

DEAR GOD...

Dorothy Maraglino offers a heart-breaking appeal to God

Page 22

YOU'VE GOT TO SEE THESE...

View the photo gallery of poets from around the world for World Poetry Day

Pages 17-19

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To Our Readers

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

YOUR MARCH MULE Creek Post features first-time contributors like Dorothy Maraglino from CCWF (pages 16 & 22) and poet Natalye Childress all the way from Germany (pg. 28). Mark Daigre dives into shame (pg. 6); author and educator Lara Gualarte shares the benefits of writing poetry (pg. 28); feature reporter Bob Gay escapes through forgiveness (pg. 19); and Manny Mendoza's journey through the California prison system is chronicled (pg. 16).

No matter where you are, we invite you to share your stories, insights, and perspectives. Submission guidelines are on page 8.

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Warden Patrick Covello, James Whitmire, Linda McRae, and Arts In Corrections instructor Jim Carlson at the Mule Creek State Prison in early 2020. (A. Gonzalez / Public Information Officer)

It's Not All at San Quentin

By Marty Williams, Production Editor

IN MY LONG career as a CDCR resident, the majority of it was dedicated to working in the Arts In Corrections program at the California State Prison-Sacramento (SAC). I worked for an amazing human being and mentor, Jim Carlson, who had dedicated himself to rehabilitation through the arts long before CDCR put the "R" in CDC. While San Quentin deservedly gets the spotlight for innovation and diversity in programs and events, I was witness to, and recipient of, two decades of Carlson bringing in extraordinary artists, poets, and musicians through SAC's grey walls, unknown to the rest of the world. Apparently, our spotlight was broken.

World famous guitar player Tommy Emmanuel came to SAC five times, once with jazz guitarist Martin Taylor; Michael Franti and Spearhead gave a rousing concert in the chapel, headlining a handful of local and visiting artists, while filming a video as well. Rosanne Cash, contrary to what you may have heard, had her debut at SAC, not Old Folsom, on Facility C in the library, after a 10-year hiatus; she wanted to debut at Old Folsom, but was denied. Norton Buffalo, world-renowned harmonica player and part of the Steve Miller band, not only performed at SAC, but also gave several instructional workshops. Mellissa Mitchell and her group One Soul came to SAC annually all the way from Alaska; from Alaska also came Buddy Tabor, singer-songwriter and a state treasure to Alaska, who sadly passed away in 2012. Edgardo Cambon, internationally recognized percussionist (he was in Carlos Santana's band for almost a decade), gave workshops for several years in Latin percussion, and brought his Bay Area-based band Candella to SAC, complete with horn section. Henry Robinette is well known to generations of prisoners as a dedicated teacher, and gave numerous performances as well as supporting prisoners' original recordings. Molly Holmes, who recorded with Bobby McFerrin and many others, and was an amazing jazz singer and teacher, taught and performed for years at SAC, forming a racially integrated jazz choir on Facility B in the '90s.

The People's Choir of Sweden, 50 voices of all ages, came all

(continued on page 2)



Certified Guitar Player Tommy Emmanuel (Wikipedia.org)



The amazing Norton Buffalo (HarmonicaBlog.com)



(from It's Not All At San Quentin, pg. 1)

the way from Europe to perform an original choral piece based on the poetry of Spoon Jackson, who was at SAC at the time. Linda McCrae, master of Americana music, came several times over the years, as well as earth-goddess and California muse Diane Patterson.

Blues harpist and consummate soulman Rick Estrin brought the nationally famous Little Charlie and the Night Cats to perform, and held several harmonica clinics. Mark von Wagenbingen, bassist for Tower of Power and Aretha Franklin, gave several bass guitar workshops, and the Fish from Country



Little Charlie and the Nightcats (Alligator.com)



Martin Taylor (Wikipedia.org)

people there pushed boundaries, took risks, and created amazing opportunities for both the incarcerated and outside artists to share, teach one another, and be human.



Michael Franti and Spearhead (MichaelFranti.com)



Percussionist Edgardo Cambon (sfcv.org)

Joe and the Fish performed with his blues band, using an incarcerated bass player when his original one couldn't make it. International bass violinist and social activist Dobbs played many times over the years, performing Bach cello pieces adapted to the bass violin, and telling outrageous stories. Zoe Boekbinder not only performed, but collected works by prisoner writers and musicians, sharing them with Annie Defranco and Jack White, leading to a number of original pieces getting recorded by those artists. Local poet Tony Montoya gave an all-day workshop at a writing class, and Nuyorican Poets Café founder Piri Tomas came all the way from

New York to share with and listen to incarcerated poets. There were a lot more.

San Quentin has done brilliantly in bringing real-world communities together in the arts, and nothing could diminish that. But it should be remembered that other prisons and the dedicated



Roseanne Cash (Wikipedia.org)



THE MULE CREEK POST
MISSION STATEMENT
AND STAFF

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

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California Model



Making California Correctional History

By O. Rick Bridges, Feature Reporter

IN SEPTEMBER 2024, SUM Bible College & Theological Seminary celebrated its historic inauguration at the Mule Creek State Prison (MCSP) Facility E. The college seminary is an accredited baccalaureate (BA) program. Considering the now long-running California State University, Sacramento communication studies bachelor's program, this facility and its community of incarcerated students are now able to apply to, enroll in, and attend two BA college satellite campuses.

The acting director of the SUM program is Brendan Bagnell — who is also the director of admissions for all of the SUM California campuses. In sharing some of the specifics about his role at the MCSP program, Bagnell rather humbly points to the fact that SUM is the first accredited four-year seminary in the history of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Bagnell describes his immediate role and purpose as facilitating all of the logistics, administration, and structures required to adjust classes to this environment. He also ensures that the contents of the classes' curriculum are adjusted for the unique student contexts.

Upon further reflection — in a subsequent interview with the *Post*, Bagnell stated:

A lot of what we do for our traditional students may not be practically applied here. We want to make sure that the assignments are practical in relating to the type of hands-on ministry that we're going to introduce the students to here, to be both credible messengers and serve as a positive influence to the Mule Creek residential community.

Bagnell outlined a process through which SUM is bringing its seminary students into the light of ministry. The school wants to modify and expand upon its students' past experiences — or what we here would loosely refer to as their "street cred" — to make them credible

messengers of the transformative power of the gospel.

Bagnell credited Burl Cain and SUM for all of their efforts in wanting to start this type of program in a California prison setting for over 10 years. He smiles as he recalls that:

All of a sudden, I'm right here in the middle of it. I had to ask myself: What am I doing here? How did this happen? I really have really kind of gone along for the ride, not realizing the enormity of the program until I met with Burl Cain and some of the other leaders. That's when I realized what a privilege it is for me to be involved in this, talking with our 23 incarcerated students, listening to their stories of how God sovereignly orchestrated their journeys to intersect here. My heart is to help them to be agents of change so that it's not just the 23 experiencing transformed lives, but that they become agents of change for the other residents of the Mule Creek community.

Bagnell remembers that he attended three important meetings to advance the SUM program to its inauguration day. First was the meeting before the meeting — which included the final planning. Second was the meeting — which was the inaugural event itself. Third was the meeting after the meeting — a debriefing in Facility E chapel with the secretary and director of corrections:

I think in that moment, for me, I could really see the power and potential of what's possible here at Mule Creek. What a great testimony to the power and presence of God, right here, right now, in order to bring about the ultimate goal, which is transformation of a [toxic and dysfunctional] culture. I don't think I've ever in my life been involved in something so impactful as what I'm witnessing and what I'm doing here. I absolutely love every minute of it. And, I know every one of those guys at the table that night love every minute. They are 100% committed to making sure this is successful.

When he leaves the MCSP campus in the afternoons, Brendan Bagnell returns to his work at SUM's main office. His work there requires collaboration with the entire faculty, many of whom attended the September inauguration at MCSP. "They were here on Saturday and they were just completely blown away at what they saw," he happily reports.

They were so excited to hear about what was going on at Mule Creek. That just tells me once again how much the power of God is being manifest here, but also that others are seeing it as well. It's that everybody who hears the story is absolutely amazed at what's happening. They're rooting for this program to succeed.

Overwhelming

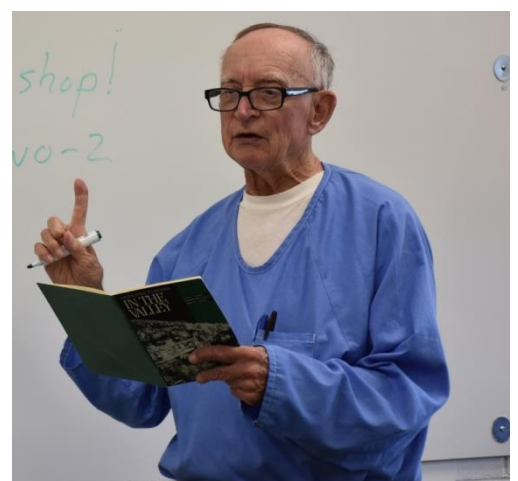
By Donald Domelle,
Mule Creek State Prison

WHO WOULD HAVE dreamed that each prisoner would have his own personal tablet? Not only that, but he can call people on it. Now this will overwhelm you: Each prisoner can have video visits with family and friends.

Maybe it's because I'm older than most (84), but in the years I have been in prison, I would have never dreamed that I would have my own tablet in my cell, and it is all legal. Now, isn't that overwhelming? I can remember, not so many years ago, they had trained dogs come into our cells to sniff out illegal cell phones.

Today, we can glean from these tablets so many programs for our enjoyment and education. We have telephones, texts that we can get from the outside, video visits, calculators, dictionaries, law library, movies, news, music, and the Edovo app that has a wealth of material we can program into that is educational. Video games lovers can play games throughout the night if you want. The list goes on. You can even get this article on the tablet through the *Mule Creek Post*. Now isn't all of that overwhelming?

I have found that these tablets have helped me to take a lot of stress out of my life. If I need to talk to a family member, regardless of where they live, I can communicate with them. I don't know about you, but I know it sure has helped me. Isn't that overwhelming? Let's be thankful for these sources to help our time in prison be a little less stressful. We should all be overwhelmed by this special gift, and let it overwhelm us.



Donald Domelle (H. Kim / Media Specialist)



(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

Land Together on Facility D

By Fred Munch, Post Columnist

RICHARD STEWART DID not know what to expect when he joined what is now known as Land Together, a gardening program on Facility D. In his life before prison, he'd never planted anything. Yet, he'd done yard work and was interested in growing legal cannabis plants for the CBD oil business after his release.

Over the months in class, he liked learning about the soil and watching plants grow. He was especially interested in "ecological cooperation," the ways in which beneficial plants and insects work together for mutual defense against pests and disease. He also gained knowledge about the medicinal use of plants such as comfrey and calendula. Stewart's experiences in the garden gave him a sense of peace and unity with nature. He described the garden as a place of refuge amidst the concrete buildings and razor wire because it had a calming influence with its vibrancy of colors and smells.

Stewart described the project as, "An oasis in the desert," where people of different backgrounds can come together in a positive setting. It was "a piece of freedom," and a reminder of the natural world where a feeling of closeness to nature can help to change old negative attitudes and behavior. Stewart sees how the balance among various forms of life in the garden carry over to human interaction. He was proud to be helping people in need on the outside through a project to make herbal salve, which will be donated to a women's shelter through the efforts of Joanna Cote, one of the instructors. He was impressed with her willingness to work with the residents as a volunteer.

His most memorable moments in the class were spent feasting on the freshly harvested strawberries that were bursting with juice and flavor.

Dr. Mark Stoner

A Provoker of Original Thoughts and Ideas

By Jessie Moore, Mule Creek State Prison

HAVING THE HONOR to participate in a presentation for new professors teaching for California State University, Sacramento in the Transforming Outcomes Project at Sac State (TOPSS) at the Mule Creek State Prison, I was afforded the opportunity to meet Dr. Mark Stoner, a revered and distinguished communications professor with a multitude of academic accolades.

From our initial encounter, it was easily determined that he intended to challenge his students as if they were on Sac State's main campus. As a teacher's aide in Facility E's education department, I had the opportunity to witness Stoner implement his intentions within his course curriculum. What transpired was astounding. As Stoner challenged his students, he cultivated a supportive learning environment that allowed students to challenge themselves academically. What ensued was students challenging their overall thoughts; yet, the most captivating aspect of this occurrence was the value placed on our ability to adapt and apply knowledge from real-life experiences.

Oftentimes, our thought patterns are predicated on the things we experience in our formative years. Thus, we adopt our mindset from our environmental settings and the people we encounter within these settings. In the time allotted to us in correctional settings, we develop some deeper sense of individuality. This individuality is what propels us to analyze how we think and the way we think. How we think involves the mental process of combining information in ways that make it useful or beneficial; it encompasses the practicality and application of information. The way we think embodies the perceptions or perspectives that are developed from the valuation that influences our view and value of information. When Stoner sought out to elicit original thought from his students, he made sure to emphasize the difference between analytic intelligence (academic proficiency involving abstract planning, focused attention, and remembering concepts) and practical intelligence (understanding the specific skillset needed to overcome challenges that appear). Many scholars refer to practical knowledge as "street smarts" and proclaim that it cannot be taught as it comes from "the school of hard knocks." The practical knowledge we possess, which enables us to assess real-life problems in real time, represents how we think and is invaluable as it comes from experience.

Stoner set out to provoke original thought within his class. However, what occurred was an entire community analyzing their innermost thoughts to procure original ideas. By challenging our thoughts, we engage in being open-minded which bestows the ability to incorporate new knowledge into our thought patterns. The hindrance of individual manifestation allows for an external perspective to be ingrained in our everyday thought patterns, which disrupts the development of thinking, depriving us of deep thought. Our transformation is dependent on our thought patterns, therefore, our thought process should undergo logical scrutiny in order to purify our perceptions and perspectives. Our living amends is contingent on self-development and self-development requires that we pursue knowledge. Attainment of knowledge is only beneficial to our communities, and society abroad, through its application. It is only by original thought that our words are transformed into advocates, and even activists, transcending the limits of time.

Today, these very words inspire generations. Tomorrow, they shall exist to inspire even more. By highlighting our practical knowledge, hope is given to all of us in need and in doubt. For knowledge, in collaboration with original thought, provides pathways for meaningful change. Meaningful change encompasses us utilizing our experiences to apply new knowledge. The application of new knowledge yields wisdom. Wisdom begets freedom.



Source: Kathleen S. Berger, *The Developing Person: Through the Life Span* (11th ed.), 2021.



The Wordsmith

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

ONCE AGAIN WE cover homophones, irksome words that sound like other words but with different meanings. Many spelling errors come from this confusion, so it's important to know the difference between them.

We've all had experience with the courts, and so there are some who confuse these two words: *bail* and *bale*. *Bail*, as a noun, means "money paid as security to be released from jail until trial"; as a verb, "to remove water from a vessel." *Bale* the noun means "a large bundle"; the verb, "to make into bales."

These next two words sound exactly the same when spoken, as in some definitions the *l* is silent in the first word: *balm* and *bomb*. *Balm* (a noun) means "a healing and soothing unguent." *Bomb* (also a noun) means "an explosive device," or as a verb "to throw or drop."

Another pair is often confused in writing: *better* and *bettor*. *Better* the adverb means "more than good"; the adjective "greater or superior"; the verb "to improve." *Bettor* is a noun meaning "a person that wagers."

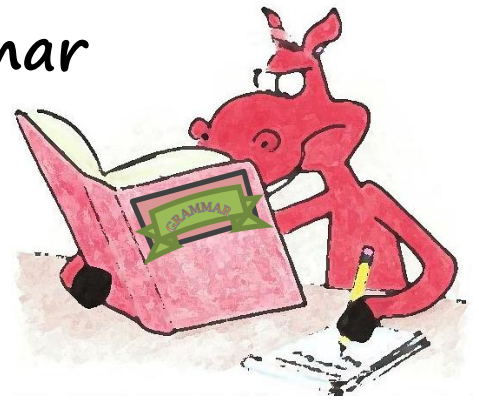
Here are two words often misused by printers of formal invitations: *bridal* and *bridle*. *Bridal* is an adjective meaning "of or about a bride or wedding." *Bridle* is a noun meaning "the head restraint for a horse"; the verb means "to control or hold."

These two words are among the 50 most-misused words: *capital* and *capitol*. *Capital* means "an uppercase letter or the seat of a government," or "money invested in a business." *Capitol* means the "building(s) where government meets."

Here are four words that also sound exactly the same: *carat*, *karat*, *caret*, and *carrot*. *Carat* means "the measure of how gemstones are weighed." *Karat* means "the measure of the purity of gold." *Caret* means "a mark, ^, used in printing and writing for locating where to insert something." *Carrot* means "an orange-colored root vegetable."

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

Big Red's Grammar Guide



GOOD WRITING BEGINS with the basics. Here in my grammar guide are more things a writer should know. Last month, we began a discussion of the first draft and the purpose of the writing. This month, we'll continue with our discussion.

It's important to remember that we can improve most nonfiction by using lots of specific examples or supporting details. Take a look at this sentence, written for an essay about an ideal vacation spot:

England is a good place to visit.

This sentence doesn't exactly make us want to pack our bags, does it? However, with a few details added, it becomes a workable sentence:

From the jam-packed boulevards of cosmopolitan London, to the barely wide enough cobblestone paths of ancient York, to the right-for-rambling lands of Lake District villages, olde England crooks its finger and beckons me.

Not only is it important that we know our purpose, we must also communicate it to our reader — preferably in our first few sentences. For example, reading the revised sentence about visiting England, we'd expect that the rest of the work would be about what a fascinating place England is to visit.

This sentence would be called our *thesis sentence* or *thesis statement*. If our writing format requires a thesis statement, keep in mind that every sentence of our work has to be connected to it in some way. After we've finished, look at each separate sentence or idea and ask if it is somehow related to our thesis statement. If it isn't, cross it out.

Next month, we'll talk about the audience for whom we are writing.

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

The Uncaged Writer

On the Writing Process

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter
and John Orr, Feature Reporter



FOR WRITERS OF all ilk and genres, the ability to communicate effectively with the reader, inspiring an emotional response, requires thoughtful contemplation and skillful execution. The unforgettable passage from a favorite book, an inspiring line from an insightful article or song, or the memorable scene from a movie were all born in the mind of the writer seeking to connect with an anonymous audience.

Technically, the writing process contains four distinctive phases: *planning*, *drafting*, *editing*, and *final version*:

Planning is a fundamental phase, the initial stage, formulating concepts and goals, identifying target audience, and establishing genre and structure. This includes discovering and producing various thoughts and developing an angle. Word count comes into play, and organizing paragraph structure to fit space constraints.

Drafting consists of consolidating opinions and data and organizing, scaffolding, and providing overall arrangement of the writing. This phase is actually beginning the piece, articulating one's thinking, and providing supplementary information into a first draft.

Editing and revision is reading again and again what one has written to correct any inaccuracies in flow, syntax, grammar, spelling and punctuation, fact checking, and reviewing the writing to determine if better and deeper things can be said more concisely.

A **final version** should begin to take form after the foregoing. Still, at times, a writer has to revisit elements and rework paragraphs and ideas, such as organizing thoughts and themes that rebel against organization; revisiting, reworking, and revising material that illuminate the dark corners of thought in the night — while wilting in the light of day. This can be a daunting prospect.

(continued on page 6)

(from *Uncaged Writer*, pg. 5)

Sometimes, ideas can be left adrift like an abandoned child in a crowded railway station. Other times, the loneliest phrases discovered in the most painful desolate places arrive unexpectedly as we stare into the abyss, our minds emptied, beckoning creative insight, standing on the side of the road “Busted flat in Baton Rouge, waitin’ on a train, feelin’ near as faded as my jeans” (“Me and Bobby McGee”).

New Form for Correcting Record Errors

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

A SEPTEMBER 2024 *Mule Creek Post* article described the discovery of serious errors in the “Social History” section of an incarcerated person’s medical records, and the complicated, two-year long grievance process involved in eventually correcting the inaccuracies. Now, a recently revealed CDCR Form 7236, Request to Amend Health Records, streamlines the investigation of your claim and, initially, avoids the laborious grievance procedure. The grievance process is still available as a last resort.

The *Post* first became aware of the form in October 2024, after an editor read the September article and, in preparation for his upcoming parole board hearing, scanned his medical files and located several egregious errors. His notification to the medical records department resulted in the CDCR 7236 document sent to him. The six-page form clearly describes the new procedures. The form declared its initial issuance in May 2023.

A Nov. 14, 2024, request to clarify the lack of an official announcement for the “new” 7236 form went unanswered. The Mule Creek State Prison Facility E librarian states that she received notification (via email) of the existence of the 7236 form on Nov. 13, 2024. The document is now available from Medical Records and the library.

It is advisable to request copies of your own “Social History” section of your medical history to verify accuracy. Read the September 2024 *Post* article for more information.

The 15-month delay in an-

nouncing availability of this official form is unusual. The 7236 launch, just after exposure of these issues in the September 2024 *Mule Creek Post* article, may be an example of the power of the press.

A Further Dive into Shame

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

IN RICHARD ROHR’s 2020 book, *The Wisdom Pattern: Order, Disorder, Reorder*, he puts forth what is commonly called “original sin” in Bible-based belief systems. It could more accurately be described as original shame, because it wasn’t the act of eating the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge that caused the issues attached to original sin, but rather the experience of shame that came from that knowledge.

Rohr, a minister and counselor, describes how many people who come to him for counseling or confession hold the same shame-based belief: “If people only knew the things I think, the things I’ve done, the things I’ve said and the things I want to do, who would love me?” Then he explains everybody has feelings of fundamental unworthiness, a belief that says, “I am essentially bad.” This is not to be confused with guilt, which says, “I have done bad.”

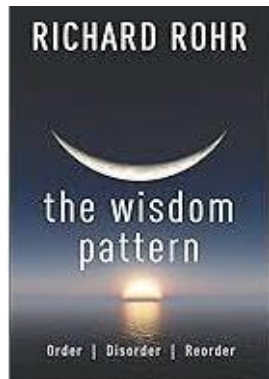
Rohr continues, “Shame — foundational shame, at least — has to do with our very being. It is not resolved by changing behaviors as much as by changing our very self-image, our alignment with the universe. Shame is not about what we do, but where we abide.”

The root word for *shame* comes from Greek and means “to cover.” Feelings of shame are rooted in feelings that some essential part of our self needs to be covered or hidden.

Today, everything we know about guilt versus shame, everything from the teachings of Brené Brown to Richard Rohr, says that guilt is about actions we have committed or things we said, things that we can change or fix, either now through apology or in the future through changing how we act. It is through modifying behavior, changing the way we speak and how we treat others that we can deal with guilt. But to remove or deal with shame, we have to believe that we are essentially good, not evil or wrong.

Let’s go back into the book of Genesis and look at the story of Adam and Eve, after they recognize they are naked and God asks them, “Who told you that you were naked?” (Genesis 3:11). God then takes care of Adam and Eve by giving them clothing, whereby he gave them the means to deal with their nakedness, their shame.

Many people believe that if they change their behavior, everything will be okay. The world will begin to treat them differently and life will get easy. This has been proven false; in order to be okay, we need to change the way we think about our place in the world. We need to change not only the way we engage with ourselves, but also how we engage with the world.



Richard Rohr (Wikipedia.org)

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



Vignettes

Wheel of Misfortune
By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

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

THE CALIPATRIA STATE Prison is located in the Imperial Desert. Blazingly hot at least six months of the year, I was fortunate to work in the air-conditioned program office.

The officer and clerk interactions were sociable; officers openly shared the reasons to close the yard, whether for training or to escape the heat — a frequent occurrence, hated collectively by the incarcerated. We wanted yard time — hot or not.

On scorching days, a sympathetic sergeant sheltered his men from heat exposure by closing the yard when the temperature was expected to exceed 108 °F. On one of these days, an irritated laundry worker pointedly asked the sergeant why the yard was closing and he was being sent back to his cell. The sergeant kiddingly answered, “There is a large, helium-filled balloon flying loose with a child trapped inside headed our way. The yard is closed. Go home.” The inflatable incident was true, but occurring in Texas over 1,500 miles away.

Perpetuating the cordiality of the office, a program clerk used a pizza box and fabricated a cardboard spinning disk, adding multi-colored paper wedges to imitate the TV show “Wheel of Fortune.” The homemade device also had a pointer and the printed segments contained ready-made — mostly irrational — reasons for the yard to close: AVALANCHE RESCUE DRILLS; MIGRATORY BIRDS IN THE AREA; LIGHTNING STRIKES EXPECTED; PIRATES OR CHARGERS HOME GAME IN SAN DIEGO; or GOLF CART MAINTENANCE TRAINING. We labeled it the “Wheel of Misfortune.”

The wheel was enjoyed by all, until a visiting lieutenant walked in one day, saw the wheel, and asked, “Who put this up?” Nobody answered, so he tore it down.

Governments Fail to Use Commutation

By Naila Awan & Katie Rose Quandt, Prison Policy Initiative



ON APRIL 26, 2022, President Joe Biden used his executive powers to commute the federal sentences of 75 people — a first step toward addressing his campaign promise to release some individuals “facing unduly long sentences.” While this action was promising and life-altering for the 75 individuals, it took nearly 100 days into his second year in office to act on his promise and grant clemency to a single person. What’s more, many of the people receiving commutations were already released on home confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and all were convicted of nonviolent drug offenses.

The president has the power to grant commutations to large categories of people in federal prisons independently — without any action by Congress, the Department of Justice, or a third party. Despite this broad power, most U.S. presidents in the era of mass incarceration have been hesitant to use it.

In 2021, at the request of advocates working on clemency reform in the Northeast, the Prison Policy Initiative submitted records requests to eight northeastern states seeking information about their commutation processes. As our survey of these states finds, state executive branches also chronically underuse their commutation powers. The states in our sample reported granting just 210 commutations from 2005 through mid-2021, for a total average of 13 grants a year across the eight states. For comparison, the average total prison population across these eight states from 2005 to 2020 was about 130,000 — meaning that each year, this group of states commuted about one out of every 10,000 sentenced and imprisoned individuals.

In addition to granting few commutations, most states in our sample do not appear to maintain robust data on their commutation systems. Several states did not have access to commutation records for all the years we requested, and others implied that they do not keep this information in a centralized database, and would have to review individual applications in order to fill our request.

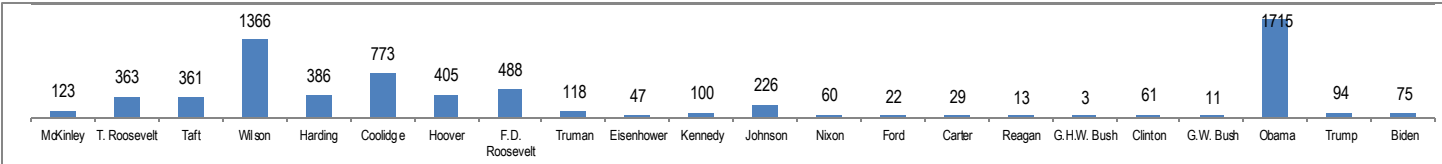
Historically, commutations were used much more frequently, but grants have since slowed down drastically and become exceedingly rare across the country. Today, commutations are often explicitly reserved for — or in practice, awarded only to — narrowly defined groups, such as people who have served at least half of their sentence or those convicted of “nonviolent” offenses.

Several factors contribute to the current lack of commutations. First, politicians fear being seen as soft on crime. There is an outsized fear of releasing someone who might go on to commit another crime, and an undersized appreciation for the benefits of prison releases. This fear is particularly unfounded because, in many cases, commutation does not trigger immediate release but simply reduces a sentence or makes someone parole-eligible. Throughout American history, there have in fact been many instances of large-scale releases, and recent mass releases have resulted in lower-than-average levels of recidivism.

Second, politicians and the public frequently misunderstand clemency’s place in American history. Individuals on both sides of the political aisle have expressed hesitancy in revisiting the sentencing decisions of judges. But the concept of revisiting judgments and forgiving sentences is a longstanding American tradition, enshrined in the Constitution, and core to the country’s (and states’) founding.

In order to more effectively and consistently use commutation powers at the federal and state level, a number of reforms should be adopted:

- Congress should pass the FIX Clemency Act
- Act unilaterally to provide relief when possible
- Conduct regular, affirmative outreach to those individuals who qualify for commutation
- Use the clemency power to grant mass commutations
- Simplify commutations applications
- Expeditiously process, review, and act on commutation applications
- When a group must approve a commutation application, do not require unanimous consent or set different vote requirements based on the crime of conviction
- Equally consider all people who qualify for relief, regardless of their crime of conviction
- Increase transparency



The New School Cool

By Markeese L. Carter,
Mule Creek State Prison

WELL, I MIGHT be late to class, but I will not apologize for my tardiness. The truth is, while the upperclassmen were being convicted, us freshmen were being born into the chaos left behind and forced to learn on our own or die without ever fully understanding why. The way I see it, we have a failure to communicate.

My earliest memory of my father, the one from whom I should have gained my initial lessons, is him and a bunch of scary men pulling into my grandmother's driveway, asking to take me shopping because it being my fifth birthday. Well, Mommy said never talk to or go with strangers, and since I didn't know him, or them, I refused, firmly. I didn't see him for 12 years due to his attendance at the Hard Rock University.

Pride? Never really had it. My shame ran so deep I fought to keep from drowning in it. The truth is, I've spent every day in fear and anger, and wonder how I would survive and be taken seriously when I learned how to be a man from a mixture of females, media, and other adolescents facing the same problem.

Honestly, it's not pride nor is it arrogance. The reality of emotion is relief and a hunger to stand tall because, number one, I'm still alive even though I'm in prison. Many of my peers and closest friends started getting knocked down, if they were not locked up, at 13 if not younger. And, two, the horrors the "old school" generated left insanity for everyone. Nature and nurture makes us smile all day, but the only joy is that at least we feel something. At 14, my

cousin died in my arms at a house party for no reason at all that I can make sense of, his last words, "Damn, Blood! It burn!" We were side by side dancing when the bullets hit him right-to-left across his chest. No pride in my gangster, I been living scared as hell, so excuse me if I call myself "OG" because I made it to 25 before hell, even if it was in a cell.

I blame it on the disconnect. Funny fact, the first time I ever truly felt 100% connected to my father and his generation was when we started hanging on the yard together at San Quentin and I showed him my pictures of his granddaughters who would grow up without me, and daughter-in-law that will, in all probability, divorce me and have children by another man before my release.

I think that's "old school" enough for me to consider myself to be a follower of the old school ways. But what do I know? What have I been taught? What are the right lessons? How do we bridge the gap and correct the disconnect in order to elevate, so we each one can teach one to reach one, to graduate and leave behind the School of Hard Knocks?

Release Date Granted After 34 Years

By Nemo Burgos, Post Reporter

THE FIRST TIME I saw Thomas Moore, he was teaching himself how to throw horseshoes. One throw went sideways and hit the light pole, which caused a deafening clang that vibrated across the yard. Needless to say, it caught everyone's attention. He literally hit the wrong pole.

For an introvert like Moore, drawing ridicule and laughter could be disaster. Many others would give up or make an excuse, but he wasn't discouraged. Well, maybe just a little. Instead, he sought help from advanced players and practiced again and again. Years later, he's competing with the best. Fortunately, Moore's approach to adversity transferred to his parole board prep.

Moore went going home after 34 years, two postponements, and three board hearings. Of course, he was relieved and excited, yet he was also introspective. He's proud of all the work and personal growth that led to finally being found suitable. Even before his first parole hearing, he knew he wasn't ready. He needed more groups, maturity, and buy in. He couldn't overcome his denial and destructive behavior. After his second hearing, he realized he needed yet more preparation and to take full responsibility for his crime. He took himself away from troublesome peers and joined AA and NA. Now he is six years sober. His persistence paid off and he was finally found suitable on the third appearance.

Moore credits the one and a half years in the Facility D dog training program as the final missing piece to his rehabilitation. He recognized himself in the rescue dogs that also needed a second chance. Like him, they were abused and often neglected through no fault of their own. The dogs also needed to be rehabilitated, loved, and properly socialized. In the dog program, Moore found a supportive family and a cause greater than himself. Saving the lives of the dogs paralleled the direction and discipline he sought. More importantly, he discovered the joy that had been missing in his life.



Women's History Month



Malala
www.vanityfair.com



MULE CREEK POST Submissions

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



CALIFORNIA INNOCENCE PROJECT



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Assistance with reentry planning can be found by contacting Root & Rebound and requesting the 102-page *Reentry Planning Toolkit for People in Reentry & People with Records*

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1730 Franklin St., Suite 300
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Extinctions on the Rise – Who’s Next?

HUMAN ACTIVITY MAY be causing the mass extinction of plants and animals. Since life began, it has been a fact of nature. At least 98% of all species that ever lived are now gone forever: dinosaurs, dodo birds, and woolly mammoths to name a few. Yet today, with climate change, deforestation, and development, extinctions are happening 100 to 1,000 times faster. The Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems estimates 1 million species are at risk as the planet keeps warming. These figures are telling. Thousands of daily high-temperature records were tied or broken in one month: Sep. 20 to Oct. 20, 2024. The year 2024 is certain to be the warmest ever and the first to exceed the 1.5 °C-limit set at the Paris Climate Summit in 2015.

Picture a little bird living on a mountain, one whose diet depends on the fruit of a tree growing there. Both the bird and tree evolved to thrive in the same microclimate. Now warming makes them move up the mountain to cooler conditions, yet they can only go so far. This is called the “escalation of extinction,” when climate change squeezes species out of their habitats.

At 1.5 °C of warming, one in 20 species will be at risk. At 5.4 °C, one in three could die out. We’re on track to lose 160,000 species, possibly 3 million, and some are more sensitive to change such as amphibians.

The evidence of this threat is everywhere. In the Arctic, a heat wave resulted in 4 million birds dying of starvation. The coral in Australia’s Great Barrier Reef had a 72% mortality rate, the highest ever, after a summer of mass bleaching. Warmer water turns the once colorful coral a sickly shade of white. It was the fifth such event in the past eight years. Plants are also in danger. One third of wild tree species face extinction. Clearing land for farming and logging, pests, and diseases, plus climate change, are all to blame. Trees clean the air while providing homes for birds, insects, and mammals.

How can species be saved? At a summit on biodiversity, world leaders pledged to protect 30% of land and oceans by 2030. Mark Urban, who studies climate and extinction asks, “Will we curb emissions now and work to protect 2% of species at risk, or do we choose one of the other paths that will fundamentally alter the nature of our world?”

Habitats need to be preserved. After several dams were built on the Klamath River starting 100 years ago, salmon populations plummeted, blocked off from their spawning grounds. Indigenous people were deprived of the fish they depended on for their traditional ways of life. Species such as Coho and Chinook salmon were placed on the “threatened” list. Conservationists, fishermen, and local tribes advocated for the dams’ removal. In a massive deconstruction project, four of the dams were dismantled. Salmon numbers bounced back immediately. One survey surprised biologists with a count of several hundred in one creek above the dam site.

With recent advances in genetics, disappeared species can be brought back. Australia’s Tasmanian tiger was declared extinct in 1939 when the last one died in a zoo. For decades, the animal was killed by bounty hunters for killing sheep. Their absence allowed kangaroos to proliferate and overgraze the habitats of endangered species in a domino effect of environmental harm.

Colossal Bioscience was able to obtain the Australian tiger’s RNA from a 110-year-old head that had been stored in ethanol and reconstruct 99.9% of the genome. Using a living cell from a close cousin, the fat-tailed dunnart, the scientists performed 300 gene changes and made it the “most edited animal cell to date,” and a breakthrough in de-extinction technology. Before long, the tiger could again roam the outback.

By damming rivers, plowing prairies, and cutting down forests, mankind’s march to industrial might upset the balance of nature. For species to survive, including our own, it must be revered and restored.

Sources: BBC, “Science & Environment,” October 18, 2024; CBS Science, Nov. 19 & 21; NPR, “Species Go Extinct,” Dec. 7, 2024; High Country News, Dec. 24, 2024



Keep Your SSN Safe

By Al Rice, Copy Editor

EVERY AMERICANS' SOCIAL Security number is the master password to everything about us: financial records and history, government agencies and accounts, and pretty much all of our personal records. And, guess what? It has probably already been stolen and published on the Dark Web. All criminals need to apply for credit, loans, government benefits, tax refunds, and jobs is our SSN. Here are some ways to protect this information:

- The federal government has a Self Lock feature to prevent others from using our SSN. It requires an E-Verify account to do online. One can also request a block by calling the Social Security Administration at 1-800-772-1213.
- The Social Security Administration also provides online access to our Social Security history by requesting an account for this purpose. Create a Login.gov account or use an ID.me account.
- If we suspect criminals have used our SSN to file for our tax refund, we can go to IdentityTheft.gov to file a report at the IRS.
- To protect our tax account information before something bad happens, the IRS offers the Identity Protection PIN program, which is a special number to use when we file that locks out the criminals.
- If we suspect your SSN was stolen and being used by criminals, contact the Federal Trade Commission at IdentityTheft.gov. Also, contact the IRS at Identity Theft Central. We can also get credit reports, one per year, from each of the three major credit bureaus at AnnualCreditReport.com.

The main thing is not to panic, for there is a lot we can do to protect ourselves from criminals who wish to steal our Social Security numbers.

Source: Kim Komando, "How to Keep Social Security Numbers Safe," *USA Today*, Nov. 15, 2024.



Laws of Human Nature:

Mastering Emotional Self

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

EMOTIONS STEM FROM physical stimulus intended to gain our awareness and make us take notice of something going on within or around us. They originate in biochemical reactive processes, which are difficult to understand or put into words. Involuntary instinctive mechanisms are regulated in a separate area of the brain than language and conscious thought, and attempting to rationalize emotional impulses can be challenging.

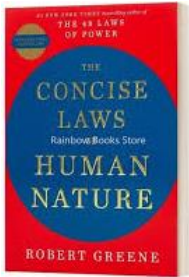
In *The Concise Laws of Human Nature* (Penguin Publishing, 2019), author Robert Greene explains, "The first step toward becoming rational is to understand our fundamental irrationality." For example, we may react with anger at person A, when in fact the true origin of our emotion might be envy; subconsciously we may feel inferior to A and covet what they possess. However, feelings of envy are not comfortable so we react in anger, resentment, or hostility — feelings that are more acceptable to our unconscious internal psyche. Or, maybe we're frustrated and tense, so we lash out in anger at person B who just happens to be nearby, unknowing that our outburst was triggered by something completely unassociated with B. In another example, we have legitimate anger within us originating from long past experiences, even as distant as childhood, and we target our anger at person C because subconsciously they remind us of someone from our past, perhaps a parent.

Greene explains that we lack conscious awareness of the root origins of our emotions and moods, and the attitudes and reactions they generate. When we experience them, we try to interpret these emotions and translate the feelings into language, but usually fail. We cling to self-explanations that satisfy our internal beliefs and align with justifying our positions, or we remain confused. We may feel depressed, but have no idea why. Being unconscious to emotion origins means we rarely are able to learn from them or halt or avoid compulsive behavior patterns. Instead, we repeat old habits whether they are helpful or not. If we were abandoned as a child, for instance, we will create what Greene calls "pattern of abandonment" all throughout our lives and never understand why.

As social animals, Greene tells us that interpersonal communications are critical in functioning effectively in the world. When we communicate in anger, in reality it is a completely different emotion that is subconsciously driving feelings. Those we are interacting with can't understand this and may feel personally attacked, which can lead to a domino effect of continuous misinterpretations.

Emotions and cognition are separate brain functions that evolved for different reasons; these two functions are not wired seamlessly in the human brain. For animals, emotions function as they were designed; they don't need to translate physical stimulus. For humans, the disconnect between emotion and cognition is a continual source of conflict. Animals react to fear as the need arises. Humans dwell on feelings of fear, exaggerating its intensity and allowing unconscious emotional entanglements to last long past moments of perceived danger, even to a point of continual unease.

Emotions constantly influence our thinking and steer us to thoughts that ease our ego. Biases, preferences, and tendencies always enmesh with and influence how we think. With introspection, rational thought, and effort, we, to some extent, are able to separate emotions from cold reasoning. This is rationality. If we are driven primarily by emotion, when we are irrational, we rush ahead without consideration of consequences.



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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SPORTS AND RECREATION



Your Move

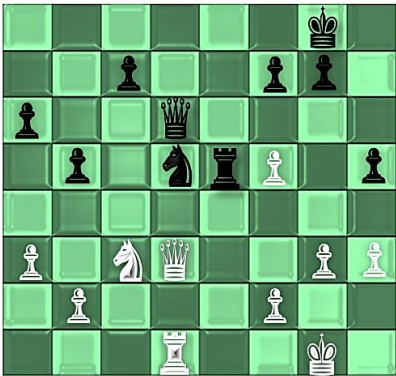
By Sean "Sharif" Neal,
Post Columnist

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

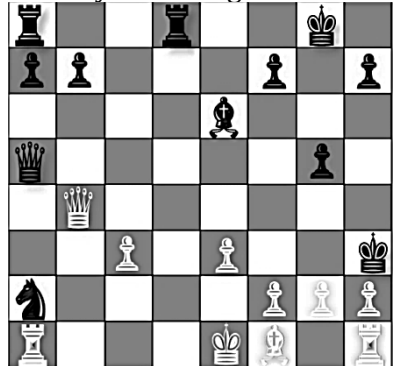
The exact origins of chess vary, some attributing its beginnings to ancient Persia and India as a means of formulating battle strategies. However, today's chess has evolved to attain a loftier goal: elevating the human mind.

See if you have the farsightedness to solve this problem. I think you'll enjoy this little treat from black's point of view.

Black to play.



February's challenge:



In last month's chess problem we offered an unexpected surprise: a grand queen sacrifice! Often players place so much importance on keeping their queens in play, never realizing the great potential of a spectacular queen sacrifice. See if you can play this out: 1. Rd8 (white has the move).



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

Right Mindset: Weight Loss Journey

By Jason Rosacia, Post Reporter

PRISON LIFE IS what you make it. If you choose to program like you're supposed to, which is doing the right thing, the effect in your overall wellness can be fulfilling. We all can agree that having an ideal body weight (less body fat) feels great.

Meet Richard Eredia, a Facility D resident of the Mule Creek State Prison who struggled with addiction, suffered from depression, and was clinically obese. While residing on Facility B, honey buns and soups were his delight. At 5'6", 340 pounds, and with no clear direction, life seemed hopeless. When Eredia finally arrived on Facility D in 2023, he found a renewed mindset.

"I was only 34 with kids," said Eredia. "I had to do something for myself and my kids. I was pre-diabetic. I got tired of being unhealthy and that destructive lifestyle," he added.

Eredia started working out in summer 2023, doing cardio, pull-ups, and burpees. After a year of dedication and consistency, he lost exactly half his previous body weight, from a miserable 340 pounds to 170. But what was behind the motivation?

"My spiritual awakening," said Eredia. "I gave myself to God. And, whatever you're going through, just remember that there's always a second chance. Just give yourself to the Lord, and he'll help you stay on track."

This is indeed a good example of how a right mindset can positively transform a broken person. Eredia is currently attending Self-Awareness & Recovery (SAR) while sticking to his embraced workout routine.



Richard Eredia at 340 lbs.
(Courtesy of Richard Eredia)



Richard Eredia today, workout king on the lifetime road to recovery. (J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)



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Roleplaying as Training

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

MOOT COURTS IN law school are a tried-and-true example of roleplaying. Law students make presentations, in an emotionally charged atmosphere closely mimicking real trials, to prepare for future, real-world legal battles after they graduate. Roleplaying sessions can also be adapted effectively for use in all rehabilitative groups. To prepare for a parole board presentation or a job interview, both inside and after release, roleplaying works as a proven strategy.

One or two members of your group who have prior parole board experience can play the panel and ask the prospective “candidate” a variety of questions presented to them in a real board appearance from the past. A candidate’s poor responses in this controlled environment carry no weight like they would in a real parole hearing, so one can make mistakes here and not in front of the parole board panel. Innovate as the session progresses to make it realistic. The entire group benefits from the roleplaying experience.

Marty Williams used roleplaying sessions in the Men’s Support Group at the California State Prison-Sacramento. “In one circle, we staged a confrontation between a father and a son,” Williams said. “I’m older and had a little gray in my beard then. I looked like the kid’s dad so the experience was realistic.” The intimacy of this session may never have occurred between father and son in real life. “The son found the experience cathartic,” said Williams. “He always had a hard time talking to his father.”

Whether a roleplaying session is a rehearsal for a job interview, parole board prep, or a staged one-on-one emotional encounter, the strategy is beneficial to the group’s audience, as well as the active participants who learn by doing.

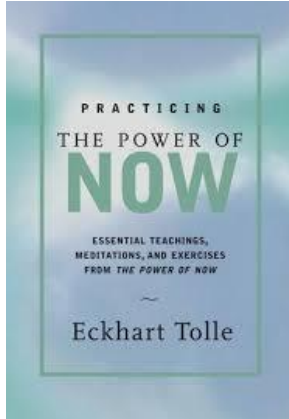


The Power to Choose

Accessing Present-Moment Awareness

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

THE WORD *CHOOSE* can be misleading. Acclaimed spiritualist Eckhart Tolle writes, “When we assign responsibility to someone or ourselves by saying or implying that a ‘choice’ was yours or mine to make, and the consequences that follow are thusly a result of our choice, we are assuming the choice was a conscious act.” That’s the catch. Most of the choices we make are unconsciously made and motivated by the past. We are reacting, subconsciously, to conditioned patterns. We are, in fact, compelled to act, think, and feel in a certain way according to our pre-conditioned mind. Intelligence and education have nothing to do with it. Mental acuity has nothing to do with growth of consciousness, and in an unconscious state the potential for unhappiness and misfortune is high.



over the unknown, and that is dangerous. This is why the mind refuses to accept the present.

According to Tolle, present-moment awareness represents a gap in the stream of consciousness (which is actually unconsciousness) of the past-future continuum. We are conditioned to see the world from our past, imagining a future. But since all time is now, we exist in an illusion. The past is gone, the future is beyond our grasp. We only have now.

Issues with parents, past relationships, something someone did to us or failed to do for us — if we still harbor resentments then we are operating on a belief that they had a choice, that they could have done something differently. The truth is they were acting on pre-conditioned mind, that there was no choice. Instead of resentment, we should feel pity or empathy. Following this mindset we continue to suffer the consequences of unconsciousness and will manufacture more suffering, fear, conflict, problems, and pain. It is this suffering that should, and eventually will, awaken us from living unconsciously and force us into consciousness and quit living in the past.

Only by existing in the now, in present-awareness, can we access our true potential. Otherwise, constant bouts of anger, frustration, suspicion, and despair will be our reality. When we surrender to what is now, the past no longer has power and control over our lives. We don’t need it anymore. We will be free.

In *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment* (New World Library, 1999), Tolle presents the following example: A person becomes involved in an abusive relationship after suffering several previous abusive relationships. Why? Is it because they have chosen abuse? That would seem to be ridiculous. The fact is they have no choice, no conscious choice, because most of us exist in a pre-conditioned mind algorithm. Our minds become pre-conditioned by the past and always seek to re-create what is familiar. The mind clings to the familiar, even if it is bad. The mind doesn’t want to venture into the unknown, the unfamiliar, because it has no control



Eckhart Tolle (EckhartTolle.com)

Criminal Offender Reform Establishment (CORE)

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

Mind Makeover: Changing your thoughts to change your ways

Biological Blueprint: What qualities you inherited to become who you are

Self-Awareness: Nurture your good qualities and eliminate the negative ones

Goal Gaining: Setting your goals and making them achievable

Perspective Personified: Seeing the world through more eyes than only yours

Dreaming in Color: Making your dreams a reality

CORE

P.O. Box 1361

West Sacramento, CA 95605

Email: CORE.educators@gmail.com

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

**California Coalition for
Women Prisoners**



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



Courage is doing what you're afraid to do. There can be no courage unless you're scared.

— Edward Vernon Rickenbacker

Whatever We Are Not Changing, We Are Choosing

By Maya Emig, Post Columnist

AS WE BEGIN 2025, I want to share a quote from Laurie Buchanan “Whatever we are not changing, we are choosing.” When I read that quote it stuck with me. I have that quote on my office desk, and I think about it during conversations with my clients, in suitability hearings, and while doing observations. The quote is so simple, but it encompasses many different areas of our lives and making deliberate choices moving forward.

Striving to be our best is a form of self-love. I had an interesting conversation with a colleague about attorney representation. One of the things my colleague and I have in common is that we always look for ways to up our attorney representation. Following our conversation, he wrote an email that read, “I NEVER want to be a complacent attorney! We are never sedentary, we are only ever moving forward (getting better) or moving backward (getting worse). I only ever want to move forward.” I have that mindset as well. That mindset is what clients of mine all share who are working on their rehabilitation.

In our quest to be better, it does take an honest assessment of ourselves. It begins with looking at our lives and seeing what areas we need to improve. For me, I see the value in my day in the good night of sleep I have at the end of it. I often ask my clients as they shift to pro-sociality — and are no longer breaking the rules — how do you sleep now? Overwhelmingly, they sleep better. They aren’t worried about cell searches happening because they aren’t hiding things in their cell. They aren’t worried about drug tests because they aren’t using drugs, and they aren’t worried about what the board will ask about restitution because they are not putting money on someone else’s books or having money put on theirs. There is calm and peace that is truly valuable.

As we enter 2025, set goals for yourself. Goal setting is important because it gives you purpose and focus. It increases your motivation by giving you things to strive for, and it allows you to measure your progress. Goals help you with decision-making and give you the framework to make decisions. Goal setting helps you prioritize tasks and manage time to help you reach your goals.

Whether I sit down with a private client at the onset of their custody time or a client who is a few months away from their suitability hearing, more times than not these individuals want to change but they don’t know how. They don’t know where to start or just can’t grasp the task ahead because they are not aware of the prevalence of anti-sociality in their thinking and actions.

For the next few articles, I want to give you a roadmap of some of the things you can begin to think about in terms of the starting steps for understanding your criminality and the choices you have made in your life. One of the questions panels ask in suitability hearings is, “Why were you engaging in that specific criminality?” whether it was using drugs, selling drugs, burglarizing homes, robbing people, or any other of the enumerated crimes in the penal code.

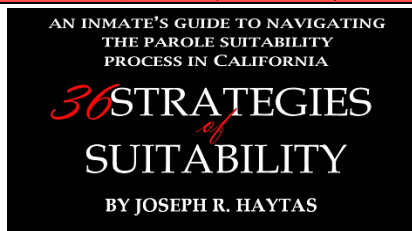
Choice is our ability to make decisions when presented with two or more options. The psychology of choice explores why we subconsciously make the decisions we do, what motivates those decisions, and what needs these decisions are meant to satisfy. Spend time asking yourself, “Why was I choosing bad instead of good, dark instead of light? What motivated my decisions? What needs were my decisions satisfying?” Figuring out why you do things is an important piece of the puzzle to figuring out ways to address those issues.

The average adult makes between 33,000 to 35,000 decisions a day. Decisions about what we eat, what we wear, what we say, how we say it are all part of that number. *Harvard Business Review’s* article, “A Simple Way to Make Better Decisions,” from Dec. 5, 2023, states, “These decisions are made possible by the information we’ve subconsciously stored about what is ‘good’ or ‘bad.’”

Figuring out what our goals are and aligning our decisions geared toward these goals is important. Staying away from rules violation reports and custodial counseling reports is important in working towards a finding of suitability. Making decisions to stay away from negative peers is important as well. Criminal thinking is knowing the difference between right and wrong and choosing wrong. G.D. Walters defines *criminal thinking* as “a set of attitudes or beliefs connected to criminal behavior that support and maintain a criminal lifestyle.”

Set goals: daily goals, yearly goals, etc. For some of my clients, minute-to-minute goals are how they stay away from using drugs, stay away from anti-social peers, and work on achieving the goals they have set.

If you would like to learn more on your own, read *A New Direction: Criminal and Addictive Thinking Workbook, A Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Program* by the Minnesota Department of Corrections & Hazelden Publishing available on Amazon.com.



Get Educated

THOSE INDIVIDUALS WHO participate in correctional education programs while incarcerated have significantly lower odds of recidivating than those who do not. This is according to a report published by the Rand Corp., “How Effective is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here?”

More than 30 years of research has proven that prisoners with higher education are linked to much less recidivism. Studies show that even a little college study reduces criminal behavior.

Using time wisely to pursue an education is something that incarcerated individuals (or anyone) should consider seriously. No matter what level of education you currently possess, advancing your education will improve your quality of life both in and out of prison.

Education provides learning about new subjects, attaining new and improved skills, new ways of thinking, new perspectives, and a new worldview. Education provides you with a sense of accomplishment; personal growth; and will enhance the ability to make a life for yourself and family upon release, the ability to give back to the community, and above all to give yourself a second chance at life.

All education is good — GED certificate, A.A. degree, and up, and vocational trades. Becoming a more informed, improved person is about being an asset to your family, friends, society, and most importantly yourself. It takes a person who genuinely wants to change their current self in order to get real results that they can be proud of.

Contact your counselor or the education department for scheduling and sign-up information.

Joseph R. Haytas is an attorney who represents candidates at the Board of Parole Hearings, and is the author of 36 Strategies to Suitability.



Joseph R. Haytas
(LinkedIn.com)

Reading is Fundamental

By Dortell Williams, Post Reporter

SOME REMEMBER THE phrase, “reading is fundamental.” As a teen, I always wondered what it meant. Later, after I’d earned a stay in the Los Angeles County Jail, this catchy phrase took on real and personal meaning.

Sheer boredom led me to read an entire book for the first time; I was 23. *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* had a profound effect on my outlook. It was as if Malcolm spoke directly to me, and what he said was that I was the problem. He explained that, as a drug dealer, I helped to destroy my community. Likewise, just being in prison, I was not only a negative statistic, but that I confirmed all of the adverse labels foisted on my community in a continuous generational cycle of hurt and harm. Malcolm’s book provoked me to self-reflect for the first time; it challenged my value system up close and personal.

I hated history throughout my school years. I didn’t know that if you are ignorant of the past you are bound to repeat it. That’s what makes me a statistic, one of millions who fell into the same hole and never saw it coming. It’s because I was looking ahead; however, you can’t predict the future by looking ahead. Looking back, on the other hand, offers clues to possible outcomes.

From that first book, I’ve never been bored in spite of 36 years of continuous imprisonment. Books have become my best friends, and what I love about them is they don’t argue. They say what they’ve got to say and leave it at that. In addition, I can go back to them and nobody gets mad. They don’t cut you off when you’re talking, and if you listen they can teach you a lot. It’s these teachings that have given me substance to share with folks on the outside.

I often hear friends complain that guys have nothing interesting to talk about, nothing stimulating for the mind, nothing that makes them think or teaches them something new. Gossip, complaints, or just run-of-the-mill conversations can only go so far. People want substance, conversations they’ll remember, some mental gymnastics. And, like gymnastics or any exercise we do for our physical body, the mind needs the same level of attention. The thing about books is they feed you just enough information for you to follow along. The best writers make you come up with your own conclusions. And, unlike television that gives you all the scenes, imagery, and colors, books make your mind do the heavy lifting. Your brain has to fill in the blanks, which is why books are a great tool for writers.

As a writer, reading offers me an expanded vocabulary, a diverse world of writing strategies to learn from, and endless ways of describing any one thing. Not only does this help me learn new words and definitions, but to also absorb a creative repertoire of adjectives to dazzle my friends and family with in letters and texts home.

Speaking of home, I suppose this is where writing becomes most fundamental. Prep for the Board of Parole Hearings requires a lot of writing. The better we can express those remorse letters or that relapse prevention plan, the more likely we’ll have the opportunity to take those expressions to the outside world. Literacy literally adds value to our lives, whether it’s preparation for the board or for life. It really makes sense when you think about it — employers pay those with the most skills the highest rewards.

Take it from a guy who once hated history and made some of the stupidest decisions — reading really is fundamental.



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Chino Dive School

By Scott Culp,
California Institute for Men

THE LEONARD GREENSTONE Marine Technical Training Center (MTTC), at the California Institution for Men at Chino, provides advanced training creating a gateway for incarcerated students into a vocation as lucrative as it is dangerous. With a mere 6% recidivism rate among graduates, the school fulfills a vital need to California’s marine infrastructure and offshore fields. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, commercial divers can earn up to six-figure salaries.

As one of only five commercial dive schools nationally, MTTC was founded by Leonard Greenstone, an experienced U.S. Navy diver who served during World War II. Greenstone created the Chino school’s curriculum based on his own training at the Navy School of Ship Salvage in New York City.

The basic laws governing the commercial diver’s field are universal, but because of the very nature of this specific occupation, the MTTC at Chino mimics real-world conditions encountered in the trade. The inherent hazards in this highly specialized industry require a careful appraisal of each program applicant’s emotional and temperamental fitness and is accomplished by chief instructor Kenyatta Kalisana and assistant instructor David Calvert — a total of 37 years’ experience between them. As past graduates of the school, both instructors bring a unique peer dynamic leading them full circle, back to where their dreams of worldwide opportunities began.

At MTTC, students can experience the challenges of deck handling skills and diving under the watchful eyes of the two seasoned commercial divers with extensive occupational qualifications in multiple sectors. Their experience includes underwater welding, rigger/tender, scientific expedition support, civil engineering and bridge inspection, deep ocean remote-operated vehicle operator, offshore oil exploration, aquaculture industry, inland ma-



(Wikipedia.org)

Using training similar to the U.S. Coast Guard’s rescue swimmer program, MTTC students follow a progression of timelines to accomplish a five-mile swim in under three hours in the huge main pool. Two flights of wooden stairs lead to the island’s offshore platform where participants log hundreds of hours, performing extreme water confidence drills in 16,500-gallon tanks replicating oceanic conditions. A typical daily exercise is knot-tying practice — while blacked out, under water. Every day, from 20 feet above, with artificially-generated waves below, students step off a platform and drop into the roiling water with a line in one hand and a 30-pound shackle in the other to master tying 10 basic rope knots while blindfolded. Glass portals at the bottom of the tanks give a glimpse of the business end of the submerged exercises and training.

In his role as safety diver inside the tank, instructor Calvert oversees what is known as the “ditch-and-don” procedure each participant must master underwater while wearing a commercial diving helmet and attached to an umbilical line providing air. Holding his breath, the participant must drop into the huge tank, reach the bottom, unlatch four locking mechanisms securing the helmet, remove the cover, and hand it to the instructor for five seconds. The dangerous procedure is then reversed, donning and re-latching the helmet; only then can the student open the purge valve to remove water inside the helmet and again begin breathing. This critical safety procedure must be performed three times, back-to-back, using three different helmets.

MTTC turns novice swimmers — with deep-seated water and confinement fears — into accomplished divers comfortable with a unique relationship with the sea, leading to a marketable trade. Divers play an important role in underwater exploration, search and recovery, and salvage operations.

With the support of the California Prison Industries Authority, in conjunction with American Divers Contractors International, MTTC showcases training in industry technology and innovations in the fields of gas, oil, and wind energy. MTTC staff allows potential outside employers into the classroom to make their employment pitches directly to the students prior to graduation.



Sources: *USA Today*, “Chino Dive School – 6% recidivism,” July 14, 2008; *L.A. — Fox News*, “Chino Dive School – 6% recidivism rate among graduates,” Dec. 23, 2024; Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Six-figure salaries,” September 2024.



Self-Awareness & Recovery

SAR is a program to reduce recidivism and incarceration rates by helping adult and youth offenders heal from the emotional wounds they experienced during their early years. Through self-awareness, participants seek to explore the causative factors that led to destructive lifestyles, and through recovery to teach healthy coping skills.

Fill out an Inmate Activity Group Program Request (CDCR 2016) if you'd like to be on the waiting list for this group.

The SAR Model of Transformation



Problem: Destructive Lifestyles, Negative Social Beliefs, Negative Experiences

Solution: Spiritual Nature, Authenticity, Resilience, Healthy Coping Skills

Recovery: Self-awareness, Recovery, Healing, and Transformation

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Elaine Wong Beats the Odds

By Dorothy Maraglino,
Central California Women's Facility

ELAINE WONG IS an institution within an institution. Arrested in 1980, she served the second-longest amount of time for a woman before being found suitable for parole. She was condemned to life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) in an age when being sentenced to life meant one would never see freedom, a step beyond no hope.

Incarcerated people like Wong are often called "the living dead," "pine box inmate," and other derogatory terms to reinforce the fact that they have been sentenced to die within the prison walls. Wong defied all the odds and after 44 years has been found suitable for parole.

This woman didn't endure her sentence — she made the most of it. Her journey was shared by a husband who stood by her, a son who grew up without a mother's daily presence yet in her constant love, and friends from the beginning and those she met along the way. She always tells lifers and those serving LWOP that when you picture hope, you should think of her.

The odds against you are just obstacles to overcome.

Special Olympics
Northern California



A New Kind of Hard Time

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

Survive or Die

As told to D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

MANNY MENDOZA IS one of many who have made the transition to a non-designated facility after surviving on the mainline for years. The following is his inspirational and impactful story.

"When I first came in, I was a 21-year-old Hispanic male sentenced to life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) and couldn't envision a life outside of the mainline. To me, I had no other options. I had sacrificed my freedom, family, and everything the outside world had to offer. When my counselor walked the cellblock to tell me I'd be sent to either High Desert or Pelican Bay, I said, 'That's it? No other options?' I'll never forget what he told me. 'Don't worry, they'll make a soldier out of you wherever you land.'"

"I eventually landed on a Level IV yard on the mainline, locked down due to ongoing race wars. I wasn't able to make any phone calls to my family; couldn't go to yard or canteen or leave the cell. It was a depressing situation and a depressing state of life. I was stuck in that cell all day long with nothing but my own thoughts. It was a place where you do what you have to do to survive; it's a dog-eat-dog, survive-or-die mentality."

Mendoza says he chose to put myself through this because of fear, the fear of dropping out. Everything he had heard about SNY yards [Sensitive Needs Yards, now non-designated facilities] kept him where he was, and he felt stuck in that stressful environment. "People I associated with told me that those on SNYs have no morals or values; everything I heard was negative. My thoughts were that I can't go over there, it wasn't even a possibility, that was it for me ... till 2018."

"That year a close friend of mine got killed and it changed my perspective. I was tired of all the gang culture and gang life. I had an epiphany that although my body was incarcerated, my mind and soul didn't have to be. I made a choice to go SNY and got sent to Mule Creek."

"Once there, I discovered that all the horror stories I had heard were false. I actually ran into individuals who wanted better for themselves and those around them. I was introduced to CGA (Criminals & Gangmembers Anonymous) and that changed my whole thought process to how I was living my own life. I discovered I had a huge addiction to the criminal and gang life growing up. I was able to gather tools and utilize steps to undo a lot of the personal and cultural trauma that impacted me through adolescence."

"I was able to take education seriously and enrolled in college. I earned an A.A. degree in social behavioral sciences and am currently in the bachelor's program at Sac State studying for a communications degree. I'm in the Juvenile Diversion Program, helping and mentoring at-risk youth."

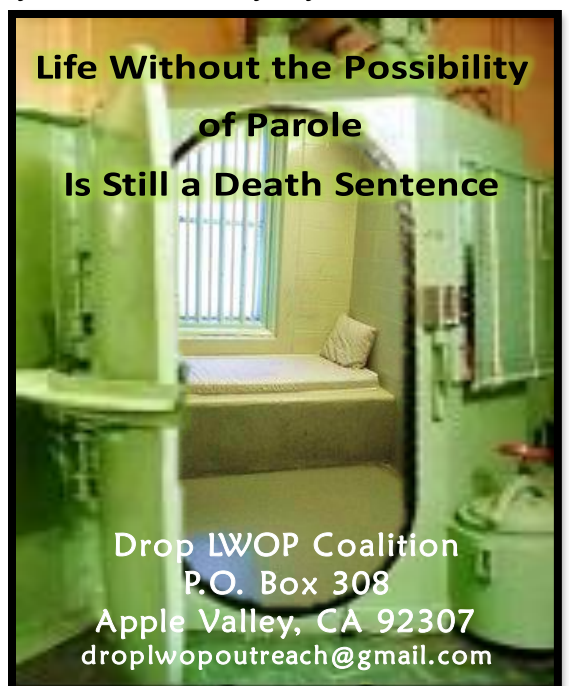
"I believe that my coming to this side has helped me to reconnect with family; my no longer being in the gang and mainline lifestyle has given me peace of mind, and I have my kids back in my life. Most recently, my mother told me that she's proud of the man I am today ... that means a lot."

"I don't believe any of this would have been possible without the grace of God and without making the decision to step away from the mainline and that life."

Mendoza is currently involved in ongoing court action to attempt to remove the LWOP designation from his sentence. The court is taking into consideration all the positive things that he's done, as well as the negative, and he believes his choice to transition to a non-designated facility may be the determining factor in how the court proceedings go.



Life Without the Possibility of Parole Is Still a Death Sentence



Drop LWOP Coalition
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droplwopoutreach@gmail.com

Poets of the World

(Mar. 21 is World Poetry Day)



Pablo Neruda, Chile (AgenciaBalcells.com)



Antonio Machado, Mexico (PoetsHouse.org)



Lara Gualarte, U.S. (Courtesy of Lara Gualarte)



Sylvia Plath, U.S. (Npg.org.uk)



Rumi, Persia (PoemAnalysis.com)



Dante Alighieri, Italy (Real-Life-Heroes.Fandom.com)

Unofficial Guide to Federal Prison

By Franklin Lee, FCI Englewood, Colo.

FOR THOSE WHO will experience federal prison after doing time in a California prison, there are differences. For those going to the feds for the first time, be prepared; it's a bigger system and you'll do a lot of traveling.

There are 122 federal prisons in the United States as of 2021 (*Prison Legal News*, April 2024). All federal incarcerated individuals must be processed at a reception hub such as the main hub in Oklahoma City. Processing can happen prior to or after sentencing and transport can be by airplane or bus. Once processed, each person receives a federal ID number and security level score, and can be placed in an available facility anywhere in the United States.

As in any institution, each facility has a security level depending on the severity of the crime. Max levels are high security with cell living and limited programs, while low security and camps have less restrictions, more programs, and even access to the community.

After spending about a week or two at the hub, incarcerated people are sent to any of the U.S. prisons, with some consideration given to distance to family and home. There are special programs and treatment some are required to enroll in, such as Residential (or Non-Residential) Drug and Alcohol Programs, Sex Offenders Management Program, and Sex Offender Treatment Program.

Much of the terminology is different. For example, write-ups are called "shots," ducats are called "callouts," CalPIA is called UNICOR, restitution is called "FRP" (federal restitution process), and appeals (the 602 form) are referred to as "BP8," "BP9," or "BP10."

Being in federal prison has many positive and negative aspects compared to state prison. For example, in a federal prison in Colorado, the menu includes pepper steak, fried chicken, meatloaf, salad bar, and soups. Commissary has a larger variety of products since there are no quarterly packages. Everything must be purchased, including special orders for hobbycraft, ordered and received. All electronic information is processed via TRULINCS: kiosk terminals where residents can access bulletins, send e-messages, review FRP transactions, submit "cop-outs" (similar to a Request for Interview form), and download music, games, and movies for their tablet.

Instead of state prison mental health clinicians for the different levels of care, federal prison has a psychology department (specifically for treatment programs), with therapists who conduct consultations, run therapy groups, and evaluate each person's progress. Other amenities include a big outside yard with tennis courts, track, free weights, softball fields, and inside recreation with pool tables, Foosball, table tennis, and various exercise equipment. Hobbycraft has a variety of classes including pottery, leatherwork, painting, crochet, and beading.

One shocking realization at a low-level federal facility, coming from a Level II state prison, is no electric fence. This Colorado facility rests on the edge of the nearby city, so even residences are just across the street.

There are some disadvantages in federal prison compared to state facilities. Recently, the First Step Act (FSA) was passed in Congress to help encourage rehabilitation and earn time off, but a large list of disqualifying offenses keep many from earning it. The tablet programs are not free and the content limited. Residents must pay for games, music, and movies. Depending on the institution, continuing education is limited. Those who can earn FSA credits can watch Adult Continuing Education videos in the media lab or earn their GED certificate. Some may offer vocational training courses.

Another disadvantage is the administration process. Meeting with your counselor and case manager to review paperwork can be a lengthy process and often take constant reminders to get anything in motion. There is no Inmate Advisory Council to help inform the population, except that each race has a representative as well as unit or floor representatives. Any paperwork being processed, such as appeals (BP8, BP9, BP10), case file review, FSA credits, and other filings have been known to be misplaced, shuffled away, or delayed, which affects those trying to get home sooner. For those who are released, the process of arranging halfway housing and transportation via flights or by train can be a hassle.

In federal prison, there are no personal televisions, fans, inmate publications, typewriters, plastic bins, or food sales. Uniforms (khakis) are worn weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 3 p.m., with the exception of those at the Rec Center. Standing count may include a "Bed Book" that includes ID checks.

Going to federal prison is a completely different experience than state prison, but once having been to both institutions, doing time is still the same.

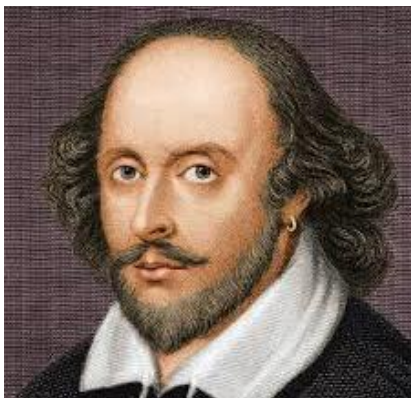
Missteps:

In the February edition of the *Post*, Jason Davis was identified as having taken photos of the Facility D Art Show (pages 28-29); Media Specialist H. Kim took the photos.

Poets of the World



Etheridge Knight, U.S. (EKFreePeoplesBe.com)



William Shakespeare, U.K. (Biography.com)



T.S. Eliot, U.K. (Britannica.com)



Matsuo Basho, Japan (PoemAnalysis.com)



Virgil, Rome (Biography.com)

DQ'd by Past History

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter



THE U.S. MILITARY has a long and sordid history of disqualifying (“DQing”) applicants for induction or advancement who have a health issue histories, no matter how insignificant. According to a recent *Air & Space Force Magazine* article, “Applicants are shot down ... by an opaque and confusing ... review process. Many are disqualified because of conditions that have not affected them for years.” This philosophy mimics society’s general attitude toward convicted criminals: Why should the public trust that there will not be a repeat of prior difficulties if an offender is released? Like the military’s attitude towards DQ’d candidates, a second chance for the incarcerated is deemed an extreme gamble.

In a June 2024 article, Dennis Trynosky recalled his medical DQ when he applied to the Air Force ROTC Program in college. He was truthful on his application and revealed a teenaged bout (ages 11 to 15) with asthma, ending his attempt to become an Air Force officer. Even with a private doctor’s approval and a report stating no likelihood of a recurrence of the malady, his appeal was denied by the U.S. Surgeon General. The theory of their decision, stated in the response, was a childhood occurrence of an illness might crop up after the adult candidate completes extensive and expensive military training and later require discharge. The lack of a recurrence of the illness as he or she grew older was irrelevant; thus a blanket exclusion due to prior history.

In reality, Trynosky went on to serve as a successful enlisted man in the U.S. Army, had a productive civil service career, and served over 20 years as a construction manager. His youthful spell of asthma never appeared again; the childhood issues had no bearing on his later life. The Air Force lost a viable candidate for an officer’s position simply due to antiquated DQ views.

Society ends potentially significant prospects among the incarcerated when the stigma of decades-old criminal behavior is used as a yardstick to measure conjectural actions upon release. Individuals convicted of even minor crimes must live with the shame of a loss of respect, trust, and, in many cases, are considered unemployable — DQ’d by society because of an illness or lapse in judgment at an earlier age. However, incarcerated persons who are determined can dedicate themselves to rehabilitation and go on to lead exceptionally productive lives like Dennis Trynosky.

DQ’d by something beyond his control, Trynosky created his own second chance by working hard and earning progressively better jobs. Incarcerated individuals can travel the same path by taking advantage of rehabilitative platforms while in custody, and showing a positive work ethic in these programs as well as in the prison workplace. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation moves forward, addressing these considerations with increased focus on rehabilitation, increasing reintegration programs, and by implementation of the California Model.

The military’s views are progressing, too. After 30-plus years, several devastating overseas conflicts, and low recruitment and retention rates, U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren is concerned with these issues, grilling military commanders on the persistent DQ problems. Colonel Ian Gregory, of the Air Force’s Medical Waiver Division, said, “When you use data from the past [to consider an applicant’s viability], you evaluate it and you say, ‘Aha, I can probably make a different decision moving forward.’” There was a time in the military, before 1975, when pregnancy ended a woman’s career; but currently, some badly injured troops have successfully completed rehabilitation and petitioned to return to an active duty function, even with missing limbs. The concept of change is timely and realistic.

Mass incarceration and punishment have not worked. Society’s acceptance of rehabilitative efforts of those coping with release and parole is at hand. The military has lost countless viable candidates by adhering to antiquated guidelines, but is examining their procedures and progressing. Everyone deserves a second chance.

Sources: “Rethinking Medical DQs,” by David Roza, and “Honored to Serve,” by Dennis Trynosky, in *Air & Space Force Magazine*, March/April 2024.

National Veterans Foundation

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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.

Poets of the World



Aleksandr Sergeyevich Pushkin, Russia (Britannica.com)



E.E. Cummings, U.S. (PoemAnalysis.com)



Mary Oliver, U.K. (WomenSpiritualPoetry.Blogspot.com)



Rainier Maria Rilke, Germany (Britannica.com)



Hafiz Saeed, Persia (Wikipedia.org)



Rita Dove, U.S. (VQROnline.org)

Freedom Through Forgiveness

By Bob Gay, Feature Reporter

THE LATEST STATISTICS for the U.S. reveal the highest rate of mental health disorders in decades, perhaps since the last big war. Could we be holding onto personal resentments or issues of unforgiveness?

How can we begin to make amends in a creative way with those closest to our hearts who have let us down or offended us? We learn a lot of information in the classes and groups offered in education and recovery, and most of it slanted toward release from our concrete prison. Another way to use this new input and turn information into revelation is to allow those facts to become a means to our transformation. To paraphrase what someone once said, "Unforgiveness is like taking poison and hoping the person we won't forgive will die." If we actively choose to forgive all people for all things, perhaps we can unlock some of our own inner captivity. We can allow these insights and planning skills we are learning into our true selves to reach beyond the dark world of our failed pasts. A quality decision like that can touch those who need us more than ever. In reaching beyond ourselves, we can find a new release of energy and satisfaction that surpasses our personal world.

Our classes have supplied, trained, and drilled us in the skills that can put us back into the mainstream of society as healthy contributing citizens. That journey does not have to have a pause button on it. We can begin now by exercising our newly acquired abilities with fellow incarcerated people and those closest to us in the free world. These implements work. These tools don't have to lie dormant until we leave prison; we can exercise them now. It's a win-win-win scenario. We win here and now with our peers. We win now with our family and friends outside. We become confident we can win in our new outside life because we have become proficient in our day-to-day life of incarceration.

Forgiveness may be a key element to our successful future. As we forgive ourselves, our failures and condemning memories, we free ourselves to forgive others. The real problem is that unforgiveness only kills the one who won't forgive. Many times the one who is hated doesn't even know what's going on in the mind of the one who won't forgive.

There's an interesting story about the Polish wrestling championship back in the 1930's. Seems two young boys competed in everything all their lives. The one boy always won by at least one point. Then, as men, they were up against each other for the national championship. You guessed it. The youth that always won everything by a thin margin took the national title by one point, then refused a rematch with his childhood competitor. Unfortunately, the champion suffered a fatal accident and left his childhood rival high and dry with no opportunity to ever best him.

To honor the national hero, his town erected a cast-iron statute in his likeness and placed it on a marble block in the city square. The man who could not beat the champ would not allow his unforgiving heart to release its bitterness. Each year on the date of the championship's anniversary, the old man would show up at midnight in the city square to wrestle and scuffle with the deceased champion's metal rendering. He just couldn't forgive the dead man for refusing a rematch.

Then one day the morning paper carried the story of an old man killed in the park as the great statue fell from its marble platform and crushed its victim. Over the years, the welding had become loose and the monument toppled over on the man who couldn't forgive. Is this story true? Who knows? But the rumor is that it was unforgiveness that took his life.

Everything begins with the freedom to forgive. Nelson Mandela, once a prisoner in South Africa, made the quality decision to forgive during his decades of incarceration. He made an amazing statement, "I can never forget, but I can forgive." Look how his decision to forgive changed the trajectory of his life. That choice transported him from prisoner to president.

The question is this, "Where will your decision to forgive yourself and all others lead you in the quest for real freedom?"



Nelson Mandela (YouTube.com)



Our Social Unconscious

Society's Addiction to Crime and Incarceration

By Marty Williams, Production Editor

AMERICA IS ADDICTED to crime. We love it. We love crime shows, real or dramatized, and the more graphic, violent, or shocking the better. We love it on the news; we love seeing Cartel murders in Mexico, Mafia hits, mob bosses and mob-wife fashion styles, gangsta bling and pointed Glocks, good-looking serial killers, and Trump thumbing his nose at the courts. It's an American pastime, like baseball. Like Christmas. Like indigenous genocide.

What we don't love are people in prison. The citizens of California, a decidedly progressive and liberal state, continue to support the use of the death penalty and life without the possibility of parole. They also spent two decades with a three-strikes policy that gave automatic life sentences for anything from murder to pizza theft, and only in the last 10 years have given prisoners with contingent life sentences a chance to see the light of day. Soy lattes, green ecology, kill the criminal.

According to Michel Foucault, the American social-psyche can only reflect the individual psyches that make it up. The Freudian model of the psyche, while overly simplified, still stands as a great place to start. The notorious Id, full of our primal desires and instinctual responses (accessing our reactive brain), is held in check by a regulating Ego, and a "good person" persona of the Superego, shares our psyche with a vast Unconscious where the Superego banishes the things it doesn't want to be true about itself (like our violent or sexual fantasies). The psychologist Carl Jung gave this Unconscious a kind of personhood, dubbing it the *Shadow*. The individual with this array of safeguards against any real self-knowledge is not only tragic, but completely normalized by society. Historically, human society is often normalizing tragic things.

When this lack of self-knowledge, this tragic disowning of the nasty things we love, extends into a collective social

unconsciousness, the result is punishing those who dare act out against the false idol of American morality, and to banish them into the darkness as if they didn't exist at all. The personal Shadow that serves this purpose becomes a macrocosmic mass incarceration to remove from our view what we deny is true about ourselves.

Part of the premise of sociological imagination involves how society affects our personal decisions. The reverse is also true, and obviously a mass of personal decisions drives a social framework. We focus on crime-and-punishment as problematic by individuals; the truth is, society can only reflect the human psyche — because that's what it's made from. Whatever people as a whole deem unacceptable, regardless how bad they unconsciously want it, they will find a way to give it to themselves, usually secretly, subliminally, or vicariously. Once the Id thing is satisfied, the discomfort (or horror) of who we are makes us negate the action by exiling it from our consciousness into the Shadow; out of sight, out of mind. In the macrocosm of society, we call it prison, and the self-hate we have for our own violence and creepiness is transferred onto the criminal. We banish him the way we banish the ugly truth of ourselves.

While it may be asking too much to get people to do the work necessary to bring unconscious Shadow into consciousness, it is not too much to get people to simply admit that their addiction to crime and incarceration is a problem, and that the symbol of "criminal" objectifies not only others, but themselves. Bizarre "tough on crime" laws, perpetual prison sentences, and the social shunning still practiced 200 years after the Puritans died of boredom will inevitably give way to humanizing our justice system when people accept the humanity of others acting out their own unowned violence, sexual deviancy, racism, fear, greed, vengeance against their mothers, or whatever. As the philosopher and poet Goethe said, "There is nothing human that is alien to me."

My responsibility as a person is only to know myself. When I do, no one else will seem like a criminal anymore. They'll just seem human.

Sources: Marijke C.L. Baljon, "Wounded Masculinity: Transformation of Aggression for Male Survivors," *Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapies*, 2011; Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in The Age of Reason*, Vintage, 1988; Leah Gooch, "Agitated to Elevated: A Transformational Class in Prisons," *Corrections Today*, 2022; M. Seo, "Institutional Contradictions, Praxis, and Institutional Change: A Dialectic Perspective," *Academy of Management Review*, 2002.

Psych View

By Daisy Switzer, Post Columnist

Education

DO NOT SHIRK education if your disability is educational. It will still be harder for you to do school tasks, and as it is harder for you, it will be more honorable when you come to the board and present your achievements. If you are illiterate, work on literacy. If you do not have your GED certificate, work toward getting it.

There are individuals who insist they are high school graduates and yet are functionally illiterate. If your testing was done to your best effort, and shows a need for education, get your ego out of the way and pursue the educational programs. If you cannot read, write, and understand the materials given in other programs, they will not benefit you. Others will recognize this and, if you are lucky, they will tell you to improve your skills. Listen to them. Most of us are not as gifted as we think we are.

Without education, your other programs are not going to look strong, and you may even have unexplained failures. It is simply the way things are. If you fail to educate yourself to a base level, other programs will not work for you, and you are creating a hardship for your own future.

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. Her book, *Parole: A Guide/Workbook for Inmates Seeking Freedom* comes out in the summer of 2025.



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



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

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



La abogada **Maya Emig** se especializa en libertad condicional y ley de convicción posterior. Anteriormente estuvo en el California Parole Advocacy Program, en donde ella representó a miles de candida-tos a libertad condicional (parolees) en asuntos de revocación. Ella también tiene amplia experiencia representando a prisioneros sirviendo cadena perpetua (“vidales”) en audiencias de consideración para libertad condicional. La Sra. Emig ha hablado en The Today Show y Dateline sobre los asuntos de elegibilidad de los vidales. La Sra. Emig se graduó de la UC San Diego y la McGeorge School of Law.

Lo Que No Estamos Cambiando, Lo Estamos Eligiendo

Por **Maya Emig**, Post Columnist
Traducido por **Fabian Garcia**,
Spanish Reporter

AL COMENZAR EL año 2025, quiero con ustedes una cita de Laurie Buchanan: “Lo que no cambiamos, lo elegimos”. Cuando leí esa cita hace unos años, se me quedó grabada. Tengo esa cita en el escritorio de mi oficina y pienso en ella durante las conversaciones. La cita es muy simple, pero abarca muchas áreas diferentes de nuestras vidas y la toma de decisiones deliberadas para seguir adelante.

Esforzarse por ser lo mejor que podamos es una forma de amor propio. Tuve una conversación interesante con un colega mío sobre la representación de abogados. Una de las cosas que mi colega y yo tenemos en común es que siempre estamos buscando formas de mejorar nuestra representación legal. Al terminar nuestra conversación,

me escribí un correo electrónico diciendo: “¡NUNCA quiero ser un abogado complaciente! Nunca somos sedentarios, solo avanzamos (mejorando) o retrocedemos (empeorando). Solo quiero avanzar”. Aprecio eso porque también tengo esa mentalidad. Esa mentalidad es la que comparten todos mis clientes que están trabajando.

En nuestra búsqueda por ser mejores, se necesita una evaluación honesta de nosotros mismos. Comienza con mirar nuestras vidas y ver qué áreas necesitamos mejorar. Para mí, veo el valor de mi día en la buena noche de sueño que tengo al final. A menudo les pregunto a mis clientes, a medida que pasan — y ya no rompen las reglas — ¿cómo duermen ahora? En su gran mayoría, duermen mejor. No les preocupan los registros de celda. No les preocupan las pruebas de drogas porque no las usan. No les preocupa lo que la Junta les preguntará sobre la restitución porque no están poniendo dinero en las cuentas de otra persona, ni haciendo que se ponga dinero en las suyas. Hay calma y paz que son verdaderamente valiosas.

Al entrar en el año 2025, establezca metas para usted mismo. Establecer metas es importante porque le da un propósito y un enfoque. Aumenta su motivación al brindarle cosas por las que luchar y le permite medir su progreso. Las metas lo ayudan a tomar decisiones y le brindan el marco para tomarlas. Establecer metas lo ayuda a priorizar sus tareas y administrar su tiempo para ayudarlo a alcanzar sus metas.

Ya sea que me siente con un cliente privado al comienzo de su tiempo de custodia, o con un cliente que está a unos meses de su audiencia de idoneidad, la mayoría de las veces, estas personas quieren cambiar pero no saben cómo. No saben dónde deberían comenzar, o simplemente no comprenden la tarea que tienen por delante porque no son conscientes de la prevalencia de la antisocialidad su pensamiento y sus acciones.

En los próximos artículos, quiero comenzar a brindarle una hoja de ruta de algunas de las cosas en las que puede comenzar a pensar en términos de los pasos iniciales para comprender su criminalidad y las elecciones que ha hecho en su vida. Una de las preguntas que hacen los paneles en las audiencias de idoneidad es ¿por qué estabas participando en ese delito específico?, ya sea consumir drogas, vender drogas, robar casas, robar a personas, o cualquier otro de los delitos enumerados en el código penal.

La elección es nuestra capacidad de tomar decisiones cuando se nos presentan dos o más opciones. La psicología de la elección explora por qué inconscientemente tomamos las decisiones que tomamos, qué motiva esas decisiones y qué necesidades se supone que satisfacen con esas decisiones. Dedicar tiempo a preguntarte lo siguiente: ¿Por qué estaba eligiendo lo malo en lugar del bien, lo oscuro en lugar de lo claro? ¿Qué motivó mis decisiones? ¿Qué necesidades satisfacían mis decisiones? Descubrir por qué haces cosas o hiciste cosas en el pasado es una pieza importante del rompecabezas para encontrar formas de abordar esos problemas.

El adulto promedio toma entre 33,000 y 35,000 decisiones al día. Decisiones sobre lo que comemos, lo que vestimos, lo que decimos, cómo lo decimos, todo forma parte de ese número. El artículo de *Harvard Business Review*, “A Simple Way to Make Better Decisions”, del 5 de diciembre de 2023 afirma: “Estas decisiones son posibles gracias a la información que hemos almacenado inconscientemente sobre lo que es ‘bueno’ o ‘malo’”.

Descubrir cuáles son nuestros objetivos y alinear nuestras decisiones orientadas a esos objetivos es importante. Mantenerse alejado de los RVR y los cronos de asesoramiento 128-B es importante para trabajar hacia una determinación de idoneidad. También es importante tomar decisiones para mantenerse alejado de los compañeros negativos. El pensamiento criminal, como sabes, es saber la diferencia entre el bien y el mal y elegir el mal. G.D. Walters define el pensamiento criminal como “un conjunto de actitudes o creencias relacionadas con el comportamiento criminal que apoyan y mantienen un estilo de vida criminal”.

Establezca metas: metas diarias, metas anuales, etc. Para algunos de mis clientes, metas minuto a minuto que les permitan mantenerse alejados del consumo de drogas, de compañeros antisociales, y trabajar para lograr las metas que se han propuesto.

Si desea aprender más por su cuenta, lea *A New Direction: Criminal and Addictive Thinking Workbook: A Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Program* del Departamento de Correcciones de Minnesota y Hazelden Publishing, disponible en Amazon.

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

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



FAMILIES UNITED TO END LWOP
6109 S. WESTERN AVE #100
LOS ANGELES, CA 90047

Positive Plasticity at SATF

By John Crosthwaite,
Substance Abuse Treatment Facility

IN THE OCTOBER 2024 edition of the *Mule Creel Post*, the article “Shining a Light in SATF” illuminated a lack of positive programming at SATF. With this update, I am happy to say that a lot of progress has been made.



Thanks to the collective effort of staff and incarcerated individuals here on Facility C at SATF, we are on the path to success. With endless patience, persistence, and perseverance, we have self-help groups up and running. In fact, we have an awesome example of what the California Model should be.

One self-help group here sponsored by The Shining Light organization, the Loop Group, is a beacon of hope and success. *The Loop* is a magazine published by The Shining Light and has a digital version on Edovo and a paper publication. Our Loop Group is the first of its kind in California, according to Jeff and Barbara Bohn, the founders of The Shining Light.

Each Loop Group across the nation has a name. Ours is FAITH (Felons Accepting Intentional Transitional Healing), and we are featured in the 2024, Issue 5 edition of *The Loop* magazine. It was a truly powerful and positive experience for all of the participants to see their group highlighted in a magazine on the tablet. Since then, The Shining Light has provided a box of the magazines for distribution at SATF. Our “Loopers” of FAITH are the shining lights at SATF.

As an incarcerated facilitator for AA, NA, CGA, GOGI, and the Loop Group FAITH, I am proud to see the California Model taking shape. Nothing can form without creators, and each member in our group is a creator of positive plasticity. If we all come together, we can make the world a better place.



Dear God ...

By Dorothy Maraglino, Central California Women’s Facility

DEAR GOD, ARE you as surprised as I am that I am sitting in a jail cell accused of murder? Who is going to tell Daddy? Who is going to take care of my house? I’m six months pregnant and I don’t want to have my baby in this nasty cell. I am so afraid to touch anything. How did this happen? Are you there? Please help me get out before my baby comes. Amen.

Dear God, I rode to court and heard all the horrible things. I did not recognize the person they were talking about. In the bus on the way back, people chanted “murderer” and threatened to rip my baby out of me and kill us both. Such hatred. I’m so lost. I don’t want to hate like that. Please don’t let this change me. Amen.

Dear Heavenly Father, I bow before you a sinner. You alone know all my transgression. You know all I have done in secret and in the light. As per your word, I deserve death for the least of my sins. I ask you to seek my heart. Hear my plea. Grant me your mercy. Set aside your wrath. Deliver me from the end I deserve. Cleanse my heart of sins through your son’s sacrifice. May my sins be blotted out so all you see is the debt paid. Deliver me from the guilt of my failing. Renew my faith and my joy in salvation. Lend me your strength so I may not stray far from your face. Do not depart from me. Lord, please do not abandon me. Do not remove your Holy Spirit from me. Uphold me and restore me to my place as your child. I praise you for your lovingkindness. I praise you for your righteousness. I praise you for being the final judge who decides my ultimate fate. I surrender my all to you and cast myself at your mercy. Bless me, Father, so I may once again be of use to you. Use me for your purpose. Amen.

Dear God, please be with me tonight. I left my tiny baby at the hospital alone. There is no one here to be with her and I am back in this cold cell. My arms ache for her and I fear my heart will not last the night. Lord, I want my baby, PLEASE. Amen.

Dear Heavenly Father, I just got back from the hospital. My latest suicide attempt has failed again. Why won’t you just let me die? Even those who would be sad would also sigh with relief if I died. Please stop saving me. Amen.

Dear Heavenly Father, through the trial, I learned so much ugliness and the loss of such a young life. Oh Father, the family heard, and I know their heart was torn more than mine. I ache for friends who stand accused and can’t bring myself to accuse either of them. Only one is guilty, but both say it was not them. Father, I ache for the family, but I don’t know them. My friends are more personal to me, and I know them enough to know they are both in pain. I love them, Lord, and that won’t stop. I am hated for loving them and was condemned for crying for my friends. I miss my daughter as the family misses theirs and as my family misses me. Lord, life hurts too much. Please make it stop. Amen.

Lord, I lost my case, and it was because I refused to speak or act. The result is that I will now be separated from my daughter for the rest of my life. I can live with the rest but this is the hardest. How did I choose silence over the chance to be with her? I know I am wrong but I could not make myself speak up. I am damned. Please don’t let my little girl be damned too. Amen.

Lord, today I tried to explain to my family why I didn’t speak, but they are so angry. I cannot blame them because I am angry at myself too. I cost my parents their daughter and now I pay for losing my own daughter. Everyone has lost someone. There is nothing I can do now. Please be with my family and let them find a way to forgive me if they cannot find their way to understand. I am too exhausted to say more. Amen.

Dear Heavenly Father, HELP! Amen.

Dear Heavenly Father, today I saw some people claiming to be your children, but Father, these people rarely act like they know you. I was so upset that people would be so hypocritical and misrepresent you. How dare these people publicly declare you when their daily actions denounce everything you are. My anger rose until I heard your still small voice say, “Go ahead, my child, go ahead and cast the first stone.” It was then I had to admit I am not the one to judge. So, Lord, I ask you to forgive me for the times my actions and words conflicted and misrepresented you. Please help me always to remember I’m your child and to always act like it. I will stand up for the principles and values you teach. Bless you and praise you for all you do for me. In the name of the Father and Son. Amen.

Dear Heavenly Father, I heard the sentence of life without the possibility of parole. Lord, I knew my fate before the jury left to deliberate but did not understand fully what that fate entailed. I am sitting in a room with a Velcro dress on suicide watch. I am told this is standard procedure for the sentence here. I am too numb to consider taking my life. The past few years I have exhausted my

(continued on page 23)

(from *Dear God* ..., pg. 22)

attempts with no success. Now I just lay here. Lord, my family is not so numb. They do not have years of jail to drain them of everything. They had hope. Be with them tonight. Amen.

Dear Heavenly Father, I am losing my numbness and I awoke in a cell with eight people after spending over three years alone. It's too much! Please make it stop! The noise, the smells, and everything is too much. Bring back my numbness. Please! Amen.

Lord, please shut this b— up before I lose it and get a write-up. Amen.

Lord, I am told that as an LWOP on Close-A status, I may not get a job off the yard, I may not go off the yard unescorted even to medical appointments, I may not transfer to the smaller prison that offers two-man cells, and basically told to shut up do my time and disappear as best I can in a sea of 3,000 people. Amen.

Lord, I started cutting again today on my legs so no one will see. It helps not feeling like jumping out of my skin. I promise to keep them clean but please don't let any get infected. Amen.

Lord, a girl committed suicide today by hanging herself from the window. Everyone talks about how sad it is and I feel jealousy at her resolve. I might need help but I don't want to talk to anyone about what I am feeling. Amen.

Lord, please let my dinner stay down. Amen.

Lord, please make this mean officer go away and let the nice one come back. Amen.

Lord, please let a shipment of toilet paper and pads arrive before this little bit runs out. Amen.

Lord, my neighbor OD'd. If you will allow it, please let her recover with her body and mind intact. Amen.

Lord, please don't let the pepper spray cloud reach this far. I forgot to bring my asthma inhaler with me today. Amen.

Lord, please don't let the officers see those girls fighting. It is raining and I don't want to have to sit on the rain-soaked ground. Amen.

Lord, I got word Grandma

died. She lived a long life, but she was my best friend. She had such hope we would see each other again on earth. Lord, she never got to meet my daughter. My heart feels like it is being squished. Please make the pain stop. Amen.

Lord, can you please let someone email me? I am so lonely. Amen.

Lord, please let someone help with my quarterly box this month so I can get a few luxury items. Amen.

Dear Heavenly Father, I have gone years without really talking to you. It is unclear if you left me or if I left you. Daddy says you never move so I guess it was me. I am in a tiny cell and at the end of my rope. Last week I was raped. After some hairy situations that followed, I am now in protective custody, which is the same as the jail within prison. They would not let me have a cell alone and I don't know my roommate. Lord, I have been here enough to know that this will label me for life here. They won't let me stay here forever and I am living every day in fear. I am afraid to close my eyes between the roommate I don't know when I am awake and the nightmares when I close my eyes. Amen.

Lord, I am making an effort and still, all I feel is anger. There has been no news about my daughter since I came to prison. There are members of my family I never hear from. My friends that relied on me often have never been in touch. I feel like I am disappearing. Amen.

Lord, they announced LWOPs can apply for resentencing so I did. I can't bring myself to hope. They exclude LWOPs from every type of relief. It feels like the whole world wants us dead and gone but wants us to die the slowest way possible. Just letting you know I did apply. Amen.

Lord, today I looked in the mirror and did not recognize my face. There are days I can't remember my name. It feels like I am losing myself. Maybe this is what life without parole means. They call it the slow death or death by incarceration. I wish death was quicker. I lost my daughter, my home, most of my family and friends, and now my identity. Lord, I don't know what I am asking because I don't seem to care what comes next. Amen.

Lord, I got news today that my dad is on hospice from COVID. Please don't take him. I am not strong enough for this. This is something I can't survive. Please God, don't take my dad. Amen.

Lord, thank you for the miracle treatment that saved Daddy. I will never ask for anything ever again. Amen.

Lord, just letting you know I am still here. Amen.

Lord, my roommate lost her grandfather to COVID today. I feel guilty for my blessing when you saved Daddy, but so grateful. All I could do was hold her while she cried. Will this illness kill us all? Amen.

Lord, I see so much pain, abuse, and heartache besides what I experience myself. It makes me not want to get up. I am not sure what to do. Amen.

Lord, I am back in the county to be resentenced. The Appellate Court acknowledged I was not there and even dropped half my charges. It's almost over. Daddy is in his 80s and Mom close behind. I am so excited that I will be home in time to spend their final years together. I should be able to get my daughter so they can meet her. I have my parole plan ready and there is a chance for real life. I am about to turn 49 and my friends and family are planning a huge 50th when I am home. It's finally happening. Thank you. Amen.

Lord, I don't understand. The judge read the denial but it wasn't about me. He said I was guilty of charges that aren't mine and cited evidence that was not against me. He sent me back to prison as an LWOP. What if Mom dies before this gets fixed? What if I lose Daddy because he loses Mama? My daughter will be 12 soon and doesn't know me. There are less and less people who write and now I am losing more. Lord, I am drowning again. Please let me know you have a plan. Amen.

Lord, I am back in prison and the counselor reviewed all my exclusions based on my LWOP sentence. No job with Joint Venture, which is the only way I could pay off my restitution in my lifetime. No participation in the tattoo program. No transferring to the smaller prison until I am over the age of 50. No juvenile parole. No elderly parole. I stopped listening after that. Basically, LWOP = NO, but advocates tell us LWOP = HOPE. Which is it, Lord, because I am losing my fight? Amen.

Lord, Mom had to stop chemo. I can't believe a court error might stop me from seeing her before she dies. Dad's health is not good, either. If you take them, I don't think I would even care if I went home. If you take them, please take me, too. Amen.

Lord, I am here. Are you?

**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.**



A House Divided

By Bob Gay, Feature Reporter

WHAT DOES HISTORY show concerning a house divided? If the past is any indication of the future, we can make a pretty fair guess about what is out in front of us. A house, family, or nation has always failed when it has become divided.

Today in our world we see two dynamics: The power of unity and the power of division. Nation is dividing against nation, kingdom against kingdom, man against man — worldwide.

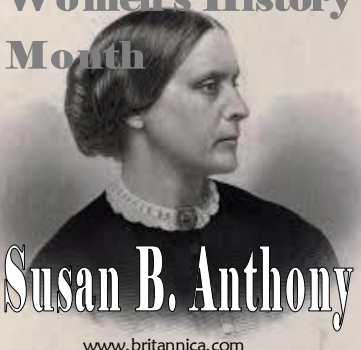
We saw the Democrats unifying and we saw the Republicans unifying, all in a race for the White House. However, the unity of each party is polarizing under the flags of division, and our nation is once again dividing. The last time this happened to a level of this magnitude was in the American Civil War, where we lost more Americans than WWI, WWII, Korea, and Vietnam combined. Can we afford such a display of self-centered politics as our enemies creep ever closer while we are distracted by our divisions?

Meanwhile, China, North Korea, Iran, Russia, Turkey, and others are unifying. The power of the American dollar worldwide is shifting to other currencies right under our noses. Sudan, Palestine, and other countries are suffering genocide right before our eyes. Many of us don't really seem to care, or maybe we are just too distracted to notice.

Rome thought it could outlast its divisions — they failed. Communism lost its momentum as the great USSR divided. Perhaps China's unity will bring back the deadliest foe mankind has seen in centuries — it's a gamble of nuclear proportion.

Dare we push the envelope and continue our divisive ways?

Women's History Month



Susan B. Anthony

www.britannica.com

Where do we go from here? Have we learned anything positive from our past failures, or are we in the midst of repeating them to our demise? We certainly are not too great to survive a nation divided — all of history is screaming at us: "Stop, don't do it!" Are we too proud to put the brakes on and look for ways to get along in our divided nation?

Hopefully, we wake up and realize our foes are hopeful too, hopeful we will avoid a great demise. Everyone, nations included, only get so many wake-up calls before it's all over. Is there any humility left in this great land of ours? We'll see, because humility is what it's going to take to serve our fellow American and do more than just survive; we need to thrive again.

It's time to unite, time to remember the words of the great patriotic anthem: "God bless America, land of the free ... Unite us and guide us across our land from sea to sea..." You probably didn't even notice that the above words are not in the song. Why? Because most Americans long ago stopped singing "God Bless America." But those words above are a good start. Why not take the time to do a little research and find out exactly what our mothers and fathers sang out in the unity that held our nation together these past decades. A house divided cannot stand, but a nation unified, like we used to be, cannot be defeated. Let's serve each other wherever we can find common ground and forget about our differences. Then watch God bless America again, and again, and again.

How Many Stamps Does It Take?

By Jesse Carson, Editor-in-Chief

THE BACKPAGE OF the June 2024 edition of the *Post* provided postage rates effective July 1. But most people use Forever stamps, which, according to the Postal Service, "will always be valid as First-Class postage ... even after rates increase" — so how many stamps does it take to send out mail? Below, we do the work for you of converting stamp prices to number of stamps. See the June 2024 Backpage for information about sizes and weights of envelopes.

Letters		
Wt. (oz.)	Cost	Qty. Stamps
1	73¢	1
2	\$1.01	2
3	\$1.29	2
3.5	\$1.57	3

Large Envelopes		
Wt. (oz.)	Cost	Qty. Stamps
1	\$1.50	3
2	\$1.77	3
3	\$2.04	3
4	\$2.31	4
5	\$2.59	4
6	\$2.87	4
7	\$3.15	5
8	\$3.43	5
9	\$3.71	6
10	\$4.01	6
11	\$4.31	6
12	\$4.61	7
13	\$4.91	7

International Mail			
Destination (Qty. Stamps)			
Wt. (oz.)	Canada	Mexico	Other
1	\$1.65 (3)	\$1.65 (3)	\$1.65 (3)
2	\$1.65 (3)	\$2.50 (4)	\$2.98 (5)
3	\$2.36 (4)	\$3.30 (5)	\$4.36 (6)
3.5	\$3.02 (5)	\$4.14 (6)	\$5.75 (8)



The Creative Arts Program

The Creative Arts Program provides instructional workshops in drawing, painting, guitar, and writing by local artists.

In Facility E Hobby Room:

Creative Writing	Tuesdays 12-1:30pm
Poetry	Tuesdays 2-3:30pm
Painting	Tuesdays 2-3:30pm
Painting	Tuesdays 6-7:30pm
Art	Wednesdays 9-11am
Guitar	Wednesdays 9-11am

Fill out an Inmate Activity Group Request (CDCR 2016) if you'd like to be on the waiting list for these groups.



Cherie Hacker Lara Gularte

Why Read the Classics?

By Rob Sharp,
Feature Reporter



FIRST PUBLISHED *The Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann Wyss is a well-loved adventure novel that strongly stresses family values, self-control, and self-reliance. This is a novel of shipwreck survival on a fortunately hospitable island in the East Indies.

The story begins in a horrendous storm with the Robinson family abandoned by panicked sailors. What's left of the ship is lodged between two large rocks, which is why they rode out the storm in the wrecked vessel. As it turns out, all of the crew were lost to the raging sea.

The three sons, Fritz, Jack, and Ernest have very different characters that highlight a nobility of character in various ways as a guide on morality for younger readers. Written mainly as a novel for adult consumption at the time, it has nonetheless over the years become a favorite among younger readers. Even so, if you enjoy survival stories, this is a great one.

When he wrote the story to tell his children, Johann David Wyss was strongly influenced by Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. However, Wyss wanted a story written specifically for a Swiss audience without the violence in Defoe's story. He and his son, Johann Emmanuel, illustrated it. Years later, another son, Johann Rudolf, revised it and had it published. Johann David and Johann Rudolf are each sometimes considered the author.

In 1960, Disney made a movie of the same title based on the book that for the most part stuck close to the novel. It became a big hit and revived interest in Wyss' fine novel.

The Swiss Family Robinson may be available in your facility library. If not, you can request the librarian order a copy.



The Invisible Minority

By Jason Davis, Lead Reporter

"When the prison gates slam behind an inmate, he does not lose his human quality... his yearning for self-respect does not end; nor is his quest for self-realization concluded. If anything, the needs for identity and self-respect are more compelling in the dehumanizing prison environment."

—Justice Thurgood Marshall



Supreme Court Justice
Thurgood Marshall
(Britannica.com)

THERE IS NOT one silence but many silences; for the transgender population this can be seen through the onslaught of discriminating legislation proposed across the nation. Beginning in 2016 with HB2, a North Carolina bill that aimed to restrict bathroom use to the one corresponding with a person's assigned sex at birth, states started creating laws targeting LGBTQ communities at a record-breaking pace. Advocacy groups raised concerns in 2021-22 as the number of anti-LGBTQ bills approached 200; this trend continues, as in the 2022-23 legislative session alone, state legislators introduced 510 bills, and 2024 was no different with just under 500.

The introduction of these laws harm LGBTQ communities. Even when bills do not pass, the effort to limit LGBTQ rights has a profound impact. Researchers are generating an evidence base to show how the stigma and discrimination exacerbated by these laws are creating an environment in which LGBTQ communities are at an increased risk.



Anti-LGBTQ laws take many forms. Seven states passed laws censoring discussion of LGBTQ people or issues in schools. An additional five states require parental notification of any LGBTQ content and can opt out of inclusion for their child. Nine states implemented laws affecting transgender individuals' ability to use bathrooms congruent with their gender identity in schools, with two states expanding the ban to colleges or government buildings. Florida makes using a bathroom inconsistent with assigned sex at birth a criminal offense. Of particular concern are states banning transgender youth from receiving gender-affirming care in accordance with medical best practices. Twenty-two states enacted bans on gender-affirming health care. Five states make providing gender-affirming care in accordance with medical best practices a felony.

Until recently, transgender people marginalized on account of their gender identity had no recourse under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Congress excluded "gender identity disorders" from the qualifying disabilities under the act. However, some courts have found that gender dysphoria, a condition that many transgender people experience, is a covered disability under the ADA. This has the potential to be a particularly effective tool for transgender people in the fight to be treated fairly.



It was in 2013 when the American Psychiatric Association adopted the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, which no longer contained gender identity disorders as a diagnosis and explicitly articulated, "gender non-conformity is not in itself a mental disorder." Rather, the revision contained a new diagnosis of gender dysphoria, with different diagnostic criteria. Instead of focusing on the person's identity, the new diagnosis is grounded in the clinically significant distress, or dysphoria, a person experiences when their gender identity does not match their assigned birth sex. Transgender congruence is the degree to which transgender individuals feel genuine, authentic, and comfortable within their external appearance and presence and accept their real identity rather than the socially prescribed identity. Still, not all transgender people engage in hormone transition therapy nor do all transgender people experience gender dysphoria.

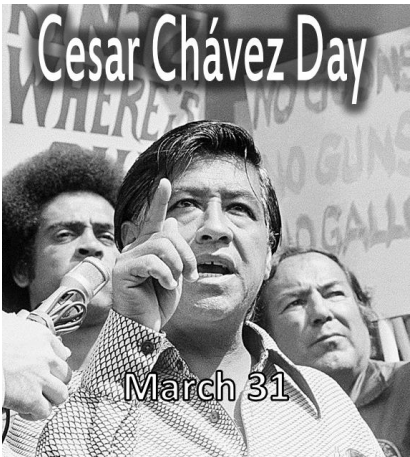
One of the primary health consequences of prevalent discrimination and stigma is present in the rates of behavioral health issues in LGBTQ communities. Depression, anxiety, and substance use disorders are all seen at higher rates for LGBTQ individuals than for cisgender heterosexual peers. Lifetime suicide rates are nine times that of the general population. However, these rates are not inherent or absolute. Studies show that when an LGBTQ person is in a supportive environment that recognizes and affirms who they are, their suicide rates are closer to those of their cisgender and heterosexual peers.

Given the tremendous discrimination that transgender people continue to face, especially at this moment of tremendous backlash against LGBTQ people generally and transgender persons in particular, the protection of the ADA is desperately needed.

(continued on page 26)

(from *The Invisible Minority*, pg. 25)
Consequently, it would be advantageous for the government to develop strategies aimed at enhancing the well-being and satisfaction of transgender communities. By adopting a conceptual approach towards this objective, policymakers can effectively address the specific needs and challenges faced by transgender individuals, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

Sources: Vincenza Priola, et al., “The Sound of Silence. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Discrimination in ‘Inclusive Organizations,’” *British Journal of Management*, July 2014; Benjamyn C. Elliott, “Transition & Thaw: An Equal Protection Basis for Gender-Affirming Hormones in Carceral Settings,” *Virginia Journal of Social Policy & the Law*, May 2024; Victoria Lynn Smith, “Gender Dysphoria and the Americans with Disabilities Act: The Shameful Wall of Exclusion,” *Duquesne Law Review*, Summer 2024.



P.O. Box 77850
LOS ANGELES, CA
90007

The donation of flat artwork for PREP auctions is ongoing without a deadline for submissions. Donations can be made in the drop boxes in the facility chapel.

If you wish to contact PREP for its excellent self-help correspondence courses or to receive the Oasis newsletter, feel free to write.

Writing for Publication

Simultaneous Submissions

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

WHEN YOU SUBMIT an article to a magazine or newspaper for publication consideration and, at the same time, mail copies to other periodicals, you have violated a fundamental rule of the publishing and writing industry: the disrespectful act of simultaneous submission. Standard practice in the industry is to send your article to the most appropriate, targeted location for your offered piece, and wait for formal acceptance or rejection of the work. Then, and only then, try another publication. This may seem an arrogant requirement but, until you have an established writing history and carry some credibility in this field, follow the rules.

Imagine an editor getting excited by your submission, discussing the work in an editorial meeting, getting the green light to publish, only to have you later say, “Oh, yeah, *Wall City* is publishing it, too.” Or worse, the editors see the same piece published elsewhere before they print it because you did not inform them. With some exceptions, most prison publications will not reprint articles already appearing elsewhere. Outside prison walls, publications do not appreciate the practice either and, according to *Writer’s Digest* magazine, you can be blacklisted if you violate this tradition. There are some loopholes, however.

A previously published article can be “tweaked” (modified) — maybe the title changed — and it is suitable for another periodical. These potentially rewarding alternatives, known as reprints and spin-offs, will be covered next month in the *Mule Creek Post*. One prisoner advocacy project recently solicited a previously-published article appearing in the *Post*, asked the author for a rewrite, changed the title to suit its needs, and will soon publish it; in effect, a reprint, but acceptable with mutual agreement. Additionally, an actual spin-off of the original piece was also recently solicited from the original author; three articles from one original story. There are possibilities, so adhere to industry standards and respect those periodicals publishing your efforts.

If your submission is time-sensitive (such as an Easter, Christmas, or Veterans Day piece), or there is a genuine need for simultaneous submissions, at least let your target(s) know you have mailed out the manuscript to others and why. If your article is good, this may encourage quick acceptance by the first recipient in hopes of beating out the others, but do not make this a regular practice. Some publishers clearly state: No simultaneous submissions. To avoid any blunders, follow these simple guidelines:

- For example, submit your article to the *Mule Creek Post*. Do not send the same piece to PJP and *Wall City* at the same time. Wait for our response.
- The *Post* replies to all submissions, accepted or rejected, as do most publications, but it may take several weeks, or longer, to respond to you. Including a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) with your submission is always the best practice to speed up this procedure, but the *Mule Creek Post* does NOT have this requirement. Most publishers do, so include enough postage if you also want your manuscript returned. Otherwise, tell them to return just the reply only.

It is also advisable to keep a thorough record of your submissions so you know what organization(s) you sent an article to, the date, and the status when it is accepted or rejected. You want to keep close watch on your publishing history for future reference and use. Another future article in this series will focus on the importance (and a sample copy) of this record.

WALL CITY

DEVIATION

Wall City is a documentary arts magazine created to inspire conversations across the prison walls. For inside writer interested in connecting with us on GTL Getting Out, please write us at: **WALL CITY**
P.O. Box 1493
ALAMEDA, CA 94501

IRON CITY

MAGAZINE

Creative expressions by and for the incarcerated

IRON CITY MAGAZINE
P.O. Box 370
Tempe, AZ 85280

JOURNAL X

Our mission is to give voice to social justice issues like inequality, racism, environmental degradation, and gender bias, just to name a few categories. Submissions can be short fiction, short memoir, poetry, short plays and screenplays, essays, art, and photography. Experimental submissions are welcome. They can be in English, Spanish, Spanglish, or Mixtec. Please submit before December 15 each year.
Cabrillo.edu/Journal-X

Rattle

Rattle magazine, which is distributed by Prisoner Express, is always open to submissions by incarcerated poets and writers. If you would like to submit your work or have questions, you can write: **Prisoner Express**
PO Box 6556
Ithaca, NY 14851

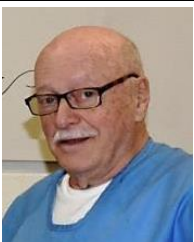
Business & Finances



Leah Ward-Lee



Carolyn Warren



Robert Von Villas

ENTREPRENEUR'S WORKSHOP

By Leah Ward-Lee
Post Columnist

Treat Yourself Better #1

GET GOOD SLEEP. If you're not one of the minority who goes to work at the same time every day, five days a week, getting enough sleep requires attention. I don't know about you, but when I haven't had enough sleep nothing is fun, everything irritates me, and I feel like I'm phoning it in.

Establish A Quiet Time. Be certain to let your friends and family know when your quiet time is. Trust me when I tell you, they'll be thrilled to know you're not going to be answering their calls after 8:30 p.m. I was startled when I finally started to tell my friends that I have trouble staying up past 8:30, and took the time to understand when *they* liked to talk.

Establish a Sleep Routine. Our minds are wired to recognize patterns of behavior. They recognize "put on my sleep clothes, take out my contacts, wash my face, brush my teeth" as what we do when we get ready to sleep.

Establish a Sleep Place. The place you sleep should be personalized for what helps you relax. If clutter irritates you, declutter. Give yourself the gift of clean sheets and a clean pillow. The quality of your sleep will determine how tomorrow goes and how you approach it.

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

DRIP Investor Directory

Horizon Publishing Company
7412 Calumet Avenue
Hammond, IN 46324

Build & Protect Your Credit Like the Pros

Income You Can Count On

By Carolyn Warren, Post Columnist

THERE IS SURPRISINGLY good news that many people don't know when applying for a mortgage: Underwriters count the following income sources when you apply for a home loan.

Seasonal Work: Some jobs are seasonal and it is standard to receive unemployment income during the off-season. That is perfectly fine and your unemployment checks count in your annual income. Calculate your annual income for the past two years and then divide it by 24 for your annual income.

Overtime Income: As long as you can document receiving overtime income for the past 12 to 24 months, you can put it on your loan application.

Pay Increase: For a recent pay raise, explain and document, then you can use your new, higher income to qualify. Your loan officer will help you with this.

Incarceration Income: For people who were in prison, write down your prison job and income, such as: Federal prison, custodial work, \$35/month, 15 years. You use that to satisfy the two-year employment requirement. Then you will need 12 months of employment on the outside, and that is the income figure that will be used to qualify. If you have been out of prison for more than 24 months, do not include your prison job on the application.

Recent College Grads: Your years in school count toward the two-year employment requirement, but you need at least 12 months earning income. If you graduated three months ago and began work immediately, you need nine more months of income to qualify for a mortgage.

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

The Financial Corner



By R. Von Villas,
Post Columnist

IN MY LAST two columns, I went through the basics of the stock market and how from prison you can invest through dividend reinvestment plans (DRIPs), and I selected three stocks I believe are undervalued or have strong potential.

UGI Corp. (UGI) is a utility that supplies natural gas and electric services to its customers. It is also the largest propane distributor in the country. Shares of UGI are in the \$25 range, but have the potential for \$35 to \$45 over the next 12 to 18 months. It has a 37.5¢ dividend paid quarterly with a current yield over 6%. UGI is rated above-average financially, and I consider it a low-risk, high-yield investment, with a minimum \$50 initial investment.

Comerica (CMA) is a financial services company that operates in five geographic markets, including California. It hit a 52-week low during 2023 at \$28 per share, but has recovered to the \$48-to-\$50 range. It has potential for \$60 to \$75 in 12 to 18 months, with a 71¢ dividend paid quarterly, and yields over 5% with an above-average financial rating. I consider CMA a low-medium risk with good long-term potential on a \$25 minimum initial investment.

Kellanova (K) spun off its cereal business in Oct. 2023. K primarily produces snacks, crackers, granola bars, waffles, and veggie foods. It had a low of \$47 after the spin-off, but responded during the first half of 2024 with a 52-week high of \$75. K has a 60¢ quarterly dividend yielding 3%, a good financial rating, and an \$80-to-\$90 potential in 12 to 18 months on a minimum \$50 initial investment.

Have someone call an agent to request an application and prospectus for the stock that interests you. For UGI, call Computershare at (800) 850-1744. For Comerica call Computershare at (877) 536-3551. For Kellanova call Broadridge at

(877) 910-5385. Expect to receive your application in about 30 days.

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

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

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

Creative Arts Programs

"It is difficult to get the news from poems, yet men die miserably every day for lack of what is found there."
—William Carlos Williams

Why a Poem?

Author Unknown

 NEED A GOOD reason to write a poem? Putting words on paper can help you make sense of the world around you, express your deepest emotions, and give you a healthy way to cope with whatever is on your mind. As a bonus, you'll feel pretty accomplished once you're done.

Believe it or not, people would probably be pretty impressed if you wrote a poem that felt meaningful to you. After all, some of the world's most respected songwriters, rappers, and performers are actually poets who channel their voices into the written and spoken word. While you might not find fame and fortune writing about your life, current events, or an important topic that's on your mind, there are plenty of benefits and incentives to grabbing your pen. Here are five reasons to get started.

1. It can help you figure out how you feel. Putting words on paper allows you to organize your thoughts.
2. You've had unique experiences. By writing a poem, you can share your unique perspective on life.
3. Poetry is a powerful form of self-expression. Whatever your message is, a poem gives you an opportunity to communicate it eloquently and even spread it, if you're up to reading it out loud or publishing your work.
4. Writing can help you cope, a form of therapy that's totally free. Plus, if you share your poem, you're likely to find that others will connect with your words and relate to what you're saying. That can help you feel less alone.

5. Poems can help you see the world differently. One thing that can turn a good poem into a great poem is adding details. This might encourage you to become more observant in everyday life.

There are dozens of other reasons to write a poem — once you get started, you'll find some powerful motivation of your own.

crying in queen city

i'm careening along a one-lane road, heading
toward a terminus, darkness descended.
i'm driving on 68 west, on 220 south,
everything a haloed sheen, it feels like a fall.

i'm tracing the outline of the city forged by the potomac. i'm passing
a sign that reads: *md correctional facilities, 3 miles.* and what is
anguish becomes audible, if only to me.

i'm accelerating through the light pollution, my body wracked with
waves. i'm incapable of surfacing, certain i will drown in the depths
of this sorrow.
i'm suffering, but my pain is not unique.

i'm turning, then idling, in the visitors parking lot, texting you from
a few hundred yards away,
only the barbed wire and a list of "i wish"es
and a distance of forever between us.

i'm at a gas station, crying. i'm in a grocery store, crying. i'm passing
through bowling green, through crespatown, through bel air
— and i'm crying.

later, on the phone in a third-story attic bedroom,
the connection stable but my voice breaking.
there isn't a single street in this former rust belt
glory town that hasn't seen my sadness. and
i'll go on to cry throughout the panhandle,
my sorrow something to be walked on.

i'm at the highest point, the allegheny front before me. i'm searching
for a glimpse of you, and for the briefest of moments, i find it but
like everything here, it's temporary, this escarpment eroding and
faulting.

now i'm falling prostrate, your memory chasing me even as i race to
put distance between us. i'm crying my way across maryland, crying
along the new jersey turnpike, crying from 4,197 miles away,
mourning you and the emptiness you've carved out in me.

—Natalye Childress

Natalye Childress *Is a writer, editor, author, and translator who lives in Berlin, Germany. Her first book was published in 2014, and she's currently writing a poetry collection about her friend who is serving life in prison.*

Indigena

There's nights of cold sorrows and
days of forgotten dreams, things
of reality that forever I'll call
enemies of my Destiny. When a
bird sings it brings joy into
my soul, when I look up to the
sky I notice the touch of my Creator
in the clouds of a rainy
day as drops cleanse my Soul from
life's misfortunes. Songs and
soulful prayers I offer to
Grandfather as I feel the

blessings from the far directions,
on a spiritual red road I walk
to the beauty of my heart.
Tarahumara blood I feel running
through my body, Mexico until
I die and forever a brown
legacy on your mind. The dream
world waits for my mind, my
spirit will fly away as
the sacred eagle flies
and takes my prayers to God in
the peaceful sky.

—Jose Monsivias



Submissions by incarcerated writers can be sent to:

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

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

on Twitter and Instagram:

@prisonjourn,

on Facebook:

.@prisonjournalism

They may also sign up on the PJP website for *Inside Story*, a monthly e-newsletter.



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Are You Stuck?

By Bob Gay, Feature Reporter

HERE YOU ARE, stuck in prison while your mom needs help. She's a senior who can no longer do any of the five state and federally accepted activities for daily living: 1) Get out of bed by yourself, 2) Use the toilet, 3) Bathe, 4) Dress, and 5) Feed yourself.

Is your mom stuck? Absolutely not. Check her MediCal eligibility at: CalQualityCare.org or www.CalQualityCare.org/Learn/Nursing-Homes/Pay/MediCal.

Here's another scenario: Let's say you're still in prison with 20-plus years in the system and past your 50th birthday. You're looking forward to an early senior release date, but of late have realized you're having trouble doing some of the five daily activities for daily. Are you stuck? No. You can get the paper application at your local county social services office, or online at How to Apply, Covered California at: www.CoveredCA.com/Apply/.

Let's say you don't need a nursing home yet like your mom, but for now need assisted living. There are solutions, and you can start by choosing the nursing home in the area you plan to live. Choose one that has assisted-living facilities as well as long-term care. You can pay with your own money, or you can use Medi-Cal. By law, you can be reimbursed up to three months of private costs while waiting for conversion to MediCal. Usually, the private rate is about \$4,000 to \$6,000 a month. Simultaneously, submit your application for state-funded MediCal. Be sure you have enough cash on hand to pay for three months.

The most important thing you needed to do prior to your application at the MediCal office was confirm that there was at least one other patient in your facility of choice already on MediCal. Attorneys tell us MediCal law states that by having at least one patient paying their bills through MediCal, the facility is required to make all their beds MediCal available.

Last scenario: Perhaps you can do all five activities for daily living by yourself, but you need a parole plan. You've been down for years and now you face the task of living on the outside alone. Stuck? No, you are not. Remember, your mom needed to qualify for long-term care in a state-qualified nursing home. With the help of a qualified senior-care attorney, she was able to qualify for care paid for by her state and federal government entitlement programs. She qualified simply by calling the state bar association and asking for an attorney referral or consulting with the yellow pages under attorneys and calling one who specializes in nursing home practices.

Let's say this parole plan presents itself and you just need a place that has a clean, safe room. Preferably it's one with meals available if you don't want to eat out, and a bus that takes residents to the mall or grocery store a couple times a week. Is this possible? Absolutely. You too have state and federal benefits available as a returning citizen, but you must qualify for them. California offers you help in the form of various state agencies. You're entitled, but you must comply with the rules. Every case is different, yet every returning citizen can qualify if you meet the requirements set by law.

Life on the outside takes far more than a parole plan. Life on the streets takes planning. Period. Know your rights and your state and federal entitlement benefits. Everything is easier with a plan, and now is the best time to begin. You have resources here in the library and on the tablet. With a little imagination and work, you can be that returning citizen with a future with solutions.

Additional Resources: www.RootAndRebound.org,

www.DHCS.ca.gov/Services/MediCal/Eligibility/Documents/c09-16.pdf.

www.LawHelpCA.org/Find

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

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

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

LifeSupportAlliance.org



PEN America Prison Writing Program



120 Broadway, 26th Floor
New York, NY 10271

My Fish Story

By F. Orlando Wells, Feature Reporter

ANYONE WHO'S EVER gone fishing or is a fishing enthusiast probably has a great story about their experience. Some are whoppers, pun intended, and others not so much. In any event, this is my fish story.

My friend Anthony, one of my closest friends, took me to get our striped bass fishing permits on a whim during the season. I was off work at the time since the construction season was winding down and the jobs were becoming scarce, so I of course jumped at the chance to go fishing. You know what they say, "The worst day of fishing is better than the best day of work."

After getting our permits we loaded up my car with rods and tackle, drove to the bait shop, got everything we needed and took off down the road. We drove to a place far from civilization where no one was around for at least 20 miles — a supposed hot spot for catching the big ones.



We baited our lines, dropped them into the river, and then waited.

It wasn't long before Anthony was pulling up fish. At first, it was small ones below the keeper size,

then he started catching bigger and bigger fish. I, on the other hand, wasn't even getting a nibble. This went on for what seemed like hours — Anthony catching fish and me not so much. I couldn't understand why because I was using the same bait, had the same setup on my line, and it didn't take a genius to cast into the water. I was even fishing some of the same spots. I thought, "Why do these fish hate me?" Yeah, I know, fish don't think that far, but I was sure it was true.

After hours of disappointment and even trying different baits and lures, I finally got a big bite. "I got one!" I yelled happily as I began reeling in my first fish, which felt like a giant.

It seemed like it took forever to get this monster to the shore, but soon enough my line began to surface. As it came into view, I was utterly surprised to find I hadn't caught a giant striped bass. It wasn't even a fish. On the end of my line chewing on my bait was a clam. That's right, a clam. Anthony was rolling on the ground laughing hysterically. My face, as you might imagine, was locked in a deep scowl.

Now, I come from a fishing tribe in the Northwest and a long line of professional fishermen, but, apparently, the fishing gene must have skipped me. If I were to be judged by my ancestors on this catch, I would qualify for the worst Native American fisherman in the history of my people.

I have since made a pledge after this unfortunate circumstance, that one day in the near future I will be free and able to go fishing in that spot again. I vow to avenge myself by catching fish, not by catching another stupid clam.



Postscriptum

THANK YOU FOR joining us for our March edition of the Post, and helping us mark some of the month's festivities like 'Id al-Fitr, Ash Wednesday, Holi, and St. Patrick's Day. Among the many — sometimes obscure — holidays that fall in March (I'm looking at you, National French Bread Day), one that doesn't get as much attention as it deserves is World Social Work Day, the third Tuesday of the month (the 18th this year).

Social workers perform crucial services and engage in amazing, often thankless labor. In more administrative roles, we see them looking after the welfare of children in foster care, managing adoptions, and assisting youth in the juvenile justice system; creating treatment plans and interagency referrals for those dealing with substance use, domestic violence, or workplace harassment; and assisting incarcerated people with mental health treatment, parole preparation, and medical care. When you sign up for government disability payments, or work out a reentry plan, or go into a rehab center, that's a social worker you're interacting with. Social workers are also activists: Mary Ward was behind the creation of the playground, a modest but important response to industrialization; Jane Addams founded the Hull House social settlement and earned the Nobel Prize for Peace; and Jean-Martin Charcot revolutionized the way we see the mentally ill at the Salpêtrière hospital. One of the foundational principles of social work is advocacy, and history is full of examples of these advocates.

It might surprise you, but there are incarcerated social workers around you, too. There are domestic violence and peer recovery specialists and drug and alcohol counselors in most facilities, if you look hard enough.

This month, take a moment to thank a social worker. Odds are you'll run into at least one this month if you keep your eyes open. They're all around us, doing unnoticed but life-changing work.

Thank you, social workers.

-JC, Editor-in-Chief



December GED graduates. From Left—Emilio Chacon, Lenny Saldaña, Jeremy Brown, Damin Pashilk, Benjamin Villanueva. (Jason Davis / Mule Creek Post)

THE BACK PAGE | What you need to know about

Sources: This guide was adapted from the guide available on Genentech: uspreventiveservicestaskforce.org; www.cancer.org; seer.cancer.gov

Colon cancer is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer in both men and women in the United States, and the second leading overall cause of cancer deaths.

WHO GETS COLON CANCER?

More than **90%** of colon cancers occur in people age **50** and older

incidence has been increasing in adults

COLON CANCER INCIDENCE IS:

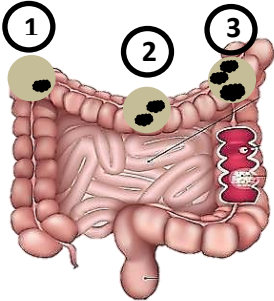
35% - 40%

More common in men than women

Higher among African Americans than whites

20%

HOW DOES COLON CANCER DEVELOP?



(iNovaNewsroom.org)

- Most colon cancer begins as a non-cancerous growth called a polyp that forms on the innermost layer of the colon or rectum.
- As a colon cancer tumor develops, it grows through several layers of tissue.
- Eventually the tumor may reach nearby lymph and blood vessels, and may even spread to lymph nodes and distant sites in the body.

HOW MANY ARE AFFECTED?

More than **140,000** Americans are diagnosed each year

That's about **16** every hour

Each Year **28,700** People are diagnosed with metastatic colon cancer, or advanced stage disease

50,000 Americans will die from the disease each year

CATCHING COLON CANCER EARLY IS IMPORTANT

more than **9** out of **10** individuals diagnosed with early-stage colon cancer that has not spread (metastasized) beyond the colon or rectum

SURVIVE 5 YEARS (and may live much longer!)

approximately **1** out of **10** individuals with advanced stage colon cancer that has spread (metastasized) to other organs such as the lungs or the liver

SURVIVE 5 YEARS

Because the early stages of the disease do not typically cause symptoms, the U.S. Preventative Services Task Force recommends screening tests beginning at age 45. Some patients with increased risk factors may need screening sooner.



WHAT ARE SOME WARNING SIGNS?



Changes in bowel habits, such as diarrhea, constipation, or narrowing of the stool



A constant need to evacuate the bowel

Blood in the stool



Weakness & Fatigue



Cramping or abdominal pain



Unintended weight loss

Colon Cancer

If you are experiencing any warning signs or have a family history of colon cancer, submit a CDCR 7362 Health Care Services Request for Treatment and speak to your primary care physician. The tests are easy, and could save your life!