from my childhood with her — watching autumn rains arrive to quench nature's thirst, the splash of autumn colors that captured the essence of her smile — as she told me stories about creation. She pointed to the leaves prancing across the sky in the morning breeze, shades of gold and crimson, dancing in a flutter of elegance. "When the leaves fall," she said, "they feed the earth and allow new leaves to be born."

As I look out my cell window, I often think about Grandma's kitchen and the scenic wonderland that once captured my imagination. Yet, like fallen leaves plucked before their time, those of us serving life without parole find ourselves fluttering down onto a harsh landscape of broken dreams, unable to turn back time and chase away the turbulent winds of our past.

Guillermo "Willie" Brambila Jr. was arrested in December 2007, at the age of 21, and subsequently sentenced to life without parole. "Growing up in Southern California, baseball was a passion of mine. I started playing when I was 7 years old and didn't realize how good I was until age 12 when I began making the first team All-Stars every year," said Brambila. But life at home was difficult for the young all-star, growing up watching his mother battle a severe substance use disorder. "I often felt unworthy at home and abandoned by the ones I loved," he said. Baseball was an escape from the reality he faced, and by the time he entered high school he was revered as a left-handed pitching phenom, scouted by Major League Baseball teams. "After our first game in my senior year, I got hurt and was out for most of the season, which led me to have to go to junior college to play ball. This was quite a blow for me. I felt my value as a ballplayer and a human being had gone down."

Influenced by the gang lifestyle that began to form his identity, he found acceptance among his peers, a sense of belonging lacking in his life. "In hindsight, I wanted to impress my homeboys and prove myself worthy in order to be validated by their so-called love," confessed Brambila. "This seemed to justify my violence and led me to a life without parole sentence. But as I look around me, I often ask myself, 'Where are my homeboys now?' I felt scared and nervous for what was about to come my way. I was at a place in my life where I acted on impulse and that scared me because I knew that prison life was unforgiving."

His breakthrough came with a second rules violation report for possession of a cellphone. "I woke up that day and decided it was enough, it was time to get help," he stated. "My search for self-awareness started with victim's awareness, ARC [Anti-Recidivism Coalition], and GRIP [Guiding Rage Into Power]. I am now on the road to becoming a rehabilitated person with a positive future in sight. I realize that I don't have to be home in order to be free. Freedom means giving back to the people I've hurt and living as a productive citizen, in or out of prison, and giving back to the community that I once helped to destroy. It means giving back to my family and making up for lost time."

The Long Walk Home is a journey back through time, a search for the person we were before we committed our crimes. As we press forward, we notice a trail of autumn leaves that once painted the sky in a brilliant display of life, yet plucked too soon by the winds of our self-destruction.

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.





By Richard “Lonewolf” Legan,
Post Columnist

ROSEMARY, KNOWN IN Latin as *Rosmarinus officinalis*, is a dense ever-green shrub with soft blue flowers. When used in cooking, this herb goes well with pork, lamb, and shellfish. This plant has antiseptic qualities, is an antioxidant, and helps with digestion of fats; it helps in weight loss.

The distilled flower water is used to make a soothing eye wash. Targeting darker hair, its leaves are made into a shampoo and conditioner that controls dandruff. Rosemary has a pleasant scent and I have enjoyed growing and using this herb. Bees love it, too.

The distilled oil is invigorating and is an anti-fungal. It helps with blood circulation while relieving muscle pain. There are several sub-species, such as Majorca pink.

Rosemary *officinalis* has variegated dark green leaves, mixed with some yellow coloration. Rosemary *officinalis albus* has lavender veining on the leaves, and is sometimes called Suffolk blue, with sky blue flowers.

So next time you look at a plant, you might say to yourself, “I wonder what that’s used for.” They are man’s gifts from the Creator!



Rosmarinus officinalis

Richard Legan is the author of *More Valuable Than Gold* published by Wild Willpower (WildWillpower.com), about ethnobotany and survival skills. 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.

Resentencing Pilot Program, Pt. 4

By Dale Hurd, Post Reporter

California’s pilot program allowing prosecutors to look back and remedy unjust sentences, Prosecutor-Initiated Resentencing, was established to support and evaluate a collaborative approach to exercising the prosecutorial resentencing discretion authorized by Penal Code §1170 and §1172. Nine counties were selected to participate in the program: Los Angeles; Santa Clara; San Francisco; Riverside; Contra Costa; San Diego; Yolo; Merced; and Humboldt.

PROSECUTOR-INITIATED RESENTENCING is heavily weighted toward predicting the risk of future damage to the community. But when does predictive technology become a witness for the state without an opportunity for the prisoner to test the data, assumptions, and even prejudices that underlie the conclusion?

In a 2018 concurrence, Iowa Supreme Court Justice Brent Appel cautioned against jumping on the risk-assessment bandwagon too quickly:

Certainly the shiny legal penny of a new risk assessment tool should be carefully scrutinized by the courts. We should not forget the recent unattractive history in which the U.S. Department of Justice and the FBI, for over a decade, developed and advocated the use of “bullet match” analysis that was often presented by expert witnesses without providing the full picture of how statistically insignificant the ‘match’ of the bullet really was. The relentless and potentially corrosive drive for efficiency and certainty in a resource-scarce public sector should not drive courts to use risk assessment in an unjustified “off label” manner or in a fashion that otherwise lacks meaningful support to drive sentencing.

U.S. District Judge Noel L. Hillman noted, “A predictive recidivism score may emerge oracle-like from an often proprietary black box. Many, if not most, defendants ... will lack the resources, time, and technical knowledge to understand, probe, and challenge ...” the use of these tools.

To what extent can prior crimes be considered as evidence of future dangerousness? The commitment offense not only relates to past moral character, it also yields insight into the potential of a future public safety hazard. The problem of categorizing the commitment offense has been compared to light, which is simultaneously a particle of matter and a wave of energy. Murderers are blameworthy because they have murdered, but they are also dangerous because they have murdered. Such unchanging factors include not only the commitment offense itself, but also a prisoner’s prior record and social history before incarceration.

In some cases, unchanging factors may have no predictive value regarding suitability for resentencing and relying on such stale and unchanging factors is inappropriate. In other cases, prosecutors argue certain offenses are so “heinous, atrocious or cruel” that a prisoner should not be considered for resentencing on this basis alone. “Unsuitable for resentencing” connotes both unworthiness and a judgment regarding risk to public safety. If the crime is so “heinous, atrocious or cruel” as to make the offender unsuitable for resentencing, then no intervening factors can justify setting a release date on the basis of no risk to public safety. Most importantly, exactly when can intervening factors justify granting resentencing?

What if the crime that has consistently rendered a prisoner unsuitable for parole suddenly poses no obstacle? If the parole board has made the same finding about the commitment offense each year to deny parole, and then a judge makes a decision, based on the same facts, granting resentencing, is the process arbitrary and capricious? One superior court judge asserted

The fact that Title 15 §2402 has been invoked in every case, but then sometime later not invoked, tends to show either completely arbitrary and capricious behavior or that unwritten standards are what really determine outcomes.

Left unanswered is the question of whether the Legislature’s exclusion of those serving life without the possibility of parole from resentencing consideration violates the principle that the heinous nature of a crime is a static factor that will never change and is an improper basis for de facto exclusion.

Subsequent parts of this series will discuss the results of the Resentencing Pilot Program’s second year of operation.

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



LIFE SUPPORT ALLIANCE

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!**

P.O. Box 277 Rancho Cordova, CA 95741 • LifeSupportAlliance.org

Can a Man Change?

By Bob Gay, Feature Reporter

CAN A LEOPARD change its spots? Can a zebra change its stripes? How about a convicted felon? Are self-help groups enough to change a person sufficiently in order to fend for themselves with their new jargon in front of the parole board? Maybe some of that information can seep into a person — past their mind, emotions, and self-will — to actually change their real-self, their character, when finally back on the street.

For some, perchance, self-will finds a place, yet the recidivism numbers aren't impressive. According to Los Rios Community College District statistics collected between 2015 and 2022, California's average recidivism rate is 60 percent. Many felons haven't changed on the inside enough to keep from returning to prison. They can impress the board, maybe even an employer, or a new landlord; but, when push comes to shove, the person on the inside has either changed or just put up a good front. Figures don't lie, but liars figure.

Where's the reality? What are successful ex-cons doing to make it in the real world? One school of thought tells us we are all innocent at birth, all good people at heart. Children aren't taught to lie, to be mean, or cheat when they need to get ahead. Yet, they do these things. What children need is to be taught right from wrong, and that teaching needs to be consistent with rewards and consequences. Our dog program here in prison proves this even works with puppies. Train up a dog in the way it should go and when it is mature, it will follow that discipline for the rest of its life.

Sadly, many in the system did not have a good male role model to teach us right from wrong. Some ended up in the gangs looking for approval; others stumbled their own way through life, only to end up misguided and later in prison.

Life is what we choose it to be. Even our bad choices are repairable, but with great costs. Those who succeed come to a place where a willingness to pay that price wins over the pain, as

they reach out to do what is right in spite of their past failures. There are lifers among us with no hope of a future outside the wall; yet, they prove they want change enough to pursue good character simply for the sake of good.

Getting out and staying out is far more important than just getting out. How devastating would it be to have to return to prison once one is free? There's an old saying, "You'll know a tree by its fruit." Our time in prison is a golden opportunity to make heartfelt character changes for their own sake. There's no such thing as "Fake it till you make it." Faking out the system, only to end up back in it because we didn't really have a true character change is heart breaking. Our time in prison is a golden opportunity to humble ourselves and do whatever it takes to be the individuals we were created to be — starting here and now. The laws are changing; hopefully we are too. The future will reward those who choose a new life on the inside, not just a new life on the outs.

Writer's Submission Guidelines: Mule Creek Post (Part 2)

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter



MANY OF THE article proposals to the *Mule Creek Post* come from first-time writers; we receive an average of 65 submissions per month. The majority are stories about topics we typically publish (rehabilitation, self-help groups, legal updates, etc.). Some are not, and we have to reject the submission. Most of our writers are familiar with what we showcase in each edition, and this insight is known in the writing and publishing world as "targeting." An article examining the politics surrounding the Vietnam War has no relevance to the *Post* or to our mission statement and will be rejected unless it can be somehow made relevant to our readers.

The concept of targeting is demonstrated every time you watch television. What kind of commercials do you see when you watch a football game? Ads for trucks, fast cars, fast food, beer, ED medications, and video games. Why is this? Because the people who watch football are predominantly boys and men, 12 to 80 years of age, males who buy trucks, fast food, and alcohol. Yes, many women watch football, too, but the vast majority of the viewing audience are men. Advertisers want bang for their buck and buy ad space where their audience is watching. You do not see any ads on Sunday Night Football for Dior perfume or kitchen appliances.

When writing an article, focus on the target audience of the publication you will submit your piece to before putting pen to paper. An experienced writer would not submit a story about his first three-horsepower mini-bike to *Easy Rider* motorcycle magazine. A Harley-Davidson lifestyle monthly has no interest in this topic, unless you removed the tiny bike's motor and installed a 1948 Harley panhead onto the motorbike's frame. That is targeting.

The *Mule Creek Post's* masthead, on page two of each edition, outlines our mission statement and the article topics we are looking for. Always read past editions of the publication you intend to submit an article to and do not duplicate past pieces unless you have a substantially new angle on the subject.

Keep in mind that part of being a writer is acceptance of rejection of some of your submissions. Your piece may be too long, the writing below par, or perhaps you need to list your sources. Learn from a disallowed article and the information returned to you with the rejection slip. You will generally receive helpful, constructive criticism with the denial; use this as a teaching moment. Also, go to the library and check out a writing book (nonfiction writing) or journalism reference volume to see how to strengthen your future submissions. Be sure to send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to your target publishers for their submission guidelines. *The Associated Press Stylebook* is a standard reference for any publisher in the United States.

Mule Creek Post feature reporter D. Razor Babb wrote in his November 2023 "The Uncaged Writer" column that "Freelancing [writing] is a perilous, stress-inducing, at times thankless and pitiable process of endless work and seemingly limitless rejection."

Keep trying. Embrace rejection as just part of the writing profession and absorb what you pick up along the way to a writing career.





Team 2 vs. Team 1, Facility E,
Jan. 6, 2024

Team 2 67, Team 1 81

Team 2	19-48-67			
Team 1	40-41-81			
Team 2	Reb	A	PF	Pts
A Helton	2	1	1	6
J Lawson	8	4	1	7
M Lee	5	1	1	9
J Mitchell	3	0	0	6
L Peterson	3	0	4	12
D Smith	4	5	3	13
R Yim	9	0	1	14
Totals	34	11	11	67

3-point Goals: 6 (Mitchell 2, Lawson, Lee, Peterson, Yim).
Team Turnovers: 5.
Blocked Shots: 0.
Steals: 12 (Lawson 3, Lee 3, Mitchell 2, Helton, Peterson, Smith, Yim).

Team 1	Reb	A	PF	Pts
A Burrell	1	4	2	6
E Chacon	3	0	1	15
K Daniels	3	1	1	0
R Facio	0	0	0	4
M Lewis	7	1	0	2
L Saephanh	2	2	0	6
R Taylor	7	0	3	10
S White	3	2	2	9
D Williams	9	2	2	29
Totals	37	12	11	81

3-point Goals: 5 (Taylor 2, Chacon, White, Williams).
Team Turnovers: 8.
Blocked Shots: 2 (Williams).
Steals: 13 (Williams 6, Burrell, Daniels, Facio, Saephanh, Taylor).

Team 3 vs. Team 4, Facility E,
Jan. 6, 2024

Team 3 105, Team 4 79

Team 3	24-20-105			
Team 4	36-43-79			
Team 3	Reb	A	PF	Pts
G Atkins	0	1	1	12
G Brambila	4	5	0	13
L Jefferson	18	4	3	18
J Jones	7	8	5	15
E Palacios	1	1	2	0
J Robles	4	5	2	30
T Smithson	4	4	4	15
J Wilson	1	0	0	2
Totals	39	28	17	105

3-point Goals: 20 (Smithson 5, Atkins 4, Robles 4, Brambila 3, Jefferson 2, Jones 2).
Team Turnovers: 9.
Blocked Shots: 2 (Jones).
Steals: 10 (Jones 3, Smithson 3, Brambila 2, Robles 2).

Team 4	Reb	A	PF	Pts
M Blueford	1	0	1	0
E Garcia	9	0	3	12
J Hicks	2	0	0	0
C Lane	16	7	3	25
T Moultrie	11	3	5	28
D Murray	4	0	0	8
J Robinson	8	0	3	6
Totals	51	11	15	79

3-point Goals: 2 (Lane, Moultrie).
Team Turnovers: 12.
Blocked Shots: 1 (Lane).
Steals: 6 (Moultrie 3, Murray 2, Lane).
Referees: N. Blalock, J. Williams, B. Smith.



The Facility E Pinochle League finally drew to a close with the crowning of Team #4's James Perkins and James Brugette as 2023 Pinochle League Champions. The champs accomplished this feat by downing Team #2's Richard Kimbro and Danny Garcia in three games due to a renege. (Left Photo: Perkins and Brugette; Right Photo: Perkins, Kimbro, Walter Ceasar, James Williams, Brugette, and Garcia)



A Celebration Between the Lines

By David Viens, Substance Abuse Treatment Facility

ON NOV. 1, 2023, Facility G at the California Substance Abuse Treatment Facility was blessed with the company of Between the Lines (BTL), a strategically crafted program that presented the sport of basketball, but was so much more.

BTL was founded by Lamont Stapleton in 2014, after he visited a friend serving a term of 25 to life at the Centinela State Prison. That event started out as a demonstration of basketball skills, but turned into an experience with rhythmic sounds from an incredible DJ and team of kind-hearted and talented volunteers. The program evolved into a rehabilitative effort teaching valuable life lessons associated with the game and beyond.

The November event started with our facility team and the BTL team warming up together in lines of three. It was fun to watch the energy build in our packed gym. The BTL co-ed team was stylishly dressed in black sports gear (UnderArmour) and highly proficient as they moved with speed and accuracy with each placed shot. They provided their own media team that worked fastidiously, capturing the events of the game and the abundant smiles from the crowd. The game was competitive with our facility team displaying skills and determination to keep the game close. Our resident emcee had the crowd on its feet adding his own entertainment qualities to the ambient sounds of music.

During halftime, a dance between an energetic resident and a BTL player at center court added to the fun. Soon dozens were participating and the energy became electric. In the last quarter, the BTL team seemed to improve and the close game quickly turned into a runaway, ending 83-63. BTL are beautifully genuine, kind, and loving people who really stirred an emotional connection that was palpable.

In the closing ceremony our BTL guests were incredibly gracious, thanking us for allowing them to be at the prison. Everyone in attendance was moved by the experience of being treated like humans by complete strangers. BTL is much more than a group of kind people participating in a basketball exhibition event. They are a non-profit that advocates for prisoners, second chances, anti-recidivism, and networking for those who need help upon release. The event was truly inspiring, and we thank the Between the Lines organizers and participants.

To learn more about BTL, look for them at BetweenTheLinesUS@gmail.com or BetweenTheLinesUS.com website.

Mule Creek Crowns B-Ball Champs

By Aorrell Burrell, Post Reporter

THE TALK IS over, at least for now. Facility E's depth shined with an epic shooting performance in its 140-81 win over rival Facility D in a basketball All-Star Game. Many spectators packed the courtside hoping to watch a competitive game. But for the players on Facility E, this was not just another game; this was personal and based on revenge. The last time these two matched up was back in 2020, prior to COVID-19, when Facility D managed to come from behind and pull off the upset.

The first four minutes of the game were very competitive as both teams traded baskets while trying to feel each other out. After that, Facility E shifted gears, turning up the pressure on defense which translated into easy buckets on the offense. This game looked like boys playing amongst men. Facility E was too fast, physical, and well-conditioned for their slow opposition.

Nine different players finished in double-figure scoring: Power forward James Perkins dominated the paint, recording an impressive double-double (18 points, 18 rebounds, 3 assists, 3 steals, and 3 blocks). Center Luishus Jefferson

(continued on page 12)

(from *Mule Creek Crowns Champs*, pg. 11) contributed in a major way, filling all five stat sheets (20 points, 13 rebounds, 2 assists, 3 steals, and 1 block). Shooting guard Damon Williams managed to shake off a slow start and finish the game with 16 points, 8 rebounds, 11 assists, 3 steals, and 1 block.

Perhaps most importantly, the Facility E team displayed its ability to excel on both sides of the floor when needed. After running up the scoreboard in the first half with a 39-point lead, in the second half Facility E hit the gas to leave their rival in the rearview mirror.

"My mindset going into the game was that I was going to have a competitive offense and defensive competitor," Jefferson said after the win. "There was a lot of hype around this event, so I went in with the mindset that I am going to have to live up to the hype. Next time, I will be looking for those exceptions that didn't happen."

Overall, Facility E put on a stellar performance and showed their camaraderie. Watching from the sidelines, the unity was visible as players were encouraging and lifting one another up when mistakes were made. Basketball on Facility E is not just about offense and defense; it's a brotherhood.

JDP Reaches Staff Family Members

By Jesse Carson, Editor-in-Chief

IN DECEMBER, THE Juvenile Diversion Program (JDP) of Facility E brought in a family member of prison staff for mentorship for the first time since the program began at the prison in 2007. Two days before Christmas, a retired correctional officer accompanied her nephew, Evan (not his real name), for the daylong workshop, hoping to get his life on track.

The oldest of 11, 16-year-old Evan had run away several times, was drinking and smoking pot. "He was doing bad," said his aunt emphatically. Accompanying the two was the sister of another staff member who wanted to learn more about the program.

With only one young person visiting the prison instead of the

normal five to 10, only about half of the JDP mentors led the workshop. Another youth was expected to attend, but removed his GPS ankle monitor and ran away the day before. The smaller group provided for a more intimate setting than usual, allowing for moments of levity as well as tenderness, a balance the JDP facilitators struck skillfully.

For example, after sharing some life stories and taking a tour of the yard, the group discussed warped beliefs. The facilitators pointed out the inconsistencies of the so-called "G Code," with its premises like "Don't harm women or children" and "Don't snitch." But mentor Frank Rojas, 44, pointed out that his father, a longtime gang member, used to beat Rojas and his mother, and that when he joined the gang he was jumped in (fought by multiple gang members at once as an initiation) by several adults when he was only 12. Forty-eight-year-old Mario Lawson, another JDP mentor, described how his unwillingness to give up the name of the individual who actually committed a murder led to his conviction and sentence of life without the possibility of parole. "It doesn't matter what you did or didn't do," he said. "Your lifestyle is going to tell your story."

The serious mood was broken up by a game of Pictionary, in which teams have 30 seconds to guess what their teammate is drawing on the whiteboard. The winners got to watch the losing teams dance the classic 80's move, the Cabbage Patch, for 10 seconds. Many mentors hadn't even been born when the move caught on.

The discussion about "anchors" — those individuals who provide a positive, grounding influence in one's life — brought some heavy emotion into the room. Asked who their anchors were, most mentors chose their family. Several shared similar experiences of childhood abuse, including the visitors, leading one to comment that "Sometimes family can be toxic. Remember," she added through tears, "you're under no obligation to care for the people who only take from you and don't give you anything back."

"We had similar experiences," observed Rojas, "but what's important is the choices and decisions we make."



Evaristo Toscano
(H. Kim / Media Specialist)

Evaristo Toscano contrasted his early beliefs about education with those he holds today. As a young man, he held no interest in school, but the 33-year-old recently earned a bachelor's degree and works with his daughter to foster an interest in her education. "For a lot of years I couldn't understand why my mom was proud of me," he shared. "Then one day she told me that it's because I'm finally making the choices to do better and be a better person."

Evan shared that he considers his siblings to be his anchor. "And I want to be a good big brother to them," he added.

As usual, the workshop drew to a close by recalling those JDP participants and facilitators lost to violence: Eduardo, Julio, Sebastian, Rayshawn, and Mo, a facilitator who was killed at work after paroling from Mule Creek in 2019. Everyone in the room was asked to make a promise to themselves, and to help each other keep that promise.

"I promise to be reliable to my family," said Evan. "I want my siblings to know that I can be counted on. I just need someone there to talk to, to let me know if I'm doing things right." His aunt immediately volunteered for the job.

Evan was welcomed into the JDP family with a bracelet that read "Be Your Own Hero," and invited back to share his progress on his promise.

"You always know when you're doing wrong," offered mentor Trevor Heard, 47. "You feel it in your stomach."

Evan's aunt, who retired after 17 years with the prison system, tearfully offered appreciation to the mentors of JDP. "This is really good. I'm so happy I brought him," she said. "It makes me think, 'Who else can I bring in from my family?'" she added.

"It's not just the young people out in the community that face problems," said mentor Jacob Robles, 32. "There are many prison employees who have family in need of mentorship, and it's great that we're beginning to see staff recognizing this."

The JDP is arranging a workshop just for prison employees who are interested; they are encouraged to contact Correctional Counselor I E. Albertson on Facility E with any questions.

Evan summed up his takeaway from the workshop. "I learned not to follow the wrong people, [and] when my gut feeling tells me it's wrong, to trust it," he stated.

"We don't have it all figured out," said Rojas. "We've just learned to ask for help. We're all trying to change lives, and in the process we correct our own lives."



Frank Rojas
(H. Kim / Media Specialist)



Attorney **Maya Emig** focuses her area of practice on parole and post-conviction law. She is a former attorney with the California Parole Advocacy Program, where she represented thousands of parolees in parole revocation matters. She also has extensive experience representing prisoners at parole consideration hearings. Ms. Emig has appeared on The Today Show and Dateline to discuss lifer suitability matters. Ms. Emig is a graduate of UC San Diego and the McGeorge School of Law.

Maya Emig writes a monthly column for the Mule Creek Post focusing on Board of Parole Hearings issues. For more information about the BPH, write:

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☎ (833) Emig-Law
✉ AttorneyEmigMCP@gmail.com

For more information regarding the Board of Parole Hearings, write to:

BOARD OF PAROLE HEARINGS
P.O. Box 4036
Sacramento, CA 95812-4036
www.cdcr.ca.gov/
(916) 445-4072



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Much of spiritual life
is self-acceptance,
maybe all of it.

— Jack Kornfield

Relapse Prevention Plans, Pt. 4

By Josiah Hartman, Outside Contributor

Over the last few articles, I've spent time discussing relapse prevention plans. In state-appointed work, time spent with clients is limited and it is incumbent upon you to learn these concepts in your classes. Each attorney I have spoken with has a different way of talking about these plans with their clients. I want you to have a deeper understanding of how to approach them, and understand your triggers. I asked fellow attorney Josiah Hartman to contribute how he discusses them with his clients.

—Maya Emig

WHEN TEACHING SOMEONE to develop a relapse prevention plan and learning how to articulate this plan to the parole panel, we typically follow these steps: 1) Identify the struggle or issues; 2) Identify what triggers the temptation of that struggle or issue; 3) Formulate an action plan to deal with the struggle or issues when triggered so you do not relapse.

In our experience as parole attorneys, we have found that identifying triggers is both the most difficult and important aspect of this process. The parole panel is looking for in-depth personal identification of these triggers to determine your level of insight into this area. If you present a generic plan that anyone could pick up and apply to their life, then the parole panel will likely conclude that you lack the requisite insight.

Identifying risk factors is typically the easiest part of the process. If you're having trouble knowing your risk factors, I encourage you listen to the professionals in your life. You will most likely be working with a correctional counselor, parole attorney, forensic psychologist, and, finally, the parole panel. Listen to the professionals, especially your attorney. There's a reason they're appointed to you; do not take the advice from these individuals for granted.

The more complex part is identifying all the possible triggers concerning those risk factors. Many groups and self-help books will teach two categories of external or internal triggers. I have learned that when you place triggers into three categories, identifying these triggers can be more accessible. The three categories I recommend are *physical*, *emotional*, and *mental* triggers.

Physical triggers are mostly external, such as people, places, and things that tempt you to fall back into negative patterns, habits, and conduct.

Emotional triggers tend to be internal: subjects, words, and memories that evoke powerful negative feelings. Both positive and negative emotions can be triggered. Negative emotions can create the temptation to escape these feelings, while good emotions such as feeling relaxed and happy can trigger memories of old patterns or habits. For example, sometimes an old habit was when you felt good, you took a substance or drink that would make you feel even better.

Mental triggers, on the other hand, are emotional triggers that are more severe and deeply rooted. Examples include depression, anxiety, or insecurities such as low self-esteem, a desire for acceptance, and a lack of purpose.

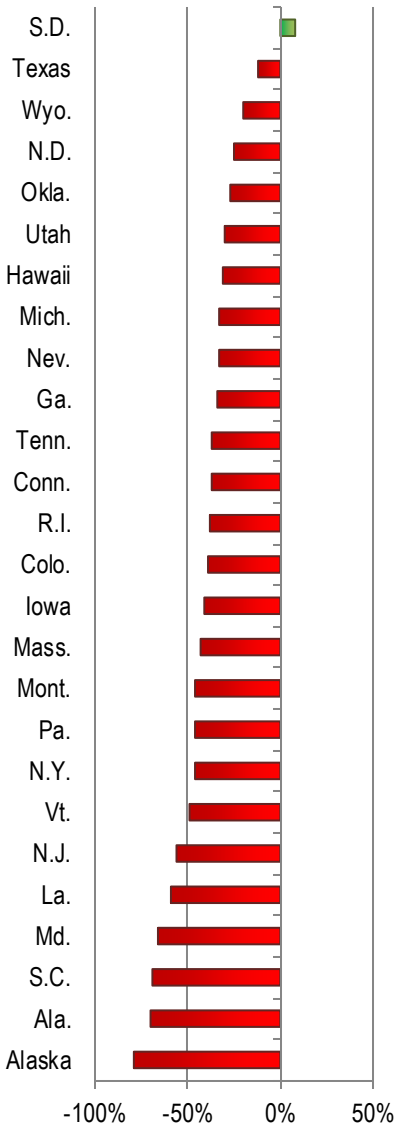
While some things are cut and dry, others are more difficult to identify. If you can only identify the cut-and-dry triggers, you're lacking insight. I always recommend you be on the lookout for a chain of triggers. The first level of insight is identifying what is and is not a trigger. Identifying the chain of triggers is a deeper, personal level of insight the parole panel seeks. Additionally and most importantly, developing this skill can help you identify other potential triggers you have not yet experienced, which is why this ability is so important. For example, your coworkers are treating you in a specific way because of your past incarceration. This treatment triggers low self-esteem, which triggers the memory of how you didn't feel this way when participating in gang life. Those memories trigger you to text an old friend, and a few days later you find yourself at a gang member's house where there are guns, drugs, and other individuals living an anti-social life. You have not even done anything wrong. However, the cops show up, find out you're on parole, and being around guns is a violation.

Identifying the chain in the process of triggers is personal to you because someone else is not likely triggered through the same chain. Thus, identifying the chain of triggers requires deeper self-awareness and insight. When identifying your triggers, these three categories and the chain of triggers help you identify a wider variety of triggers, but also help you articulate these triggers to the parole panel in a logical, laid out approach, better showcasing your insight into these issues."

Many thanks to Josiah Harman for contributing to my column. Our strategy and approach differ a bit, but the essence is the same and come from our experience in suitability hearings and questioning of the Board of Parole Hearings. Do the work and examine this as though you were analyzing a chess game from beginning to end. Examine those early moves and why you chose to make them (first 20), and pay specific attention to the last moves (last 20) and strive to understand your middle instances as well. I can tell you unequivocally that this work really pays off for you in unraveling your criminality, building insight, putting plans in place, and a byproduct of this is doing well in your hearing. —Maya



Parole Grant
Percent Change
2019-2022



Comparison of percent changes in the number of people approved for parole release in 26 states with discretionary parole systems and available data, 2019 to 2022. Note that there is only one state parole board that released more people on parole in 2022 compared to 2019.



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
San Diego, CA 92198-0352
SupportPWA.org

States’ Parole Grant Rates Plummet

By Emmett Sanders, Prison Policy Initiative

WITH PAROLE BOARD practices so much in the news, we thought it was important to look around the country and evaluate the direction in which state parole boards are moving.

In 29 states for which we collected 2022 parole approval data (not including California), only eight had grant rates above 50% — Connecticut, Idaho, Massachusetts, Nevada, North Dakota, Utah, Vermont, and Wyoming. Wyoming had the highest grant rate of 78%. At the other end of justice’s sliding scale, Alabama (10%) and South Carolina (13%) have the lowest parole approval grant rates in the nation. And while we don’t yet have data from most states for 2023, South Carolina’s recently updated parole data show that the state’s parole approval rate has dropped to an astonishingly low 7%.

In the 27 states for which Prison Policy Initiative was able to track changes in parole rates from 2019-2022, only seven — Connecticut (+29%), Georgia (+17%), Texas (+11%), Hawaii (+8%), Massachusetts (+8%), South Dakota (+6%), and Nevada (+1%) — have seen any increase since 2019. In the remaining 20 states, parole grant rates have seen either no change or have seen a marked decline, with South Carolina (-63%) and Alabama (-67%) seeing the biggest drop offs in grant rates.

State parole boards not only chose to release fewer people, they heard fewer cases as well. With the exceptions of Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Arkansas, parole boards continued to hear significantly fewer total cases in 2022 that they did in 2019. The result is that since 2019, the number of people released through discretionary parole has decreased across the board. Why are parole boards releasing fewer people?

Denial is often effectively the default position for parole boards, and the burden of proof is usually on the person who is incarcerated to justify their release. Another issue is the general outlook some politicians and parole board members have toward people who are up for parole. Moreover, policies that provide relief only for those with nonviolent offenses are simply not impactful enough to address the juggernaut of mass incarceration. Why are policy efforts to increase release rates not impactful enough?

Efforts to restore discretionary parole in some states have come achingly close to success in recent years. Some states with discretionary parole have begun to implement presumptive parole in an effort to increase fairness and remove subjectivity and political pressure. While presumptive parole is a key strategy to reduce incarceration, in states that have implemented it, the efficacy of this policy is limited by carveouts — exceptions in policies that exclude certain categories of people from relief. Most states with some form of presumptive parole will not apply the presumption to people with certain offenses, those who have received recent disciplinary infractions, or those who haven’t completed relevant rehabilitative programming. Offense-based carveouts do not have a strong basis in policy, and programming-related carveouts are problematic because programming is neither universal nor guaranteed and can vary from prison to prison. Reports also show that black and brown people who are incarcerated are more likely to receive disciplinary infractions than their white counterparts, meaning they are more likely to be denied presumptive parole based on this carveout.

Despite the dangers of incarceration in a post-pandemic world and the efforts of many to make the parole system more just, fewer people are receiving parole hearings, and fewer still are released through discretionary parole. In fact, discretionary parole accounted for only a small fraction of total releases from prison in 2021. Expanding access to discretionary parole won’t by itself end mass incarceration; however, expanding its usage in conjunction with presumptive parole while eliminating undermining carve outs could be a powerful tool for decarceration. Hopefully, a review of parole in 2023 will see incarcerated people given a greater chance to be paroled.

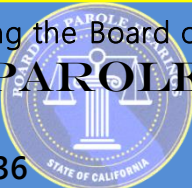
Editor’s Note: The above Prison Policy Initiative article did not contain data from California for comparison. Research of recent data compiled by Life Support Alliance indicated the following overall California grant rates for years 2019 through 2023.

2019: 34% 2020: 32% 2021: 34% 2022: 28.4% 2023: 35%

For more information regarding the Board of Parole Hearings, write to:

BOARD OF PAROLE HEARINGS
P.O. Box 4036
Sacramento, CA 95812-4036

(916) 445-4072
www.cdcr.ca.gov/BOPH



Prison Hacks

Foot Remedies

By John L. Orr,
Feature Reporter



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

HAVE YOU EVER walked into your cell and detected an unusual smell; something different than the typical cubicle odors?

After trekking around the yard for a few hours, we carry in any number of substances and odors on our sneakers; these are easily remedied by cleaning off the soles of your shoes with soap and water. The interior of your Nikes are a different challenge. You cannot wash the inside of your sneakers frequently because it takes so long to dry, sometimes as much as 24 hours.

As a temporary remedy between washings, try this: Find a newspaper and take two, full-sized pages and compress these into a wad the size of a grapefruit. Sprinkle a little talcum or baby powder inside your sneakers, and then stuff the wads of newspaper into the opening of each shoe. Even without the powder, the newspaper absorbs sweat, dampness, and obnoxious sneaker and sock odor while blocking the stench from escaping into your cell. When you wear your shoes, store the wadded newspaper in a plastic bag. Change out the newspaper every three or four days, or sooner.

If you regularly experience foot, leg, or knee pain, you may simply need more arch support in your shoes. Recent advertisements on TV hype the benefits of arch support as a cure-all for these common orthopedic issues. My miracle experience with additional arch support made me a believer.

Try this: Create your own custom arch support by using the state-issued, soft rubber boot inserts. Take a second pad (or more) and fold it over (or notch it to fit), attaching it to the base pad with tape or by sewing it into a custom fit for your own arch. Any other soft material will also work. My knee and heel pain in both sneakers and state boots disappeared overnight.

See your physician if this remedy does not work and your pain persists.

BPH Commissioners

Receive Training

By Vanessa Nelson-Sloane, Life Support Alliance

DURING A RECENT BPH Executive Board meeting, commissioners and deputy commissioners attending training focused on sex offender risk assessment (the review of relevant risk and protective factors) and trauma informed criminal justice responses.

Here are the biggest takeaways:

- Risk of re-offense for sex offenders is likely overrated.
- Lack of empathy is not proven to be related to recidivism.
- The existence of protective factors to mitigate re-offense does not mean an absence of risk.

Here are the biggest risk factors for such re-offenses:

- lack of housing
- lack of employment
- lack of social connections
- lack of a defined purpose in life
- lack of pro-social identification

It was noted that compliance with supervision (previous periods of supervision on either parole or probation) was more impactful in warding off re-offense than compliance with medication. Non-compliance with prior conditional releases was a factor in predicting future recidivism.

Panel members also received information and training on the long-term effects of trauma, even perceived trauma, to justice-involved individuals. Panels were urged to look for signs of trauma in everyone. Members were encouraged to be aware of the pervading impact of trauma, and the fact that just discussing past traumatic events can be a triggering event — including how parole candidates discussing past abuse can be triggering for them in reliving that victimization.

The presenters suggested panel members be attuned to the progression of event ⇒ experiences ⇒ effect. They suggested that about half of women experience some sort of sexual trauma and stalking and about one-fifth of men report the same, but that percentages of both are higher in justice-involved individuals among both men and women.

At the conclusion of the training presentation, Executive Director Jennifer Shaffer made a strongly worded statement reminding the panel members that the board would not tolerate the demeaning of those before them and dismissal of concerns in this area, whether by panel members or others participating in hearings. It was unusual for Shaffer to weigh in in this manner, but welcome. Life Support Alliance and others, including attorneys, have expressed concern regarding some of the condescending, accusatory, and demeaning questions from panel members toward those sitting for parole consideration who have reported how trauma, often of a sexual nature and long in the past, had a lasting impact on their thought process and actions. We'll be on alert for comments and actions by parole panel members that cross this line and disregard the training offered.



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The National Veterans Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit providing national veteran crisis management, information, and referral services.

Call 1-888-777-4443 toll-free for information and references.

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.

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LifeSupportAlliance.org



An Incarcerated Scholar among Scholars

By Fabian Garcia,
Post Reporter

NO MATTER WHEN, where, or how we're becoming the best version of ourselves while paying our debts to society, attributing our successes solely on self-reliance is an injustice to those who came before us. Role models, mentors, or just good examples, whichever noun we use to denote them — their blueprints to success inspire us to continue chasing our goals and accomplishments behind these walls. One such person of positive influence at the High Desert State Prison on Facility A is Donel "Fateen" Poston.

Entering the California prison system with nothing more than a GED certificate and an unwavering determination to succeed, Poston, 47, understood all too well the indispensable role that his perseverance in procuring a college education would have on his future.

"If you are looking for results," said Poston, "you must stay consistent. Success is a moving target, so you have to wash, rinse, and repeat until you hit it."

As I began my higher learning experience with Lassen Community College, Poston was starting on his B.A. in Business Administration through Adams State University. Analogous to the influence an "OG" (original gangster) has on a misguided youngster pursuing the thug life, mentors like Poston leave a strong impression on those of us pursuing the scholarly life in prison.

With two-thirds completed on his Master of Arts in business administration through Adams State, Poston is that much closer to checking off what I call another "unbox" from his list. These are goals, thought of by many to be unachievable, unrealistic, or simply unnecessary for someone in a blue uniform. And it doesn't stop with higher education.

"I have done so much with so little that I'm now qualified to do anything with nothing," Poston added.

An avid writer, Poston has published three urban novels (two are *Swapping Places* and *A Day in the Life of a Hustler*), and co-authored five self-help books (including *Freedom by Degrees* and *Unlikely Success*).

When he's not assisting others in their career paths, self-improvement, or even math, he spends what free time he has studying and working out. With everything he's done and continues to do for the residents of Facility A, one can only imagine what a contributing constituent Donel "Fateen" Poston will be for his community upon release.

"Perfection is attainable, but it's not sustainable," said Poston to anyone trying to follow in his footsteps. "Just aim to be the best version of yourself every day."

Digital Literacy Matters

Student Instructions for Opening Canvas Using Google Chrome

By Shawn Brusacoram, Mule Creek State Prison
and O. Rick Bridges, Feature Reporter

FOR NEWLY ENROLLED and returning college students, ease of access to Canvas provides critical support for daily student learning requirements. While there are several pathways to sign on, the path with the least steps and the most access to practical study tools is the path that makes most sense. For example, accessing Canvas through the DRP portal limits the student's ability to copy instructions and study guides for assignments and exams and then transfer them to Word documents. To avoid such unintended restrictions inherent to integrated programs, Google Chrome can be tasked to open Canvas automatically. To set up Google Chrome to automatically open your Canvas dashboard, along with the EBSCO research portal as a secondary page, when you open Google Chrome take the following steps:

1. Using the mouse, left-click on the **Google Chrome** app icon, either on the task bar or the Start menu.
2. Left-click on the three dots "⋮" on the far-right top of the screen.
3. Left-click on **Settings** in the menu that drops down.
4. Choose **On startup** from the navigation menu that pops up on the left of the page.
5. Left-click on the choice in the main content area that says **Open a specific page or set of pages**.
6. Left-click on the option that says **Add a new page**.
7. Type cdcredu.instructure.com/login/saml into the box that appears, then press **Enter**.
8. Left-click on the option that says **Add a new page** again.
9. Type cdcr.correctionaled.com into the box that appears, then press the **Enter** key.
10. Close Google Chrome, and then reopen it.
11. Left-click on the **I Accept** icon that appears for the internet control system.
12. Left-click on the tab at the top that says **Log in**.
13. Left-click on the blue button that say **Single Sign On**.
14. Close Google Chrome, and then reopen it.

Now, Canvas will automatically appear any time that you click on the Google Chrome icon on the task bar or the Start menu. EBSCO will open simultaneously as a secondary tab. This efficient sign-on process should save each student a significant amount of time each day — time that can be used for study.

Help Wanted:

Mule Creek Post writers needed.

Are you interested in seeing your yard or your prison represented in the *Post*? Do you know of a newsworthy event or interesting person on your yard that should be known by all our readers?

Send a Résumé and Writing Sample to:

The *Mule Creek Post* • Mule Creek State Prison • % MCIC Associate
Warden • P.O. Box 409090 • Ione, CA 95640
Attn: Editor-in-Chief



Notable Women in History



Susan B. Anthony (Britannica.com)



Joan of Arc (Britannica.com)



Emma Goldman (KPBS.org)



Gloria Steinem (Biography.com)



Ruth Bader-Ginsberg (People.com)

GRIP Holds First Alumni Meeting

By Ricky Ortega, Post Columnist

IN MID-DECEMBER 2023, former Guiding Rage into Power (GRIP) graduates met on facilities D and E for the first monthly alumni gatherings at Mule Creek State Prison. GRIP is a yearlong offender accountability program that guides people on healing and learning journeys where they agree to stop violence, develop emotional intelligence, cultivate mindfulness, and understand victim impact. They form tribes and build alliances with peers who are on the same journey of self-awareness and personal discovery. On graduation day, they signed a pledge in front of their family, community, and fellow tribe members, vowing to stop their violence. After graduation, however, they leave the safety of the tribe and return to a violent world as peacemakers.

GRIP is answering the call by creating a place of shelter for graduates to reunite monthly and reconnect with the roots of their true selves. In attendance were members from various tribes, creating a sense of home, adding to the familial ambience with smiles and hugs from other family members.

"It was very comforting to know that just because we graduated, we are not forgotten," said Vernon Barker of Tribe 1045. "The caring that we all received here today and the humanity from the outside facilitators was very rewarding. The work I put in on myself is never done. It's something I owe to my community," he added.

Fellow GRIP member Willie Brambila spoke about being part of the GRIP alumni. "Continuing the journey of getting back to being in a circle of trust and being able to share a safe container with individuals from different tribes that are on the same road to recovery, brings a sense of joy to my heart," he said. "The community of peacemakers is expanding."

"A true blessing and gift to have this chance of experiencing a full healing journey that GRIP has demonstrated countless times," said Frank Lanear of Tribe 1035. "To all my fellow Peacekeepers, we are here now so let's go out and show them a living example of amends."



GRIP alumnus Luke Scott

Luke Scott, a recent GRIP graduate from Tribe 959, was elated about his experience at the reunion. "We are aware that each life lesson and experience is a tool for our toolbox of solutions to be of service to another," said Scott. "This alumni meeting is ingeniously a benefit to the constant empowerment of each participant into the GRIP family. We must be trailblazers in creating a platform of useful life assets which are transformational between graduating GRIP and becoming a good citizen."

"Remaining hopeful," said Timothy Junker of Tribe 959, which seemed to be the theme of the day. "I am hopeful that being able to stay connected to GRIP, I will be able to continue on my path."

Indeed, togetherness is a cornerstone of GRIP.

In a closing salute, all attending tribe members and facilitators joined arms in a large circle and ended with a triumphant shout, "We are GRIP Family. For us, by us, about us."



GRIP alumnus Willie Brambila and family



The September 2021 GRIP graduation ceremony. From Left—Richard Gillem, Joseph Viruegas, David Hwang, Cedric Tate, Cameron Byars, Jeffrey Duvarado, John Butterfield, Aorrell Burrell, Raymond Cooper, Moisés Amezcua-Manzo, Frank Ferrel. The cloth-covered chair commemorates Rilen Cathey, a member of Tribe 711 who passed away in 2020. (H. Kim / Media Specialist)

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

GRIP's Reentry Coordinator is Rafael Cuevas
(415) 759-8824



Notable Women in History



Sojourner Truth (WomensHistory.org)



Adrienne Rich (BostonReview.net)



Rosa Parks (Achievement.org)



Lucretia Mott (WomensHistory.org)



Marianne Williamson (HarperCollins.com)

FLC Student Council Seeks to Improve College Experience

By Angelo Ward, Mule Creek State Prison



THE PRISON REENTRY Program District Academic Senate (PREP DAS) task group was formed as an internship program with a three-fold purpose. Firstly, our task group is here to discuss and make recommendations on Los Rios Academic District programs interfacing with Mule Creek’s educational services. Secondly, we address issues pertaining to professional development, student services, academic counseling, equity, technology, and funding opportunities related to Los Rios prison education. Lastly, we provide incarcerated students a voice.

We are pleased that our initial goals were met. We advocated for the delivery of education supplies every semester, which began the fall of 2023. We also advocated for an academic counselor, slated to be hired in the spring of 2024 for our prison campuses.

Since these accomplishments, our goals have shifted. For example, we are trying to determine what happens after our soon-to-be-hired counselor’s two-year contract expires. We want to get a Los Rios Advisory Board on the online learning portal for general information, as well as a place for each yard to express its unique concerns. We want to learn how the unaccounted for funds of our program are being spent, and how we can get those funds invested back into the program. We also want to shift Mule Creek’s culture through the whole-hearted implementation of the California Model.

We currently face a few barriers that hinder our ability to accomplish these goals. The biggest obstacle, thus far, is the lack of communication by Los Rios administrators. They represent our population without knowing our population’s needs and don’t listen to the faculty representing us. This is why, for example, our task group had to advocate for basic supplies, and for an academic counselor that is state-mandated for all students.

Our task group is new and experiencing growing pains; this is a first-of-its-kind program in the state and maybe even the country. We are aware that we cannot accurately represent every yard’s needs, and we hope that our proposal for a Los Rios Advisory Board, managed by each yard’s Los Rios lead faculty, will change this.

Some of the obstacles we face in achieving our new goals can be easily remedied through the full implementation of the California Model’s four pillars (see below). Mule Creek and Los Rios have a unique opportunity to model what this could look like for the rest of the state, making our rehabilitative and educational efforts a trend for other prisons to follow.

Part of our task group’s purpose is to provide incarcerated students a voice, which allows us to start these pro-social conversations and build these positive relationships. Students on traditional campuses are able to take part in their school’s governance process. Allowing our task group the ability to do the same, unimpeded, allows for us to resemble a traditional campus and college life outside.

Our task group consists of Los Rios college students whose academic careers range from beginners to nearly completed bachelor’s degrees. We are using these different lived experiences to improve the educational journeys of those who follow and provide them the support some of us went without.

Our task group also has used its platform to promote an incarcerated student-led professional development program. For example, there are Creating Neighbors workshops (see July 2023 *Mule Creek Post*), one of which specifically addresses educational and life traumas.

The California Model exists; it’s about time we implement the program the way it was intended. Let’s start with access to quality education.

The Four Pillars of the California Model

Dynamic Security: Promoting positive relationships between staff and incarcerated people through purposeful activities and professional, positive, and respectful conversations.

Normalization: Modeling life in prison as close as possible to the outside world, easing transition back to the community.

Peer Support: Seeking to train the incarcerated to use their lived experiences to provide recovery and rehabilitative support to their peers.

Becoming a Trauma Informed Organization: Making a commitment to change the practices, policies, and culture of the entire department, at all levels, to recognize the impacts of trauma and ensure the physical and emotional safety of staff and incarcerated individuals.

Notable Women in History



Frances Cabrini (MotherCabrini.org)



Amanda Gorman (Wikipedia.org)



Jane Addams (WomensHistory.org)



Helen Keller (WomensHistory.org)



Mother Teresa (Britannica.com)

Soft in a Hard Place

By Cameron Terhune, Correctional Training Facility



PRISONS ARE NOT soft and cuddly. All across the world, prisons are built from cement and steel. They are stocked by hard people doing hard time and ruled with iron fists. In a place where toughness is mandatory and brutality is virtue, those who do not affect a spiritual exoskeleton and fashion their minds and bodies into weapons, held ever ready to fend off assaults of a hostile world that values strength alone are seen as lesser, as contemptible, as objects of scorn, as prey.

Perhaps prison could have persisted indefinitely. Perhaps these hard places, filled with granite hearts and iron wills, would never crumble. Perhaps these mean lives born out in the closest proximity to our fellow human beings, these callous existences devoid of compassion where we could not so much as acknowledge the struggle, the despair, the suffering of those beside us as they were subjected to the exact same indignities and cruelties that we were, could have kept on without diverging, and in the prison mentality could have maintained its crunching grasp upon us, enforced its illogical directive that humans — a species by all accounts predisposed to seek softness, warmth, comfort, not stone and steel and solitude — be hard, be cold, be heartless.

Perhaps; but then there were cats.

At first there was just one, a wary orange tabby that prowled the yard between human hours and haunted the forbidden spaces between the fences like the phantom of a world long forgotten. We watched from behind glass and steel and wire and cement, watched her romp about, watched her chase birds and share a meal with us. She grew, fed by both pigeons and state food offered by many hands, though in time we realized it was not the meager scraps of unidentifiable meat that made her fat.

The blessing she bestowed upon us for our gifts was delivered, appropriately enough, in an unused locker on the yard's religious grounds. From the moment the litter of kittens arrived, there existed a covenant among all her feeders and fawners and fans: we shall belong to these cats.

Thus, in the ensuing weeks, the atmosphere was sprinkled with the sounds of crinkling plastic as not just state food, but canteen and package morsels were brought to the sight of the pilgrimage, set like sacrifices upon the altar of this mysterious beast that walked among us. We watched in quiet awe from behind our stoic masks as the kittens opened their eyes and emerged to take their first steps, as they explored the world they now shared with us and grew into rambunctious, playful beings of wonder.

Then, of course, we pet them.

I had not, until a small orange cat wandered over to sit with me in the grass, had the divine pleasure of petting a cat in 15 years. I am a writer by trade, but to describe the experience leaves me scrabbling for words. Simply, the experience reminded me that I am alive, instilling in me a raw, unbridled happiness that I had never felt, not even as a child. I spent many hours with those cats and still I am amazed at how perfectly they reject everything it means to be in prison: they are playful and unselfconscious, curious and silly, soft and cuddly and so damned schmoofy that if I had a thousand of them I would delight in being buried alive. But even one is bliss.

Sometimes it is even more interesting to watch the interactions of my fellow prisoners with our cats. All those hard cases, doing hard time, melt like butter on a summer sidewalk when they visit the cats, when they feed them and watch them chasing bees and birds, when they make toys to entice the cats to play with them (as I have done — it is too fun for words). Engaging with a fluffy ball of innocence that offers no judgment whatsoever, stony visages finally bear smiles.

And I understand. I don't think about the past when a cat hops in my lap. I don't think of what I should or could have done. I don't think about courts or life sentences or parole boards. What comes to mind are peace, and a sense that everything is going to be okay. What comes to mind is that what's in the past needs to stay there if I want to have a future, if I want to be grateful for today and for the fact that I am no longer the person I once was. The cats, of course, already know this, but they are gracious enough to spend their time with us so that we might learn, and so that we can enjoy a few quiet moments of warmth, of softness, of non-judgment, of freedom.

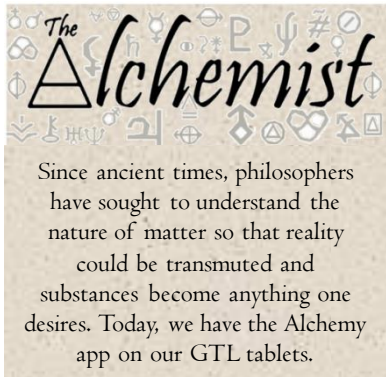
Every prison should have cats.



(NYPost.com)



Dr. 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.



Since ancient times, philosophers have sought to understand the nature of matter so that reality could be transmuted and substances become anything one desires. Today, we have the Alchemy app on our GTL tablets.

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!

SO, YOU WANT to be an alchemist. Here's your challenge for the month. Once you've realized one of those three little pigs was on to something with his building material, you unlock several structures you can create, such as **Hut**. The tricky part to getting started is making **Brick** (which involves **Fire**, of course) and **Concrete** (which involves **Cement**). With these starting elements, can you make **Hospital**, **Skyscraper**, **Bar**, and **Museum**?



A Building Maintenance project in 2019.
(H. Kim / Media Specialist)

Psych View

Understanding Risk (Pt. 2)

By Daisy Switzer, Post Columnist

SOMETIMES ERRORS ARE made and something is put into a record which does not tell the whole story. Perhaps this has happened to you. If that is our situation, writing our part of the story may help clarify the record. If the record is correct, do not submit excuses. This will make you look like a liar. Take responsibility. It is better to have a record of maturity than defensive posturing. A person who takes responsibility is showing maturity. It is easy to empathize with a person who relates a story in a non-confrontational manner (by submitting a note of clarification, in some cases). It is not as easy to listen to someone who rambles off a similar repetitive excuse to multiple events. While some people are unlucky, too much bad luck gives cause to examine the common denominator of the unlucky events: That would be you.

Solitary Program suggestions are offered elsewhere in my book. If you have a high-risk past (or even a need to program), some of those suggestions may help you change the patterns that create risk in your record and better manage your profile in the future.

The past is not something we can erase, but we can make peace with it and in the best cases turn it into something productive. Doing so reduces your risk.

Another important risk factor is encapsulated in your relationships. Who do you connect with, if anyone? How do you relate to others? Have you been violent or abusive toward others, either physically or emotionally? Do you create dependence in others, make unreasonable or even illegal demands of them? Do you see others as an extension of yourself only, there to meet your needs? Have you asked about what they experience in their lives? If they told you, how do you know you would care? Some people simply cannot relate to other people. This can increase your risk to society, as society is populated with people whom you would need to interact with in the event of release. If you have a record of predatory behavior, relationships will be especially hard for you. Some who have worked in the sex trade or have committed violent sex crimes will find that parole may be more difficult. One way to manage that difficulty is to acknowledge how you have created it for yourself and to confront those traits within yourself that allowed you to commit such acts. Only by acknowledging those factors can you hope to change them. There are sometimes programs available to help you with this, but many people are afraid to take advantage of them even when in a position to do so. Solitary Program activities to help you with this kind of exploration and work are offered later on that may help you begin this work alone if you must. It is better to have another person to work with, and shows trust and maturity to be able to work with others. Are there no groups where you find yourself? Why don't you start one? If nobody steps forward, nothing will change. Even if your group is a group of two, it shows trust in another person. This will be crucial to your self-development and to becoming a person who is best suited to parole. Reach out. Connect to other people. It is essential to your survival and to theirs.

Relationships are excellent places to discover your faults. Do not become angry or alarmed if your companion expresses criticism toward you or toward your choices. This can be a healthy way to support each other's changes as you work together. It will give you things to think about. The mirror does not offer a voice. Try to learn to hear criticism and, even if it is poorly stated, to find the possible truth within it that can help you be a better person.

If you were an adult at the time of your conviction and your record is one of dependence on others to care for you, some of your risk might be related to that pattern. Do you have a disability that requires such care? If not, have you thought about making things right with the people you took advantage of? Have you apologized? How might you better support yourself and more productively make use of your relationships?

The **Prison Journalism Project's** mission is to help incarcerated writers and those in communities affected by incarceration tell stories about their world using the tools of journalism: gathering and testing facts; writing with nuance, texture, and insight; and reaching a thoughtful audience. Submissions may be made electronically or by mail:

Email: submissions@prisonjournalismproject.org
JPay email: prisonjourn@psu.edu
Postal mail: Prison Journalism Project
 2093 Philadelphia Pike #1054
 Claymont, DE 19703



Follow the Prison Journalism Project (and prisoner-written stories) on social media: **@prisonjourn** on Twitter and Instagram, **@prisonjournalism** on Facebook. They may also sign up on the PJP website for *Inside Story*, a monthly e-newsletter.

Heavy

That time
I thought I could not
go any closer to grief
without dying

I went closer,
and I did not die.
Surely God
had His hand in this,

as well as friends.
Still, I was bent,
and my laughter,
as the poets said,

was nowhere to be found.
Then said my friend Daniel
(brave even among lions),
“It’s not the weight you carry

but how you carry it—
books, bricks, grief—
it’s all in the way
you embrace it, balance it, carry it

when you cannot, and would not,
put it down.”
So I went practicing.
Have you noticed?

Have you heard
the laughter
that comes, now and again,
out of my startled mouth?

How I linger
to admire, admire, admire
the things of this world
that are kind, and maybe

also troubled—
roses in the wind
the sea geese on the steep waves,
a love
to which there is no reply?

— Mary Oliver



Guiding Rage Into Power (GRIP)

GRIP is a yearlong program designed to build understanding of how past trauma has created attitudes and behaviors that hurt the self and others. Through intensive reflection, small group sharing, and instruction, the group focuses on cultivating mindfulness, understanding victim impact, developing emotional intelligence, and putting an end to harmful behaviors.

Interviews are held prior to the beginning of each yearlong cycle; the interview dates will be announced.



The Trauma-to-Prison Pipeline

By Jason Davis, Feature Reporter

When you study prison populations, you see a common preponderance of childhood trauma and mental illness. The two go together. So what we have in prison are the most traumatized people in our society.
—Dr. Gabor Mate

WHEN CHILDREN EXPERIENCE trauma, it dramatically affects their relationship with the world around them and their path of development. Children are especially susceptible to emotional trauma as they are more vulnerable, their brains are still developing, and they lack coping skills. What happens to people in childhood can make a difference in whether they end up in a prison cell, or whether they are even wired to make rational decisions. Experts say the path to trouble may begin long before an individual has any say in the matter.

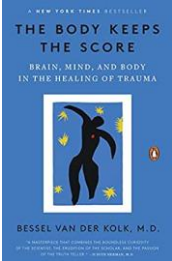
Trauma experienced during childhood is called adverse childhood experiences. The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration defines *acute trauma* as “an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.”

Trauma experiences for many incarcerated individuals continue inside prison. The correctional environment itself may cause or aggravate post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in some individuals. “The bright lights, loud noises, questioning by guards and staff, harsh physical handling/movement, restrictions, and sparse living quarters can be triggering,” wrote S. Adams and coauthors in a 2017 article on trauma in correctional environments.

Within correctional facilities, the main methods of treatment focus on reducing recidivism and substance abuse, while mental health services focus primarily on individual symptoms (anxiety, depression, addiction, aggression). Facilities can implement trauma-informed practices to minimize re-traumatization and reduce PTSD symptoms. This would require a new approach, a change in prison culture, policies, and practices across the industry.

The next step is treatment for trauma and its consequences within the correctional setting. There are many reasons the incarcerated do not receive treatment for mental health issues relating to past trauma. These may include feelings of vulnerability, fear, or denial, and barriers related to a man’s traditional social masculinity roles. For many incarcerated residents, there is a general lack of knowledge and access to these services, which may be the reason they have not received treatment.

Recognizing that trauma affects the behavior and well-being of those under correctional care — while failing to address it — is not rehabilitative and is potentially harmful. Psychologist and author Dr. Bessel van der Kolk writes in his book *The Body Keeps the Score* (Viking, 2014), “as long as trauma is not resolved, the stress hormones that the body secretes to protect itself keep circulating and the defensive movements and emotional responses keep getting replayed.” This can cause a retriggering of memories from traumatic events.



Until the trauma response is addressed, individuals are subject to reliving their experiences of trauma and this reliving “engrave[s] those memories [of trauma] ever more deeply in the mind,” says van der Kolk. The trauma response activates the body’s survival mechanisms, preparing for fight-or-flight. In such cases, survival takes priority and the trauma response provides a physiological imperative for the individual to prioritize their immediate safety concerns over potential long-term health consequences. For example, smoking, alcohol, and drugs provide a sense of relief in the moment, outweighing the possible long-term effects like heart, liver, and lung disease. Often, individuals experiencing a trauma response are not conscious of the connection between their current state of elevated stress and previous experiences of trauma.

Adopting a trauma-informed approach changes our perspective of people who are coping with these issues. Rather than dismissing their problem as inherited, we should understand that these outcomes are survival skills learned through childhood trauma. Having a better understanding of how adverse-childhood-experience scores affect the prison population can help develop a more complete and supportive environment. If correctional facilities adapt to the unique needs of incarcerated individuals, they can foster individual health, healing, and public safety.

Sources: S. Adams, J. Houston-Kolnik, and J. Reichert, “Trauma-Informed and Evidence-Based Practices and Programs to Address Trauma in Correctional Settings,” Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, 2017; B. van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Viking, 2014.

State IDs for Incarcerated

By California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

THE DEPARTMENT OF Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) is working with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to offer incarcerated people a streamlined process to receive a California ID card upon release.

Assisted by CDCR staff, people with less than 13 months left to serve on their sentence will use an electronic process to apply for a replacement state ID card to the DMV. If the applicant does not have a usable photo on file, CDCR staff will use new tablets to take and submit a new one to the DMV for processing.

"CDCR is committed to helping incarcerated people reentering their community to obtain a California ID card. Proper identification is necessary to get a job, apply for vital state and federal services, obtain housing and more," said Division of Rehabilitative Programs Director Brant Choate.

Senate Bill 629 mandates CDCR and the DMV collaborate to ensure a new photograph is taken for every eligible incarcerated person who needs one. Approved applicants will receive their replacement ID card on their release date.

"Giving incarcerated people proper identification as they transition is a critical step toward successful reintegration into society," said DMV Director Steve Gordon. "This streamlined and automated process will help people access essential services and opportunities as they assimilate into their communities."

In 2014, Assembly Bill 2308 allowed eligible incarcerated people to receive California IDs if they had a photo on file that wasn't older than 10 years, had previously applied for a state ID, and met other requirements.

The new process will be crucial in bridging gaps and giving all who are released a better chance to get legal identification, which is a necessary step toward their successful reintegration into society.

The 988 System & Gun Violence

By Earl S. Breckenridge, Feature Reporter

FATAL GUN VIOLENCE — resulting in 48,207 deaths in 2022 nationwide — is far more likely to be a consequence of suicide than homicide. Though 12 percentage points higher than the national average, in Wisconsin "For every 100 fatal shootings in the state, on average 71 deaths are suicides, 25 are homicides, two are police shootings, one is deemed an accident and the balance are undetermined, according to an analysis of state health data by *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*," reported *USA Today*.

Those most likely to commit suicide with guns are rural, middle-aged white males. "Among elderly people, 70% of suicides involve firearms," the paper reported. Psychologists have attributed the rise in suicide deaths to what they sum up as the 5 D's: "depression; disability, because of functional impairment; disease, with illness and pain; disconnectedness from others; and access to deadly weapons." The *USA Today* report went on to note that experts suggest that gun owners are not more prone to gun homicides or suicides, but that quick and easy access makes gun violence more likely to occur.

Sara Kohlbeck is a licensed mental health counselor and director of suicide research and healing in the Comprehensive Injury Center at the Medical College of Wisconsin. She commented, "If we are able to put time and distance between a person and the means to end their life, there is a good chance we'll be able to prevent that suicide."

So what do you do if you or someone you know is experiencing suicidal thoughts or other mental health crisis? "The federal government has invested nearly \$1 billion since 2022 to transition and expand the National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline first established in 2005 into the new 988 line, which offers free and confidential support for people in distress over call, text, or chat through a three-digit number that's easy to memorize," said *USA Today*.

According to Angeleena Frances of AMFM Healthcare, the best time to use 988 is when a person is in crisis or they'd like to learn more about available mental health resources in their area. The goal of 988 call-takers is to de-escalate a crisis and direct callers to appropriate mental health resources. Call takers go through 32 hours of training provided by the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and Vibrant Emotional Health, in addition to local training.

If you or someone you know needs mental health resources and support, please call, text, or chat with the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline or visit 988lifeline.org for 24/7 access to free and confidential services.

Sources: *USA Today*, Nov. 21, 2023; *USA Today Weekend Extra*, Dec. 1, 2023; *USA Today*, Dec. 12, 2023



Strange Fruit, Forgetful Plants, © 2022 Nathan P. Blalock, Ink on Paper.

"I drew the [above artwork] with a political statement in mind. ...The piece is titled, 'Strange Fruit Forgetful Plants.' Steeped in history, directed at the artificial eloquence of a people who want to forget."

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.



Calling Female Writers!

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

THE MULE CREEK Post formally requests incarcerated women in California prisons write and submit articles, poems, or artwork for publication in our monthly newspaper. We receive few submissions from our women's prisons and want to add the female prisoner perspective to our pages. With a circulation of over 95,000 on the GTL/ViaPath tablets, we offer broad coverage for your work.

Keri Blakinger did prison time in New York state, but paroled and currently is a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* newspaper. Her works appeared in the *Houston Chronicle*, *New York Daily News*, and other media, including on television, in magazines, and in the *Mule Creek Post*.

The *Post's* mission is to present content and messaging that encourages rehabilitation, pro-social values, and enhances a sense of community, creativity, and positivity. Find a distinctive and positive topic, experience, group, or individual who highlights our mission statement. Does your yard host an innovative self-help group or charitable function? Scan our past editions for content and pay attention to the style of these articles.

Check out last month's article on submission guidelines (pg. 10) and this month's follow up (pg. 10) to assist you in the proper formatting of your manuscript — these are standard in the publishing world and must be followed to appear professional. If accepted, our staff will edit your work.

We do not pay for published works, but offer a genuine publishing history for writer résumés, which is invaluable for parole board presentation and future job searches (both inside and post-release). How many parole candidates can say they have been published and, at the same time, present a legitimate self-employment career potential for the parole board's consideration?

Remember to include a self-addressed stamped envelope with your submissions for our response. We look forward to hearing from you!

"Cooking with Butter"

By Albert Bell, Mule Creek State Prison

Albert Bell is a prolific writer whose work has appeared in several publications, to include *Iron City Magazine*, *Journal X*, and *Colossus: Freedom*. "Cooking with Butter" was accepted for publication in the 2024 issue of *Mend*, from *Project Mend*, a publication of Syracuse University's College of Arts & Sciences. This is his second publishing credit with *Mend*. The short story is republished with his permission.

THE FINER THINGS in life come as easy as a cool summer night's breeze, gently blowing against your face — or as a pair of my baby girl's eyes. Her beautiful brown eyes would melt me, like butter melting in a warming skillet that's on top of a stove.

Joy is the name her mother gave her. A lovely 2-year-old who already knew how to "slow cook" her daddy. One Saturday afternoon, after the family had returned home from grocery shopping, I had taken some See's Candies out of the grocery bags and left them on the table. Upon returning from the bathroom, I discovered that some of the candy was gone.

So I asked, "Who has been in my See's Candies?"

I looked around. No answer.

So I went back to the kids' room and stood in the doorway looking at them.

Everything stopped. Even the air in the room stopped moving.

Then I asked, "Who has been in my box of candy? Fitz, Joy, Alicia, come with me."

We all went back into the kitchen. I stood for a moment, looking at the kitchen table, upon which sat the open box of See's Candies and a few candy wrappers. Looking at each of my young children, I began the lightweight interrogations.

"Fitzgerald?" I asked.

"Yes, Daddy?"

"Did you eat some of the candy that was in this box?"

"No, Daddy," he answered me, in his then 8-year-old voice.

"Are you sure?" I asked.

"Yes, Daddy. I'm sure."

Next I turned to Alicia. Looking at her, I asked, "Alicia?"

"Yes, Daddy?"

"Now, I know I'm not crazy. Before I left to use the bathroom, I sat the box of candy on the table, and I only ate one piece out of it. But when I came back, there were three candy wrappers on the floor. Now tell the truth. Did you eat some of this candy?"

By now Alicia was a bit excited, and she stutters when she gets excited.

"No-no-no Da-Dad-Daddy. I didn't ea-ea-eat the candy."

"OK, baby," I said.

And now the only one left to ask was Joy. As I turned and we all glanced at Joy, she rushed over to me and grabbed hold of my leg. Now the "slow cooking" process had begun.

Looking up at me with those big brown eyes, Joy said, with a bit of a slow whine in her voice, "Daddy?"

I just stood there looking at her face, noticing something like chocolate.

"Daddy?" Joy called to me again, as if she knew the gig was up.

"Yes?" I said.

"Daddy, I love you."

"And I love you too, sweetheart. What's that on your face? Is that chocolate?"

"Daddy?"

"Yes, Joy?"

"I love you."

She and I went back and forth for a few minutes, with me explaining how she is supposed to ask for what she wants. All the while, Joy continued to hold my leg. Joy's mother, Onie Marie, stood by quietly, looking at the two of us.

Then she said to me, with a funny look on her face, "She cooked you again, huh?"

"Yep," I said. "She melts me like butter."



(SeesCandiesManila.com)

PEN America Prison Writing Program



The Freedom
to Write

588 Broadway, Suite 303
New York, NY 10012

Vignettes

A Slice of Prison Life
By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

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

BIG BOB, A former Hell’s Angel, ran the Terminal Island Federal Prison laundry like he owned it. Only about 5-foot-6, he weighed over 230 pounds, with bulked up, heavily tattooed arms the size of mature oak tree limbs.

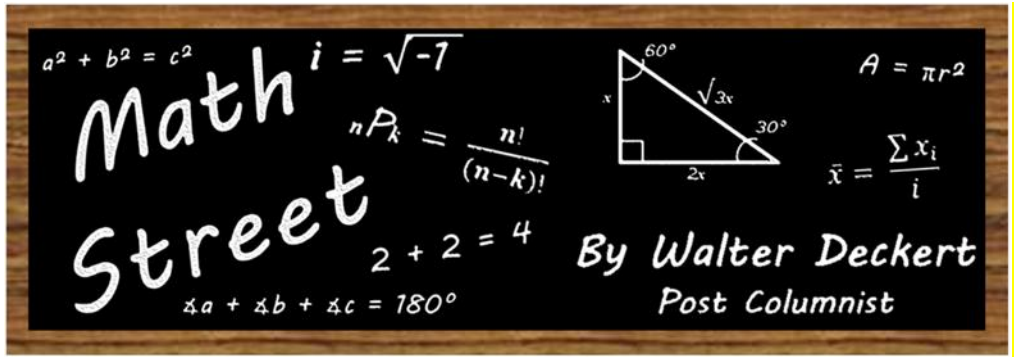
At clothing exchange, Bob worked alone while shouting “Next!” like the Soup Nazi character on the 90s TV show *Seinfeld*. If you did not move up fast enough, Bob refused to help you and ordered you to step aside: “Next!” Try to turn in a ripped sheet or blanket and you expected it thrown back at you. “Next!” Nobody dared confront him and laundry staff backed him up. Asking him a question on the yard got a grunt or a growl if you got too close.

I volunteered for suicide watch in the clinic during the 2 a.m. to 6 a.m. shift, taking notes on those housed there for observation. Down the hall from my post was a hospice care ward for dying AIDS patients shuttled in from other California federal joints. It was monitored by another volunteer concealed behind a partition; I avoided the depressing ward. One day I saw Big Bob walking my way with a plastic bag with a loaf of bread inside. He wore the AIDS volunteer smock. I was shocked and my mouth dropped open. Big Bob was a volunteer?

He stopped at my desk and quietly asked if I wanted some peanut butter toast. I agreed, and he came back five minutes later from the nurse’s station with a plate of aromatic toasted bread slices, a jar of Jif, and two cups of steaming coffee. He sat down, shook my hand, and introduced himself. He was a stranger to me, but we talked softly like old friends, munching our toast. Nurse Amy joined us.

Bob was the last person on the yard (maybe on Earth) I expected to be compassionate; but there he was chatting and reading books and newspapers to prisoners dying from AIDS.

Have a short story about an interesting incident in prison to share with other readers of the Post? Submit your story, up to 300 words, to the Mule Creek Post at the address listed on page 3.



PREVIOUSLY, WE DISCUSSED a way to conduct a proof using induction. Another way we can do this is through contradiction. Essentially, we make a statement that is the opposite of what we want to prove, and try to prove that. What may happen is that we get a contradiction.

Here is an example. In basic mathematics classes, we learn that rational numbers can be written as a fraction where both the numerator and the denominator are whole numbers (or are terminating or repeating, non-terminal decimals). For instance, 1/3, 2, 2/5, etc. are rational numbers. Irrational numbers do not have repeating, terminating decimals.

So, how about $\sqrt{2}$? Is this irrational? The calculator shows us that the *estimated* value is 1.414213562... But this does not tell us if it repeats at the 1000th place. So, we need to prove it be irrational all of the time, and we will use proof by contradiction to do that.

Our statement is that $\sqrt{2}$ is irrational. However, we will assume it *is* rational, and show this leads us to a contradiction. In other words, we should be able to write $\sqrt{2}$ as a fraction p/q for some integers p and q , and we will assume that this fraction is in lowest terms (meaning we cannot reduce it).

$$\sqrt{2} = p/q$$

$$(\sqrt{2})^2 = \left(\frac{p}{q}\right)^2 \quad \text{square both sides to remove the radical}$$

$$2 = \frac{p^2}{q^2}$$

$$2q^2 = p^2 \quad \text{multiply both sides by } q^2$$

Now remember that any number multiplied by 2 is even. This means p^2 is an even number, which also means p has to be even. So p can be written as $2k$. Now let’s go back to our equation.

$$2q^2 = p^2$$

$$2q^2 = (2k)^2 \quad \text{substitute } p = 2k$$

$$2q^2 = (2k)(2k) \quad \text{factor } (2k)^2$$

$$2q^2 = 4k^2 \quad \text{divide by 2}$$

$$q^2 = 2k^2$$

But wait! q^2 must be even because it is equal to $2k^2$! This means p/q is *not* in its lowest form, which contradicts our earliest assumption. Therefore, $\sqrt{2}$ cannot be a rational number. Old mathematicians used to write “QED” at the end of a proof (QED stands for the Latin phrase *quod erat demonstrandum*, or “that which was to be demonstrated”).

If you have math-related questions or comments about my column, come see me in the Facility E Post-Secondary and Continuing Education program (formerly VEP) or send them to the *Mule Creek Post*.



The Office of the Inspector General is here to serve you!

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The OIG is a prison oversight agency independent of the CDCR, established by the California Penal Code, §§6125 and 6126(a).

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Business & Finances



Donating a Book to the Library

By Rob Sharp, Post Reporter

LATELY THERE HAS arisen some confusion as to how to go about donating books to the facility library, and to have those books removed from one's property card, as well as the mailroom's list of allowed number of books. There is a form available in the libraries at Mule Creek State Prison for the asking, that will cover donations with Receiving and Release (R&R). It is a good idea to have a second copy made and have it sent to the mailroom, since staff there are also keeping a number count of how many books you have received through the mail. This only applies to paperback books, as hardbound books are still routed to R&R for issuance to prisoners.

You have to request from the librarian that they send two copies, one each, to R&R and the mailroom for paperback books. You should only need one for any hardback books. Any form sent to R&R or the mailroom by a prisoner will not be honored, as they have to be sent directly by the librarian with their signature to be official.

You should already be aware of the fact that incarcerated citizens are allowed 10 periodicals (newspapers, books, magazines). Keeping R&R and the mailroom officially notified with that form will save you a lot of frustration later.

Sources: Law Library Donation form, CCR Title 15 §3134.1

The Financial Corner



By C. Robertson,
Post Columnist

WE WILL CONTINUE our blueprint for successfully planning and managing your savings. We previously discussed three categories of saving to include short-term, point-saving, and long-term. Our focus in part three was point-saving, and now we will begin the final category: long-term saving.

When we think of saving for the long-term, most of us think of retirement. For most people, relying solely on the Social Security system for retirement provides them with a much lower quality of life than they had in their working years, and the program is not guaranteed to be available in the future. Keep this in mind, along with the reality that many other things — such as starting a business, paying for college or weddings for your kids and grandkids, leaving an inheritance, donating to important causes, etc. — may be just as important to us as retirement itself. So let's take a holistic approach to our long-term savings goal, and from the perspective of the wealth we need to accumulate in a worst-case scenario, to not only be able to fund our daily living expenses, but to satisfy the financial demands we may encounter later in life.

There is no one-size-fits-all financial plan to reach your long-term savings goal, even when your dollar figure (\$1 million, for example) is the same as someone else's. A good financial plan is customized to you, and begins with a thorough analysis of what we will call your personal financial demographics (PFDs):

- Your long-term savings goal in dollars
- Current age
- Current net worth/current holdings
- Current budget
- Number of years you will commit to the goal
- The personality type and spending habits of the person involved

This last one is a consideration that I have included personally when dealing with clients in the past, but is not typical among financial planners.

By and large, financial planning professionals will typically include your preferred risk tolerance as a part of your analysis, or later recommend a particular product to you for reasons outside the scope of this article. But I like to take a more practical approach of letting your PFDs determine the risk you should tolerate, and the financial products that are aligned with that risk, to help give you the best shot at reaching your long-term savings goal, and on time. It is important to understand the general relationship between risk and return. Generally speaking, *low risk = low return*, and *high risk = high return*. If after a financial analysis, it is determined that the level of risk or return that you require to hit your long-term goal is intolerable or impractical for you, then you need to adjust your "long-term savings goal in dollars" to a more tolerable and practical dollar figure. You have to approach your financial goals in an intentional and sensible way that is grounded in reality. It is not realistic to achieve a 50-percent return on investment year after year. The reality is many people will not hit their ideal savings goal in dollars, but will rather have to figure out what financial goal is realistic for them, and then find creative ways to adjust their lifestyle to accommodate their financial reality.

There are many financial professionals such as myself that you can meet with to come up with a customized financial plan, and there are many websites and phone applications that can help you for free.

In the next column, we will breakdown the personal financial demographics (PFDs) so you can gain insight on what type of long-term goal in dollars is right for you.

Criminon offers a correspondence course covering common sense issues designed to broaden insight surrounding rehabilitation and self-awareness. Write for more information:

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Business & Finances

ENTREPRENEUR'S
WORKSHOP

By Leah Ward-Lee
Post Columnist

Your Personal Finances (pt. 9)

HAVING LOOKED AT our monthly obligations and income, let's compare the two. Subtract your monthly expenses from your monthly income. If what you have coming in doesn't equal what you have going out, you need to do something about it.

Close the Financial Gap

If you need an additional source of income to meet your monthly obligations, your starting point needs to be either a part-time job or a product or service you're capable of providing with very little financial investment.

If you decide to get a part-time job, consider taking one working in the type of business you want to start. If you can't find something in the type of business you want to start, consider a job in the type of venue where your products or services will be sold. You can also consider working part-time in a business that attracts customers in your target market.

Review your current schedule to determine what hours you have available. A word of caution: don't make the mistake I've made of trying to work seven days a week to make that number of hours.

Leah Ward-Lee is an international business consultant for the airlines and aerospace industries, community activist, social justice advocate, and entrepreneurial trainer. LWL Enterprises Inc. provides scholarships for disadvantaged minorities and underserved demographics such as prisoners. She volunteers for Defy Ventures, a prison entrepreneurial training program, and provides pro bono counseling for aspiring small business startups.



Build and Protect Your Credit Like the Pros

Credit Bureau Rejection
By Carolyn Warren, Post Columnist

HAVE YOU EVER received a letter from one of the credit bureaus that says this?

We received a recent request regarding your credit information that does not appear to have been sent directly by you or to be authorized by you. As a precautionary measure, we have not taken any action on your alleged request. According to the federal Fair Credit Reporting Act, "If the completeness or accuracy of any item of information contained in a consumer's file at a national consumer credit reporting company is disputed by the consumer and the consumer notifies the company of such dispute, the company shall reinvestigate free of charge." Therefore, you can dispute any inaccurate information directly with Experian for free.

If you believe information in your personal credit report is inaccurate or incomplete, call us at the phone number 833-421-3400 or visit our secure web site to upload your documents at: www.experian.com/dispute.

If So, Here's Why ...

They believe that the dispute letter was not sent by you, personally, therefore, they are rejecting the request.

Here's What to Do Next ...

First, make sure you are not sending disputes on someone else's behalf. Don't help a friend or family member by sending letters for them. DIY credit repair must be done by the individual. They may choose to hire a professional service, but that is another topic.

It is illegal to order a credit report on someone else without a permissible purpose, such as a lender, landlord, insurance agent, or employer checking for credit-worthiness — and even then they must have your written permission to do so. Therefore, if you can't order your friend's credit report, it follows that you can't dispute your friend's credit report. That's what's behind the rejection letter.

But what if you got that letter and it was really you disputing for yourself? That can be annoying and maddening.

Here's What You Can Do Next ...

1. Send a letter with your handwritten signature that matches the signature on your ID. Include a copy of your ID. If you can send several different IDs, that is even better and more persuasive.
2. At the top of your letter, handwrite "Sent by me personally!"
3. Change the header "Dear" to something unconventional and non-business-y, such as "Hello" or "To the esteemed representatives at Experian." LOL
4. Change the sign-off from "Sincerely" to something non business-y, such as "Have a tremendous day." "Peace," "Namaste," or even "Thank you in advance for your prompt personal attention."

That should assuage the credit bureau's suspicions about the sincerity of the letter. Good luck, and do what the pros do; they continue on, never giving up.

Carolyn Warren is the author of Amazon's bestselling *Repair Your Credit Like the Pros*. She is passionate about saving people money and helping people reach their dream of home ownership.

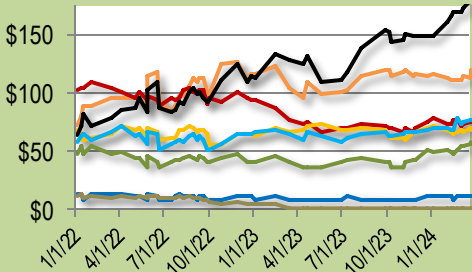
Build and
Protect
Your Credit
Like the Pros™

Go from beginner to expert,
raise your credit score, and
secure your finances

Carolyn Warren
Bestselling author of *Repair Your Credit Like the Pros*™

Financial Corner Tracking Stocks (From Jan. 1, 2023 to Mar. 18, 2024)

● Apollo Comm. Real Est. Fin. Inc. (ARI)	\$10.76 → \$11.15	+3.6%
● ConocoPhillips (COP)	\$117.00 → \$120.04	+2.6%
● CVS Health Corp. (CVS)	\$93.19 → \$77.40	-16.9%
● Edison International (EIX)	\$63.62 → \$38.80	-39.0%
● Lumen Technologies (LUMN)	\$5.22 → \$1.57	-69.9%
● Marathon Petroleum Corp. (MPC)	\$112.00 → \$193.84	+73.1%
● ONEOK Inc. (OKE)	\$65.90 → \$77.00	+16.8%
● Wells Fargo & Co. (WFC)	\$41.29 → \$57.51	+39.3%



Creative Arts Program

What the caterpillar calls the end, the rest of the world calls a butterfly.

— Lao-tzu

Creating a New Vision

S. Martin Williams,
Production Editor

RECENTLY, THE FORMER members of Blackberry Jam got together and re-structured the best elements of that project into a new group: The Vision. While the name is new, the commitment of the talented members is the same, and incorporates an even more solid hope in the power of music over prison. “At one time, we all had a difference of opinion, a different vision,” said singer Robert Taylor. “We all have the same vision now.”

Sean “Sharif” Neal wants to make it clear that this isn’t his first rodeo. Born in Chicago and raised in California, he’s been around music, and musicians, his whole life. His father was a musician with a clean falsetto, but his whole family sang as well. He sang with a group called Chills that nearly got him signed to an rhythm and blues label. Fellow singer Dawaun King had a similar upbringing, with an accomplished musician father who taught him to play a variety of instruments, and how to respect music over ego.

“I love each musician like we were brothers,” King says of his fellow bandmates, who share his sense of musical respect. “We butt heads, but we smooth it out. All that matters is making good music.” Making good music plays into their collective purpose: to take their listeners out of prison for a short time, and give their own lives purpose. This always requires a balanced sense of self in a group of talented people. “No one person’s ambitions should go ahead of the whole,” explained Neal.

Jeremiah Jones isn’t one of the singers, but is recognized by all as the managing force that keeps the band focused and on mission. Even so, he rejects any notion that it’s “his” band. He’s an accomplished keyboardist with a lot of knowledge about music. The Vision, for him, is

about four extremely talented singers bringing their own vision into view. Like the others, his musical background began in childhood, predominantly around gospel music. “I grew up in church all my life. Now that I’m here, I want to use my gifts to glorify God.”

“I want to be around something great,” says singer Kevin Davis, who at 61 is the oldest member of the band. He can also play bass and keyboard, and writes gospel music as well. “These guys are very impressive to me.”

Taylor, one of the four singers, says his mother Jazzy was his musical inspiration, and uses music now as a way to “Move forward in life.” He describes the organic process The Vision uses to decide which songs are performed. He picks songs for each artist that he feels best fits that artist, and which highlight the differences they possess; but there is also a pitch process, where the singers sing to Jones the pieces they want to lead. If Jones likes it, it’s in.

Singers are not all that it takes to make The Vision. Gerald McKoy is their guitarist as well as their youngest member. All the members of the band feel strongly about McKoy being in the group. “He has an awesome gift, a natural ear,” said Neal, and the other members agree. Sitting at a set of bongos and a conga is usually Alonso Dearaujo. He wants to make sure others understand that the nickname “Donkey” is not to be taken negatively; it signifies his ability to carry burdens.

“When we practice it takes us away from this place,” Dearaujo says of the rehearsal experience. “We don’t feel like we’re in prison.”

I got to be a part of that rehearsal experience one Saturday when I was invited to sit and listen. While waiting for the whole group, McKoy was playing with loop effects on the loop machine while Davis fingered the bongos; Taylor was working out something on the keys. When Jones arrived he began setting up the keys through the loop machine; without a drummer or bass they have to make do with keyboard effects and the addition of Dearaujo’s percussion. Once the singers assembled, the vibe changed. It’s time to go to work.

For an hour the harmonies gripped the little music room of the Facility E gym as clear and solid as any professional studio. Jones kept the energy up, kept the voices from competing, exercised the golden mean of rehearsal with the word “again.” The singers supported each other, made way for each other’s leads, and remarkably sang a piece for the first time as if they’d been singing it for weeks. The high point was a rendition of Brian McKnight’s “Anytime,” which stood so well on its own it could have been their original. McKoy’s guitar carried rhythm and leads throughout, but his freshness to the experience was clear. Even so, he spoke about it poetically.

“As one candle shines bright,” he said, “many candles make a bright light.”

The Vision shines on. They perform at yard shows, and are about to do a video for the institutional channel at Mule Creek State Prison. The schedule for future performances is unclear, but they will continue to develop and grow as musicians and as people who have found the gift of creating beauty for others.



Ocean Wave, © 2021 Jose Herrera, acrylic

Creative Arts Program Facility E Hobby Room	
Creative Writing	Tue 12:30-2 pm
Poetry	Tue 2-3:30 pm
Graphic Arts	Tue 2-3:30 pm
Graphic Arts	Tue 6:30-8 pm
Graphic Arts	Wed 9-11 am
Guitar	Wed 9-10:30 am
Guitar	Wed 11-12:30 pm
Intensive Journal	Wed 2-3:30 pm



Eyes, © 2022 Cherie Hacker, acrylic

Out of the Shadows

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

“THOSE WITH PC 290 convictions experience lower parole grants than the overall population, primarily due to ... lack of programming for 290 individuals,” reported the *California Lifer Newsletter* last April.

In the mental health department of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, when a patient asks for sex offender therapy, they are told something like, “We don’t provide those services here.” At the same time, the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH) usually requires that a person convicted of a PC §290 offense, once denied suitability, must seek sex offender treatment before the next board appearance, thereby creating a Catch-22.

This is not the only disparity brought to the fore by the actions of the parole board. In much of the questioning by the parole commissioners and in the comprehensive risk assessment process, PC §290 registrants are repeatedly asked about their chances of reoffending based on an assumption that those with sex offenses cannot control themselves. This assumption is based upon a Department of Justice figure that 80 percent of sex offenders will reoffend — a figure that is blatantly and provably untrue. The vast majority of people who have committed sex offenses return to prison for technical violations of parole conditions, not for new offenses, which illustrates the unjust and ultimately dangerous demonization of sex offenders.

In a September 2017 edition of the *New York Times*, David Feige said about sex offender laws:

A few years ago, Ira Ellman, a legal scholar affiliated with the Center for the Study of Law and Society at the University of California, Berkeley, and the researcher Tara Ellman set out to find the source of that 80 percent figure, and what he found shocked him. As it turns out, the court found that number in a brief signed by Solicitor General Ted Olson. The brief cited a Department of

Justice manual, which in turn offered only one source for the 80 percent assertion: a *Psychology Today* article published in 1986.

The article was not written by a scientist but by a treatment provider who claimed to essentially cure sex offenders through innovative “aversion therapies” including electric shocks and pumping ammonia into offenders’ noses via nasal cannulas. The article offered no backup data, no scientific control group and no real way to fact-check any of the assertions made to promote the authors program.

Nonetheless, because the 80 percent figure suited the government lawyers’ aim of cracking down on sex offenders, Solicitor General Olson cited it, and Justice Anthony Kennedy, seemingly without fact-checking it, adopted the figure in a 2002 opinion that Justices William Rehnquist, Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas joined. (Justice Sandra Day O’Conner concurred.) Their decision blew open the doors to the glut of sex offender restrictions that followed.

But in the 30 years since that *Psychology Today* article was published, there have been hundreds of evidence-based, scientific studies on the question of the recidivism rate for sex offenders. The results of those studies are astonishingly consistent: Convicted sex offenders have among the lowest rates of same-crime recidivism of any category of offender. ...

Indeed a study by the California Department of Corrections (and Rehabilitation) concluded that 91 percent of sex offenders returned to California prisons were returned for (these) technical violations, while only 1.8 percent were returned as a result of having committed a new sex crime. In short, the entire scheme of registration and restriction that the Supreme Court condoned 15 years ago in *McKune v. Lile* has done enormous violence to a huge number of Americans now branded as sex offenders.

Being quoted in a Supreme Court decision has allowed this baseless assertion become fact.



One of the saddest things about the severe restrictions applied to sex offenders is that they are a wedge in the door. Once a restriction or requirement is applied to one segment of the convicted population — and after constitutional challenges, allowed to remain in place — that same regulation could be applied to other types of offenders without further judicial or legislative action. This creates a situation where the regulations and restrictions that are passed specifically for sex offenders may then affect entire populations after being introduced as

“common sense” laws to prevent sex offenses through keeping track of and (in many cases) punishing sex offenders.

California has had a sex offender registry since 1947, and ankle monitors have been mandated since the mid-2000s as a means of tracking sex offenders; however, once the constitutionality of these conditions were upheld, gang members, arsonists, and other groups of offenders have been forced to register and in some cases wear ankle monitors.

Make no mistake: Sex offenses are heinous crimes that create great harm in the lives of all involved. However, people who commit these offenses are not broken forever, and are worth as much as anyone else; they are not beyond recovery. If they were, there would no industry focused on reforming sex offenders, and the BPH could not legally make a requirement of sex offender treatment a condition for finding suitability.

There does seem to be something disingenuous in the board making sex offender treatment a requirement for a grant of suitability, while the mental health system of the department does not offer said treatment.

According to a Legislative Analyst’s Office recent estimate, it costs approximately \$100,000 per year to house a prisoner in a California state prison, and close to \$200,000 per year to keep a paroled sex offender in the Sexually Violent Predator Program at Coalinga State Hospital. This money might be better spent keeping the public safe from new sex offenders, not punitively keeping someone in custody who has served their prison sentence. Or, in the case of lifers found suitable for parole, by not requiring them to wear a scarlet letter for the rest of their lives.

In general, people who have committed acts of sexual violence should have a higher level of law enforcement presence in their lives. The problem comes about when the treatment of any group of people becomes a vehicle for political gain. As so many communities learned in the 1980s and 90s, getting tough on crime often means getting back at individuals who commit certain categories of crimes demonized in the headlines today, with disastrous effects tomorrow.

In most recovery programs available to incarcerated people in California, the phrase, “Hurt people hurt people” is oft repeated. If we accept this premise, why

(continued on page 30)

(from *Out of the Shadows*, pg. 29)

do we ignore the damage to some of society's worst offenders early in their lives? Here are a couple of things society can do:

- Prevent sex offenses from happening in the first place.
- Work with those who have sexually assaulted others to ensure they not reoffend, but also ensure offenders of all types are given the best chance to succeed during and after prison.

Doing this does not ignore the need for accountability and responsibility. Instead, many recovery groups find that any approach to address all offenders must rely on accountability and responsibility. And apology.

Loud and Dangerous

One of the effects of loud and public displays of vitriol around sex offenses is that sometimes a person who has been victimized will not step forward because they feel responsible for being assaulted in the first place, and sometimes as a result of these same expressions of rage. Because they want to avoid further harm, some stay silent. This keeps victims isolated, and enables offenders to remain active and to create more harm.

The point is most sex offenders currently incarcerated are programming; People with sex-based offenses are taking part in recovery groups like Alcoholics Anonymous, Awareness Into Domestic Abuse, Breaking Barriers, Center for Council, Criminals & Gangmembers Anonymous, Guiding Rage Into Power, Narcotics Anonymous, Partnership for Reentry Program, Self-Awareness & Recovery, Victims Awareness Offender's Program, and others. By doing so, they are getting varying levels of rehabilitation through taking what applies to them and their specific circumstances. They are working to change what they can about how they see themselves and the world, how they engage with others and themselves, working to become healthy and productive citizens in their communities.

Source: *California Lifer Newsletter*, April 2023.

Phoning Fiji: A 28-Year Struggle

By Jason Davis, Feature Reporter
and Daniel Quintero, Spanish Reporter



FROM THE POLYNESIAN Islands of the Republic of Fiji, where 333 individual islands are spread across 200,000 square miles of the southern Pacific Ocean, Mule Creek State Prison resident Mustaq Ali Kahn was born on the main Island of Viti Levu, in the city of Sigatoka. As one of 11 children, Kahn grew up on a farm, in a large home full of love. He fondly recalls memories of his mother, now 93 years old. "My mom makes me laugh," said Kahn.

Kahn left Fiji in 1994 to meet his new wife in the U.S. This would be the first time in 24 years he had been away from the island. As the tradition in his family and culture, he always obeys his parents, as this was an arranged marriage. He drove trucks and worked odd jobs to provide for his new family, yet despite his best efforts, he could not please his American wife. Kahn longed for home.

Back home on their farm they raised chickens, goats, cows, and grew fruits and vegetables all around the home. Everyone had a job to do, yet no one complained. They were a close family where everyone was encouraged to stay in the home. In his culture, children grow into adulthood in the family home. When his family would celebrate, Kahn said, "A goat is not enough to feed my family, we need a cow."

Everything seemed to revolve around his mother. "My mom raised us with love and care," Kahn said. When two orphans were brought to their home, his family took them in as their own, giving them a place to live and be loved. "My mom is pure love," he said. "I was taught growing up you love and respect the one that gave you life. Heaven is at the feet of your mom."

Shortly after arriving in the U.S., Kahn made a reprehensible choice one night that resulted in a sentence of life without parole, and, as it turns out, a life without being able to hear his mom's voice. "My mom and I used to talk every day, from morning to night," he said. For 28 years now, Kahn has not been able to call home to the Fiji Islands; the phone system through ViaPath (formerly Global Tel*Link) will not make the connection.

Kahn has brought his concerns many times to counselors, administration, and ViaPath regarding his inability to connect with his family in Fiji. This has been independently verified through counselors and administration. Yet, he is still unable to call home on the tablet, the building phone, or through the kiosk.

ViaPath representatives were reached on Khan's behalf by the administration. They informed the prison that Kahn would need to get a message to those he was calling and have them contact their phone company. Specifically, he was directed to tell his family to interact with their local phone company and ask to "whitelist" the phone number these calls originated from. They did; however, calls will still not go through.

The problem remains unresolved. He is able to call family residing in Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, but still cannot connect a call to the Fiji Islands. This situation is frustrating at the least, and maddening at worst. With an aging mother, he wonders how much time is left to connect with the one person he holds dearest in his heart. Kahn continues his struggle to phone home.

Postscriptum

THIS MONTH, THE residents of the Central California Women's Facility in Chowchilla inaugurated a media center, marking the first media program for female prisoners in the state.

The grand opening was filled with excitement, but also with tears of joy and gratitude. One attendee was a retired warden who had spent over a decade trying to create a media presence at the prison; this month's event was truly a celebration for her.

While it may seem simple, this was no small feat. During this month for contemplating important women in history, let's not forget the challenges faced by women even in the present day. It was not so long ago (within a few decades) that women in America weren't allowed credit cards or a mortgage; it was only 100 years ago when they were allowed to vote. And these facts come from "The Land of the Free"; in countries throughout the world, women still cannot drive, vote, hold property, choose a spouse, or go to school.

Take a moment to celebrate the women in your life this month. Not just for what they've done for you, but for what they've had to overcome to do it.

-JC, Editor-in-Chief