



Volume VIII, Issue IV April 2025

HOW DO I HONOR MY VICTIMS?
Our incarcerated writers take on the
question for victims' rights week
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Wildlife Conservation Month

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To Our Readers

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

AS WE ENTER spring, we hope your year is progressing well and hope is on the bloom. On that topic, Barbara Kingsolver said, "The very least you can do in life is to figure out what you hope for. And the most you can do is to live inside it." And most memorably, from Emily Dickinson: "Hope is a thing with feathers, that perches in the soul, and sings the tune without words, and never stops at all."

We would like to thank PEN America's Prison and Justice Writing Program for including the *Post* in its Calls for Submissions flyer. We encourage all our readers to submit and share and we look forward to your stories.



Rachel Posada-Gonzalez and her nephew, associate degree recipient Gabriel Espinoza at the December 5, 2024, graduation event held at the Mule Creek State Prison. (J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

Celebrating Milestones of Success

By Jason Davis, Lead Reporter

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CONGRATULATIONS CLASS OF 2024! On Dec. 5, 2024, 87 residents of facilities D and E achieved monumental milestones of great personal success, earning college degrees, college certificates, GED certificates, high school diplomas, and vocational certifications. What was scheduled as one event turned into two, with a record number of graduates and attendees there to celebrate. Family, friends, educators, and administration personnel filled the visiting room. For many, this was years in the making.



Michael Delerio and his mother Helen Adelle-Hernandez. "To see him do so good, I knew I had to be here today," she said. "It's a special moment and I had to be part of it." (J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

Keynote speakers from Facility D were Michael Delerio and Marco Balarezo, and from Facility E Johnny Guerrero and Michael Barefield spoke. These men represented their respective facilities, examples of success from troubled pasts.

Delerio entered the prison system at 27 with a second-grade reading level, rejecting education; however at, one point he felt he had to do some "soul searching" and soon remembered the promise he made to his grandmother. "I told her that I would get an education," he said. Today, he fulfills that promise with an associate degree with honors from Folsom Lake College. He also found his purpose as a tutor in education. "I finally had something to offer ... and I was proud of that." He went on to address those along his journey, "I owe this newfound purpose to all of you! I needed you! All of you!"

"School is like reading a book," Balarezo said. "So, as this story ends, the climax has passed, the pieces of the puzzling plot are finally coming together." He reminded everyone there is a whole lot left in each one of us, "that the rest of your life is what you decide to make of it.... There is never a single road to success, but better yet, there are many different roads to success."

When Barefield took the stage, he began, "We are here today with our caps and gowns because we made a choice. We chose to do better and be better than what we were. We are the best versions of ourselves today and are still growing." As he

(continued on page 2)



(from *Milestones of Success*, pg. 1)
came to a close he stated, “Our prison has become our prosperity. We went from rebels to relentless, from incapable to invaluable, from statistics in prison to statistics in education, from ‘othered’ to organized, and from nuisance to noted scholars. Be proud of yourself and keep going!”

Family members were overcome with pride for their loved ones. Guerrero’s sister, Monica Flores, said, “This is so big for our family, his kids, my kids; they see what he has done, and we as a family are so proud of him.”



Monica Flores, her brother Johnny Guerrero, and their parents. (J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

allow my disabilities or anxiety to hold me back from something I value and feel is important,” Guerrero said.

Clearly, Guerrero’s blessing is his strength to face such a paralyzing fear. “Along this journey I have learned about myself and how to learn with my disabilities,” he continued. “Not only have I learned to live with these disabilities, but to thrive in spite of them.” And, through this educational journey, he said, “I have also found my passion and calling, which is helping and giving back to our community whether that’s in here or outside of these walls.”

Others are encouraging family through their achievements, as Bobbi Willis says about her husband, Austin. “This is a blessing,” she said. “He is the only person on both sides of the family to graduate. That pushed me to go back to school. I’m pursuing my degree now as well.”

What are you passionate about, where do you get your drive? Like these graduates, celebrate your successes, face your fears, and strive to be better every day.

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Javier Manriquez and fiancée Itzyana Garcia with their infant daughter. “This is just amazing, seeing him walk in cap and gown is both example and motivation for her,” Itzyana said. “He is doing what he needs to do to be a good role model and provider.” (J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

As Guerrero approached the podium, he was visibly nervous as is expected in a room full of people. When he began his speech, it became clear, “I have an extreme public speaking anxiety, so I humbly ask for your grace and patience.” The room was filled with compassion, observable by the tears on many, and he continued, “I’ve named it my curse and my blessing.” Why would someone with public speaking anxiety volunteer to speak? “I will no longer



THE MULE CREEK POST
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AND STAFF

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California Model



Opinion: The Calif. Model Means Investing in Education

By Babak Azadgilani,

R.J. Donovan Correctional Facility

IN RECENT YEARS, California made strides in reducing its prison population following a federal court order. However, despite a sizeable reduction from over 170,000 in 2006 to below 95,000 in 2024, California's prison budget remains stubbornly static. This is due, in large part, to increased spending on mental health treatment, medical expenses, and staff compensation. If California intends to reduce spending on prisons and incarceration, and increase spending on education, affordable housing, and the climate crisis, then the state may look to funding post-secondary correctional educational programs, including the California State University, Dominguez Hills master's degree program (HUX).

Post-secondary correctional education is a proven rehabilitative tool. According to the Rand Corporation, a leading public-policy think tank, for every dollar spent on correctional education, \$5 is saved on expenses related to incarceration. Additionally, the Dominguez Hills' program will help the state incorporate the four pillars of the California Model, a once-in-a-generation seismic shift in prison policy and practice (and Gov. Newsom's signature prison reform initiative). The California Model consists of dynamic security, peer support, trauma-informed care, and normalization.

It is important to note that California recently passed Assembly Bill (AB) 1104, which made it law that "The purpose of incarceration is rehabilitation and successful community reintegration achieved through education, treatment, and active participation in rehabilitative and restorative justice programs." Therefore, the time has come for all state organizations to work in collaboration to achieve the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of incarcerated people.

Successful reintegration must begin well in advance of a person's release from custody. If



(www.csudh.edu)

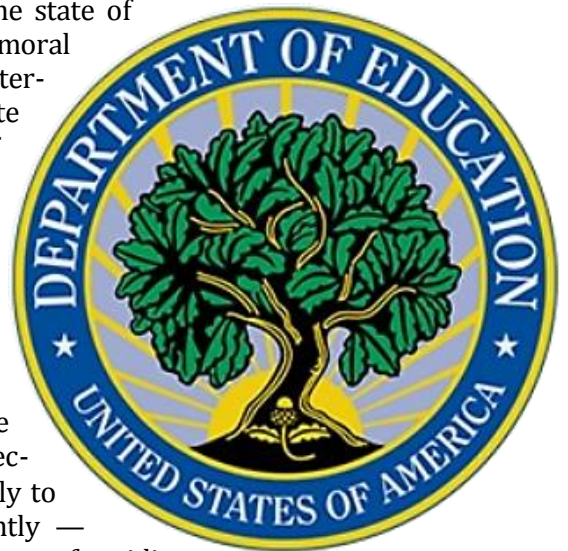
(meaning things like commitment offense, sentence length, and sentence type). By failing to fund higher education for incarcerated people based on their incarcerated status, California is betraying the intent of AB 1104 and the California Model.

Education has long been considered a human right. As far back as 1948, the United Nations General Assembly recognized this in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 26 of the document "declares that everyone has the right to education ... and that higher education be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit." This is an especially important concept when it comes to post-secondary correctional education. In the last few years, the U.S. made Pell grants available again to incarcerated students. Additionally, California has been a leader in the field since 2014 when the passage of Senate Bill 1391 made community college courses more widely available to incarcerated students.

By educating these students, the state of California is not only doing the moral thing, but also acting in its own interests. According to the Vera Institute for Justice, "At least 95 percent of the people in American prisons are eventually released, with more than 600,000 released each year." Importantly, continuing to educate incarcerated people makes sense as higher education has been shown to reduce recidivism. In fact, formerly incarcerated people who have participated in post-secondary programs are 48% less likely to recidivate. Perhaps most importantly — with each degree they attain, their rate of recidivism drops.

California is on the precipice of systemic change to its systems of incarceration, and the state's corrections department is at the forefront of prison college programs nationally, with associate and bachelor's degree programs available on an unprecedented scale. Master's degree opportunities are the next frontier, and an opportunity for California to demonstrate its commitment to the principle of rehabilitation. Additionally, higher education programs such as the HUX program help support California's adoption of the Norwegian style of penological policy and practice known collectively as the California Model. State organizations, including the DOR, are natural allies in the governor's mission of transforming California's prison system and should support Dominguez Hills' program as it pushes into the next frontier of higher education in the CDCR.

California is serious about the new model, then incarcerated people must have access to social services while they are in custody, as is the case in Norway. To implement the normalization pillar of the California Model, the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR), California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR), and California State University system (including Project Rebound) must work in collaboration. This collaboration must afford incarcerated people the same opportunities to pursue rehabilitation as any other Californian — regardless of their incarcerated status



PEN America Prison Writing Program



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Honoring My Victims

By F. Orlando Wells, Feature Reporter

MY EXPERIENCE OF the justice system was humiliating at the time, and I felt like my world was ending which made me angry. I was in denial, and the lies I told myself and anyone who would listen — as I found out later — only added to the harm I was causing my victims. I couldn't in my selfish and self-centered values see any of the crimes I committed as my responsibility. I never once took into account the massive amount of damage I caused my victims to feel, or their family's pain, let alone the community we lived in.

When I began my journey in recovery and rehabilitation, I found out just how inauthentic I was and just how deeply the lies I told myself continued the harm I caused. In all the things I had been doing, it became painfully clear just how much pain I am accountable for, and the long-term effects of my criminal and destructive behaviors. I realize in this journey to heal that I have a duty to do everything I can to give back in every possible way to honor my victims. Every change I make and every person I affect in a good way, I do in honor of my victims in hope that the positive effects I add to someone else's life may directly or indirectly help heal the pain and damage I caused my victims.

I fully acknowledge, take accountability, and serve my community with positivity and with everything I have to honor my victims. This has given me purpose today and how I continue to honor my victims.

Moral Teaching and the Transformation of Communities

By O. Rick Bridges, Feature Reporter

IN SEPTEMBER 2024, Burl Cain — the Mississippi commissioner of corrections, 21-year warden of the infamous Angola State Prison in Louisiana, and cofounder of the historic SUM seminary program — attended an inaugural event for the four-year baccalaureate seminary program at the Mule Creek State Prison.

When he last visited the prison in February 2024 (see the March 2024 edition of the *Post*), the program was just an idea. Within the year, 23 students had begun taking classes, five days a week for several hours a day.

"It was an idea that had some experience and some investment," said Cain. "We have prison seminaries in about 30 states," he explained. "There'll be about 2,200 similar seminary students busily learning somewhere in America. There are about \$5 million private dollars raised to pay for this every year."

Cain believes that as the students move through their studies, they will initiate a change in their environment. Change won't be limited to the incarcerated, either. "The staff changes will make a big difference, because the staff starts to respect the inmates more, and the inmates are a little different. The inmates become better first — so when inmates get better, staff gets better."

"The men are all very excited about it as well," he added. "It's also going to get hard because college is hard. ... They may get discouraged. It's up to them to stay the course and [finish] the program."

Cain says that it is his faith which is behind his motivation to heal the incarcerated people his program works with.

"I'm a Christian, and so I love God, and I love my country, and I love my fellow man. And so I love the prisoner because I think about and love the prayers of people that they deserve better. All of us have suffering. I want the prisoner to have a chance to do better. And, I care that we have less violence. I care that we have less people that are victims of crime."

"I don't claim credit," he is quick to add. "It's divine intervention."

The program is not about religious teaching, he says, but about increasing morality. "I don't think that any single religion can claim morality — but good moral rehabilitation is true rehabilitation. Moral people don't cheat, steal, rob, assault, or kill." With the moral teaching provided by the SUM seminary program, students are "learning to respect the value and purpose of the conventions and traditions of human morality, as well. We're after more than just religion here, we're focused on the moral teaching at the core of religion."

Cain also talks about the idea that incarcerated individuals can bring their healing home with them when released. "The communities that they hail from have violence, have drugs, and a lot of things that they shouldn't have," he says. "So, we're sending people back into the communities to help change those communities. When you can see revival in our communities come from our prisons, I mean ... that's the best place in the world to begin."

"I get chills on my back" when thinking about this dynamic, he says. "I know that most people don't think that far. But we see it now. It's happening all across the country. It had to happen in California because it's such a big place — big prisons, lots of inmates. This is a good example to the country."



Burl Cain (H. Kim / Media Specialist)



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The Wordsmith

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

HERE IN THE third installment covering homophones, we discuss additional words that sound alike yet have different meanings.

We'll begin with the following three words *censer*, *ensor*, and *sensor*. A *censer* is a container for burning incense. A *ensor* is a critic who prohibits offensive content, or the verb which means "to remove from circulation, print, or other media." And a *sensor* is a device that detects or measures something.

Some sentence examples are as follows: "The acolyte lit the incense in the censer." "The censor seized the book he thought obscene." "The sensor turned off the light after dawn."

Here's another trio of words often confused: The noun *chord*: "musical notes played together." The noun *cord*: "a thick string, a rib in fabric, or a stack of firewood measuring 8 feet by 8 feet by 4 feet." And the adjective *cored*: "to remove the core of something." Some sentence examples are as follows: "He played a D chord on the guitar." "His wrists were bound with a cord." "The apples should be peeled and cored first."

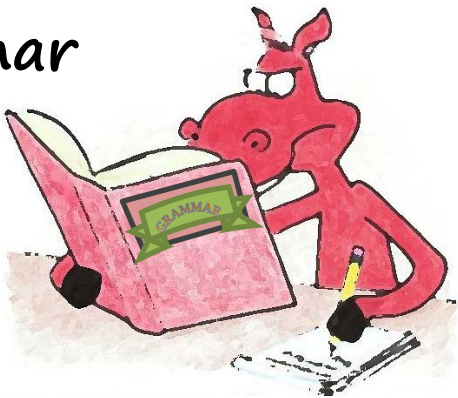
Here's a third trio of words: The verb *cite*: "to refer to," or "to quote." Or *sight*: "vision" (noun); or "to view or see" (verb). And *site*: "a location" (noun); or "to place at the scene" (verb). Some sentence examples are as follows: "The lawyer did not cite the correct case." "He sure was a sight, all covered in mud." "The site of the plane crash was remote."

Those may seem too easy to confuse, but you would be surprised how often even experienced writers put down the wrong word when they are in a hurry to finish a story or article.

This brings up a good thing to keep in mind: There is an old saying that carries a lot of good sense about not rushing through your writing: "The hurrier I go, the behinder I get."

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 ended our discussion of the first draft and the purpose of the writing. This month, we'll talk about the audience for whom we are writing.

When we set out to write something, it's important to know who our intended audience is. Largely, this will determine our purpose, style, and the content of our writing. Our audience could be incarcerated readers, family, college professors, etc. The chart below shows these potential audiences and the purposes for writing.

Topic	Audience	Purpose	Style
New self-help group on yard	Incarcerated readers	To inform	Expository
My worst day at work	Family	To entertain	Friendly letters
Causes of the American Civil War	College professors	To persuade	Essay

By identifying our audience and the purpose of our writing, we'll know what details to add and what language is appropriate for these particular readers.

Next month, we'll be looking at fine tuning writing through revision.

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.

Workmanship

By Brian Warner, Mule Creek State Prison

work·man·ship \ˈwɜrk-mən-,ship\ n 1: The art or skill of a workman.

THIS SERIES IS dedicated to exploring poetry written about work people perform that enriches our lives. The English word poem derives from the Greek word *poeimen*, which can be translated as workmanship.

Being, There by Gary Whited reflects on the meaning of *being*. This collection of poems is informed by his experience growing up on a ranch in Montana and the equally distant voice of Parmenides, a fourth century BC Greek philosopher. From roots sunk deep in the Montana country, Whited went on to plumb the depths of philosophy and psychotherapy.

Dr. Whited writes from the Boston area today. His journey from ranch to university enabled the elegantly crafted poems, which are set against the work of Parmenides, and which he translated from the original Greek. Their combined wisdom might inform our journeys from prison, on to new horizons; new ways of "being."

Parmenides, Fragment XI

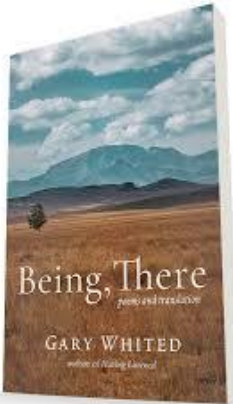
...How the earth and sun and moon and the shared heaven
Along with the heavenly milk and outermost Olympus
And the warm life-blood of the stars all passionately
Set themselves into motion to come into being...

Heavenly Milk

After the cow births her calf
My dad lights a smoke. We move to a hill
Far enough back not to bother them,

Getting to know each other the first
Time in the light of day. He rests on his
Haunches, lights another and watches.

A smile curves his mouth, blue smoke curls
Into the still air. We wait while the calf
Finds its feet, stumbles to the cow's udder,



(continued on page 6)



Being There author Gary Whited
(NarrativeMagazine.com)

(from **Workmanship**, pg. 5)

Drinks its first milk. Two cigarettes
Later, I know I want to smoke
When I grow up. Sounds of frothy

Sucking drift like a hymn across
The silence we share, with the calf,
cow,
Melting snow and gods, all of
them

Waiting to be fed. The thin blue
Smoke keeps dancing, remains of
snow
Give way, a crocus here another
there

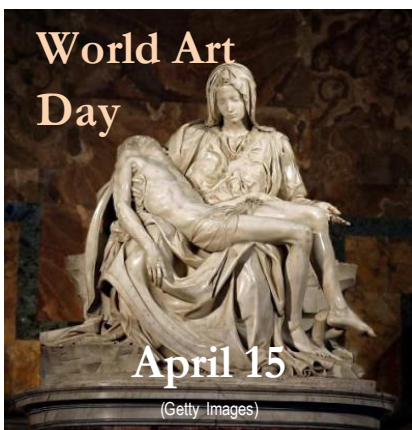
Punctuate mud and tender grass.
It isn't church, but better.

Being, There: Poems and Translations, by
Gary Whited



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

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Running for Your Life

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

While walking through his fields, a farmer was surprised by a tiger that leapt out of the brush and began to chase him. The farmer ran, and ran, and ran. He ran until he felt like he couldn't run another step, then ran some more. Coming at last to a cliff, the farmer jumped off the cliff and, while in mid-air, grabbed a root sticking out of the cliff. Looking up, there was the tiger reaching down to get him. Looking down, he saw another tiger trying to get him from below. Examining the root, he saw two mice, one white and one black, eating their way through it. Looking to his left, he saw the biggest, most-perfect, most beautiful berry he had ever seen. He reached out, straining and stretching, and picked the berry. He plopped it into his mouth — nothing in life had ever tasted sweeter!

HOW IMPORTANT IS this moment in time? What significance does it hold? Is this moment as big or important as the taste of that berry for the farmer? Or, is this just another ho-hum moment, in just another ho-hum day, of a ho-hum week, month, or year? If that's the case, how do you change it? Do you even want to change it? What would it take to change how you see each moment of each day in your life? Would you need to be chased by a tiger, intent on eating you?



(Dreamstime.com)

Believe it or not, that tiger is right there behind you, chasing you down, ready to pounce; all you need to do to let that happen is to slip, trip, or fall. Yes, life is full of unseen and unknown dangers. But it is also full of berries, those moments where each of us can experience the preciousness, the vitality, and the beauty of this moment. No matter where we are and what is going on around us.

For those of us on the inside, finding beauty and purpose can seem to be more difficult than for those outside prison walls. However, the tallest, strongest, most secure prison in existence is the one inside our own head. Once we parole from that prison, like the farmer, we are in the air, stretching out, searching for that vine, ready for the taste of that berry.

So, where are you? Are you blissfully walking through the field, unaware of the tiger lurking in the grass? Are you running for your life, unable to see anything but your impending doom? Or, are you hanging from the cliff, straining for that berry, in hopeful expectation of sweetness and the possibility of that experience?

Two tigers, one berry, endless choices.

Meet Noah Holland

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

"I am going to be sending my GED certificate home. It will be nice to have something on my mom's refrigerator besides my mug shots." —Noah Holland

NOA HOLLAND MADE the above statement to his class in June 2024, after receiving a GED diploma. After dropping out of school in the sixth grade, Holland made great strides to complete the certificate and begin working as a peer literacy mentor in prison.

Holland came to prison as a result of involvement with gangs, drugs, and alcohol abuse. He left home at 12 after his parents split up. He spent his teenage years living on the street, staying with friends, and in and out of juvenile facilities. After receiving a life term at the age of 19, he has been sober for more than 11 years and will be going to the parole board in about a decade. He's often felt his family didn't believe he would ever be able to accomplish anything in life; he really just wanted to prove them wrong. The two-step achievement of earning a GED diploma and becoming a peer literacy mentor have gone a long way to make being someone of import — and having a positive impact on the world around him — a possibility.

A large part of his recovery from alcohol and drugs, as well as part of his mental health care program, is writing poetry. "Achieving My Dream" is one of his poems. Being enrolled in the Enhanced Outpatient Program has added additional levels of access and responsibility to Holland's journey. He spent three years in administrative segregation, and five of the last nine in a mental hospital in his struggle to achieve some form of mental stability and equilibrium. He finds it incredible that two years ago he was in five-point restraints, and today he is a peer literacy mentor.

Finding the confidence to reach out and help others still struggling with their academic career may be the most challenging part of life today for Holland.

(continued on page 7)



(from Meet Noah Holland, pg. 6)
The most rewarding part is being able to help another incarcerated person move forward, either in their academic life or in general.

Achieving My Dream
I spend more time running from the person inside me.
Working so hard on the person I'm trying to be.
Securing a future where I know I'm Free.
A place where no bars care surrounding me.
Where my family is right next to me.
And nobody can harm me.
Away from this place I call hell.
The only place I know so well.
A place I can move forward and progress.
Somewhere I feel no stress.
A place to lay my heart to rest.
A place to call home.
No more nights I lay alone.
No more mattress hard as stone.
Where everything isn't based off someone's skin tone.
Surrounding myself by people that I know are clean.
By a team that supports my dream.
To see myself achieve success.
To be the man I know is best.
And ten more years from now we will know the rest.

—Noah Holland



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.



Guide Dogs of America
Tender Loving Canines

Jail and Prison Understaffing Crisis

By Brian Nan-Sonenstein and Emmett Sanders, Prison Policy Initiative





PRISONS AND JAILS struggled with staffing levels before COVID-19 spurred a national labor shortage, and they haven't bounced back since. Recruitment and retention are a high priority for corrections agencies, with nearly half reporting between 20% and 30% of their workers leaving each year. Many departments have tried increasing compensation, lowering employment requirements, hiring more part-time workers, and building new facilities to attract recruits, but it hasn't worked. Why not? Because understaffing in an untreatable symptom of mass incarceration — not a recruitment problem. When there are fewer workers than necessary to operate facilities, corrections authorities cut back staff needed to manage them, and conditions get worse: People live in lockdown conditions or they're transferred, housing units are consolidated, access to services and programming is limited, and fights break out. As conditions deteriorate, fewer want to work in these facilities. Decarceration should seem like the obvious way to break the cycle, but it's readily dismissed by corrections leaders whose livelihoods depend on mass incarceration. In this light, understaffing is a bad way to understand what's plaguing jails and prisons, but a good way to demand more investment; it's why recruitment is the only solution corrections can offer and a dead end at the same time.

Prisons and local jails have shed thousands of full-time workers in recent years (64,455 between 2013 and 2023). Despite rising wages, this decline in the workforce — that began to accelerate in 2020 — is expected to continue into the next decade and has been markedly worse in state prisons (49,730) than in local jails (16,982).

State prisons lost 12% of their full-time workforce between 2013 and 2023, with nearly all (93%) of this decline coinciding with the pandemic, according to our analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau's "Annual Survey of Public Employment & Payroll." Local jails lost 2% of their full-time workers over the past decade, with a 7% decline in the workforce since 2020. Meanwhile, part-time employment in jails and prisons has grown since the first year of the pandemic.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' "Occupation Employment and Wage Statistics," the median annual wage for corrections officers and jailers in 2023 was \$53,300. The median salary grew by 35% in the decade between 2013 and 2023, and 12.5% since 2020. Wages have remained relatively consistent with inflation for the last 10 years. While overtime puts more money in workers' pockets, demanding work schedules burn people out and deter them from seeking or keeping corrections jobs. Jail and prison officials consistently blame low wages as an obstacle to recruitment. Still, it's worth noting that the median annual corrections wage (\$53,300) is higher than professions requiring more training and education, like EMTs (\$53,180), and counselors and social workers (\$44,040). Additionally, corrections work isn't among the top 10 most dangerous jobs in America. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics' data from 2022 and 2023, their median annual salary is still higher than those jobs that are more dangerous: corrections workers (\$53,300; 2 fatalities per 100,000), loggers (\$48,910; 100 per 100,000), roofers (\$50,030; 58 per 100,000), delivery truck drivers (\$39,950; 30 per 100,000), and construction workers (\$44,310; 39 per 100,000).

In addition to working in the same overcrowded and dangerous environments facing incarcerated people, corrections workers are exposed to health risks such as injury and increased risk of infectious diseases. They have high rates of death and suicide from routinely experiencing trauma: One 2013 study of nearly 3,600 corrections professionals from all over the country estimated that 34% of corrections staff in security roles have PTSD while 31% have depression — rates much higher than the 6% of the U.S. population who will have PTSD at some point in their lives.

In conclusion, understaffing is a real problem in jails and prisons. It is an inevitable consequence of the U.S.'s limitless dependence on criminalization and mass incarceration — not a failure to provide higher wages and new prisons. We know this because narrowly focusing on the needs of the corrections workforce has not made a dent in the understaffing crisis.



Pardon vs. Clemency

By Vanessa Nelson-Sloane,
Life Support Alliance

ONE PATH FOR many incarcerated individuals seeking relief from seemingly endless imprisonment is to seek clemency from the governor. It's important to recognize that clemency relief is not available only to lifers or those with an life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) term, but can be secured by anyone sentenced to prison.

Clemency can take the form of a commutation of sentence or a pardon. With a *commutation*, the governor can reduce the sentence of an individual serving a sentence. A *pardon* provides relief from punishment and restores some civic rights for individuals who have completed their sentences.

If your conviction involves a PC §290 offense, be aware that if you receive clemency, even at the pardon level, the California attorney general's office will not dismiss a sex offender's registration conditions. The only exception is when the governor makes an express finding the grantee is factually innocent of the crime triggering the registration requirement. Gov. Newsom has granted no pardons on this basis and there are no indications this policy will change.

A governor is not required to consider an application and there is no set timeline for review. There is no court hearing and no application fee, and an attorney is not required to submit a petition. For the pardon or clemency application, go to your law library or on the governor's website.

The Judicial Council of California provides clemency self-help information:

Judicial Council of California
455 Golden Gate Avenue #1521
San Francisco, CA 94102

The California State Bar offers referrals for no- and low-cost legal services:

The California State Bar
180 Howard Street
San Francisco, CA 94105



The Long Walk Home

By Ricky Ortega
Post Columnist

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

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

The Bonds of Peace

ON NOV. 6, 2023, Guiding Rage Into Power (GRIP) hosted a gathering at the Mule Creek State Prison with the governor's office, members of the commutation committee, and survivors of violent crime from the Amends Project. While preparing for the event, I was invited to read my apology letter to Terri, my victim, whose life I callously took on January 9, 1981.

As I took my seat in the middle of the packed room, I thought I was prepared to face my journey through this valley of deep shadow. Yet, as I began to speak, it occurred to me that everything I learned in GRIP about emotional intelligence seemed to escape me in this moment. Surrounded by governmental officials who were interested in what I had to say, I found myself standing on the edge of life, staring into the eye of the storm. I wanted to run and hide from my indignity, but I knew I had to face my reality — I knew it was time to face Terri.

I read about the person I was when I committed my crime and about what justice might look like in Terri's eyes. I described my truth in detail and how I've come to accept my responsibility for that truth. I reflected on the pain I caused by my actions and I confronted my demons of this unhealed shame. It was an emptying of soul and spirit I never knew existed, washed away by the memories I shared of Terri's tears.

As I walked back to my seat, I wanted to fly away from this moment like a bird with broken wings, feeling trapped and alone. I was then met by a gentleman, one of the survivors who had spoken earlier that day about the murder of his brother. As he extended his hand in a gesture of peace, the feelings that surfaced inside me were difficult to bear. He told me how touched he was by the courage it must have taken for me to read my letter. His compassion broke me down and I felt an awakening of emotions I had never experienced. Not wanting to look him in the eye, I turned away in a cowardly retreat, unable to endure the heat of sitting in this fire. He clutched me by the shoulders though, insisting that I face him as he uttered the words that shape the rest of my life, saying emphatically as he embraced me — "I forgive you."

I felt his words coursing through the deepest parts of my soul, as though he were saying it for his own healing as much as for mine. His willingness to stand with me in my loss of dignity has formed a lasting bond of peace, releasing the demons imprisoned within me. Somehow, we felt connected, a surrogacy, giving birth to a new dawn of healing and the true meaning of hope.

We spent much of the day together, and, as we said goodbye, I remember feeling like a part of me went with him as he walked out the gate. The fences of life without parole have no gates, yet somehow I felt free for the first time in 44 years of my incarceration. I learned on that special day that making peace starts within me, and only then can true healing awaken. Making amends is a gift — like rosebuds in the springtime, sprinkled with the fresh morning dew; a gift forever forming the bonds of peace.



Connie Layman and Ricky Ortega at the GRIP graduation Jan. 23, 2025.

(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)



UC Davis Books to Prisoners
CSI Box #157
1 Shields Ave.
Davis, CA 95616

Prisoners Literature Project
% Bound Together Books
1369 Haight Street
San Francisco, CA 94117

Prison Book Project
P.O. Box 592
Titusville, FL 32781

Human Kindness Foundation
% The Prison Ashram Project
P.O. Box 61619
Durham, NC 27715

PDX Books Through Bars
% Left Bank Books
92 Pike St., Box A
Seattle, WA 98101

Women's Prison Book Project
% Boneshaker Books
2002 23rd Ave S.
Minneapolis, MN 55404

Minneapolis, MN 55404
Groundwork Books Collective for
Prisoners
0323 UCSD Old Student Center
La Jolla, CA 92037

Prison Library Project
% The Claremont Forum
915-C West Foothill Blvd., PMB
128
Claremont, CA 91711

Providence Books Thru Bars
5 Angell St.
Providence, RI 02906

LGBT Books to Prisoners
1202 Williamson St. #1
% Social Justice Center Incubator
Madison, WI 53703

NYC Books Through Bars
% Bluestockings Bookstore
116 Suffolk Street
New York, NY 10002



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



Firestorm and Future Forests

TWO HUGE FIRES in the L.A. area burned uncontained from January 7 to 11, killing 29 people, razing 16,000 structures, and consuming tens of thousands of acres. Driven by unusually ferocious Santa Ana winds 60 to 100 mph, the flames turned exclusive neighborhoods where movie stars lived into ruins and rubble. Racking up more than \$150 billion of insurance claims, it's projected to be the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history.

Professor Stefan Doerr, director of the Center for Wildfire Research at Swanson University states, "California has seen some of the most significant increases in the length and extremity of fire weather seasons in recent decades driven largely by climate change."

There was terror in the streets as scenes of apocalypse unfolded in Pacific Palisades. Ordered to evacuate as the firestorm approached, residents grabbed whatever they could carry and jumped into their cars. The only road out of town was instantly jammed with traffic. The flames were everywhere when police on the scene yelled, "Run for your lives!" Screaming and crying, clutching pets and children, they followed the police order and fled on foot as the inferno engulfed homes and vehicles. The air was filled with suffocating smoke; hydrants went dry while residents lost everything they owned.

Global warming increases the number of fire weather days when conditions are conducive to fires spreading quickly — dry, hot, windy, low relative humidity, and drought. Warmer air creates an atmospheric sponge that soaks up and holds more moisture, then releases it at a faster rate. This results in rapid swings between wet and dry periods. Higher spring and summer temps dry out soil and vegetation, turning it into the perfect kindling for megafires. In climate science circles, this is known as "hydroclimate whiplash." L.A. weather patterns over the last decade are a textbook example of this destructive cycle. A 10-year drought ended with two very wet winters — in 2022 and 2023 — when atmospheric rivers brought heavy rain and flooding across the southland. Grasses and shrubs grew lush and thick, then turned tinder dry during a long hot summer. Drought returned with an exceptionally dry autumn and winter; a paltry 0.016 inches of rain fell from October to January. The stage was set for disaster.

Wildfires over 1,000 acres are five times more frequent and 10 times larger than in the 1970s. A recent study projects a 25% to 100% increase in hydroclimate whiplash events. Compounding the danger, both L.A. fires were in areas where people and wildlands overlap, where structure-to-structure fires spread rapidly with a massive fuel load that can trap people in an unstoppable conflagration, as it did in Lahaina, Hawaii, and Paradise, California, where there were many deaths.

Peter Kalmus, a climate scientist, says there is a silver lining to the tragedy in L.A. "The public will wake up and get angry and say, 'Enough is enough, we need to do something.'"

Efforts are underway across the continents to replant forests and wildlands. In one of the largest ecological restoration projects, Grain for Green in China has converted 700 million acres of cropland into forest and prairie. Africa's the Great Green Wall has restored 47 million degraded acres from Senegal to Ethiopia. The Trillion Tree Initiative is a global partnership of conservation groups that has restored billions of trees. Sixty countries have joined the Bonn Challenge and are committed to reforestation totaling 875 million acres.

In the U.S., where megafires have destroyed 33 million acres of forests, the flames burn hotter and longer so fewer trees survive. As a result, there are fewer pine cones left in pine forests for regeneration. A nonprofit, American Forests, has stepped in to help. They send out crews with skilled climbers and power lifts to harvest ripe cones from the tops of living trees. Then they're taken to nurseries where the seeds are extracted and grown into seedlings. It takes one million seedlings to plant 4,500 acres. Because of hotter, dryer conditions, many won't survive. Seeds from drought-tolerant varieties are being sourced, and logging companies are helping by clearing scorched land and collecting cones.

Replacing enough trees to repair the devastation caused by megafires is a monumental task. Yet, a future free of climate catastrophes depends on vibrant resilient forests and the benefits they bring.

Sources: *CBS Science*, Nov. 21, 2024, Jan. 19, 2025; *NPR*, Jan. 8, 2025; *BBC*, Jan. 7 & 8, 2025; and *Yale Climate Connections*, Jan. 7, 2025.

Bridging Barriers

Interview with Joanna Cote
By Fred Munch, Post Columnist

THE FORTUNATE FEW assigned to the Land Together Program have a unique visitor every Tuesday. For the last two years, Joanna Cote has volunteered time, knowledge, and inspiration to student gardeners on Facility D at the Mule Creek State Prison. Gracious, personable, and empathetic, she always has a friendly smile and a kind word. Her presence casts a glow of warmth and welcome upon all who enter her domain.

Cote has a BA in journalism, an MA in sports leadership, and certification in trauma-informed yoga. She coached running for former gang members at Homeboy Industries in L.A., and taught yoga to youth offenders through Rite of Passage, an alternate detention program in Indiana. She’s an avid athlete and participant in triathlons and Iron Man competitions.

She came to the Mule Creek State Prison under a grant in 2022 to lead a yoga class and be an assistant with Land Together. In Cote’s view, the body-mind-spirit is connected to nature on a path that leads to healing and reconciliation. When she talked about the herbal tea bag project, her face lit up with pride and enthusiasm. She is drying herbs such as calendula and lemon verbena to share this healthy beverage with the community.

Why would she choose to be here two days a week without pay? She explained that it gives her “a sense of belonging” lacking on the outside. “It feeds my soul,” said Cote about forming a community and sharing experiences with the residents.

Cote’s work creates a path between two very different worlds by bringing some of the harvest to Interfaith Food Ministries and giving away plants to people in other locations. She tells everyone who receives the garden’s bounty about the men who nurtured the plants. “They’re people, too,” she says.

For many who hear this message, it’s a glimpse of a separate reality that is hidden away and would remain unseen if it wasn’t for the vision and devotion of this remarkable woman.

A Garden Celebration

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

TUESDAY, OCT. 15, 2024, marked the second anniversary of Land Together (formerly the Insight Garden Program) at Facility D’s Garden of Hope at the Mule Creek State Prison. The birds, bees, and butterflies that mark the garden as a living space were in full glory, while at the same time the worms that make the garden a blooming success were also present in their underground borrows, turning garden and food waste into compost and continuing the cycle of life.

Earlier this summer, a large frog was found in the garden and invited to stay, hanging out in one of the mounds that are the base for many of the flowers and other plants that make up the living greenery. And the gophers — who in past years were not so much invited but appreciated — have moved on. Some might think they left because of the presence of the snakes that moved into the garden this past year, including a rattlesnake, once discovered, was gently relocated.

Land Together’s Jill Plumb and Joanna Cote brought the assembled group together for a commemoration of the garden and all of its progress, to include a reading of Emily Dickinson’s “Bloom.” There was the acknowledgement of these unceded ancestral lands of the Plains Miwok tribal nation, an honoring of the seven sacred directions and the sacred hoop of life. There was music and song.



Joanna Cote and Fred Munch in the Garden of Hope.
J. Davis / Mule Creek Post

Roses & Thorns

Bloom – is Result – to meet a Flower
And casually glance
Would cause one to scarcely suspect
The minor Circumstance
Assisting in the Bright Affair
So intricately done
Then offered as a Butterfly
to the Meridan –
To pack the Bud – oppose the Worm –
Obtain its right of Dew –
Adjust the Heat – elude the Wind –
Escape the prowling Bee
Great Nature not to disappoint
Awaiting her that day –
To be a Flower, is profound
Responsibility –



J. Davis / Mule Creek Post

When the ceremony ended, everyone gathered in the visiting room for lunch, more music, and poetry. Prior to the serving of food from Don Luis’ Restaurant, David Gray (violin), Toni Elmore (vocals), and Logan Ford (guitar) performed the song, “In the Garden.” James Collins then read his poem, “Roses and Thorns.”

Roses & Thorns

I am an ambitious rose that survives
in a world that is bordered by thorns
I am only a little white rose in the harvest
being cycled through a moment of time, soon
I will turn a dingy white color that will
proceed to brown and become crumbly—like so
many others that journeyed into compost—
The memories of me will be a faint whisper
upon the wind.



J. Davis / Mule Creek Post

Community Resource Manager Jason Ross brought in the food and served up healthy portions of wonderfully prepared Mexican dishes, topped off with delicious cheesecake covered with cherries and cherry syrup. When the day was done, all agreed that it had been a special day of celebration of growing things, growing hearts, and growing hope of better days to come.

There are currently nine Land Together programs in California prisons: the San Quentin Rehabilitation Center (flagship program); the California State Prison–Solano; the Avenal State Prison; the California State Prison–Los Angeles County; the Mule Creek State Prison; the Central California Women’s Facility; the California Institute for Women; the California Medical Facility; and the California Health Care Facility.

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.

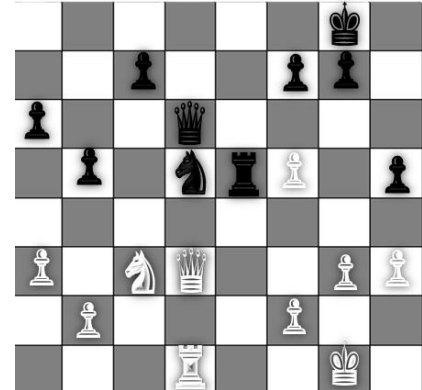
According to Reinfeld, "Lack of faith in one's position is the chief course of defeat;" even more so is to claim victory prematurely. This next game was played in Berlin in 1936.

After he played 1. Re7, white was sure of victory; but his celebration was short-lived. Can you find the flaw in his plan?

White to play.



March's challenge:



Black to move: 1 Kf3; 2 bxc3 Re1+.



26.2 To Life Viewing at SATF

By David Viens, Substance Abuse Treatment Facility

ON OCT. 11, 2024, Facility G was privileged to host a very special event featuring the documentary titled *26.2 To Life* by Christine Yoo. For the first time, four facilities came together to watch this incredibly inspiring, award-winning film. The film depicted the stories of three men sentenced to life in prison for the crime of murder as they undertook the running of a marathon in their quest for redemption and freedom.

The story begins at San Quentin where the three lifers are housed. Collectively, they lived with diminished hope until a volunteer who coached marathon athletes introduced them to the Thousand Mile Club. Hence, the SQ Running Club was formed. Yoo, an independent documentary producer, read an article that intrigued her about this prison running club and started some preliminary research. Surprised by what she discovered and filled with inspiration, she embarked on this journey to share her incredibly moving film.

This was more than a movie about marathon runners at San Quentin. It was a palpable look into the lives of men and families imprisoned; the love and struggle of those living together though separated by the gray walls of prison. The film brought to life the arduous path of the runners in the austere environment of California's oldest prison. The goal was to run 105 laps around the yard, on a track of cement and sand, under gun towers behind razor wire. I couldn't help but feel inspired as each man and his family persevered, finding hope and solace through this life-changing coping skill on their field of dreams.

Markelle Taylor and producer-director Yoo attended this film's debut. Taylor's amazing journey brought him in front of the parole board where he was found suitable. More impressive was seeing Taylor run in the Boston Marathon and beat his personal record of 26.2 miles under three hours.

The viewing was sponsored by the Tulare Adult School, where Principal Mark Smith and his talented staff put on an impressive, first-class event. There were keynote speakers, complementary concessions, door prizes, and more.

A special thanks goes to Warden Morales, Associate Warden Critchlow, Principal Smith, Coach Valencia, Coach Whipple, Facility G staff, and everyone involved for their contributions that made this stellar event possible.

Why Crochet?

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter



(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

ARE YOU A person with a creative bent? Do you like to give presents to your friends and loved ones? Would you like to be able to do so without going broke in the process? If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then consider taking up crochet as a hobby. All you really need is a crochet hook, a skein of yarn, a ruler, and fingernail clippers to get started — all for less than \$10 through Union Supply. It could be a part of your quarterly package.

So, to answer the question at the beginning of this article: Because it is easy, cheap, fun, constructive, creative, and provides a sense of satisfaction as you complete each project with a visible result for your effort. If these aren't reasons enough, by providing handmade gifts for those we care about we strengthen our relationships that have been so deeply strained by our separation through incarceration and distance.

As to the easy part, that is up to each person as there are only two basic stitches to learn, and everything else is simply a variation on the second type of stitch. Everything starts with a *chain*, which is simply one loop drawn through the previous loop and continuing until you get the number of loops you want for the length of the garment. The chain stitch is one you will use a lot and the first thing to practice making. The other basic stitch is called a *single crochet*, and from it all of the other types are made with simple moves.

This is not knitting; it uses only a single hook, and the size of the stitch depends on the size of the hook. In many ways, crocheting is much easier than knitting and is beautiful in its simplicity.

Do you want a warm beanie or scarf? How about a pair of slippers? Maybe a personal blanket for those cold nights? You can do all this and more if you learn to crochet.

This is a popular hobby among men in and out of prison, and there should be someone on your yard to help you get started with the basics. Also, there are books available, and patterns often come with the yarn on the wrapper. So why put it off? Consider crocheting as a hobby. If you try it you might just get hooked.

Climate Change Reimagined

By Philong Huynh, Feature Reporter

IN A SEPT. 19, 2024, interview on *Amanpour & Co.* on PBS, biology professor and author Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, while on the topic of climate change, posed the question, “What if we get it right?” This is also the title of her new book. Johnson acknowledges there is a great political divide in the U.S. as to the origin of climate change, and even as to whether it exists. She stated multiple actors and factors are at play when it comes to this global dilemma and controversy. A few eye-opening examples she gave included that of the fashion industry, which is responsible for 10% of the world’s carbon output in producing some 13 million tons each year of fast fashion that is worn, on average, only seven times before being discarded to end up in landfills.

The finance industry, particularly the big banks, finance fossil fuel companies to the tune of \$1.5 trillion each year, said Johnson. She also noted that 50% of the world’s richest populations are responsible for 70% of the carbon output, while the poorest 50% are only responsible for 7%, with big industries presumably filling out the rest.

Johnson noted that while fusion technology is not yet here to save the day, we do have at our disposal numerous practical solutions that utilize clean and green energy production. These technologies have created economies and opportunities for many U.S. states. On an individual level, she suggested many of us can take small steps not only by recycling, but by contributing in other ways using our resources, talent, and creativity. She also suggested divesting from companies and banks that finance polluters. “This is the only planet we got because not all of us can go to Mars,” said Johnson.

In a Sept. 23, 2024, interview with the BBC, California Attorney General Rob Bonta — who recently filed suit against Exxon Mobil — indicated that the myth about recycling’s effectiveness was actually a 1989

media campaign orchestrated by Exxon. The company wanted to put the public at ease by propagating the falsehood that recycling is the answer when, in fact, most plastics cannot be recycled. To this day, only 5% of the world’s plastics have ever been recycled, and Exxon is the largest seller of precursor polymers for plastic production.

Scientists believe there is time to change course, but we need to engage the “Carbon Majors” (the top 100 greenhouse gas-producing companies) in a culture of compliance. Lawsuits have accomplished some of those goals, but more is needed, such as independently appointed judicial monitors that have plenary power to access corporate information and institute regulatory changes and help guide these companies to comply.

Source: Susan Kuo, et al., “Forcing Climate Change Compliance,” *Harvard Environmental Law Review*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2024.

Writing for Publication

Article Reprints, Spinoffs, and Sidebars

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

AFTER SUCCESSFULLY PUBLISHING an article in a newspaper, magazine, or other publication, you may feel the same piece is relevant enough to submit to another periodical. In the case of an article you were paid for, you have opportunities to sell it again. The work is then called a “reprint,” or sometimes a “spinoff,” and can be published elsewhere to build your writing history.

The Reprint

Relevance to another publication’s audience and fitting their writer’s submission guidelines is a key to success. A reprint usually requires a few selected changes, and typically a new title, to make it salable. For example, I wrote an article in 1993, titled “Mail Call,” outlining how excited the incarcerated are at daily correspondence distribution in a federal jail where I spent six months. The work also added a few tips on writing quality letters to enable more responses. “Mail Call” was readily accepted by the original nationally distributed, religious-based *Inside Journal* (circulation: 35,000+). They paid me with a year’s free subscription to the paper. After publication of “Mail Call,” I found a copy of *Prison Life* magazine and read its writer’s guidelines for submissions. “Mail Call” fit perfectly what they wanted, so I sent a query describing the article, advising the piece was a previously published work, and I could modify it to fit their format and slightly different readership. They accepted. The original opening paragraph describing a federal lockup was changed to reflect a generic prison or jail setting and, after a title change, *Prison Life* published my article in a two-page, color-illustrated spread. This was a reprint with just a few modifications. Over the past three decades, “Mail Call” was reprinted in various forms, and published in a total of five prison-related publications. Remember to send a query letter to the new market, and also advise the potential client that a similar piece has already appeared elsewhere.

The Spinoff

A spinoff is created from an original published article and is excerpted and rewritten into a fresh piece to fit the format of another publication, or sometimes a submission to the same publisher. For example, a piece you successfully published about a prison self-help group and included several interviews with participants revealed an interesting life story of one student. Perhaps this person appeared in several car commercials before arrest. This personal tale can be an entirely different piece and appeal to prison publications as a profile article, or to an outside magazine or newspaper with focus on human interest or automotive-related stories. Maybe the incarcerated person’s hometown newspaper would be interested. The spinoff concept has broad appeal and can be highly successful with varied publications.

The Sidebar

A sidebar is a short, separate piece accompanying a larger main work and provides supplementary information, typically statistics, research, or perhaps a profile of someone interviewed in the main article. This related data is frequently a source for recycling or reprinting a freelance writer’s work. Many publishers offer extra compensation for a sidebar, as well as when you supply your own photographs, graphs, pie charts, or statistical presentations common to sidebars. This concept is easily adaptable to publishing in the many prison-related periodicals. Be creative. When you initially query a publisher, mention photos or other data you can offer in the form of a sidebar. You won’t know if you don’t ask, right?



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.

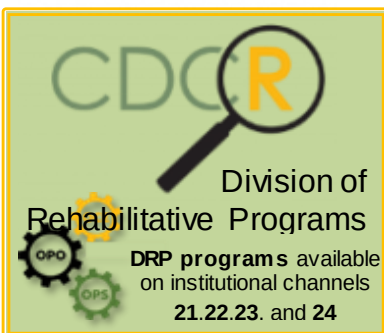
Maya Emig writes a monthly column for the Mule Creek Post focusing on Board of Parole Hearings issues. For more information about the BPH, write:

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

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



You were born to win, but to be a winner, you must plan to win, prepare to win, and expect to win.

— Zig Ziglar

A Programming Roadmap, Pt. 1

By Maya Emig, Post Columnist

AS WE VENTURE together this next year I want to give you guidance moving forward. First — on your tablets you have immense amounts of resources. Start doing all of the programs available on Edovo especially those that are focused on your issues. Whether its substance abuse, domestic violence, victim impact, or anger management — really start working through the Edovo programming. You can give your parole attorney the code number and we can pull up your classes and submit your chronology of classes to the parole board. Do all programming with a goal of understanding it and incorporating the knowledge into your everyday life. One of the things that clients often do is tell me about their certificates, but when I follow up and ask about the actual programming that they have learned, it goes one of two ways. Either they can tell me what they have learned and how it has helped them with their understanding of themselves, or they tell me that they can't remember it or they just were not prepared for our meeting (or some other reason). You are spending the time doing these programs, invest that time in internalizing them — it will pay off in dividends. Please spend the time learning it the first time and incorporating it into your understanding of your criminality, and into the coping skills you are vetting to see which ones work for you and which ones don't. This is not about memorizing word for word each of the concepts, but rather working on understanding the nature of the concepts and applying it to your life.

Another thing that is available on the tablet are videos from Parole Justice Works. The organization is a collaboration of parole attorneys, victims/survivors of crime, prosecutors, criminal justice advocates, community organizations, and formerly incarcerated people who have successfully reentered society through the parole hearing process. Parole Justice Work's mission is to promote meaningful and effective participation in California's parole hearing process through education, empowerment, and trauma-informed support for all participants.

Parole Justice Works has videos on "Parole Process Overview," "Steps of the Parole Process," "Working With Your Attorney," and "Understanding the CRA Process," as well as videos on accountability, insight, and remorse. If you do not have all of these videos available to you, know they will be coming to your tablet soon.

I have watched each of the videos and I would urge each of you to spend the time watching them as well. The video "Working With Your Attorney" is an excellent video to really understand the changes that have occurred in parole representation and the role your attorney plays in this process.

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

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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



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

30 STRATEGIES of SUITABILITY

BY JOSEPH R. HAYTAS

Control Your Anger, Reduce Your Stress

EVERYONE GETS ANGRY. People around us have their own agenda and the world does not revolve around any single individual. We can't control what others do, but we can control our own actions and reactions. The danger with anger is that it threatens a loss of personal peace and tranquility.

Anger can be a dangerous weapon, not only for those it is directed toward. An angry episode puts strain on the heart and repressed anger is associated with developing heart disease. Even when we learn self-control, it doesn't prevent angry episodes. Anger is a normal emotion, but it can grow like a cancer if not checked, causing unwise decisions, some of which create problems that last a lifetime.

Self-awareness and self-control are the best defenses against the viral effects of anger. Become aware of the warning signs: apprehension, denial, defensiveness, avoidance, irritation, and depression, which is helpful in preventing minor annoyances from escalating to full-blown anger episodes.

Here are some helpful tips for dealing with potentially angry situations. Walk away, use logic over emotion, engage in physical activity, surround yourself with positive people, write, call or visit with family or friends, read, play or run, find someone to talk to, get a dog, stay in the present, sign up for an anger management course, listen to music, or meditate.

When you begin to feel angry, it is the perfect time to practice self-control techniques like taking a time out or counting to 10. You may have a good reason for being angry, but don't use it as an excuse to stay that way.

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



Ex-Offender Myths Deconstructed

Part 1

By Philong Huynh, Feature Reporter

DEPENDING WHOM YOU ask, at some prisons the overwhelming majority of people are sex offenders. The current paradigm about sex offenders is most only commit sex offenses, have mental illnesses, and are dangerous.

As to the specialization claim, published literature shows most offenders, including sex offenders, do not specialize in crime types, but are rather versatile and opportunistic. Governed by impulsivity, they commit a variety of crimes and not just sex crimes. Thus, violent sex crimes are often embedded in criminal histories that include non-violent crimes. An estimated 40% to 60% of sex offenders have a history of nonsexual criminal behavior. The variable most strongly related to recidivism was prior criminal history, not deviant sexual preference. This is not to say that some sex offenders are not at high risk for recidivism; it's just that there is no clear empirical research for assessing which sex offenders present the most immediate risk for reoffending. Even long-term recidivism study for people who sexually abuse children followed from 10 to 31 years after incarceration showed a recidivism rate of 42%, which is less than the 48.7% recidivism rate for California's general population. Also, there is no evidence that sex offenders are more mentally disordered than general criminal offenders. Most criminal offenders, including sex offenders, meet at least some of the criteria for antisocial personality disorder, a chronic disorder that rarely begins in adulthood and for which there exists no effective treatment.

"The essential feature of Antisocial Personality Disorder," according to the American Psychiatric Association's fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, "is a pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others that begins in childhood or early adolescence and continues into adulthood." For this diagnosis, an individual with antisocial personality must have demonstrated certain conduct before age 15 such as truancy, deceitfulness, initiating fights, forcing someone into sexual activity, physical cruelty to animals or people, or destruction of property. In addition, the person must also show irresponsible and anti-social behavior such as inability to maintain employment or responsible financial behavior, violation of the law, repeated physical fighting, impulsivity, and being reckless regarding his or her own and others' personal safety.

The presumption of mental illness, which is differentiated from personality disorder, results in legal and mental health policies that operate on the assumption the sex offender is a mentally disordered specialist motivated by deviant sexual arousal, which, if not treated, will result in future sex crimes. However, empirical research shows there is no statistically significant difference between sex offenders and control groups when it comes to deviant sexual fantasies, meaning in those studies, the control subjects were aroused by the same deviant fantasies in similar numbers. The only difference was the control subjects had apparently never acted on those arousals and were never convicted of any sex crimes.

In the next installment of this article, we look at more studies on recidivism, treatment, and criminological theory on the pleasure principle of crime as well as the accuracy rate of dangerousness prediction by professionals.

Sources: Leonore M.J. Simon, "An Examination of the Assumptions of Specialization, Mental Disorder, and Dangerousness in Sex Offenders," *Behavioral Science & Law*, vol. 18, 2000; Leonore M.J. Simon, "Criminal Offenders Specialize in Crime Types?" *Applied & Preventive Psychology*, vol. 6, 1997; Leonore M.J. Simon, "The Myth of Sex Offender Specialization: An Empirical Analysis" *New England Journal of Criminal & Civil Confinement*, vol. 23, 1997; Michael R. Gottfriedson & Travis Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime*, 1990; telephone interview between Leonore M.J. Simon and Travis Hirschi, Professor of Sociology, University of Arizona, March 25, 1996. Vernon L. Quinsey et al., "Actuarial Prediction of Sexual Recidivism," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 1995; Leonore M.J. Simon, "Does Criminal Offender Treatment Work?" *Applied & Preventive Psychology*, 1998; William D. Pithers et al., "Vermont Treatment Program for Sexual Aggressors," in *Relapse Prevention with Sex Offenders* (D. Richard Laws ed.), 1989; Ron Langevin et al., "The Prevalence of Sex Offenders with Deviant Fantasies," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 1998; Weisberg et al., Stanford Criminal Justice Center (Sept. 2017) study; Laureen Aljazireh, "Historical, Environmental, and Behavioral Correlates of Sexual Offending by Male Adolescents: A Critical Review," *Behavioral Science & Law*, 1993; R. Karl Hanson et al., "Long-Term Recidivism of Child Molesters," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 1993.

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New BPH Executive Director Calls for Questions

By Vanessa Nelson-Sloane,
Life Support Alliance

SCOTT WYCKOFF, THE new executive director of the Board of Parole Hearings (BPH), would like to hear from the lifer population — not appeals regarding denials or decisions, but with boots-on-the-ground observations about which parts of the parole process they feel are fair, understandable, and reasonable. Conversely, he would also like to know which details of the process are overly complex, not relevant to who those individuals are today, or are misused.

If you have such observations you'd like to share with the director, send them through the LSA office at:

LSA: Comments to Director
P.O. Box 277
Rancho Cordova, CA 95741

We will forward these messages to Wyckoff. You need not sign your name, as that information will not be forwarded. Please keep comments clean and short.

News

Inside Magazine

The Marshall Project

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TheMarshallProject.org

JEFFERSON'S BIRTHDAY

APRIL 13

AIDA Meets the Need of a Lifetime

By Jacob Robles, Mule Creek State Prison
and Fabián García, Spanish Reporter

ON JUNE 30, 2024, THE Mule Creek State Prison held its second graduation for Awareness Into Domestic Abuse (AIDA). Located in the Facility D chapel, participants gathered alongside their sponsors to celebrate the completion of this yearlong program. Beginning with 45 participants, the 31 remaining graduates learned all about the different facets of domestic abuse. This consisted of learning about the layered definition of *violence* (physical, energetic, verbal, structural, etc.), and how to recognize the many ways it shows up in their lives. Students also learned about emotional intelligence and how to identify, understand, and regulate their emotions during tense situations. Centered on the idea of self-awareness, participants learned to use these concepts in ways that challenge their distorted beliefs and enrich their lives through meaningful change.



The graduation began with a speech from Vanessa, the primary sponsor. She congratulated the participants for sticking through the entire curriculum. She told them she was grateful for all of the hard work they put in to complete this program. Though they finished it, Vanessa reminded them to keep on going, and to live lives free of any type of violence. "Keep doing the work," said Vanessa, "it never stops." She ended her speech by reminding the graduates to never forget AIDA's mission statement: To eradicate domestic abuse from the inside out.

The next speaker was Leslie, also a sponsor. Leslie encouraged the graduates to continue growing in their self-awareness and to never give up on their progress. "I'm excited to see all the growth that I've seen in you," said Leslie, "because you guys have gone through something special here."

For Christopher Reed, AIDA was indeed a special program because this was where he learned about the possibility of breaking the cycle of violence. Being the first graduate to speak, Reed asked the circle if they could just take a moment and pat themselves on their back. "Pause, take a breath, and walk away from here knowing we broke the cycle of violence," he said.

Unlike Reed, Moisés Amezcua-Manzo began his AIDA journey with skepticism. "I thought that this was going to be just another group," Amezcua-Manzo said as all eyes were on him, "one that no one would take serious." But it did not take long before he was convinced this was not like the other groups he had taken. AIDA required participants to share their experiences with domestic abuse, and it was during these vulnerable moments when Amezcua-Manzo learned about the different faces of violence in his own life. He graduated knowing that "domestic violence goes beyond the physical."

Many more students spoke about the insight they gained from this program, but when the graduation was nearing its end, Floyd Collins, one of the founding members of AIDA, felt compelled to leave the graduates with a little piece of his mind. "This is my first time back into prison," Collins said, "but walking through the door and into your accomplishments is really humbling."

After spending 27 years in prison, Collins never thought he would be so quick to return. Now on the other side of the fence, it took him only seven months to decide to come back and be of service to his former community. "Seeing the impact AIDA has had on all of your lives," Collins said to the graduates, "makes coming back all the more worth it." Even though he is finally free, Collins advised the participants that their primary motivation for completing AIDA should go beyond freedom. "Don't be in a rush to get out of prison," he said. "Because if you don't know your *why*, you're never going to be able to explain to the board your *how*."

Collins ended the graduation by asking each participant to take their transformation seriously. "It has to be in you, not on you," Collins said, "because even though God and my wife got me out the door, my transformation will keep me out."

Those who are interested in participating in Awareness Into Domestic Abuse should fill out a CDCR Form 2016 to be placed on the waiting list.

Awareness Into Domestic Abuse

P.O. Box 5323

Sacramento, CA 95817

Free Correspondence Course Available

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.



Community Corkboard Coming!

By Gerald McKoy, Feature Reporter

MULE CREEK POST

HEY THERE!
We appreciate you reading our stories so much that we want to hear a bit about yours!

Coming soon, a new column, the Community Corkboard, will begin in the Mule Creek Post, featuring Post-It Note Quotes directly from the population and readers (aka, you!).

Who's your favorite artist? How did your week go? Why do you like your favorite food? What's something you're really proud of? What do you want to see more of in the Post? Send us your quotes of 25 words or less, and it could be pinned up on the next issue's board!

June's Board Highlight: Music!

PJP

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.

PJP

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.”

The Welcome

By Mike Owens, Mule Creek State Prison

THE DAY I entered prison as a teenager in the early '90s, I was given this speech: “Welcome to state prison. If you try to escape, we will kill you. If you hurt one of my guards, we will kill you. Everything else you need to know to survive, your homeboys will tell you when you get to the yard. Go play.” That sounded reasonable enough to me. I went out to yard and added my darkness to the insanity that was 1990s prison politics.

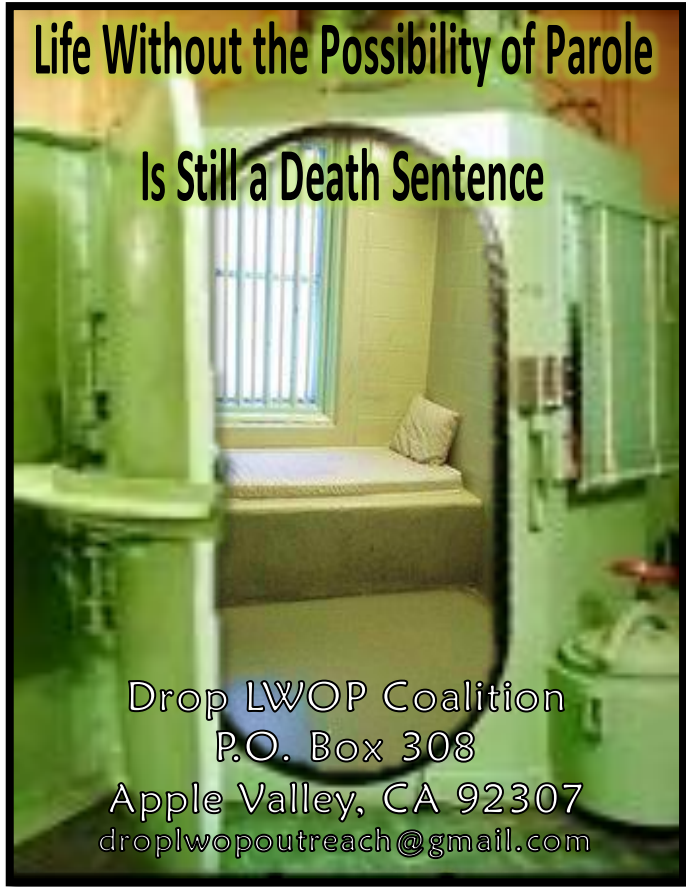
Fast-forward to November 2011. I was coming out of my last SHU term to begin life as someone serving a sentence of life without parole voluntarily choosing to go SNY. When I arrived to the program office of the new yard, I received another welcome speech: “Welcome to A Facility. This could be a fresh start if you don’t waste it. The only politics here are the ones you decide to make for yourself.” I’d had enough prison politics. I “checked in” for all the right reasons and I was ready to change.

I am 51 years old and I have over 30-years’ experience in the department of corrections, most of it spent in Level IV 180 yards. I’ve been around long enough to know better than to try to talk anyone into becoming SNY. Checking in is a deeply personal decision and if you do it without being ready to bury the old you and having the courage to begin the journey of self-discovery, you’ll regret it. SNY is not the place for you if you’re not done with the gang or the game. SNY is a place where you can discover who and what you are apart from having to toe the party line, apart from being responsible for what might go down on the yard, and apart from any expectations of mandatory group participation in any negativity.

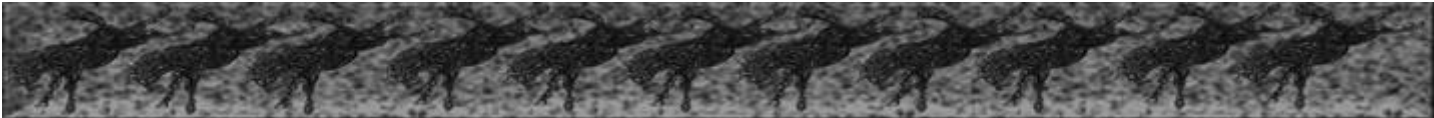
I could list for you all of the programs and achievements I’ve completed since going SNY and choosing to stay on a non-designated programming yard, but I won’t. There’s no doubt in my mind that any individual with a strong character could likely achieve the same accomplishments right there on the mainline. However, I also know that it would be infinitely harder. The best decision I have ever made for myself was the decision to make change easier on myself.

I can’t speak on why anyone else chooses to check in, but I have no shame when I tell you that I checked in so that I could do my own time. I checked in so I wouldn’t have to participate in race riots, or “discipline” assaults on friends, or wars over drug debts that had nothing to do with me. Ultimately, I checked in to mind my business and focus on my own growth and development in peace. Today, I’m a published poet, a certified peer and youth mentor, and a student pursuing a master’s degree. More importantly, I am a man living on his own terms, even while I happen to be incarcerated.

Life Without the Possibility of Parole
Is Still a Death Sentence



Drop LWOP Coalition
P.O. Box 308
Apple Valley, CA 92307
droplwopoutreach@gmail.com



Sculptures of the World

(April 26 is International Sculpture Day)



Throne, in Bari, Italy, marble, 1098 (Flickr.com)



Olmec Head, stone, 800-600 BC (Wikipedia.org)



Asanga, by Unkei, wood, 1208 (tnm.jp)



King Mycerinus and Queen, 4th Dynasty Egypt, schist, 2613 BC (FineArtAmerica.com)



Bison, in La Madeleine, France, antler, 9000 BC (LinkedIn.com)

Addressing Sexual Harms with Restorative Justice

By Jason Davis, Lead Reporter



RESTORATIVE JUSTICE OFFERS a framework for addressing all forms of harm, from simple disagreements to violent crimes that include people who have perpetrated harmful acts, those who have experienced them, and others who have been impacted by them; the main focus is always on healing and doing no further harm. Restorative justice can help meet some of the needs of victim-survivors by giving them a voice to speak of their harm, granting a measure of control over the treatment of their complaint, helping to ensure that their experience is honored, treated seriously, and with respect.

Alexa Sardina, PhD, is an assistant professor of criminal justice at California State University, Sacramento and cofounder of Ampersands Restorative Justice. As a guest speaker for "Conflict Resolution and Restorative Justice," a class held on the Facility E campus at the Mule Creek State Prison, she stood before our class of 29 students, confident and composed, ready to give a presentation on sexual violence.

In 1999, at 18 years old and a freshman in college, Sardina was raped at knifepoint by a stranger who broke into her dorm room and hid in the shared bathroom. This traumatic experience would inevitably change her life. Sardina reported the rape to law enforcement, resulting in the arrest and criminal prosecution of her assailant, who received a 40-year sentence. However, she was not prepared for the psychological toll that would follow.

According to a survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nearly 52.2 million women in the U.S. have experienced sexual harm in their lifetime. And, according to the FBI, a forcible rape occurs in the United States every 3.8 minutes. Despite these alarmingly high rates of sexual violence, there is reason to believe that rates of sexual harm are much higher, as these acts are the least likely to be reported. For example, only about 36% of attempted rapes are reported to police.

Investigations can also be traumatizing for those who report sexual harm. Police investigators are often looking for gaps in a survivor's account, parts of the account that do not make sense, and any motivations there may be for giving a false report. After the prosecutor decided to file criminal charges against the man who raped her, Sardina had to recount the night of her rape in great detail many times to the prosecutor and others. Overall, despite the positive outcome of the trial, Sardina was left without a sense of closure or justice that she hoped for. Sardina also testified because she believed that it would help her heal and move on from the experience. The result did not diminish the significant impact the criminal legal process had on her mental health and well-being; it only left her feeling re-victimized by the very system she sought for justice.

Nearly 20 years later, Sardina was presented with an opportunity to participate in a vicarious restorative justice process (VRJ). The session consisted of other survivors of sexual harm and offenders at a correctional institution in California. The typical forms of restorative justice in cases of sexual harm include victim-offender conferencing, circle processes, and VRJ. Sardina says through engaging in a restorative process as a survivor has been one of the most profound moments of healing.

Sexual trauma shapes the way one connects with and thinks about themselves and others. It can impact how one processes emotions and how they behave. Understanding these impacts and the unique ways they are experienced by individual survivors, including helping survivors to understand these impacts in themselves, can aid in the healing process. The measure of success and outcomes in relation to victims should be more than just a focus on convictions. Honoring the experience does not necessarily equate to securing a conviction, but encompasses being believed, being treated with dignity, safety, support, feeling in control, and the ability to make informed choices.

It is time to move beyond a one-dimensional focus on the conventional criminal justice system. This does not mean abandoning the current system; such efforts must continue as there will always be a central role for the criminal justice system in dealing with sexual violence. Nevertheless, it does mean that acknowledging its limitations requires us to consider new ways of thinking and new forms of justice which honor the experience of victim-survivors.

"I want to think we can solve all problems," Sardina said, where a world restored from sexual harm is possible.

Sources: Alexa Sardina & Alissa R. Ackerman, "Restorative Justice in Cases of Sexual Harm," *CUNY Law Review* vol. 25, no. 1, 2022. Available at <https://AcademicWorks.cuny.edu/clr/vol25/iss1/10>.

Sculptures of the World

(April 26 is International Sculpture Day)



Ere Ibeji Figures, in Yoruba, Nigeria, wood, 1900s
(Artic.edu)



Moses, by Michelangelo Buonarroti, marble, 1530
(SmartHistory.org)



David, by Giovanni Bernini, marble, 1600
(Wikipedia.org)



Puppy, by Jeff Koons, flowers, 1992
(TheCollector.com)

My Victim's Rights

By Marty Williams, Production Editor

MY VICTIM'S FAMILY has a right to believe that I will die in prison. I made that promise when I

accepted a life-without-parole (LWOP) sentence in lieu of death row and death. The state made them that promise when they offered them the option as well. They have the right to believe that the justice offered would be the justice done.

We are in a time of commutations, youth offender laws, resentencing, and board hearings for LWOP people unprecedented in the history of our state. We still sentence people to death, either by chemicals or incarceration, a practice voted for by the citizenry of a state that prides itself on progressionism and matcha-tea therapy. The voters of California continually say that death is an option for failed people, while still reticent to actually kill. Years on death row is like having a gun pointed at your head while someone hems and haws about pulling the trigger. Death by incarceration is no better, because there is no trigger and there is no gun. It's just waiting for someone to die. Weird.

The push to see the humanity in the most failed of people is a good sign for our collective humanity. Not all are sincerely interested in salvaging themselves, true; but if someone can do so, if someone can make that herculean effort to be not only better than themselves, but better than the average person, they should have the right to do so. If doing so results in a board of professionally skeptical people deciding they should return to society, they should also have that right. We do well to give that option to our walking dead.

As we pursue these new offerings of freedom and social forgiveness, as we learn to move on from the traumas of our childhoods, from the harm we've done and the distortions that have (and still do) drive our thinking, we shouldn't forget that victims and their families have the right to not do so. They have the right to be just like us. They have the right to not forgive. They have the right to be angry, traumatized, broken, and grieving. They have the right to not be ready to move on. If they oppose our release, it doesn't make them villains in our heroic recovery story. They have a heroic recovery story of their own.

My victim's family has the right to believe what they were promised.

How Do I Honor My Victims?

Self-Improvement

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

THE PEOPLE I have hurt did not in any way deserve the crimes, pain, and awful memories that I forced upon them. What they do deserve is complete healing from all I have caused them. In aid of that end, I approach my parole hearings with the purpose of providing them the opportunity to confront me with the hell I have put them through, in the hope they will gain some measure of healing through this small direct amend.

In my apology letters, I always make sure to emphasize the fact they had absolutely no fault whatsoever and I alone am responsible for the crimes I perpetrated against them. Hopefully, those facts will help to relieve them of any guilt they may have put upon themselves which would be wholly unwarranted. No one should ever blame themselves for the acts of another person.

Over the years I have been in prison, I have worked to honor my victims by the self-improvement I have gained through not only the self-help groups and education I have been involved in, but also through putting into practice such useful tools from those groups as mindfulness, emotional intelligence, Q-TIP (Quit Taking It Personal), and others. But especially by actively using the process of forgiving the past wrongs against me by others that fueled my own past anger and offending. Through that gift to myself of forgiving, I have learned the very real truth that forgiveness is always for the one doing the forgiving and not the ones being forgiven by me. In letting go of those past painful events in my own life, I am also honoring my victims in that I am eliminating a primary driving force behind my crimes against them with the intent of never again victimizing another human being for as long as I live. These living amends and the practice of taking the message of the power of forgiveness to others empowers me to continue to live a crime-free life by the strength I gain from knowing that I am doing right.

I also know that no amount of self-help can ever make up for the terrible harm I have caused my victims and their families. That said, continuing to be involved in these groups and sharing the truths I have learned with other offenders also constitutes living amends as participation helps to influence the necessary changes in others with the goal of shortstopping any future offenses by them through the things we learn together and practice in these groups.



Sculptures of the World

(April 26 is International Sculpture Day)



Reclining Figure, by Henry Moore, elmwood, 1936 (sfmoma.org)



Orpheus, by Auguste Rodin, bronze, 1892 (BrooklynMuseum.org)



Moai, Easter Island, stone, AD 900-1200 (TheCollector.com)



Sculpture, by Simon Lehner (ArtViewer.org)



Unique Forms of Continuity of Space, by Umberto Boccioni, bronze, 1913 (moma.org)



The Great Sphinx, Egypt, limestone, 2500 BC (TheBrighterSide.news)

Opinion: Abolitionists Need a Plan B

Marty Williams, Production Editor



I'D LOVE A world without prisons.

There is a sickness of the human soul that conceives of walling up living things to feed on each other in endless cycles of trauma, hate, and mental illness. It is probably the same sickness that conceives the things that make prison a necessary evil to begin with. In the words of Dr. Christine Montrose, "Prison may be necessary, but it need not be evil."

Dr. Anna Plemons spent years of her life coming in to prisons to share in writing communities, as well as to support incarcerated teachers. The abolitionist professors at her university, her bosses, tried to forbid her doing so on the basis of her being complicit with the ideology of prison by acknowledging its existence. Many of these folks encourage the idea of a violent uprising by prisoners to do away with prisons altogether. There isn't any noise from these academics about the consequences to the already damaged souls for biting the hand that shelves them. Nor is there a Plan B for the brutal humanness that requires walls to keep the innocent safe.

Abolitionism has often become more like enable-ism for vast numbers of incarcerated who feel sorrier for themselves than they feel for the world they wounded. Their diatribes against the carceral system are more often than not diversions from accountability. The system is corrupt, apathetic, and objectifying — no argument here. But as long as I am focused on the evil outside myself, the world does not change, and it will continue to build walls around me.

Abolishing prison, as noble and endearing as it may be to those who paint themselves as victims of incarceration, is far down the wish list of what the world needs to do without. I'd love a world without prisons. I'd also love a world without sex-trafficked children and wives beaten to a pulp. I'd love a world without armed adolescents gunning down toddlers ... or each other; a world without masked monsters invading homes, pillaging stores, burning mosques or synagogues or crosses. I'd love a world without drug cartels, drug dealers, and drug overdoses; a world without dirty cops, molesting priests, or entitled rich boys.

I'd love a world without the roots and causes of crime and violence, a world without poverty, without gender objectification, racism, nationalism, and homophobia. A world without abandoned children, war refugees, religious hate indoctrination, and mental illness.

Give me that world first. If you can give me that world, I'll help you tear down every wall we've ever built, walls that keep the immigrants out, that keep the damaged souls in, that keep countries divided.

Abolish the sickness. Make a Plan B. Then we'll talk about a world without prisons.

Sources: Anna Plemons, "Saying Goodbye, Keeping My Keys," *Teaching Artist Journal*, 2018; Christine Montrose, *Waiting for an Echo*, Penguin, 2020.

Wind and Fire

By Pamela Cipriotti, Post Researcher

ON DEC. 9, 2024, after renting homes in various cities throughout the Los Angeles County area, my husband Angelo and I moved into a beautifully remodeled home in Tarzana. This was our cousin Robert's family home, and he invited us to live with him where we could take care of each other in our golden years. Finally, we were done moving, in a place close to church, family, and friends. Our newfound peace lasted almost a month.

On January 7, the Santa Ana winds began to blow fiercely over an extremely dry Southern California. These 60-to-100 mph gales pushed huge wildfires through tens of thousands of acres of wild lands and neighborhoods, killing 29 people and destroying more than 16,000 homes.

Our family and friends are scattered throughout the southland area, and it was a frightening few days that followed. Our son Daniel's house was threatened by approaching flames out in Canyon Country. Our son Michael's home was also in danger in Newbury Park. Our daughter Jenny's condo in Woodland Hills was also at risk. She took a photo

(continued on page 20)



(Courtesy of P. Cipriotti)

(from *Wind and Fire*, pg. 19)
of the encroaching orange glow from her fifth-floor condo.

Our home in Tarzana sits on a mountain range, and we could see the orange glow of the approaching flames from our bedroom window. That's about the time we took seriously the evacuation warning, packed some clothes and photos, and left for Michael and Wendy's place in Newbury Park.

The worst of the danger ended on January 11. And, fortunately, no one in our immediate family lost property to the flames. We returned home to settle back into our normal lives, but nothing is normal for our neighbors. Thousands of acres of ash and rubble are all that is left of their homes. And so, the clean-up begins, then the rebuilding of houses and lives.

We pray to God and his son, Jesus Christ, that the people and the land will be healed. We have faith this will be so, and that the Los Angeles area will be renewed, better and stronger than before. God bless.



BPH

Commissioner on Restitution

As Told to Vanessa Nelson-Sloane,
Life Support Alliance

Life Support Alliance (LSA) had the opportunity to discuss the issue of restitution avoidance — as a basis for denial — with one commissioner at a recent BPH Executive Board Meeting. This commissioner, who comes from a legal background and whose grant rate is higher than the overall board grant rate, offered the following thoughts and connections regarding restitution avoidance as a supportable reason for denial. And, while we can follow the logic to a degree, we firmly disagree in some instances. Nevertheless, the comments are offered here for educational and informational purposes within the lifer community.

REGARDING RESTITUTION AVOIDANCE, honesty is most important; if you lie

about it or fail to acknowledge it as soon as you can, there is ongoing dishonesty. This entails criminal thinking and may be continued evidence of a character defect. The act itself is dishonest. No one does it out in the open, despite the common refrain, "Everyone knows it goes on." Credibility is always an issue in the hearing, and if you cannot be truthful in this area, we may have problems trusting other areas of testimony.

Despite many who claim they didn't know this was wrong, that is not a reasonable position. This is criminal thinking. If it is a direct order of restitution, avoiding that obligation violates California Penal Code §155.5. It also violates Title 15 and CDCR regulations. Trying to justify or rationalize it can indicate other criminal acts may be justified.

Any programs involving criminal thinking, victim impact, making amends, and the 12-Step work has to be questioned if this activity continues after completing such programs. This shows a non-internalization of programming.

Restitution avoidance also shows a lack of offender change, especially if the crime involved theft and greed. Lifers with any of the following issues at the time of their crime are in this category: callousness toward others, criminal thinking, dishonesty, drug addiction, entitlement, greed, negative peer association, and selfishness. Negative peers, by definition, require the involvement of at least two people, which is a conspiracy.

Finally, avoiding your restitution obligation directly contradicts testimony about true remorse, caring for victims, or making amends.

Author's Note: This continues to be an area of controversy, and LSA continued to point out to the board the lack of a real and demonstrable nexus between this "offense" and either danger to the public or recidivism. It remains to be seen how the panels will employ the restitution problem in the future.

Editor's Note: While no departmental regulations specifically prohibit restitution avoidance, it is in practice prohibited: §3192 forbids the giving or selling of property, including canteen, which is a necessary component of restitution evasion (why have family send money to another person for you, if not to have that person buy canteen that you want and then give it to you?). Penal Code §155.5(b) also makes it a crime to evade the payment of restitution fines. Finally, as parole attorney Maya Emig and parole commissioners have pointed out, it is unethical: We owe a debt to those whom we have harmed, and finding ways around paying that debt is equivalent to not taking accountability for that harm.

Source: *California Lifer Newsletter*, Vol. 16, Issue 1, Jan. 2025

Psych View

By Daisy Switzer, Post Columnist

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

By Daisy Switzer, Post Columnist

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS disorder (PTSD) is an anxiety disorder that results from exposure to life threatening trauma. Some incarcerated people will have this disorder at some point or even at multiple points during their lives.

For some incarcerated individuals, the stress of prison life, fights, rapes, and fears can invoke a manifestation of this disorder. For others, the simple facts of a violent crime may remain unresolved well into incarceration, to a degree that the disorder has been present for years.

People handle anxiety in different ways: drugs, stress management, or silent suffering. Some mask it with bravado. Some bury it. In some cases, the disorder can resolve as a person becomes more distant from the original triggers. In other cases, the constant exposure to triggers in prison can make the disorder complicated.

If you have this disorder, or think you might have anxiety problems, seek help. If you can't get help (competent counseling, stress management, meditation, journaling), create your own plan for recovery. Do something.

If you have active symptoms of a serious illness, such as traumatic stress anxiety, it will impact your risk evaluation.

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.



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 candidatos 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.

Una Mapa de Programación (Parte 1)

Por **Maya Emig**, Post Columnist
Traducido por **Fabián García**, Spanish Reporter

A MEDIDA QUE nos adentramos juntos en este próximo año, quiero brindarles orientación para seguir adelante. Primero, en sus tabletas tienen una inmensa cantidad de recursos. Comience a realizar todos los programas disponibles en Edovo, especialmente aquellos que se centran en sus problemas. Ya sea abuso de sustancias, violencia doméstica, impacto en las víctimas o manejo de la ira, comience a trabajar realmente con la programación de Edovo. Puede darle a su abogado de libertad condicional el número de código y podemos buscar sus clases y enviar su cronología de clases a la junta. Realice toda la programación con el objetivo de comprenderla e incorporar el conocimiento a su vida diaria. Una de las cosas que los clientes suelen hacer es hablarme sobre sus certificados, pero cuando hago un seguimiento y les pregunto sobre la programación real que han aprendido, sucede de dos mane-

ras. O pueden decirme lo que han aprendido y cómo los ha ayudado a comprenderse a sí mismos, o me dicen que no pueden recordarlo o simplemente no estaban preparados para nuestra reunión (o alguna otra razón). Está dedicando tiempo a realizar estos programas, invierta ese tiempo en internalizarlos; eso dará sus frutos. Dedicar tiempo a aprenderlo la primera vez e incorporarlo a tu comprensión de tu criminalidad y a las habilidades de afrontamiento que estás evaluando para ver cuáles funcionan para ti y cuáles no. No se trata de memorizar palabra por palabra cada uno de los conceptos, sino de trabajar en comprender la naturaleza de los conceptos y aplicarlos a tu vida.

Lo siguiente que está disponible en la tableta son videos de Parole Justice Works. La organización es una colaboración de abogados de libertad condicional, víctimas/sobrevivientes de delitos, fiscales, defensores de la justicia penal, organizaciones comunitarias y personas que estuvieron encarceladas y que se han reincorporado con éxito a la sociedad a través del proceso de audiencia de libertad condicional. La misión de Parole Justice Works es promover la participación significativa y efectiva en el proceso de audiencia de libertad condicional de California a través de la educación, el empoderamiento y el apoyo informado sobre el trauma para todos los participantes.

Parole Justice Works tiene videos sobre “La Descripción General del Proceso de Libertad Condicional”, “Los Pasos del Proceso de Libertad Condicional”, “Cómo Trabajar con su Abogado” y “Cómo Entender el Proceso de CRA”, así como videos sobre responsabilidad, comprensión y remordimiento. Si no tiene todos estos videos disponibles, sepa que pronto estarán disponibles en su tableta.

He visto todos los videos y les insto a que se tomen el tiempo de verlos también. El video “Cómo Trabajar con su Abogado” es un excelente video para comprender realmente los cambios que se han producido en la representación en libertad condicional y el papel que desempeña su abogado en este proceso.



CALIFORNIA INNOCENCE PROJECT

California Western School of Law · 225 Cedar St. · San Diego, CA 92101



The Creative Arts Program

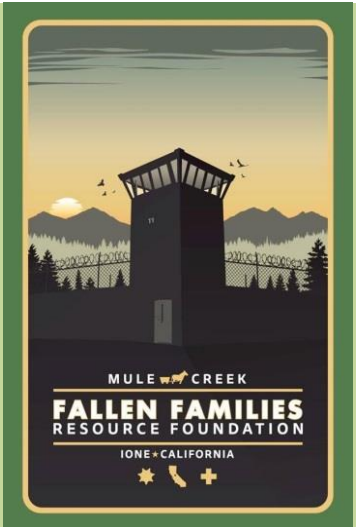
The Creative Arts Program provides instructional workshops in drawing, painting, guitar, and writing by local artists.

Creative Writing	In Facility E Hobby Room	Fill out an Inmate Activity Group Request (CDCR 2016) if you'd like to be on the waiting list for these groups.
Poetry	Tuesdays 12-1:30pm	
Painting	Tuesdays 2-3:30pm	
Painting	Tuesdays 2-3:30pm	
Guitar	Tuesdays 6-7:30pm	
Drawing	Wednesdays 9-10:30am	
Guitar	Wednesdays 9-10:30am	
Guitar	Wednesdays 11-12:30pm	

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

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

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





How Do I Honor My Victims?

Transformation

By Daniel Larson, Feature Reporter

DO YOU REMEMBER your favorite Christmas gift? Likely, it was something you wanted and made you feel good. Well, National Crime Victims' Rights Week is our chance to demonstrate growth and change to our victims. If we could give our victims the things that would make them feel good, what would they be?

Let's consider rehabilitation. We can't just say, "We're not that person anymore. We learned our lesson." We need to show our victims. But how? They're not here to see us help an old person or rescue bear cubs. Ask yourself, "What would I want if the circumstances were reversed?"

Again, no hard facts, but maybe the reassurance that, should we ever be released, we are a changed person. We have corrected the defects that brought us to prison. We have empathy, and insight into our criminal actions. We have some plans in place so that should we find ourselves in the same situation, we're able to act as a citizen should. We must take the corrected path forward so that if released, our victims feel secure; we are not a threat to them or anyone they know or love.

The time for this transformation is now. This takes a minute, and can only come from us. Make the decision and start. Be committed to your commitment. Do not be the kamikaze pilot who flew 10 missions, or rehabilitated in name only. Be committed to achieving your goal.

My plan began a long time ago. My sentence guaranteed slim-to-no chance of release. A lot of people in my spot would and did resign themselves to that sad fact. Did nothing. Why bother? There were no groups then.

I began reading any sort of nonfiction there was; kept a

journal of what it meant to me, what changes I could make from what was read and how it related to my personal growth. With no prospect of ever knowing how my crime actually affected my victims, I began to learn all I could about the why of my crime, like whatever gave me the idea no one else would be affected? Or, I would never be caught. This was all stinkin' thinkin' for sure.

I try my best to honor my victims through the way I carry myself through rehabilitation. I want to be certain my victims have the knowledge that I know my crime affected a lot of people. I have corrected the defects of thought and rationale to a level that I am no longer a danger to the public — should I ever be released. Even should my victims never know the growth I have made or the changes in me, I know I can honor all victims as I remain in touch with my sobriety. I owe that to them and society.

We could all honor victims of crime by striving to learn. Anything that can add to our repertoire or lore, that increases decision-making skills or critical thinking. Keep the memory of our victims alive inside as we live our amends.

The time for this work is now. To wait is to get behind the curve. This path we are on will continue as long as we do. Make your plan and begin now.

How Do I Honor My Victims?

Amends

By Gerald McKoy, Feature Reporter

BEFORE I BECAME incarcerated, my perspective on life had become skewed. I wasn't truly looking out for anyone other than myself, and had become used to putting up faces and fronts to influence others into getting what I wanted. Many of my poor interactions came from the fact I cared more for what I would get out of something, or someone, than anything else; whether it was a job or a relationship, I would find ways to manipulate or take advantage to get what I wanted. My behavior was manipulative and hazardous to those around me; the people I hurt didn't deserve the pain and anguish I put them through, and I will always be sorry for what I've done.

Recognizing these facts through my incarcerated experience was the first step; the understanding that my perspective was wrong and had harmed others through my actions was something I had to recognize early on. There is no rewind, no do-over button; I can't go back and change or fix everything any more than anyone else can. What I can do, however, what can make a potentially healing impact in those I've hurt, is actively searching for ways to help others, to better and encourage others. If being selfish and self-motivated caused so much pain, then, maybe, being humble, helpful, and others-motivated can start to heal that pain and honor those I have hurt.

In my journey of being others-minded, I have taken a couple standard self-help groups to keep my mind oriented on the right track; individually-focused groups such as denial management and anger management help me to reorient my personal thoughts, while collectively-focused groups such as Center for Council allowed me to practice listening and heeding the thoughts and emotions of others. I have also been involved intimately in the local Christian church community on my yard, not only by aligning myself with positive attributes and strengthening my relationship with God, but also contributing my time to worship with others through music, singing, and playing guitar with the congregation.

Recently, I was even enrolled in a course through CSU on restorative justice as well; through it, I learned a great deal about understanding the impact of those affected by a wrong, what their needs may be, and how to consider those needs in a healing way without causing additional harm. I recognize it is no longer up to me to reach out to those I have harmed; I have lost that right, and do not wish to cause any more harm than I have done. My current responsibility is to make amends for those wrongdoings I have committed through two primary ways. First, I make amends by cultivating and sharing my personal growth, reflecting through my actions that I have changed from the person that caused such harm. Second, I make amends by encouraging others to make similar growth; to help, encourage others, teach, share, and contribute to my community, helping others to become their best selves, and to encourage a society that thrives in positivity, unity, and healing.





Healing From Harm: VODs

By Jason Davis, Lead Reporter

AN INTERVIEW with Dr. Anna Zelenz, professor at California State University, Sacramento, answers the question: What is victim offender dialogue (VOD)?

It begins with restorative justice. “There’s not a single definition of what restorative justice is,” Zelenz says, describing it as a way of thinking about how to move forward from conflict and harm. “Restorative justice is very much just principles or ideas about how to approach healing from harm. And, what that looks like is very different all over the place. Some of it we see built into the current criminal justice system” such as when a victim of a crime reaches out to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) requesting a victim-offender mediation or VOD.

Such possibilities post-sentencing may assist with further mending. “We do know that the criminal legal system is not very healing for victims. It’s very state-centric; victims of crime statistically do not feel a sense of healing or peace or comfort, even if the offender is sentenced to a lot of time,” Zelenz says. “Restorative justice demands accountability in a way that I would say our criminal legal system does not necessarily. This is where the option for VODs are important. What it takes to sit across from your victim, look them in the eyes, and take accountability for the harm that you have caused them — not just the harm on paper, but what they are telling you the impact of the event was — that is really hard.”

Prior to a VOD, there is a lot of pre-work; facilitators will meet with the victim and the offender separately over a period of months leading up to a possible encounter. The facilitation process ensures that victims have certain supports in place, which restorative justice explicitly talks about doing regarding further harm. “Doing

our best to mitigate and to reduce that harm is a center point of restorative justice,” states Zelenz. “There is a lot of thought put into making sure that both the victim and the offender, in the case of a dialogue, are willing and ready.

“I think that the planning behind the California Model is trying to push into a direction that recognizes the humanity of our incarcerated people more strongly. California, in some ways, is pushing that direction; that people in prison are people,” she says. “I think that we will have trouble shifting society if we don’t first open people’s eyes to the idea that people — who have made mistakes and people who have done harm have the capacity to grow and have the capacity to contribute — are people. The question is, are people capable of change? Do you think that people are capable of growth?”

If you are interested in learning more about VODs that contract with the CDCR, reach out to the organization below. As mentioned, the process has to be initiated by the survivor, which typically means someone involved in the criminal case or registered with the office of victims services. Sometimes survivors will reach out to a restorative justice organization, or the DA will talk to them; sometimes they just stumble upon the option on the web. In any event, the request has to be submitted to the CDCR’s Office of Victim and Survivor Rights and Services (OVSRS). Then, OVSRS may contract with one of the below-listed organizations to have them facilitate the process.

Open Philanthropy 182 Howard Street #225 San Francisco, CA 94103 Sonya Shah and Richard Cruz are co-executive directors. Alba Contreras is the in-prison program manager, and Julian Ward is the RJC program manager. They normally conduct surrogate VODs only with individuals they have come to know well through their other programming.
Center for African Peace & Conflict Resolution (CAPCR) California State University, Sacramento CAPCR Office, Alpine Hall, Room 211 6000 J Street Sacramento, CA 95819 Ernest Uwazie, director
Healing Dialogue and Action 1000 Alameda St., Suite 213 Los Angeles, CA 90012 Javier Stauring, executive director
Restorative Justice California 2341 Jefferson St., Suite 102 San Diego, CA 92110 This organization does a lot of restorative justice work down south, including VOD, in-person VOD workshops, community circles, and re-entry programming. It also offers workshops on de-escalation and mediation. Note that it does not facilitate surrogate VODs.
Mend Collaborative PO Box 292544 Los Angeles, CA 90029 Rebecca Weiker and Miguel Quezada, co-directors
Yolo Conflict Resolution Center 705 Main Street Woodland, CA 95695 Alannah Tomich, executive director Rocio Saldana, restorative justice program coordinator

Note: Some of these organizations also help with Letters of Accountability for the CDCR’s Accountability Letter Bank (also a part of OVSRS). Be sure to inquire.

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



Opinion: Politeness

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

LOOK AROUND at the way people verbally abuse one another these days, and wonder, what happened to being polite? In the past, politeness wasn't an option; it was required. A snotty reply to a person could get one into trouble (especially by parents). Where did we degenerate in how we treat each other, and not seem to care about it?

It comes down to respect, not only for others, but for ourselves. How we talk to others is a reflection of how we feel about ourselves. Self-hatred often comes out as abusive speech and behavior toward others. With that in mind, it's no wonder that the level of violence in America has escalated to ridiculous levels. It is a logical result from a people who have lost their way within themselves. How have we come to hate ourselves so deeply that we take it out on others around us?

It began with the slow death of people being polite to one another. *Polite* simply means "having or showing respect for other people; marked by consideration, tact, deference, or courtesy." Another way of putting it is to be civil to one another.

In prison, we demand a certain level of civility or dire consequences may come about. But, on the street, it doesn't seem to be so apparent when you consider how violent people have become. Do we as a people really want to go there and turn ourselves into a nation of savage combatants? Sadly, that appears to be the trend when turning it around can easily begin with just the smallest effort at being polite and nice to one another.

All we really need to do to turn this around is to slow down a little and consider the other person, treat them as someone we care about, especially if we don't know them at all. We can, through a single act of politeness, make their day a little better and spread some good that will make a difference. When we are polite and show concern for others, we also feel good about ourselves from the knowledge that we are doing right.

Source: Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary

The Daily Practice of Lovingkindness

By O. Rick Bridges, Feature Reporter
and Nicholas Boyes, Mule Creek State Prison

EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF the attribute of lovingkindness is perhaps our highest responsibility in support of human dignity, decency, and civility. In Hebrew, the attribute of lovingkindness is defined by the word *chesed*. In *Counting the Omer: A Spiritual Guide* (Meaningful Life Center, 1996), Rabbi Simon Jacobson describes *chesed* as a fundamental spiritual construct: "For anything to endure it needs to be loved." He then explains:

Love is the single most powerful and necessary component in life. It is both giving and receiving. Love and its expression, lovingkindness, allow us to reach above and beyond ourselves to experience another person and allow that person to experience us. It is the expression through which we experience the highest reality. Lovingkindness comes with — and brings — personal dignity, an intimate feeling of nobility and regality. It is knowing your special place and contribution in this world.

For those of us imprisoned by logical consequences of some of the very worst of our failures in life and love, developing a renewed, strengthened, and dignified practice of lovingkindness is essential to our reformation and rehabilitation. Fortunately, lovingkindness is no respecter of context. It is always best practiced in the present — in the here and the now.

The inspiration, intention, and practice of lovingkindness find their origin in the human heart. In restoring and revisiting the heartfelt practice of lovingkindness, there are a few relevant questions that we're wise to ask in practiced metacognition:

- Does my commitment to lovingkindness support rational decision making as well as thoughtful behaviors?
- Does my commitment to lovingkindness endow me with the ability to rise above myself and love another person?
- Does my commitment to lovingkindness cause me to be more loving and giving?
- Does my commitment to lovingkindness inspire me to stand in awe, respect, and reverence, before the people or experiences before which I stand?
- Does my commitment find me standing firm in heartfelt resolve when challenged, or do I become weak and insecure in a lovingkindness of manipulative or faulty motives?
- When should my commitment to lovingkindness move me toward flexibility and compromise?
- How, why, and when does my lack of commitment to lovingkindness cause me to stand silent or ambivalent in the face of obvious evils?
- When and where is my commitment to lovingkindness compassionate and consistent? How and why is it awkward and unreliable?
- When and where might my commitment to lovingkindness be perceived as weakness, causing others to take advantage of me? How instead might I demonstrate the strength, durability, and utility of my lovingkindness?
- Is my commitment to lovingkindness genuine, or do I mask and protect my modesty with aggressive language or behavior?
- Does my lovingkindness bring me closer to others, laying a foundation on which to build a community of dignity, decency, and civility as a long-term result?

The practice of lovingkindness brings the light of love and compassion to illuminate the darkness of fear and trepidation. In the Hebrew tradition, the smallest amount of light can dispel a vast crevasse of darkness — illuminating a path, an understanding, an alliance, or a truth.

The healthy intentional development and disciplined maintenance of the emotional attribute of lovingkindness builds personal dignity and integrity as a strong experience of community. At its core value in support of community, lovingkindness is both an expression and demonstration of moral courage. It reduces the separation of fear and anxiety as isolated and subjective life experience and opinion making.

Through familiarity, lovingkindness increases the unanimity of mindful objectivity. The relationship safety afforded by our renewed and daily practice of lovingkindness becomes recognizable as reliable to our recovery and our successful social rehabilitation. Love one another.



UnCOMMON LAW

JUSTICE DONE DIFFERENTLY

318 Harrison Street, Suite 103 Oakland, CA 94607

Why Read the Classics?

By Rob Sharp,
Feature Reporter



BORN IN 1918, just one year after the Bolsheviks took over Russia in The Great Revolution, Alexander Solzhenitsyn had an interesting life. A university student, he served in the Russian army during WWII, but was arrested in 1945 for a derogatory remark about Premier Josef Stalin, and served eight years in a gulag (Russian labor camp). The novel, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, written in 1962, arose from some of the author’s experiences there. In 1970, Solzhenitsyn received the Nobel Prize in literature for his body of work on the Russian gulag prison system.

The story opens on a typical morning in the gulag, where the stark conditions of the *zeks*’ (short for prisoners) lives begin to unfold on the first page. Ivan Denisovich Shukov is serving 10 years for surrendering to the Germans during the war. As such, he is a political prisoner.

The story is well-written with good pace. There are tense moments during body and barracks searches, as well as those of camaraderie and fellowship. One particular description may be familiar to those who are incarcerated:

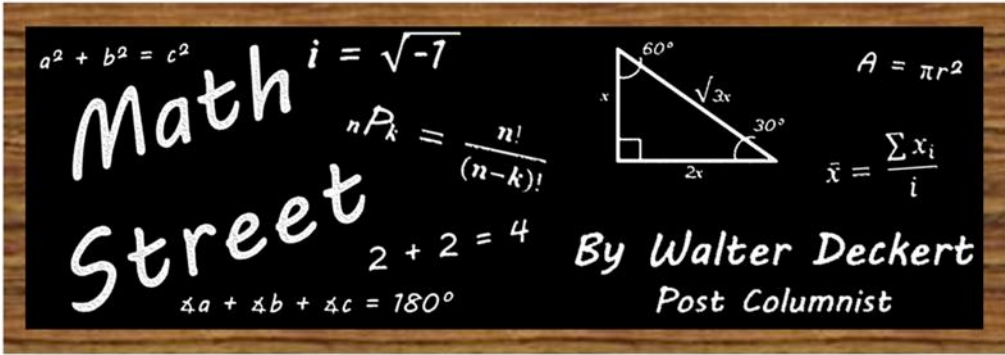
The only good thing about stew was that it was hot, but Shukov’s portion had grown quite cold. However, he ate it with his usual slow concentration. No need to hurry, not even for a house on fire. Apart from sleep, the only time a prisoner lives for himself is ten minutes at breakfast, five minutes over dinner, and five at supper.

Even if you don’t normally read prison stories, this is an exceptionally good one at 139 pages.

Look for *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in your facility library, or ask the librarian to order it or Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s other fine novels.

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*

Root & Rebound
1730 Franklin St., Suite 300
Oakland, CA 94612



THERE WAS A recent news report on ABC in late December 2024 that the population of unhoused people in the U.S. increased by 18.1% from January 2023 to January 2024. As of 2024, the unhoused population is 770,000. My question then is, What was it in 2023?

We will use my strategy for word problems to solve this.

- **Step 1:** What do they want to know? The population of unhoused people in 2023; call it *p*.
- **Step 2:** What do they tell me? The population in 2024 is 770,000. This represents an 18.1% increase.
- **Step 3:** What is a good estimate? First, if there is an increase, then it has to have been less than 770,000. Next, if this had been a 100% increase, then it would have been 770,000÷2 or 385,000. But this was only about 20%, so let’s guess around 500,000. So, our answer should be between 560,000 and 770,000.
- **Step 4:** Do I know a model to help? With percentage problems, I use:

A of B = C where A = % in decimal
 B = whole amount
 C = part

(In this case, the “part” will be greater than the whole.)

- Step 5: Set up the equation with the information in steps 2 and 4. Here for the *A* in our model we will use 1.181 or 118.1% Why? Because the population of 770,000 given is the sum of the old population (100%) plus the 18.1% increase, or 118.1%.

Part B of the model is the old population, which we called *p* in step 1. Part C of the model is the 2024 population the word *of* means “to multiply.”

A of B = C

1.181 × *p* = 770,000

1.181*p* = 770,000

~~1.181~~*p* = $\frac{770,000}{1.181}$

p = 651,989.8391 (round up)

p ≈ 651,990 unhoused people

So, the population of unhoused people in January 2023 was 651,990.

Now try this one: The world population is now 8,090,000,000, which is an increase of 71,000,000. What was the percent increase?

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



MULE CREEK POST
Submissions

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




Back2Work
2015 J Street, Suite 205
Sacramento, CA 95811

Back2Work focuses on finding work for you! It is part of a state program of 100 work crews in 32 counties that offer employment and reentry resources, with four main offices (Los Angeles, Fresno, San Diego, & Sacramento); for specific counties it is not in, there are other resources it can help with.

Residents Curate Art Show

By Chantell Black Gosztyla,
Central California Women's Facility

THE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION Empowerment Avenue recruited Tomiekia Johnson and I — from the Central California Women's Facility — to co-curate "The Only Door I Can Open: Women Exposing Prison Through Art," an exhibit at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts running from January 31 to June. This is the second iteration of the exhibit, the first having launched at the Museum of African Diaspora in 2023. Both iterations partnered with Flyaway Productions and its aerial dance performance decarceration series, which inspired co-curators to ask each artist to respond to the prompt, "How is your bed an antidote to you in prison?"

Incarcerated people are under constant exposure, watched by correctional officers and body-worn cameras, and the audio-video surveillance system records our every move. As an antidote, many find solitude in our beds, the only place we can enjoy the illusion of privacy when we hang a sheet to shield us from constant exposure. The stories vary, as seen in each individual artist's work.

The exhibit features seven currently and two formerly incarcerated artists. On display is a replica of the prison's eight-person dorm-cell for viewing, complete with lockers to show viewers how incarcerated women live in the Central California Women's Facility — both with and without outside financial support. Guests are invited to stand in our shoes, feel the exposure we endure in confinement, and sit on the prison bed to listen to our audio stories about adjusting to life inside these walls.

Empowerment Avenue and Flyaway Productions teamed up to support incarcerated artists and bridge them with the public through art. This exhibit shows what is possible when four organizations invest in incarcerated women.

For more information, go to EmpowermentAvenue.org OR YBCA.org.

Easy Keepers are Too Easy to Keep

By Dale Hurd, Post Reporter

INITIALLY, SENTENCES OF life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) was supposed to be imposed only for the most heinous crimes. Now, LWOP sentences have been implemented on a broad scale, without the legal protections and scrutiny that accompany a death sentence. Besides LWOP, there are other categories of life sentences such as the virtual or de facto life sentence, which is a sentence with a term of years that exceeds a prisoner's lifespan. This explosion in life sentences since 1972 has created a burgeoning aged-prisoner population presenting unique challenges to the systems that warehouse them.

This group of prisoners is sometimes called "easy keepers," a term used to describe prisoners who are permanently serving prison sentences. Typically, easy keepers experienced a light bulb suddenly flicking on and became "easy" when they realized it is in their best interest to deal with their sentences as mature and responsible adults. Consequently, they chose to establish a routine for themselves and focus their energy on becoming a positive influence on fellow prisoners. As such, they are well-mannered and obedient to institution rules and regulations. They focus on meaningful activities, such as maintaining a clean and organized living environment. They also play an important role in the stability of the facility that houses them by having a calming effect, making staff jobs easier.

The American system of punishment for individuals sentenced to LWOP is designed to isolate them from the public by warehousing them in prisons. In California, easy keepers tend to accumulate on Level II yards because they hit their administrative override but are never released. As stated by the U.S. Supreme Court, "Life in prison without the possibility of parole gives no chance for fulfillment outside prison walls, no chance for reconciliation with society, no hope." Despite their stabilizing influence on the prison in which they live, easy keepers face multiple forms of deprivation. Since easy keepers will likely never be released, when it comes to the selection of prisoners for prison employment and programming opportunities, shorter-sentenced prisoners typically are given priority over those serving LWOP sentences. Reducing opportunities for employment and programming not only hurts easy keepers by injuring their ability to find meaning and purpose in their life, but also reminds them that their existence is merely a "death by incarceration." Yet, many of these life-sentenced prisoners, despite having been imprisoned for decades, have transformed themselves and demonstrate behaviors that replicate those of the average law-abiding citizen.

Sudden as a tragic event and ongoing like a terminal illness, the death by incarceration sentence is an ordeal that shatters reality as constructed by the prisoner. Long-term imprisonment is an extreme survival marathon during which agency and creativity are practiced by individuals with no hope of release, yet who still engage in positive acts and forward-looking practices. Easy keepers have learned that they live a life in which everything and anything can be taken away at any time and understand that it is better to swim with the current rather than against it. The term "easy keepers" also defines how their journeys in search of atonement and redemption help transform and improve the institutions in which they live. Easy keepers do not just strive to uplift themselves, they also improve the circumstances of those around them. Easy keepers have established themselves as role models for fellow prisoners, particularly those with release dates. Accordingly, easy keepers indirectly play an important role in reducing the risk to public safety by helping rehabilitate fellow prisoners who will be returning to their communities.

One eventuality that easy keepers have embraced is the fact that they will not remain easy forever, but will eventually die in prison. As the number of older prisoners continues to rise, the death of prisoners in correctional institutions will become a much more common occurrence. Easy keepers deserve recognition because they have spent their lives behind bars attempting to redeem themselves by engaging in good behaviors and making positive contributions to the institutions they call home.

With all of this in mind, the question then becomes, "Have easy keepers become too easy to keep?"

Sources: Joseph S. Bakura, "Too Easy to Keep: Life-Sentenced Prisoners and the Future of Mass Incarceration," *Theory in Action*, vol 17, no. 1, Jan. 2024; Christopher Seeds, *Death by Prison: The Emergence of Life Without Parole and Perpetual Confinement*, University of California Press, 2022; Marion Vannier, *Normalizing Extreme Imprisonment: The Case of Life Without Parole in California*, Oxford University Press, 2021.

The logo features the words "Families United to End LWOP" in a stylized font. The letters "F", "U", "E", and "L" are significantly larger and more prominent, with the words "amilies", "nited to", and "OP" filling the spaces between them.

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

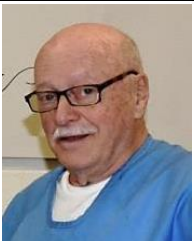
Business & Finances



Leah Ward-Lee



Carolyn Warren



R. Von Villas

ENTREPRENEUR'S WORKSHOP

By Leah Ward-Lee
Post Columnist

Treat Yourself Better #2

JUST FACE IT ... most Americans should eat better. Much of what we eat is fast food that's breaded, deep-fried, covered in cheese, and has loads of sodium, calories, and very few nutrients.

Changing that behavior isn't going to happen overnight, but wouldn't it be great to start feeding your body what it needs to be happy? You can start to change, and very quickly you'll start to see the benefits.

Step 1: Learn to Cook One Healthy Meal. Being able to cook a healthy and delicious meal is worth the effort. Even if it's only a pre-cooked chicken, salad, and a side, you'll feel better after you've made it and reap the benefits after you've eaten it.

Step 2: Learn to Eat Green Food. When my son was 5, his kindergarten class listened to a presentation on food safety. At dinner that night he looked solemnly at the spinach on his plate and announced, "I don't eat green food."

Fresh vegetables are one of the things we can do to make our bodies healthy. You might start with only one a week but getting one into a meal every day is worth it. One of the benefits of most green foods is they help keep us "regular" and that alone is worth incorporating them into our diet.

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
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7412 Calumet Avenue
Hammond, IN 46324

Build & Protect Your Credit Like the Pros

Junk Fees Added to Debit/Credit Card Payments

By Carolyn Warren, Post Columnist

SOMETIMES, UNBEKNOWN TO you, your account might not have enough money in it to cover the purchase you're about to make with your credit card, debit card, or by writing a check. When this happens, there are two possible outcomes. First, the bank could go ahead and let the transaction go through, but charge you an overdraft fee. While I don't love the high overdraft fees, I can see the bank's point. It's giving you grace by letting the transaction go through, trusting you to deposit more money later to cover it. It's like a really high-interest rate short-term loan.

Second, and this is the one I vigorously object to, is some banks have started charging a "denial fee." They deny the transaction at the time you attempt to purchase something, and then charge you an extra fee for stopping the transaction. *What!* If they deny you the money, they don't need to charge you a fee on top of that. That is total greed and nonsense.

The Consumer Finance Protection Bureau agrees. It is proposing a new rule to stop this junk fee. Rohit Chopra, bureau director, says, "Over the years, banks and their consultants have concocted new fees for fake services that cost almost nothing to deliver."

Let's hope the bureau acts quickly to eliminate this greedy fee. But, in the meantime, pay attention to your money. Pay attention to your bank balance. Don't let banks take advantage of you. They're already making billions of dollars a year. They don't need to grab your personal money, too. Please share this information with people who may need to know. Let's help educate, inform, and protect our friends and family from rip-offs.

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

The Financial Corner



By R. Von Villas,
Post Columnist

YOU MAY NOT know it, but your trust account is entitled to interest, currently at an annual percentage rate (APR) of 4.5%. If you haven't applied, simply request Form SSA-89 from the Trust Office, and mail the completed form to the address provided. You may also obtain the form from your facility library. When filling it out, do not white out mistakes or it will invalidate the form. Once approved, you will receive interest added to your account each month. Now to the stock market...

The next two years will be interesting. President Trump has this time to push his agenda through before election of the entire U.S. House of Representatives in 2026. Trump's party currently controls the House and Senate by narrow margins. Based on his agenda, expect volatility to occur during the first six months, which may provide a good entry point for some of the stocks I follow.

Health care stocks in general took a beating in 2024. CVS Health (CVS) started at \$83 and ended at \$44. CVS is financially strong and a low-risk investment. However, I'm going with 18 to 24 months for it to return to the \$50-to-\$60 range. While I wait, CVS is paying me a dividend yield of 5%.

WalgreensBoots (WBA) started 2024 at \$25 and ended at \$8.08. I considered WBA a medium risk, but one that offers a decent potential profit over the next 36 months. I paid \$8.75 a share in November. In January, WBA beat analysts' expectations and jumped to \$11.76. I know it will take time for the share price to return to the \$30 range. However, I'm receiving a dividend yield of over 9%.

Next month, we will discuss how inflation affects real estate investment trusts (REITs) and utilities.

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 own both CVS and WBA.

Financial Corner Tracking Stocks (From Sep. 9, 2024 to Mar. 10, 2025)

● Apollo Comm. Real Est. Fin. Inc. (ARI)	\$10.30	→	\$10.02	-2.7%
● Baxter International Inc. (BAX)	\$38.96	→	\$36.57	-6.1%
● Comerica Inc. (CMA)	\$54.87	→	\$58.30	+6.3%
● CVS Health Corp. (CVS)	\$57.75	→	\$66.33	+14.9%
● Lumen Technologies (LUMN)	\$5.84	→	\$5.30	-9.2%
● Pfizer (PFE)	\$28.56	→	\$26.73	-6.4%
● UGI Corp. (UGI)	\$23.97	→	\$33.02	+37.8%
● Wells Fargo & Co. (WFC)	\$54.00	→	\$71.05	+31.6%

Creative Arts Programs

“Every beginning is a consequence — every beginning ends something.”
—Paul Valery

The Smile On Me

Let me tell you a secret to endless happiness
Choice you won't regret if you have faith
Because nothing compares to this amazing grace
We gotta humble ourselves, be willing to accept

Vanity and pride brought me so low
Thank God who raised me up, now I have hope
His law is my guide. I got nothing to fear
His word is music to my ears, it makes my heart sing.

I got this smile on me, cuz' I have Christ in me
He set my heart free from the bondage of sin
I was so blind, 'till He opened my eyes
He cleared my way so I would walk a straight line

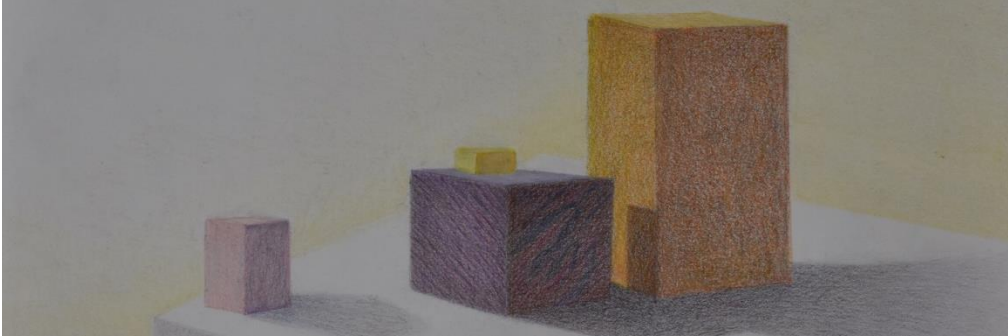
—Jason Rosacia,
Post Reporter



Doodle #1, © 2018 Franklin Lee, color pencil.



Floating Boxes, © 2022 Franklin Lee, color pencil.



Shadow Blocks, © 2022 Jose Pulido, color pencil on paper.

Michael in the Middle

We were lined in tandem
One behind the other
Christmas lights, the same color — criminal orange
Connected by shackles, shuffling sandals
Off the bus to the judge

A variety of crimes terrorized, different degrees of depravity
Our future abyss with one commonality
Monstrous prisoner to be, CDCR property

Michael behind me, cherished two daughters
His little angels, getting their meals from school
Hungry at home, Michael
Packed a shopping cart full of food
Walked out the store, strike three

Michael in front of me, fronted as a highway patrol
Robbing intoxicated drivers,
Leaving the bar swerving home

Michael first in line
Caught his cheating girlfriend in bed
Wanted to prove himself a man
Shot her twice in the head

Michael last in line, bullied for his sexuality
Nobody listened, till he shot his mother
Continue to school, targeting his classmates

Michael in the middle, I won't describe
Ashamed, I hide in a hole
Awaiting the day, it will be safe
To speak out and say I am who I am

One behind the other, off the bus to the judge
Connected by shackles
To the world, we are all the same

— Leon Oliver, California Health Care Facility

Alive, Barely?

Can it be that face reflected is me?
The wrinkles, the sags, the tired eyes.
The youth within still frolics,
the boy never grown still climbs trees.
Adventurous tyke explores.
Withered frame belies the youth within.
Which is lie, and which truth?
Do both live together within, or apart?
Be it dichotomy or illusion?
Am I he? Is he me?
I wish I knew.

— Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter



HBOT Aids Veterans

By Dale Hurd, Post Reporter

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS disorder (PTSD) is characterized by harmful changes in the brain's structure and activity. It is believed that among combat veterans the prevalence of PTSD is around 30%. PTSD's symptoms are intrusive thoughts, nightmares and flashbacks of past traumatic events, avoidance of trauma reminders, hypervigilance, sleep disturbances, and persistent malfunction of the stress response reflex. Brain imaging techniques show that traumatic events cause long-term changes in brain activity occurring in the prefrontal cortex, frontal-limbic circuit, amygdala, and the hippocampus. A growing body of evidence is demonstrating that hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) improves these regions years after trauma of the brain occurred. HBOT has positive effects on PTSD by increasing neural flexibility, facilitating the reversal of the harmful changes in brain structure and activity caused by traumatic stress.

Trauma-focused psychotherapy in conjunction with pharmacotherapy is currently the treatment of choice for PTSD, but up to 50% of patients fail to respond to this course of therapy. The use of HBOT on veterans suffering from treatment-resistant PTSD has been found to significantly reduce PTSD symptoms and associated depression. It has been shown that HBOT for PTSD is well-tolerated. The occasional instances when HBOT triggered recovery of suppressed memories were typically accompanied by severe initial distress. However, this was quickly followed by rapid integration of the memory and resolution of the distress. Clinical trials are now demonstrating that HBOT not only significantly induces brain plasticity, but is also reducing the symptoms of veterans suffering from treatment-resistant PTSD.

Source: *PLoS ONE*, vol. 17, no. 2. Feb. 2022.

Military Careers

Nuclear Secrets

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter



MY GRANDCHILDREN ARE now at an age where they consider career decisions. Despite my own reluctance to make my six-year U.S. Air Force commitment into a "lifer" choice in 1971, I now encourage my descendants to consider the virtues of such an opportunity. The military offers exciting training and job options, from writing computer programs saving taxpayers millions of dollars to real-life war game theory applications. Qualifications are minimal for enlistment in most services but, for example, current Air Force data shows the branch comprised of 8.2% high school graduates — no college prerequisite required; your abilities are your assets. College tuition payments are also an option in exchange for military service. The newly created U.S. Space Force is another career option.

As a high school graduate, I entered the service while the military draft system was in effect in 1967, and used the opportunity to avoid classroom-based college job preparation to physically work in my career field choice: firefighting. After 16 weeks of intensive training, I was assigned to a remote air base, in sunny southern Spain, housing a wing of sophisticated F-4C Phantom recon jets and Spanish F-86 Sabre fighters. Making sergeant in just over two years, I supervised crash and structural firefighting crews consisting of young guys and older lifers — I was just 20 years old. My next assignment was in Montana and I took on tasks requiring a secret security clearance. The authorization was compulsory due to a firefighter's need to access super-sensitive jet aircraft cockpit components (F-106 Delta Darts) in an emergency or rescue situation, and intimate knowledge of the basic mechanisms of nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) assigned to the base. These tasks required training for supervisors that included an actual ICBM warhead brought into the fire station on a trailer, along with technicians, and under heavy guard, to teach us how to separate the detonating high-explosive package from the radioactive components. A transporter accident on the way to one of the remote missile silos, or on base, could result in fire, thus, our need to participate; pretty exciting stuff for young men still street racing and shooting pool as off-duty recreation.

As a 20-year-old with no college education, I found my Air Force vocation a pretty exhilarating environment. Huge responsibilities rested on first-termers shoulders and provided future promotions and experiences unmatched in civilian life should I become a "lifer." I didn't think the job could be any more intriguing or enticing until shortly before discharge in early 1971. I was called to a pre-release session with a reenlistment major, and presented with an attractive offer: an 18-month assignment to a remote Nevada desert base used for "experimental development," and a one-week-on/one-week-off schedule where a helicopter ride ferried crews to the workplace "somewhere north of Las Vegas." The location name was not revealed and I could relate nothing to my family about the potential assignment other than the schedule and increased pay. I declined the offer for one reason: The job required I extend my discharge date by 18 more months of military service. The assignment, I later learned, was to Groom Lake, aka "Area 51." Thirty days later, my wife and I returned to home in L.A. However, looking back, knowing what I know now, I regret turning down the Groom Lake assignment.

Encouraging our children and grandchildren to actively consider military service as a career, even for just a three-to-four year enlistment period to pay for college, is simply good parenting. Also, signing up for military reserve commitments can produce college tuition assistance.

As veterans, sharing our unique military training, positive life experiences, and the educational benefits currently offered in the military, might just convince our teenaged descendants such a vocation is a good choice.

Sources: "AIMS: Advocates to Inspire Military Service," *Air & Space Force*, July/August; "Active Duty Demographics," *World Almanac and Book of Facts*, 2024.

National Veterans Foundation

5777 West Century Boulevard, Suite 350
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Call 1-888-777-4443 toll-free for information and references.

Major General Daniel Butterfield

The Little Known and Largely Underappreciated Hero of the Civil War
By Clarence "Buddy" Butterfield, Mule Creek State Prison

I COULDN'T HAVE been very old when I first heard of my ancestor, Daniel Butterfield, who the family said was a genuine American Civil War hero. But it was only a family story, rather vague, and who could put much stock into that? That all changed in 1978 when a genealogist confirmed the story. Life moved on and I relegated it to the back of my mind.

Moving forward to early 2024, during a conversation with a friend here at Mule Creek, the subject came up and he offered to help me document the information about my fifth cousin (twice removed). Lo and behold, there was also a book about him published this same year, and what an amazing man Daniel Butterfield turned out to be.

He had a reputation as a highly organized general officer, which made his expertise in logistics valuable to the war effort. In the winter of 1862, he wrote and published the sorely needed handbook, *Camp and Outpost Duty for Infantry*. But he was not just a bean counter, as his personal conduct in combat would soon prove.

On June 27, 1862, at the Battle of Gaines Mill, while then still a colonel, Butterfield rallied his troops and led them under heavy enemy fire. For this action, he was eventually awarded the Medal of Honor. The citation read, in part, that Butterfield "Seized the colors of the 83rd Pennsylvania Volunteers at a critical moment and, under a galling fire of the enemy, encouraged the depleted ranks to renewed exertion."

According to the author, on July 1862, while in camp, Butterfield felt his unit needed a better piece of music to be played for the evening bugle call. While he could not read music, with the help of bugler Oliver Norton he composed "Taps," which was, according to Norton, made with a "suggestion of putting out the lights and lying down to rest in the silence of the camp." Butterfield whistled the tune to Norton, then asked Norton to play it. After several minor changes, Norton recorded the notes on the back of an old envelope.

On Nov. 29, 1862, Butterfield was promoted to major general. In the winter of 1863, following the Chattanooga Campaign, he wrote a treatise in favor of the use of African American soldiers in combat. He believed they could perform as well as whites if trained as well as white soldiers. This kind of forward thinking was not popular or common among his peers.

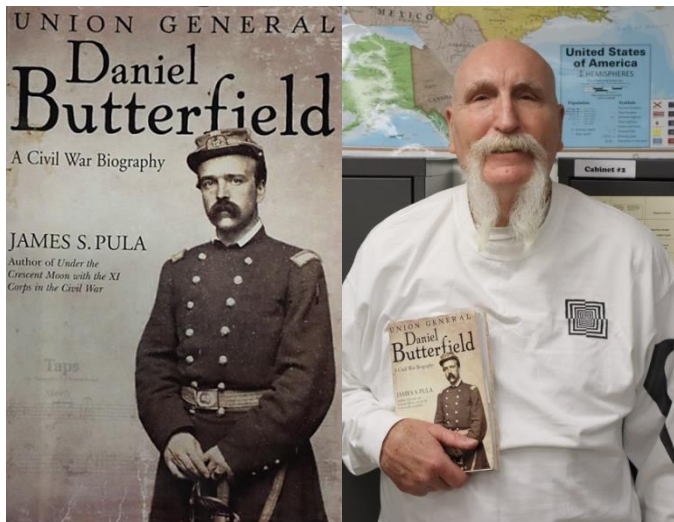
In June 1863, Gen. Joseph Hooker appointed my cousin to become Chief of Staff to the Army of the Potomac. One of the first things Gen. Butterfield did was to design unit badges for all the major commands, a tradition still in use today.

On July 3, 1863, Gen. Butterfield was wounded at the Battle of Gettysburg when a cannon shell exploded close by — a shell fragment struck him on the left side of the chest below the heart. The one and one-half pound fragment struck flat-side first and did not enter his body, but the force caused intense pain and bruising, and he was concussed by the explosion.

All in all, Major General Daniel Butterfield was involved in numerous battles and campaigns. These include Gettysburg (June 30-July 4, 1863) where he was wounded and his participation was central to the victory there; Fredericksburg (Dec. 13, 1862); Second Bull Run (Aug. 30, 1862); Gaines Mill (June 27, 1862); Malvern Hill (July 1, 1862); Hanover Court House (May 27, 1862); the capture of Lookout Mountain (Oct. 29, 1863); and many others.

Needless to say, I am very proud of my ancestor, and glad I had the opportunity to find out more about him.

Sources: Genealogy by Ken Myer Jr., Saugerties, NY; James S. Pula, *Union General Daniel Butterfield: A Civil War Biography*, Savas Beatie, 2024.



(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

NATIONAL CRIME VICTIMS' RIGHTS WEEK
APRIL 6-12, 2025

Postscriptum

THANK YOU FOR joining us for the April edition of the *Post*, coinciding with National Crime Victims' Rights Week. We hope that reading some of our contributors' thoughts on making amends to those who have been hurt will inspire you to think about your own answer to the question "How do I honor my victims?" The effects of crime go far beyond the people we harm directly with our actions, and every one of the people touched by our actions deserve our best efforts at allowing them to feel whole again.

Even a "minor" offense, a "victimless" crime like selling drugs on the corner or robbing a dealer creates hurt in our society. Without even considering the lives of those who bought and used those drugs, what about the people whose homes or businesses were nearby? How safe do they feel knowing the crowd that comes by, or the potential for violence that comes with it? What about the loved ones of the dealers who were robbed? What about the neighbors? The landlord? No crime leaves the community unscarred.

Part of our job as incarcerated individuals is to make amends to society — that's why we're here. Amends can take a lot of forms (such as direct, indirect, and living amends), and it is up to each one of us to determine how best we can make a difference that improves lives in our world.

This isn't a question just for the first week of April, but for all of us to consider year-round: How do I honor my victims?

-JC, Editor-in-Chief



Jose, who graduated from Facility A's Juvenile Diversion Program, speaks during National Crime Victims' Rights Week 2018. (H. Kim / Media Specialist)

THE BACK PAGE | What you need to know about

Sources: World Almanac and Book of Facts (2022); World Book Encyclopedia (2017)

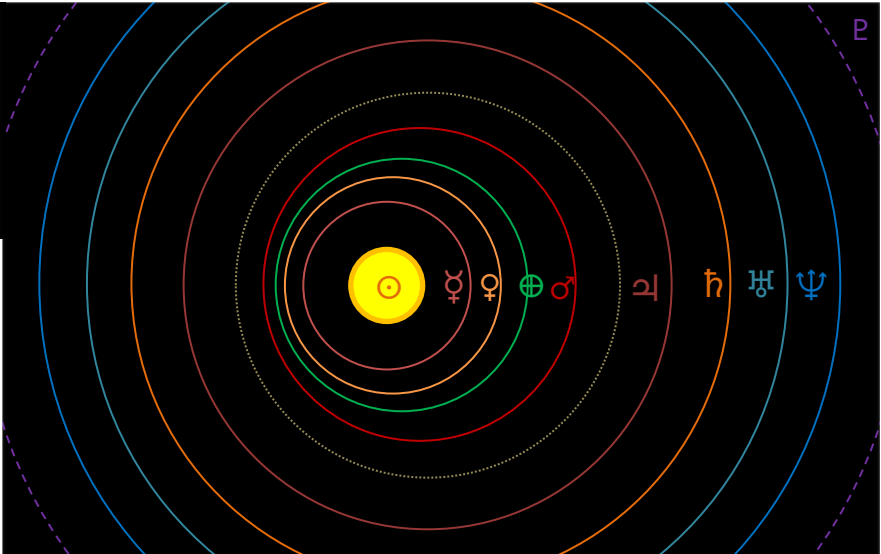
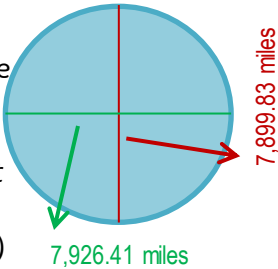
EARTH

Earth (astronomical symbol $\oplus$) is the only planet known to have the conditions suitable for life. It is the third planet from the sun, orbiting in an elliptical path about 584 million miles long at about 66,700 miles an hour (18.5 miles per second). At its closest (“perihelion”), in January, the earth is 91.4 million miles from the sun; at its farthest (“aphelion”), in July, it is 94.5 million miles away.

Revolution

Sidereal Year: The time it takes to circle the sun completely (365 days, 9 minutes, 9.54 seconds)

The earth is not a perfect sphere; due to its spin, it is wider at the equator (making it a shape called an “oblate spheroid”)



Estimated Age: 4.5 billion years

Mass: 6,600,000,000,000,000,000 tons

Tilt off the Orbital Plane: 23.5 degrees

Total Surface Area: 196,900,000 sq. miles

Land Area: about 57,100,000 sq. miles

Water Area: about 139,800,000 sq. miles

Highest Point on Land: 29,035 feet above sea level (Mt. Everest)

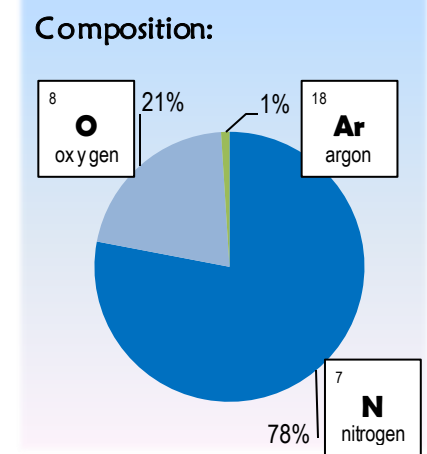
Lowest Point on Land: 1,411 feet below sea level (shore of Dead Sea)

Deepest Part of Ocean: 35,840 feet below surface (Mariana Trench)

Average Ocean Depth: 12,200 feet below surface

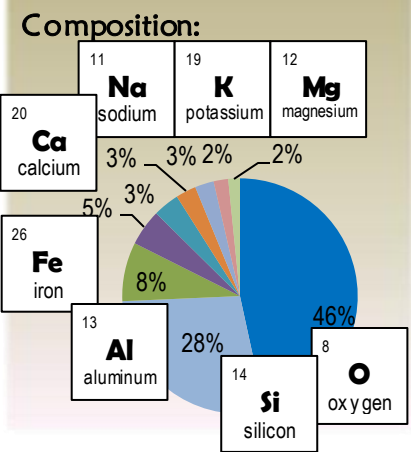
Atmosphere

More than 99% is less than 50 miles above the surface, fading into space about 600 miles above Earth



Crust

There are two types, *continental* (dry land), averaging 25 mi. thick, and *oceanic* (below the ocean), about 5 mi. thick



Rotation

Solar Day: The time it takes to spin completely on its axis so that the sun appears in the same place in the sky (24 hours)

Sidereal Day: The time it takes to spin so that the stars appear to be in the same place in the sky (23 hours, 56 minutes, 4.09 seconds)



800 mi. thick	1400 mi. thick	1800 mi. thick	5-25 mi. thick	0-10 miles	10-30 mi.	30-50 mi.	50-200 mi.	200-300 mi.	300-600 mi.
Inner core	Outer core	Mantle	Crust	Troposphere	Stratosphere	Mesosphere	Ionosphere	Thermosphere	Exosphere