

To Our Readers

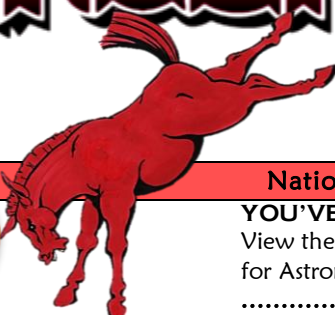
By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

SEAT OF THE SOUL author Gary Zukav offers up advice on clarity and authenticity: "Clarity is the ability to see our soul in action in the physical world. It results from choosing to learn through wisdom instead of through fear and doubt. Clarity allows you to experience your fellow humans with compassion instead of judgment. Clarity brings forth true compassion, the sharing of passion, allowing the energy of the heart to flow.

"Clarity turns pain into suffering. It sees the dynamic of the personality that is the cause of pain. An authentically empowered personality sees the perfection of each situation and experience for the evolution and maturation of all of us."

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Damon Williams emerges from the Welcoming Arch, symbolizing a return to community. (J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

GRIP Provides Healing for Survivors

By Jacob Robles, Mule Creek State Prison

FOR MANY INCARCERATED people looking to make amends with their victims, the opportunity never comes. But for those who join Guiding Rage Into Power (GRIP), the chance to share the same space with family members or survivors of other violent crimes is something that participants experience on their journey to healing. Many "gripers" call this interaction one of the most transformative moments of their lives, and participants like Godfrey "Jamal" Jackson consider it "eye-opening."

"Not only do I learn how to conduct myself in these situations," he said, "but I learn to understand rather than seek to be understood."



William Ratcliff and Elle. (J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)



GRIP graduates Ben Cardenas and Albert Bell. (J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

Serving as surrogates, survivors come into the prison and sit in a circle with people who were once defined by the worst things they did. From here, survivors begin to reflect on the consequences and ripple effects of being a victim of crime, and bare their souls for participants to see the magnitude of their criminal actions. "Understanding victim impact," said Dejon Murray, a participant of GRIP, "is key to understanding what led me to making victims."

Known as a healing dialogue, the purpose of this interaction is to provide an opportunity for both parties to accept forgiveness into their lives, and experience the interworking powers of healing and love. Most participants are changed after this moment, and survivors are empowered. For Murray, dialogues like this helped him realize that "before I victimized, I was a victim."

Having sat in the fire for true healing to occur, on Jan. 23, 2025, three survivors — Lindsey, Marylyn, and Elle — came to the Mule Creek State Prison to attend a graduation honoring

(continued on page 2)



(from GRIP Provides Healing, pg. 1)

the incarcerated folk who successfully completed the GRIP program. Along with them, over 100 people attended the graduation, including the prison’s live streaming video, to support tribes 929 and 875 as they became GRIP’s newest peacemakers. From legislators and correctional staff to nonprofit administrators and family members, everyone in attendance came together to welcome the graduates back into the community’s grace. Knowing everything that it took for the graduates to make it to this point, Lindsay had a few words to say to them.

“I come here to support you because the healing never stops, and it comes in unexpected places.”

The ceremony began with a monologue from Teddy Honey, GRIP’s program director, thanking everyone for coming and showing support to the new tribes. “GRIP is all about healing and accountability,” he said, “and these two tribes, I am honored to say, stood levels above the standard.”



R. Pearce Wagener and his loved one.
(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

younger self,” said Moises Tejeda, “because I didn’t know any better. ... How can we ever grow if we don’t know?” For Chauncey Crowder, GRIP allowed him to see himself beyond his mistakes. “My experiences in life have shaped me,” said Crowder, “but they do not define me.” He continued, “I am not my past mistakes. Instead, I am the lessons learned. I am in the compassion I choose to show the world, the love I choose to show instead of hate.”

Although the atmosphere of the graduation was full of joy, excitement, and inspiration, there was still a level of sadness in the air. Last summer, GRIP lost a beloved leader, Bernard Moss. Throughout the graduation, however, graduates and facilitators both free and incarcerated took some time to reflect on what his loss has meant to the GRIP community. “His absence is strongly felt,” said Jesse Carson, an incarcerated GRIP facilitator, “but Bernard’s efforts to make safer communities will be carried on by those of us whose lives were touched by him.”

GRIP’s chief executive officer Kim Moore took some time to talk about the benefits to the community for supporting programs like this. She mentioned that 10 graduates are now part of her staff on the outside. She talked about the cost of housing prisoners, up to \$120,000, versus the cost of taking someone through their GRIP journey, \$4,000. She mentioned that with a recidivism rate of less than 1%, GRIP has proved to be the better choice for creating safer communities.

When asked what motivated her to be involved with this line of work, she immediately thought of her daughter. “I have been involved with GRIP for 10 years now,” said Moore, “because I want to make a safer world for my daughter to live in.”

In the end, Elle advised all in attendance to leave with a better understanding of love. “Love wins every time,” she said, “if you allow the power of it to lead the way.”



Dejon Murray and his sister.
(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

GRIP participants, known as “grippers,” refer to their groups as tribes to remind themselves that they are a part of a community seeking healing together. A tribe is named by counting the total number of years served behind bars by all members of the tribe. Not only does this give every participant a chance to be represented in the tribe’s name, but it draws attention to the fact that although it takes only a few seconds to decide to commit a crime, the consequences are astronomical.

As the graduation continued, graduates were asked to give a speech about their GRIP journey, and what they got out of this yearlong program. “I learned to forgive my



THE MULE CREEK POST
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AND STAFF

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

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California Model



Correctional Officer Stress

Two Years into the New California Model

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

G OV. GAVIN NEWSOM declared the implementation of the new California Model in March 2023, a more humane system-wide methodology of incarceration patterned on the Norwegian penal system. From the onset, the viability of converting the California prison system and its over 90,000 prisoners into something less violent, more humane, and fully rehabilitation-oriented appeared problematic. However, the commitment by the governor and buy-in by the department of corrections provided hope. From interviews conducted with administrators at the Mule Creek State Prison, Secretary of Corrections Jeffery Macomber and Director of Adult Institutions Ron Broomfield, it became apparent that a major impetus of the new model was to reduce violence and to lessen stress for corrections staff, with good reason.

Research shows that the average life expectancy of a correctional officer is 59 years, 16 years less than the national average. According to the Archives of Suicide Research, correctional officer suicide rates are 39% higher than those of other occupations, with depression, alcoholism, domestic violence, and heart attacks at a much higher frequency than other law enforcement careers.

A former correctional sergeant stated, "As custody officers we put on the appearance of a hard shell, but we see things that affect us. It can be difficult. We have a heightened sense of

awareness; we're trained to be suspicious. We come to work looking around for trouble, always on edge, fight or flight mechanisms on high alert." The sergeant related how the stress carries with a person, even when they leave this place, and this affects personal relationships to the extreme.

Research shows that it is a confluence of stress factors, like those described above, that leads to "hypervigilance," a condition that contributes to anxiety and exhaustion. Expectations and fear are embedded in the minds of correctional officers from the beginning of training, forewarned to be on the lookout for trouble, to be wary of every prisoner and suspicious of their inherent criminal and manipulative nature. To live with that constant fear and expectation — even while witnessing or experiencing manipulation and violence — frays the fibers of a person's psyche.

Two years after the announcement of the California Model, members of the correctional staff at Mule Creek were asked about their stress levels. The officers who responded did so under the condition of anonymity, due to their occasional work on the higher security yards at Mule Creek. Other than issues of privacy, most were forthcoming and open to share their experiences and observations. They largely describe similar experiences when working on Level III and IV yards: They say that incarcerated individuals there aren't complying with orders, show outward contempt for staff, and appear to have a sense of entitlement. The staff express a belief that this attitude is related to the California Model, and report that stress levels are through the roof.

The numbers support officers' observations that assaults against staff are increasing. The department's research branch, which tracks data on rules violations and incident reports, verifies that staff assaults increased from 22 in 2023, to 41 in 2024.

Whether these statistics support officers' perceptions that increased assaults are associated with the California Model is unclear. There is another side to the perception: The "us-vs.-them" dynamic between staff and the incarcerated population persists. There are opposing cultural forces at play, operating in the same space with very unequal power dynamics and divergent paradigms of understanding and priorities.

Incarcerated people we spoke to perceive that officers don't see the potential benefits of progressive programming like the California Model. They believe officers are indoctrinated to not see incarcerated individuals as human beings and are frustrated with a new system that requires de-escalation rather than force as a first response. In the old days, incarcerated people followed orders or were pepper sprayed and forced to comply. Now, when there's an incident a supervisor must be called. Many residents feel that new recruits coming in are given misinformation by the old guard, arriving with a "watch your back" mentality.

Innovative programming such as the new California Model is designed to change the fundamental cultural dynamics of incarcerated-staff relations, promoting interactions that humanize prisoners and attempting to create a culture that uplifts rather than controls, supporting prisoners' rehabilitative activities and programming, while lowering violence and stress which benefits officers as well. As Secretary Macomber pointed out, it took Norway 10 years to implement an improved system. Such efforts present a promising opportunity for California to be a leader in providing resources and outcomes for the betterment of all, but change takes time.



Secretary J. Macomber. (Courtesy of CDCR)

CALIFORNIA INNOCENCE

P R O J E C T

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



Why We Should Pay Restitution

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

AS INCARCERATED PEOPLE, we face some simple choices, or they seem so at first. Take how we think about restitution fines and direct orders of restitution. To some, it seems smart to get around paying, until later when they go in front of the Board of Parole Hearings and are summarily denied for circumventing restitution. Now it doesn't seem like such a good idea.

The board commissioners, along with their researchers and investigators, instead see a clear and compelling practice of criminal manipulation — that we are what we practice, and therefore unsafe to be released into parole.

Ideally, each of us who enjoy the privilege of standing before a panel to self-advocate regarding the hard and necessary work that is our personal rehabilitation will demonstrate real remorse for the senseless crimes we have committed — taking responsibility for our criminal thinking. Good citizenship disciplines our character in support of community. Put simply, there is no getting around our legal obligations as ordered by the court. Just look to the lethal electric fence for a stark example of that.

Yet, there are other things to consider. When we avoid obligations, we continue our old ways, and that kind of thinking keeps us locked into a continuous cycle of criminal activity. If we follow the crowd in prison, then we will always come back to prison. Is that what you want for the rest of your life?

What about your accountability life partners, such as your significant other, AA/NA members, pastor, imam, rabbi and others to whom you should be relying to live the best life possible? Are we dragging them into our criminal ways by having them send money to someone else, in effect buying into our madness by not paying our legally ordered restitution?

As to remorse for the crimes we committed, how can we show remorse if we don't pay the money to help our victims recover from the harm we caused them? How do we replace what we have stolen? Is it false pride or just stubborn rebelliousness that keeps us from doing what is right and ordered by judges?

When anyone commits a crime, it is always in part due to a lack of compassion for others, that deep concern for their welfare. In not paying our restitution, we show that we have not yet grown that necessary component of a good person, the minimum of empathy necessary to properly function in free society as a decent human being.

So, are we going to grow up and do what is right, or continue to throw a temper tantrum and play a false victim role? You might think this is harsh, but how harsh has it been for our victims to recover from what we have done to them?

Opinion: Proposition 57 Credits Not Applied Hurts Programmers

By Paul A. Lopez, Mule Creek State Prison

THE RECENT COURT decision and changes to Proposition 57 are having a profound effect on lifers and their families. The Criminal Justice Legal Foundation (CJLF) made a decision to go after this proposition claiming the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) was not authorized to make changes toward an incarcerated person's minimum eligible parole date (MEPD). They decided to go after people who are positively programming and making prison yards safer for the incarcerated and staff alike.

These incarcerated people live pro-social lives and give back to their communities both inside and out. They take initiative to help others by becoming peer mentors and substance abuse specialists and work with at-risk youth programs like the Juvenile Diversion Program. These are the people the foundation decided to target, the ones who work diligently to become better versions of themselves and who earned an earlier possible release date.

Importantly, the CDCR upheld only one of three rulings by the superior court. It just so happens to be the one that makes things more convenient for them. The court ordered CDCR to: (1) Stop applying Proposition 57 credits when calculating MEPDs; (2) Stop conducting parole suitability hearings based on MEPDs that have been advanced by Prop 57 credits; and (3) Stop releasing people found suitable for parole at hearings conducted on this basis.

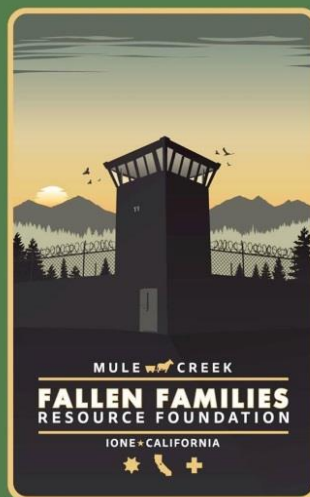
For lifers such as me who have gone through this process, it has been mentally, emotional, physically, spiritually, and financially tormenting. It is rough only for incarcerated people, but also for our families and friends. The department made the decision to continue to take us through the board hearing process, and to continue to apply Proposition 57 credits when calculating our parole eligibility dates. Therefore, when lifers go to board and are granted a parole date, they are congratulated and told "good luck." They then inform their families and friends they are headed home. A week later, the fact sheet arrives from the board, along with an updated calculated worksheet stating we no longer have good behavior and approved rehabilitative or education achievement credits. I lost four years of these credits, a significant difference. This not only crushed my spirit, but also the spirits of my family and loved ones.

All of this says to the incarcerated people who put in the work is, "Let's punish those who have made the choice to live a healthier and pro-social lifestyle."

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

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

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Freelance writers, staff, and others may submit articles or material to the Mule Creek Post, % MCIC AW's Office, P.O. Box 409090, Ione, CA 95640, or by interdepartmental mail if living at MCSP. Submissions may be edited for length (please keep under 600 words) and content and become the property of the Mule Creek Post (authors retain intellectual rights to original material). When submitting legal news articles, include source material documentation. Include your name, CDC#, and address.



The Wordsmith

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

DO YOU SOMETIMES wish you could find just the right word to describe someone who has a dark aspect about them? One word Edgar Allen Poe used to name a central character in the story “Ligeia” (the source of the poem, “The Conqueror Worm”), is *lygaeus*.

The word itself comes to us from the Greek *λυγαιος* (*lygaios*, “dark or shadowy”) But, there are many other words that can describe the same idea. Take, for example, the word *somber*, which we generally take to mean “very sad and serious, or having a dull or dark color.” One dictionary defines *somber* as:

- so shaded as to be dark and gloomy
- of a serious mien; grave-somber dignitaries
- of a dismal or depressing character: melancholy

Or how about *caliginous*, which comes from the Latin *caliginosus* and the root *caligo*, meaning “darkness.” Its first English use was in 1548. One dictionary defines *caliginous* as:

- misty, dark, a caliginous atmosphere

An example of how *caliginous* can be used: “What horrors were committed within the caliginous confinements of that torture chamber?”

Another alternative is the word *stygian*. *Stygian* is often capitalized, as it comes from the River Styx (from the Greek for “hateful”) in Greek mythology — the river separating the world of the living from Hades, the realm of the dead. One dictionary defines *stygian* as:

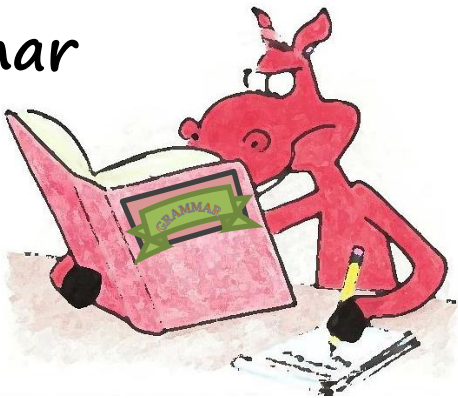
- of or relating to the river Styx
- extremely dark, gloomy, or forbidding: “The stygian blackness of the cave.”

Consult your tablet’s dictionary app for further research, including synonyms and antonyms.

Sources: Webster’s Universal English Dictionary; Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary; Dictionary of Word Origins



Big Red’s Grammar Guide



GOOD WRITING BEGINS with the basics. Here in my grammar guide are more things a writer should know. Last month, we talked about the audience for whom we are writing to determine the purpose, style, and content. This month, we’ll discuss the process of fine-tuning our writing through revision.

Revision is about the big picture — organization, vocabulary, and tone — as well as the small details like punctuation that make our writing the best it can be. Revision is as important to our writing process as prewriting and the first draft; it’s where we turn on our internal editor, evaluate what we’ve got on the page, and then work to make it the best it can be.

To start the revision process, we have to read our first draft critically and see if it makes sense. To help us do this, we can ask some basic questions:

1. Is my topic stated clearly?
2. Is my main idea clear?
3. Is my supporting information sufficient and relevant?
4. Are my ideas in logical order?
5. Are my connections clear and logical?
6. Is there anything included that is not relevant to my main idea?

The answers to these questions will direct our efforts at revision. Keep in mind that others can help in this process by reading our work and commenting on it.

Next month, we’ll continue our talk about the revision process and discuss the importance of word choice and proofreading.

The Uncaged Writer

On Writing and Publishing an Op-Ed

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter



FOLLOWING THE FAILURE of the End Slavery in California Act in November, there was no shortage of local reaction and it seemed to be an obvious Op-Ed topic. The *Sacramento Bee* responded to a brief pitch expressing interest, and I submitted an initial version to the *Bee*, emphasizing quotes and reaction from Mule Creek residents. Once an outside publisher bites on a story, a back-and-forth editing process is the norm. In this instance, communication was brief and to the point. The *Bee* wasn’t interested in a string of reactionary quotes; they wanted to “hear the author’s personal reaction to the failure of Prop 6, and about the jobs and labor [the writer] has performed while incarcerated,” in detail. I fired off version two the same day.

As is the case with many writers, second thoughts and doubts can appear in the dark hours. I reached for Prison Journalism Project’s *Prison Writer’s Guide to Media Writing*, by Yukari Kane and Shaheen Pasha (2024), the chapter on opinion writing. The op-ed checklist includes the following:

- Argument:** Describing the issue of the editorial.
- Anecdotes:** One and two, using a personal story to show rather than tell, with supporting evidence as to how the issue affects a broad group of people; the second anecdote is the point of view of another person affected by the issue.
- Supporting evidence and stats:** If available.
- Counterargument:** A paragraph with the opposing viewpoint. Don’t dismiss or rant, rather acknowledge the merits and flaws of the oppositional view and offer a reasonable counterargument.
- Conclusion:** Offer a brief suggestion on what needs doing to remedy the wrongs you see.
- Attribution:** All the facts and quotes are attributed to sources.
- Check your facts:** Ensure all statements are supported using evidence.
- Proofread for style and clarity:** Make sure it makes sense, is clear and understandable.

These guidelines sent me back to the typewriter to compose a thorough, by-the-book version, strictly adhering to journalistic guidelines and principles, and version three was submitted forthwith. The op-ed appeared in the *Sacramento* (continued on page 6)

(from *Uncaged Writer*, pg. 5)
Bee and affiliates on Jan. 20, 2025, on Inauguration Day, the day honoring Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday; interesting timing considering the subject matter. The *Bee* chose version two, and although I never actually got to see the finished piece in print, others who did describe a version that's tight, to the point, and effective, which I attribute to The *Bee's* professional editing.

We get many submissions at the *Post* more heavily opinion-editorial than news stories. One of our editors pointed out that if you want to publish an op-ed, it is good practice to have written an article on the topic previously. This advice lends itself to the fact that even if we are writing op-eds, fact-based and evidence-supported arguments to present the opposing viewpoint with solid sourcing and attribution are necessary elements to ensure publishability. My advice is to write on what you are truly passionate about, do your research, and be sure of your facts. Although op-eds are low hanging fruit in the publishing world, successfully published pieces can be valuable contributions to the community dialogue and serve as viable, valuable publishing credits.



Submissions by incarcerated writers can be sent to:

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

Those on the outside can 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.



Teaching to the Test

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

IN THE EDUCATION world, there is a process called “teaching to the test,” where an instructor imparts the minimum amount of information necessary for students to pass — no more. This is lazy instruction, selling short the student’s ability to learn as well as limiting the amount of information made available.

What is the real purpose of education? Is it just to pass a specific series of tests? Or, should education enable people to become productive and contributing members of society who do not create harm? If we are not giving them a well-rounded education, are we serving their best interests?

In many recovery groups, statements like “The board likes _____,” or “You need to know this to get through the board,” are often put out into the room. This is a disservice to participants in the room there to change how they engage with themselves and others.

Most of the self-help/recovery groups available to incarcerated people hardly mention the Board of Parole Hearings. Have you ever wondered why? The answer may lie in not teaching to the test. Could those curriculums be aimed at helping participants heal old wounds that are the result of harm done in our past, either by others or ourselves?

This is not to say that recognizing some specific lesson or realization in any curriculum could be of benefit when going before the board. However, if all we are doing is teaching and learning for an eventual parole hearing, we are not doing the best we can for ourselves and other participants. We are short-changing those out in the world who will eventually engage with a formerly incarcerated person who may have learned enough to get out of prison, but may not have been given the opportunity to learn and acquire a stable emotional foundation that would enable successful living on the outside.

If you are not a group facilitator, you still have an impact in how any group is presented. How we ask questions — for that matter, the questions we ask ourselves — what is emphasized, as well as the answers given by those in the room, all has an effect in how any group runs.

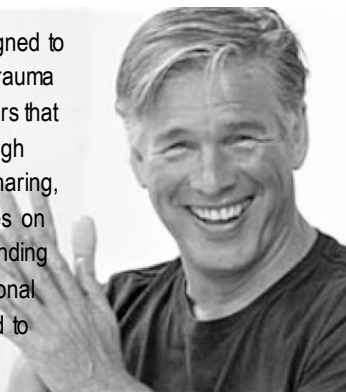
As participants, we owe a certain amount of responsibility to not allow those in the front of the room to limit the information shared to only that which is necessary for the board. Push your facilitators to speak on how all of us can live lives without negative impact, without intentional harm, without selfishness and greed.

In the end, the real purpose of any self-help group is to help each participant recognize the mental prison we have built around our essential selves, and to learn new and different ways of engaging that do not result in our coming back to prison, either the physical one or the mental prison that can be so limiting and dangerous.



Guiding Rage Into Power (GRIP)

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



GRIP Tribe 875 Graduates

Alanna Aubry	Jeffery Ault	Taurus Baker	Michael Bartel	Raymond Corona
Jose Farias	Alberto Fernandez	James Hill	Han Hoang	Godfrey Jackson
Andrew Jeffries	Lammarr Love	Thomas Moore	Augustine Morga	Madero Pouncil
William Ratcliff	Christopher Reed	Jasmine Robair	Michael Simons	Carl Skidmore
John Stove	Derrick Strong	R Pearce Wagener	Brett Williams	

GRIP Tribe 929 Graduates

Albert Bell	Benjamin Cardenas	Chauncey Crowder	Daniel Fedorenko	Dallas Herbst
Art Henderson	Jose Hernández-Pedroza		Mustaq Kahn	Mark Lim
Patrick McCarthy	Dejon Murray	Joe Nieder	Timothy O'Connell	Randy Rizzo
Larry Robinson	Poly Sanchez	Daniel Arévalo-Sarvia	Rob Sharp	Kenny Singer
Robert Taylor	Moises Tejeda	Jose Valdivia	Edwin Vlahos	F. Orlando Wells
Sekayi White	Damon Williams	James Williams	Eric Zamora	



PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE

New Medicare Rule For Those on Probation and Parole

By Mike Wessler,
Prison Policy Initiative



IN NOVEMBER, THE federal government approved a new rule that makes people on probation or parole, out on bail, or living in a halfway house eligible to receive Medicare benefits. Medicare is a federal health insurance program for people who are age 65 or older or who have certain disabling medical conditions. Under this new rule, more than 340,000 people will qualify for Medicare.

Medicare does not provide care for people who are in custody; however, prior to this change, Medicare's definition of "in custody" was much broader. Rather than applying only to people behind bars, it also applied to anyone who was on bail, probation, parole, in a halfway house, or otherwise under the supervision of correctional authorities but not necessarily behind bars — excluding them from accessing health insurance benefits.

The federal government based its previous Medicare policy on the flawed notion that people on community supervision received medical care from a correctional authority, which we heard time and time again is not the case. Prisons and jails often don't provide adequate care to people behind bars, and they certainly don't provide it to people living in the community.

This change is important because older people and people with disabilities are tangled in the criminal legal system at disproportionately high rates. Additionally, people on community supervision have dramatically higher rates of serious medical conditions, including hepatitis B or C, kidney disease, and other disabilities — they're also more likely to be uninsured.

We submitted public comment in September — with dozens of other groups — urging the federal government to make this change. This new rule went into effect Jan. 1, 2025.

Tabletop Role-Playing Games

Finding Growth in Another World

By Gerald McKoy, Feature Reporter

“GAH, IT'S A critical hit! I'm down, guys!" "I'm out of healing magic; hopefully this potion will do the trick..." "This guy's tough, but the mayor's counting on us, we're not losing today!" "The green, four-armed creature roars after knocking aside your ally, its beady, red eyeball glaring down as it approaches the nearest member of your party and swings its tree-trunk club! You'll have to roll pretty high to dodge it, good luck!"



(DungeonsFandom.com)

A conversation along these lines is a typical-yet-engaging encounter that might occur in a TTRPG session; sounds like a pretty fun one, too. For those unfamiliar, TTRPG stands for "tabletop role-playing game," a game where players come together, select or are given roles to play on sheets of paper, and use the abilities of their character's role to interact with a world hosted by a facilitator, or "game master." Players can take the roles and personalities of almost anything; from wizards casting magic spells, to soldiers trained in many weapons, to bards granting boons to their allies, and even fantastic creatures. The players roll dice to perform skills and abilities, working together to explore landscapes and worlds, defeat enemies, solve puzzles, and overcome obstacles the game master puts their way; providing a great experience in alternate settings, within other worlds.



Gary Gygax, creator of the original
Dungeons and Dragons.
(DungeonsFandom.com)

TTRPGs initially started and grew from Dungeons and Dragons, D&D for short, created by Gary Gygax; having observed its 50th anniversary, it is considered by many to be the grandfather of role-playing games. As the years passed, many types of TTRPGs have bloomed across many different genres — from fantasy to science fiction, from thriller to horror, even to modern-day scenarios inserting players into historic or real-life events. However, the common ground across every genre is the values, the engagement of the community with each other, and the satisfaction of achievement and growth.

Some believe RPGs encourage too much fantasy, however, and that such games prevent people from telling the difference between fiction and reality, but this is far from the case. Rather than encouraging poor decision-making, players must often use their real-life experiences to determine how their fictional characters will interact with the environment. A quality game will have many similarities to reality: characters will eat, sleep, help, hurt, die, and live just as they would in real life, and making poor, irresponsible decisions often result in negative outcomes for the players. The players, by necessity, have to make responsible decisions in order to get the best possible outcomes; whether it be helping the local townsfolk, searching for a valuable treasure, taking time to practice a craft, or simply following the age-old D&D saying: *Never split up the party.*

TTRPGs create opportunities to practice critical thinking, social skills and collaboration, planning and strategizing for future scenarios, all while encouraging positive values. Players cultivate an awareness of their surroundings, how their actions will affect the environment, characters, and world they play in. They are encouraged to think outside the box to find solutions for a variety of problems and encounters. Teamwork and cooperation with others, both with characters in the game and with people at the table, are greatly stressed; many beginning adventurers learn quickly that it is dangerous to go alone. Being given an opportunity to practice these values is valuable for anyone's personal, mental, and emotional development in nearly any setting; each of these values is just as important in reality as in an imaginary world. The potential for creativity and growth are endless, and in TTRPGs, with the roll of a die, limitless possibilities begin.



(Europosters.eu)

The Long Walk Home

By Ricky A. 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 Run of a Lifetime

WHAT CAUSES A person to lace up a pair of running shoes and spend an entire lifetime running laps around a prison yard? It’s certainly not the scenic landscape behind the cement walls that push endurance runners to their limits. There aren’t any gold medals waiting at the finish line — no fanfare, no applause, no recognition for a job well done. There’s nothing to show for the grit and determination except a pair of bloody socks, sore muscles, and the type of exhaustion that only a runner could understand.

The Running Club at the Mule Creek State Prison offers more than laps around the track and the opportunity to get away from the monotony of prison life— it offers a unique inclusion into a community of incarcerated individuals dedicated to changing their lives while creating a healthy lifestyle. “The Long Walk Home” series is a commitment to such lifestyle changes and wishes to acknowledge those who have led the way.

Gabriel Espinoza, 38, is the



Gabriel Espinoza
(H. Kim / Media Specialist)

marathon.”

Over the next seven months, Espinoza worked on his conditioning, running the city streets and through neighborhoods. He entered his first event, the Los Angeles Marathon, finishing with a time of 5 hours, 3 minutes; however, not without cost. “The lack of planning and experience left me nearly collapsing at the finish line,” he said. “I was hauled to the medical tent and given electrolytes to suppress the agonizing cramps that devastated my body. I realized what I was in for on mile six when another runner said, ‘Only 20 miles to go!’”

Espinoza has now run 13 marathons, two of them at Mule Creek where he shares his passion with other runners. Recently, Miguel López finished his first 26.2-mile run. “I want to thank Gabriel for his support,” said López. “When I’d see him running, I knew that was what I wanted to do. He inspired me with his dedication.”

Larry Irons, 48, has completed three marathons, with two previous attempts cut short due to institutional recalls. He describes it as “something you’ve been training for only to get robbed.” Food and nutrition are another struggle for athletes in prison. “The rise in canteen prices and poor [nutritional] quality of institutional food is outrageous; however, these obstacles that we face serve as testament to the dedication and persistence required,” said Irons. “I cost the state a lot less money being healthy. The incarcerated costs of persons age 50 and older are estimated at two to four times greater than for those younger.”

As for me, I have been running since 2003. I’ve run three marathons here at Mule Creek, with plans to run another soon. Running offers me an opportunity to get away from prison life and has benefitted my physical and mental health. I want to go through life healthy and feeling good about myself, and that’s what running does for me. After working all day in the Prison Industry Authority’s food and beverage plant, I’m determined to show up nearly every day on the track, putting in the miles.

The dedication of the Mule Creek Running Club is a direct link to the restorative justice values governing our lives for a safer community. Through running, offenders have found determination to reach their goals while leading the way to a brighter future. Club members have unique reasons for taking this path of rehabilitation, providing opportunities for runners to make lifestyle changes within a structured program based on physical and social principles.

Indeed, “The Long Walk Home” is often like running marathons through the peaks and valleys of prison life, pushing ourselves to the limit of self-awareness and recovery. Like endurance runners, we don’t give up until we cross the finish line of transformational healing. We call it running for life — it truly is the run of a lifetime.

Running Club coordinator on Facility E. At the age of 6, he was diagnosed with a rare form of dystonia which affects the ability to control the movement and function of the body’s muscles. It can cause physical and mental problems, resulting in an impaired quality of life. Espinoza says that running has enabled him live a life relatively free of symptoms. In high school he played sports, all of which required running as part of training and conditioning, but “running wasn’t something I enjoyed,” Espinoza admitted. “I found my passion through motivation by two of my aunts who challenged me to run a



Facility D marathon runner Larry Irons.
(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

PEN America Prison Writing Program



**120 Broadway, 26th Floor
New York, NY 10271**



(J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

Land Together

A Patch of Peace
By Fred Munch, Post Columnist

ON FACILITY D, the garden always draws attention. The brightly colored flowers, lush green vegetables, and ripe red strawberries are a welcome contrast to the drab concrete.

Every Tuesday, the student gardeners can be seen doing all the tasks required for growing healthy plants outside. Hidden from view is the work they do to prepare the soil of their inner gardens — an hour in the classroom using curriculum from the statewide program for prisons run by Land Together.

Each student was given a tree-of-life template to fill in with words and art that expresses their unique life experiences. Over the past year, the 18 students gave an oral presentation of their vision tree.

On February 25, gardeners pulled weeds that sprouted after recent rains. Others filled a newly cleared planter with radish, carrot, beet, and asparagus seeds. The week before, 20 potato starts of purple, yellow, and white varieties went into several planters.

This observer was fortunate as students handed out samples of kale, onion greens, and parsley to eat, along with a leaf of lemon verbena to whiff. The students also shared their personalized versions of the vision tree, filling both the observer’s mind and his mouth.



The Land Together students hard at work. (J. Davis / Mule Creek Post)

More Melting

JANUARY 2025 BECAME the warmest January ever, exceeding the same month last year and continuing an unbroken series of heat records since mid-2023. Last year was the hottest since record keeping began in 1880, and the eleventh in a row to set new records. “The reason were having records broken is because we’re increasing the amounts of greenhouse gases (GHG) in the atmosphere,” explained Gavin Schmidt of the Goddard Institute.

In this column, I’ve reported on the link between weather disasters and the burning of fossil fuels. Besides causing megafires and droughts, global warming is melting the ice at the poles and glaciers. Ocean waters reached the highest average temperature since measurements began. Sea ice on Feb. 15, 2025, was at its lowest level in recorded history. In the 1980s, there were 4.4 million square miles of sea ice. It has since diminished to 2.8 million square miles. Temperatures near the North Pole were 36 °F above normal. “This is astonishing,” said a scientist with the British Arctic Survey.

The pace of warming at the poles is four times the global average. The U.N. Panel on Climate Change predicts the arctic will be completely devoid of ice by 2050. Melting on this scale will result in sea level rise of several feet and the inundation of low-lying coastal communities. Residents of island nations have been displaced from their flooded homes; they are the first of many “climate refugees” to come. For centuries, polar ice has kept the planet cool, functioning as a giant mirror reflecting the sun’s heat. As the ice sheets melt and break apart, the water underneath will absorb more heat and further enhance warming.

Glaciers also are melting faster than ever before. They supply freshwater for hundreds of millions across the globe. Since 2010, the rate of melting has increased by one-third. Before climate change, glaciers remained unchanged because snowfall equaled what melted. Over the last two decades, 400 billion tons of ice was lost, an amount equal to the entire world’s consumption over 30 years. Melting has caused sea levels to rise eight inches since 1900. Every one-half inch of rise exposes two million people somewhere to flooding.

With a climate-unfriendly administration in Washington, D.C., most of the solutions to warming implemented over the last decade are on hold. The U.S. Supreme Court and Congress are hostile to environmental protection, while the president derides wind power and mocks electric vehicles. He has ordered a spending freeze on climate projects such as solar electricity on tribal lands.

Fortunately, local governments and the private sector have taken up the struggle for a healthy planet. While federal funding is slashed, several western states are bankrolling efforts to lower greenhouse gas emissions. California is meeting 30% of its power demand with wind and solar. Voters approved a \$10 billion bond for renewable energy projects like offshore wind farms. Laws are on the books for clean energy standards and the phase out of gasoline vehicles. The state of Washington aims to reduce its carbon footprint with the Climate Commitment Act, which has generated \$2 billion for renewables. Colorado is producing an impressive 27% of its power from wind turbines. In New Mexico, solar arrays have replaced coal-fired power plants to produce a whopping 37% of its electrical usage. In Arizona, developers and utilities are building solar arrays and battery storage while phasing out coal. Montana embraces oil drilling and is hostile to climate action, yet its supreme court ruled the state was violating residents’ rights to a clean environment. In Wyoming, wind power is responsible for a remarkable 20% of its electrical demand. Still, it’s discouraging to see the U.S. withdraw from the climate cause.

Norway has become the world leader in electric vehicle ownership. Last year, nine out of 10 new cars sold in Norway were electric, which makes Norwegians likely to be first in the complete phase out of fossil fuel cars. The U.S. pales in comparison with 8% of every vehicle being electric last year. The U.K. also trails with a mere 12% of electric vehicle sales. Norway’s success in switching to electric vehicles is partly due to these incentives:

- Higher taxes on fossil fuel vehicles
- Tax exemption for electric vehicles
- Free parking and discounts on tolls
- Access to bus lanes and an extensive charging network

The progress Norway has made in eliminating harmful tailpipe emissions can be a model and an inspiration to the rest of the world.

Sources: *High Country News*, February 2025; “The Climate Fight Endures,” *BBC Science and Environment*, Jan. 13, and Feb. 6, 15, and 19, 2025; *L.A. Times*, Jan. 13, 2025.



What's New in L.A. County

By Daniel Larson, Feature Reporter

BIG NEWS IS that Los Angeles District Attorney George Gascon lost his bid for reelection to Nathan Hockman, a Republican and former federal prosecutor. At the outset, changes will be fast with some serious consequences. As reported in the *California Lifer Newsletter*, Hockman has vowed to reverse Gascon's rehabilitative justice policies; it appears DA Hockman will hold a harsher stance on penalties: Keep those convicted incarcerated as long as possible in the name of being "tough on crime." The good news is new executive director of the Board of Parole Hearings, Scott Wyckoff, may carry on implementation of a restorative model begun under former director Jennifer Shaffer.

It is a fact: Not everyone should be released to parole. It is also a fact there are many who have put in the hard work, changed, addressed causative factors, and have relapse prevention plans in place. They are safe to be reintroduced to society.

A key question: How will this harsher attitude toward California's incarcerated people affect the state overall? Today, operational costs to run the prison system drain already stretched state resources. These costs measured in dollars per incarcerated person are \$140,000 per year. The elderly and infirm significantly add to that number. It's a lot of money at a time when there are many homeless and hungry families.

Equally important is continual damage to family structure. This affects the overall wellness in our state. Children from broken families are more likely to be involved in crime. We can observe that we the state are feeding this hugely expensive system with our children, neighbors, and friends.

Hopefully, Wyckoff will continue to see the advantages of parole, and the power it has to reunite families who struggle due to lengthy separation. It also helps to heal the broken family model, which creates the conditions that cause additional young people to fail. Working for repair will begin to bend that

curve, making California safer, saving taxpayers' money as a byproduct.

All of this is not meant to demean those who have suffered due to the criminal behavior and thinking of the incarcerated. Speaking for myself, I get it. There is no good crime, no excuse for any crime. A large percentage of the incarcerated knew better then, knows better now. Our collective lack of insight in many instances, now corrected. We reflect. We see ourselves through the eyes of society as it saw us when we were at our worst. No matter what our background, almost all of us in prison made a conscious choice to commit the crime for which we are in imprisoned. Living our amends is what we should do.

If the state goes back to the reduced opportunity for parole, those incarcerated will have little reason for hope. Personally, I was here in the era of the throwaway. If you had no date, you were not getting out early. No matter what. Our hope is that the better angels of society will continue to be positive, help those who work inside to change themselves, allowing the means and reward for making the change. Many in prison are no longer a threat to society. Additional incarceration no longer serves a penalogical purpose.

There are many challenges ahead with a new parole board director. A new district attorney in a major city and one of the largest counties in America could be one. No one wants the public to be in danger, yet it is our hope that a DA with so much serious clout will give ample consideration to that power.

The Fair Chance Project

By Dortell Williams, Post Reporter

MOST PEOPLE ARE an acquired taste. Like anything strange and unfamiliar, it takes time to appreciate new acquaintances, to get to know and understand them. Yet, that is precisely the idea, to take the time to get to know and understand others in a nonjudgmental way. Indeed, we all know what it's like to be misunderstood and judged.

The intentionality of taking the time to know and understand others has many rewards — the Fair Chance Project (FCP) offers an additional incentive: documentation. As part of the FCP, the Walking-the-Yard Program (WTY) was introduced in 2010. The program's goal is to foster community through the mentoring of incarcerated youth by their incarcerated elders, as well as for people who have successfully navigated their return to society to mentor returning citizens. Since those early days when the value of "each one, teach one" was more prolific, the WTY program has blossomed into many creative shapes and expressions.

I have mentored individuals and groups inside and outside these walls. The men at the Pleasant Valley State Prison developed an entire board prep curriculum on the WTY platform, and that's the wonderful thing about the program as the WTY pamphlet suggests: "You may mentor only one person, you may mentor many, you may build a collective of mentors — it's your choice."

The FCP does not micro-manage community. They understand communities are organic: They build and shape themselves in ways that are best for their specific locale. While the freedom of community, direct support, and documentation from the FCP is encouraging, the lasting reward of mentoring is that the mentors almost always learn from the mentees. With over three decades of incarceration, I have met a variety of personalities. From both individuals and the collective, I've learned from the misaligned to the well-educated. Everyone has something to offer if we just open ourselves to their experiences, their knowledge, and even their mistakes.

Beyond benefit to ourselves, we have the opportunity to make amends by guiding others toward success and betterment. I have literally grown up in prison, and many I've initially mentored eventually spread their independent wings and, to my amazement, mentored me in their subjects of expertise.

Apart from the individuals, the community also wins because — through mentorship and guidance — we get a second chance to shape community into the pro-social environment we should have made in society.

This dynamic happens all the time: Malcolm X is noted to have been mentored by Bimbi, an elder he did time with after his burglary conviction. And, surely, Bimbi learned plenty from his old mentee once Malcolm hit the world stage. Think about every award show you've ever seen: The winner stands on stage and lists an army of mentors who helped them reach success. The humble ones also name those who inspired them, and that's exactly how it works: Each one, teach one!

The Fair Chance Project
6109 Western Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90047

Families United to End LWOP

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

SPORTS AND RECREATION



Your Move

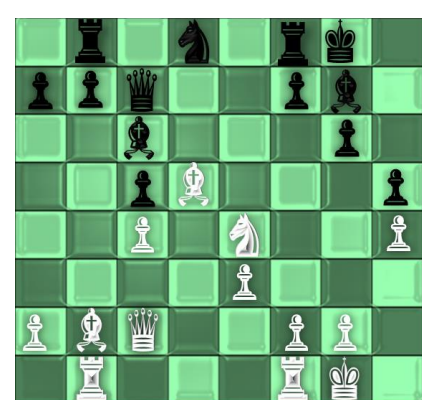
By Sean “Sharif” Neal,
Post Columnist

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

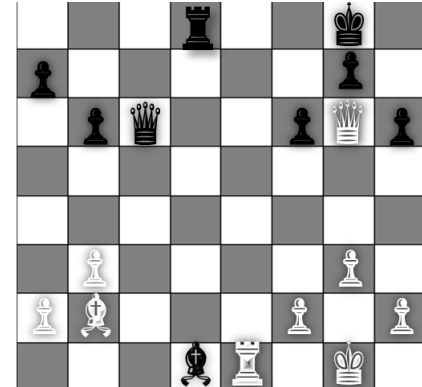
The exact origins of chess vary, some attributing its beginnings to ancient Persia and India as a means of formulating battle strategies. However, today's chess has evolved to attain a loftier goal: elevating the human mind.

Here is another doozy.

White to play. After the series (1. KNf6†, B×f6, 2. B×f6), white missed an opportunity. Can you see what he over-looked?



Last month:



The flaw is not hard to see, yet it provided white with a lesson he would never forget. Follow these moves to see the fatal flaw.

1. Re7? Qh1†!
2. K×h1 Bf3†
3. Kg1 Rd1
4. Re1 R×e1†† (checkmate!)



ARC

Anti-Recidivism Coalition

Prison Yoga Project Wraps Up Second Cycle at Mule Creek State Prison

By Jesse Carson, Editor-in-Chief

ON SATURDAY, DEC. 28, 2024, participants wrapped up the second yearlong cycle of prison yoga at the Mule Creek State Prison. Yogin (practitioners of yoga) from facilities D and E gathered in the Facility E hobby room for donuts and community after a two-hour session of yoga.

The program is made possible by the Prison Yoga Project, a nonprofit based in San Diego. Joanna Cote, who also sponsors Land Together (the new name for the Insight Garden Program) on Facility D, leads the yoga program at Mule Creek. After several years partnering with Homeboy Industries on a physical fitness program and working with incarcerated youth and adults in Indiana, Cote was certified to lead trauma-informed yoga. According to founder James Fox, yoga practices not only expand a person's consciousness but also "serve as practical tools for developing impulse control, emotional stability, and clearer thinking."

The Prison Yoga Project is centered on the practices of raja yoga, one of the most ancient forms of yoga dating from around 250 B.C. Contrary to how many see it, yoga is not tied to any particular religion or philosophy, but is instead focused on living an ethical, self-disciplined, and meaningful life.

According to participant Gregory English, there are four components to raja yoga: mindful awareness, conscious breathing, physical movement, and deep relaxation. When the *sangha* (the Sanskrit word for "community") meets every Saturday, yogin engage in all four of these components to build what Fox describes as "an ongoing sense of balance, connectedness, and inner peace."

To help achieve this goal, participants are provided a workbook containing information on the nervous system and the health benefits of yoga, tips for achieving certain poses and making yoga a regular practice, and practicing self-compassion and acceptance. "I think it provides the philosophical foundations" needed for rehabilitation, said Cote. "It opened up not only my mind but my body," said Chris Rosas. "I want to absolutely continue it."

Those interested in joining the program are invited to the orientations held each January. There is no restriction on how many times an individual can participate.

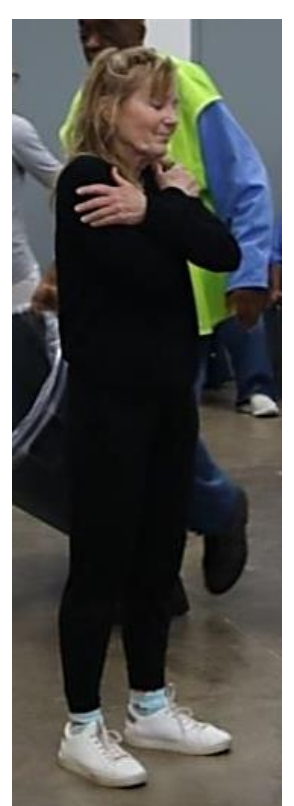
"I'm definitely going to do it again," repeated Rosas. "I couldn't have asked for a better instructor. There was humor, sincerity, levity — it was real easy to not fall into clichés about yoga classes," he chuckled.

Lenny Saldaña agreed, noting that yoga has helped him stay safe in all the sports he plays. "Stretching in this class helps me prevent injuries," he said. "I want to keep doing it."

"To heal the ... pain and suffering in the world requires us to heal our own pain and suffering," writes Fox in the workbook introduction, "so we no longer inflict pain and suffering upon others."



(J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)



Joanna Cote
(J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)



Members of the Prison Yoga Project in the Facility E hobby room. (J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)

Opinion: SOMS Conflicts Hurt Programmers

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

IN THE YEARS since the Strategic Offender Management System (SOMS) was adopted by the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation to manage its incarcerated residents' records, there have been a number of problems. One problem for those attempting to integrate into various programs and self-help groups is when an overlap occurs with job assignments. When this occurs, even when the overlap is as little as a half hour one day per week, entry into that program or group is denied as a program conflict. However, the Board of Parole Hearings frequently states that it wants prisoners eligible for parole to work and participate in self-help groups, creating an unresolvable conflict for those who looking for release through suitability hearings.

Department Operations Manual §11010.1 states in part that it "provides for the efficient and effective management of all facets of the correctional system for all wards and parolees to include custody, care, treatment, discipline, training, rehabilitation, and employment."

Notice that *rehabilitation* comes before *employment* in that policy statement. Also, a big part of the department's mission is to rehabilitate those under its care, which would be difficult without effective access to the self-help groups for those with work assignments.

Another problem arises with those whose work assignments conflict with regularly scheduled religious services, and those impacted generally have to address the situation with their supervisors, or failing that through legal avenues. However, §53130.7 of the *Manual* states that "for routine religious services, the use of [time off] shall be limited to instances where it is not possible to change the conflicting work/education assignment."

Here's the catch: In 2000, the U.S. Congress passed the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (42 USCS §2000cc), guaranteeing the right to attend regularly sched-

uled religious services/meetings. That was in part due to incarcerated person-generated lawsuits by Muslims who were not being allowed to leave their job assignments to attend their regularly scheduled Friday Jum'ah services.

These conflicts within SOMS could easily be remedied by a couple of director's rule changes that would make everyone's life easier and obviate the need for more costly and time wasting litigation in the courts.

Guiding My Rage into Power

By Lindsey V., Outside Contributor

IHAD THE pleasure and honor to attend a session with Tribe 875 at the Mule Creek State Prison with my sister survivor, Mama Elle, alongside GRIP staff Sunil, Padma, and Nina. It wasn't my first time inside Mule Creek at a GRIP tribe, and I pray it is not the last.

Before I went in, I was reminded to go into the space open-minded, and I challenged myself by not bringing in my notes as I had the first time I entered a GRIP tribe in San Quentin in 2019. Once again, my heart opened up even more and my wounds continued to heal as I communicated with the men about the harm I had experienced being stalked by a student at work. I could never have imagined that the biggest contribution to my wellness would be to have these heart-wrenching conversations where I disclose to total strangers — who have admitted to committing violent crimes in their past — deep and dark moments that I've experienced with threats of sexual assault, and even death. Moreover, I was able to share how the men and children in my life couldn't help me from the danger I was in and ultimately witnessed a violent attempt on my life. I was able to admit to them that I was also guilty of wanting to do harm. I wanted to hurt that man for hurting me in front of my children. I raged over his head, wanting to kick his face in after he was in handcuffs and badly beaten on the ground. I know rage. I stopped mine before it was too late and I did something I would have regretted.

I have had to learn how to **Guide My Rage Into Power**. That power ended up being love and forgiveness. I expressed to the men that I hope they can forgive themselves and move forward. I know many of them have deep shame that prevents them from being able to heal. But on this journey, I have witnessed redemption and transformation on the deepest levels. I now have some of my best friends and colleagues who spent decades inside prison, and without hesitation I would trust them with my life today. And I had to do a lot of work to learn to trust men.

My experiences sharing my story in a tribe and getting responses like, "I just want to say I am sorry to you and I am sorry to all my victims," or "After hearing you speak I was reminded of how I never want to harm anyone again in my life," many men have said that it took hearing my story and feeling helpless for me that made them realize how wrong they were for the things they have said and done to women based on their toxic masculine role belief system. And when they are ready to admit that they were wrong and can identify with my fear and my pain, they often recall a time in their own childhood when either they or their mom experienced sexual harm or violence, and we are all reminded that it is a cycle and together we can break it if we pledge to be peacemakers. When I sit at a GRIP graduation, I am reminded of their courage. Prison is a violent place. The streets out here are violent. Many people's homes are violent from the moment they enter the womb. GRIP teaches that it only takes a few seconds to respond and take an action that can impact your life forever. They teach how to understand your bodily sensations and emotions so that you can respond thoughtfully and without violence.

In an inexplicable way, those of us who are survivors of violence and those who have committed violence share bonds that many don't understand. Our lives were altered by violence and yet we understand that things don't happen in a vacuum. There are both systemic issues and life circumstances that end up impacting how someone can end up on one side of the prison bars or the other.

Every day, I pray that my children, who are adults, don't choose violence so that we can break the cycle. I know that I want to live in a safe world. I also know that the conventional way that I was offered safety (restraining orders, incarceration, retaliation) did not work. We need people's hearts to heal; we need to learn empathy and emotional intelligence so that we can learn to love, understand, show compassion, and grow as human beings. Rehabilitation comes through teaching people how to love themselves and others. It's beautiful to see people decide to make a life of living amends and I have seen that repeatedly in GRIP graduates.

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

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





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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 (916) 445-4072



Division of Rehabilitative Programs
 DRP programs available on institutional channels
 21.22.23. and 24

Friends show their love in times of trouble, not in happiness.
 — Euripides (480-406 BC)

A Programming Roadmap (Part 2)

By Maya Emig, Post Columnist

IF YOU GREW up in a home with domestic violence, or were part of a relationship where there was physical, emotional, psychological, financial, sexual, or spiritual abuse, you should take classes on understanding domestic violence and how to have healthy relationships. Everyone should take victim impact classes. If you had issues with substance abuse, you should take classes on substance abuse and understanding addiction. Twelve-Step groups — be they AA, NA, or CGA — have some inherent life skills that can be learned from working the steps. There are steps on doing a moral inventory and really understanding your character defects, there are steps on making amends, and for taking your own daily inventory. Working through the 12 Steps will help you understand yourself better — and that really is part of the goal as you unravel your criminality and make changes in yourself that you can sustain. Twelve-Step groups really teach you good life skills, and I highly recommend them for all of my clients.



For sex offenders, *The Road to Freedom* (4th edition) by Drs. Jill S. Levenson and John W. Morin (Safer Society Press, 2021) is the book that is highly recommended reading and available through Amazon.com. Lighthouse 9 Consulting also has educational resources available for sex offenders.

Anger management classes should be taken because they teach good life skills, and we are all prone to anger. Denial management is another class that is highly recommended as well as a class dealing with criminal thinking. With all of these classes, they should be repeated as often as possible. It is common that people who are found suitable have taken these classes numerous times. I hear from my clients that they avoid these groups because of one reason or another. What I say to each of these clients is that they should enroll in the classes, participate in the classes, and if there is something lacking from the class — then they should be part of the solution in coming up with ideas to deal with what is lacking. Taking a class over and over again will often yield new information or new experiences each time, and it may be what you can give to someone else, rather than what is it in for you.

As you begin to take these classes, really start to work on developing coping strategies and skills. GOGI is an excellent program and can be done via correspondence classes. PREP has excellent assortment of classes as well, as do a number of other programs.

One of the hardest things to overcome during a suitability hearing is lack of programming. You simply cannot internalize all the information and how it pertains to you and your criminality within a few months. Certainly you can get a few of the key concepts, but when the panel asks the question in a different way, the client often hasn't internalized the concept so they miss the question altogether.

My first roadmap is for you to get enrolled in as many programs as you can — ideally in person. If you are on waiting lists, get enrolled in correspondence classes. Support your knowledge by reading books geared towards understanding your criminality and make it a daily habit to do programs on Edovo and watch the Parole Justice Works videos.




Lighthouse 9 Consulting
 P.O. Box 247036
 Sacramento, CA 95824



PARTNERSHIP FOR RE-ENTRY PROGRAM
 P.O. Box 77850
 LOS ANGELES, CA 90007



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

36 STRATEGIES
of
SUITABILITY

BY JOSEPH R. HAYTAS

Get Out of the Gang

YOU MAY NOW or at some time in the past hold or have held the belief that crime really does pay. Or that gang membership is the “big time” and that coming to prison to be with the homies is what it’s all about or where you want to be. A gang promises money, cars, women, respect, and status. The reality is that gangs are the quickest way to prison or death.

Were your homies with you at trial? Is prison anything like you imagined? After your arrival, you may have been instructed to do unspeakable things to other people by your peers. If you don’t, it’s done to you. That’s how things work in your new home.

The glamorization of gang life has been indoctrinated into younger incarcerated individuals by the gangster rap subculture that makes prison seem cool. Those who are profiting from the sales of this product aren’t providing for you or are with you doing time. You, instead, have been reduced to begging from your family to get by.

You are the one doing the time for your gang activities. Remember riding a bike, swimming, enjoying nature, or watching your child take a first step? What about the respect of your family or spending time with your girl? Gang life doesn’t care about what you’re missing out on.

Your gang life has made you do things you really don’t want to do. Now it’s up to you to make the choice. It’s either the homies of your prison gang or working towards being with your family and loved ones outside prison walls.

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



Joseph R. Haytas
(LinkedIn.com)

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Oakland, CA 94607

Looking for Insight

By David Viens, Substance Abuse Treatment Facility

AS AN INCARCERATED citizen serving a life sentence, I have participated in boundless self-help over the past decade, searching for the elusive answer to what many of us are looking for: insight. I have read everything I could find on the subject, taken every insight course I’ve come across, and received materials my family paid good money for. Yet, still my insight was murky at best. That all changed when I was invited to a Kindful Restoration workshop on insight.



This course was conducted over seven weekly sessions that offered step-by-step instructions and required writing assignments. The course was concise, but incredibly thought provoking.

At the completion of the workshop, a counselor carefully reviewed my work and then provided a summary to help point out my blindspots. Now I understand the trauma that manifest my root cause issues and contributing factors I learned to mask with character defects.

Afterward, the Kindful Restoration people wrote a beautiful letter to the Board of Parole Hearings that acknowledged my participation. I was so impressed that I was compelled to join the facilitator team. Since then, we have offered several insight workshops on Facility G in groups of 15. Each time, I am astonished to see those in attendance have their “Aha!” moments, their faces light up with revelation after decades of incarceration. They all say things like, “I get it.” “I finally understand.”

This course is absolutely free, but it’s worth more than gold for a lifer going to board. Shortly after taking this course, I was called without notice for my comprehensive risk assessment. I shared what I learned about myself from this workshop and was rated a “low” risk. I am not home yet, though feel confident that if I am denied again, it will not be due to a lack of insight. I encourage you to embark on your insight journey with these fine people who do what they say they will.

Kindful Restoration’s mission is to facilitate recovery and reintegration for individuals affected by addiction, dysfunction, and trauma. Their approach to this is by using tools of kindness to guide interaction with mindfulness. They not only provide the aforementioned workshop, but several others to include domestic violence, electronic contraband, as well as their workshop, Mindful Kindness. In addition to all of this, they offer comprehensive support — both inside correctional facilities and in outside settings. Their focus is on nurturing physical, social, mental, and emotional well-being. They offer tailored counseling, mindfulness skills, and enhancing life skills.

Kindful Restoration has helped me, and I feel an obligation to the lifer community to share about these amazing people and their organization. Reach out to Kindful Restoration at the following address to get started:

Kindful Restoration
P.O. Box 4760
Riverside, CA 92514-4760

Awareness Into Domestic Abuse

P.O. Box 5323
Sacramento, CA 95817
Free Correspondence Course Available



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**



You are Not Alone

Social Isolation

By Jason Davis, Lead Reporter

LONELINESS IS MORE than just a measure of your social skills, it is the emotion of isolation. It is the empty feeling that comes when we sense a friend is having difficulty relating to our feelings or perceptions. Loneliness is the uncomfortable awareness that gaps exist in our relationships. To be lonely, you don't have to sit in a dark room staring into empty space.

Humans are communal beings. We have a powerful need to belong that is as much an imperative as the need for food. Our brains are actually wired to be social. Forming social bonds with others creates connections and contests loneliness. The need to belong as well as the importance of reducing loneliness during uncertain times often encourages people to connect, despite the desire to remain socially distant.

Social skills can influence approaches used to address these uncertainties and negative circumstances. Those with effective social skills tend to confront their problems actively and productively, while those with poor social skills tend to use passive coping strategies such as avoidance, emotional denial, and withdrawing. The latter often leads to a further withdrawal from society, which can fuel problems in other areas of life, such as addiction, negative relationships, depression, or neglected personal hygiene.

The benefits of social contact are so extraordinary that medical sociologists like Nina Hallowell endorse the idea of prescribing social connections to patients to improve their wellbeing: "Just as we need vitamin C each day, we also need a dose of the human moment — positive contact with other people." Knowing someone is insufficient though; the relationship must be supportive and positive to have an impact.

Ultimately, people need people. Put down the tablet, turn off the TV, and get outside and talk to people. Begin building personal relationships that are meaningful and supportive.

Part One

THE NEED TO protect children and families is the primary necessity when it comes to community social work, and the position is often thankless and harrowing yet necessary. There is a sense of dread and abandonment in children who have been taken by a social worker — the trauma starts there.

Looking back, the development of social services agencies is linked to the end of World War II, when families were severely affected by the loss of a parent and, further, to the post-Depression Era. In both instances, poverty was at an all-time high, and the need to provide primary assistance to families became a focus for the government. And so, the government inserted itself headlong into family dynamics as the champion and protector of those needing assistance, helping children suffering poverty, neglect, and abuse. There were obviously many structural problems with such interventionist governmental programs, which led to unforeseen and severely traumatic issues that children experienced while in the care and custody of their fostered protectors.

As decades have passed, many legislative changes have been enacted in an attempt to accommodate the changing landscape of familial and cultural trends in our society. The needs of families, specifically children, who are in many difficult situations within these family structures is problematic. Multi-faceted addictions and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are significant contributors in accelerating the distress of neglect, abuse, and poverty that children are experiencing. This contributes to the emergent and hyper-inflated removal of the children from their homes and immediate family. It is an unfortunate fact — as studies have shown — that the longer a child stays in the foster care system the more behavioral issues arise, and the more likely the child will suffer contact with the justice system and develop criminal behaviors.

Another issue plaguing the foster care system is the disparity of racial bias. Significantly more children of color, specifically blacks who come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, will enter the foster care system. Of this statistic, 80% will have contact with law enforcement and enter the juvenile justice system and, as a result, suffer long-term incarceration. Curiously, studies show that someone who has experienced foster care will receive a higher term sentence as a juvenile or adult for their first offense; this as compared to those who have not been involved in the experience of foster care.

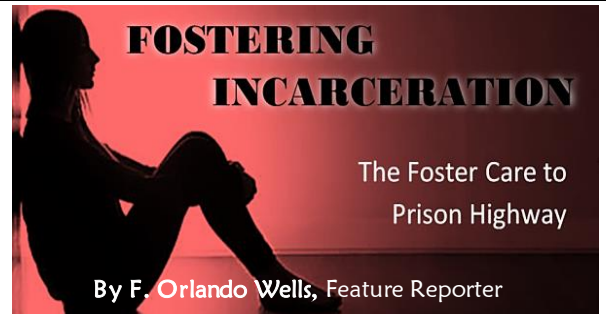
Further, studies indicate that the traumas enforced upon the dependents of foster care placement cause them to experience phenomenal increases in aggressive behaviors, exacerbated and sustained by longer stays in foster care.

Traumas, inflicted on children who experience abuse in foster care, further inhibit the healthy development of basic social skills and intimate interpersonal relationships. There are significant decreases in a child's ability to navigate the world when there is no real experience of support or trust. This is especially true when the foundation of their development is built on mistrust. The disconnection begins with the parents, social services, and community, and then extends to society as a whole. The mistrust of authority, law enforcement, and the justice system becomes a natural function of such distorted and dysfunctional early psychosocial development. This is the foundation of early criminality.

There is a definitive connection when examining the research based on future anti-social behaviors and criminality of children who have experienced foster care that has contributed to mass incarceration. According to studies, 50% of incarcerated people had contact with the foster care system and later became part of the criminal justice and penal systems. It is fair to conclude that the foster care system is more than just a pipeline to prison — it is far more. The numbers indicate it has become a highway, and the question is what can be done about this issue.

If the financial side is examined with respect to this phenomenon, the hypothetical fix could be as simple as to heal the foster care traumas occurring, which in turn would decrease the incarceration rates. Money not spent on the incarcerated because of the decrease could be put to better programs for the foster care system, nonprofit organizations that could support these programs, and better programs for the incarcerated.

Sources: Sydney L. Getz, "From Removal to Incarceration"; Christopher A. Swann & Michelle Sheran Sylvester, "The foster care crisis"; 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (AFSA); Youngmin Yi & Christopher Wildeman, "Can Foster Care Interventions Diminish Justice System Inequality"; Tanya A. Cooper, "Racial Bias in American Foster Care"; Antonis Katsiyannis, "Developmental Trajectories of Offending for Male Adolescents Leaving Foster Care," *Social Work Research* (2007); Dorothy E. Roberts, "Child Welfare and Civil Rights," 2003.





Prison Hacks

Eye- and Sunglass Repairs
By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

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

GOOD OLD MURPHY’S Law states: “Anything that can go wrong will go wrong, at the least opportune time,” and it applies fittingly to broken eyewear. For example, a screw holding your eyeglasses, readers, or sunglasses armature in place pops out and your glasses are rendered useless. Murphy’s Law ensures this occurs only when you have no access to a quick repair. The screw generally disappears like a fleeing cockroach — it’s gone. In any situation, the chance of finding the tiny screw is doubtful. That’s Murphy’s Law messing with you.

However, this annoying problem can be quickly fixed: To accomplish an eyeglass, readers, or sunglasses repair, use a staple to replace the lost screw. Common staples are found everywhere and easily bent to feed through the hole and secure the armature to take the missing screw’s place. This semi-permanent repair actually lasts a long time. You can also use a small paperclip to replace the missing screw; a large paperclip is difficult to fashion into a replacement, but possible.

Tip #1: When you discard a damaged or old pair of glasses (readers or sunglasses), remove the armature screws and keep them as spares in your junk drawer, along with extra coax connectors and miscellaneous electrical parts.

Tip #2: You can use nail clippers to make sharp bends to paperclips for a permanent eyeglasses repair (if the screw hole threads are stripped out). The narrower base of the V-shaped body of nail clippers will enable you to make these short, sharp bends. Old, dull toenail clippers can be used to create the paperclip length you need.



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.”

Breaking Tradition

By Edward G. Simmons Jr., Mule Creek State Prison

I WAS JUST 19 when I got on the chain — the bus from county jail to state prison for convicted persons — my second time in adult jail, the fourth time locked up overall. Still, I was not adapted to life away from loved ones, in a place where it seemed everyone else was programmed to violence, those things they would do when ordered by the key holder, which was not the way I saw myself doing time.

On my next phone call to the person I trusted most, the one person I fought my entire life to be accepted by — my father — I told him that I heard it could be better on the other side, and that it was going to be a dangerous ride for me at 19 the way things are on the mainline. My father told me, “Don’t do that!” So, the conversation was over. I did my term and paroled from fire camp 18 months later, crazier than I’d ever been, with a chip on my shoulder so big no man could be expected to carry it for long. The mainline is a place designed by the people who promote it, to lock in the corrupted mentalities of those they can sink their claws into.

As a white boy who never had a racist bone in his body, I grew up able to count on my best friend — who happened to be black — for everything. He never let me down or left me hanging. Everyone else in my life had me listening to their negative slurs and racist jokes, which made me feel like I didn’t belong or would be accepted if they knew who I held dear.

After I got back home, my father told me, “You know you are going back to prison, right?” Even though I’d been out just a few months (with my active chip on my shoulder), I still believed another prison term was not in the cards for me. Well, I was wrong. Four years and countless violations later, I was on my way back to prison. One month before I got arrested on the warrant I had been running from, I got the call from my ex-girlfriend’s sister. I was now a father. I got to see my son once before being arrested the next week.

I returned to prison and, on the very day I was waiting to visit with my son and his grandmother, I was ordered on a mission. I tried to get out of it; I argued that my son was coming and someone else should be on the mission. But that only made the keyholder force me to do it, or else. As I sat in the hole after the mission, I found out their visit was cancelled, and their long trip plus an hour of waiting was all for nothing.

When I got out of the hole, I was made aware that my domestic violence charge was not a problem, as a mission was already lined up for me to “clean it up.” Well, that was not going to be an option for me. I was done. At this same time, my fiancée was killed, hit by a car while running away from someone who had been chasing her. The police said her clothes were torn in a fashion that coincided with evidence of attempted rape. But nothing sealed the deal more than the new keyholder telling me I had a three-day break from mandatory workouts to get over my loss.

I was in a two-man cell when my cellmate was transferred and I was left alone. I called to the tower and told them I was done with mainline and needed to go. They told me to pack my stuff and I told them it was already done.

I still remember my first time setting foot in an SNY dorm in county jail. A man stepped up to me and asked, “You just crossed over, huh?” I said, “Yeah, why?” He said, “There are a lot of good people here, don’t worry. It’s nothing like what they tell you on the ‘line. Respect is the only rule and no one will tell you to do anything as long as you have respect. Welcome. Is there anything you need?” I was handed burritos by three different groups of people who were making food that night, and the chip on my shoulder shrank every day more and more until it was gone.

Today, I am 100 times further along in my growth than I would have been if I had stayed on the mainline. I also have a parole date that is getting a lot closer instead of consistently having more time added to it. I would never have made it home if I’d continued listening to the key holders. I made the choice to be my own man and you can, too. Anyone who wants anything less than that for you is not a friend, even if that person is your own father.



Our Universe

(May 2 is Astronomy Day)



The Sun ("Helios") (BGR.com)



The planet Mercury (Nasa.gov)



The planet Venus (Science.Nasa.gov)



The planet Mars (Science.Nasa.gov)



The planet Jupiter (Wikipedia.org)



The planet Saturn (Wikipedia.org)

Remembrance:

The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women in the United States

By F. Orlando Wells, Feature Reporter



THERE HAS BEEN a great deal of growing attention to the crisis of missing and murdered indigenous women, and in order for awareness to continue and create a path to addressing this issue, we start by honoring these women and girls of the indigenous tribal people.

The crisis of missing and murdered indigenous women and girls is so common that it often goes unnoticed, and investigations of these crimes are simply absent so no justice is ever really given to the victims or their families. Most startling is the bodies are rarely if ever found of these women and girls. Part of the issue has been the lack of attention to the problem through the major media outlets nationally. There is no light being shown on the current growing problem of failure to put systems in place that bring justice to the victims and their families. There is also no recognition of the damage to the tribal communities who also suffer further indignities, which have been prevalent for generations regarding the treatment of indigenous people historically, both in the United States and Canada, where this crisis mainly exists with no resolution in sight.

The response by government officials and law enforcement agencies in this crisis is seemingly a "condoned sexualized annihilation," writes Sherene H. Razack.

Some of the problems manifesting with this crisis are human trafficking working in concert with other root causes, as Razack reports, that "incubate" the growing problem nationally. There are also contributing factors of online "cyber-violence [and] online hate" that further add to the devaluing of women and girls. There is a clear line that can be drawn to how marginalized indigenous women and girls are in a society that investigative agencies are putting less effort into solving these crimes, such as jurisdictional issues, interdepartmental coordination problems, and a general lack of resources and funding to develop better strategies to address the problem.

One of the main issues is the ability of tribes to impose jurisdiction over these types of crimes to initiate justice system proceedings specifically where the offender is non-native. Under the 1978 *Oliphant vs. Suquamish Indian Tribe* ruling, the ability of tribal justice systems to hold non-Indians accountable for crimes committed on their lands has been limited by federal law. This has greatly diminished the ability of tribes and government officials to address these crimes. Crucial changes to legislation, specifically under the Violence Against Women Act, are creating avenues to impose jurisdiction on these matters. The amended change is known as the Special Domestic Violence Criminal Jurisdiction, which removes restrictions that have prevented tribal nations from dealing with the violence occurring on their tribal lands, and directly addressing the cycle of violence by many offenders. The secondary issue is how accountable the tribes can hold an offender; as it stands currently, any crime prosecuted by a tribal government only has a maximum sentence of a year regardless of the offense. Clearly, that is a serious problem that needs legislative assistance.

Some of the shift in policy has contributed to the ability of tribal governments to be empowered to take greater control over their own affairs; however, it is important to consider that intergovernmental agencies and law enforcement divisions have equal participation in curbing or ending this crisis. New legislation should create policies that cross over boundaries that have become part of the barrier to solving these crimes and bring those responsible for the violence against these indigenous women and girls to justice.



In the meantime, it is important as sometimes the wheels of justice move slowly, to remember and honor these murdered and missing indigenous women and girls so that change continues for the betterment of all communities.

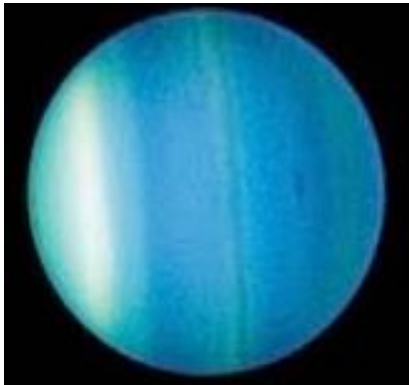
Sources: Sherene H. Razack, "Sexualized Violence and Colonialism: Reflections on the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women"; Chia Halpern Beetso, Virginia Davis, and Kelly Gaines Stoner, "Empowering Tribal Nations: The Transformative Impact of VAWA 2013 and 2022 on Tribal Jurisdiction."

Our Universe

(May 2 is Astronomy Day)



The planet Neptune (Space.com)



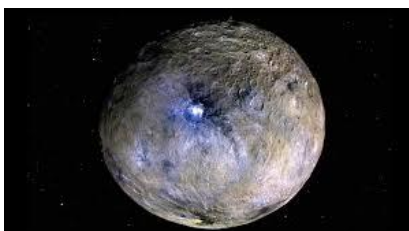
The planet Uranus (NewScientist.com)



The planet Pluto (Space.com)



The dwarf planet Eris (Space.Fandom.com)



The dwarf planet Ceres (Space.com)



The dwarf planet Makemake (Science.Nasa.gov)

Trauma as Teacher

Marty Williams, Production Editor

TRAUMA IS NOT generally thought of as having any kinds of positive associations. It is usually linked back to violent experiences, violations of our bodies, prolonged periods of fear, and being witness to inhumanity of every kind. We have individual trauma, and we have collective trauma experienced by whole peoples, cultures, even nations. The epidemic of addiction prevalent in Native communities in both Canada and the United States has been solidly attributed to the collective trauma passed down from generation to generation of violence, displacement, racism, and the wholesale abduction of children by government agencies.

Their generational trauma, like the generational trauma of black people in the U.S., is the source of both great suffering and great resilience. It enables the evoking of collective symbols, as well as the collective wisdom that unfortunately is often appropriated by the oppressors. Even so, these sources are mythic in the sense that they contain patterns that explain, unfold, and create possibilities to connect with, and teach, new generations and other cultures.

The Golden Bough Theater in Taiwan produced a Hokkien version of the Greek Trojan War, *Troy, Troy...Taiwan*, which fused forms of Taiwanese opera, folk songs, popular music elements, and local religious rituals, connecting the narrative of the trauma of impending doom lingering over the city of Troy with the trauma of Taiwan's vulnerability against China. Sofia Liu writes that

The nature of the Trojan legend is a traumatic story of violence, death, war, and occupation. It can be seen as "the founding trauma" in Dominick LaCapra's terms, the trauma that "paradoxically becomes the basis for collective and/or personal identity," which is typical of myths of origin and may perhaps be located in the more or less mythologized history of every people.

"Myths of origin" is an important term; it can refer to a people, but also to individuals. Our founding trauma is often regarded as a disruption of physical and mental health, but is always also an "origin myth," the source of our journey, our personality, and usually our greatest gifts. Dominick LaCapra notes that all origin myths are trauma-informed, whether it is a war between giants, rape by deities, cataclysmic events changing geographies, or the trauma of simply being born. Christianity has its origin in traumas of crucifixion and persecution; China had decades of bloody revolution before they became "China." Black Americans have an origin myth founded in slavery, violence, social isolation, disparity, and normalized racism. Trauma myths speak to each other across cultural lines, the way individual trauma can speak through creativity, empathy, and heroic action. According to Cathy Caruth,

The phenomenon of trauma has seemed to become all-inclusive, but it has done so precisely because it brings us to the limits of our understanding; if psychoanalysis, psychiatry, sociology, and even literature are beginning to hear each other anew in the study of trauma, it is because they are listening through the radical disruption and gaps of traumatic experience.

At journaling workshops introduced into prisons by Dr. Harvey Shrum while a reentry facilitator at Folsom State Prison in the 1980s, the importance of knowing our own trauma narrative is at the core of the journal work. Without judgment or analysis, Shrum invited prisoners to simply be in relationship with the reality of early, and current, traumatic experiences, and not see them as events that deform them somehow. Out of these traumas emerge vessels of creativity, and reflect the myth of the hero's journey as ancient as humanity.

Without being in relationship with the traumas that shape us, they rule over us. They lie hidden in the "normal" of ourselves, driving behavior and responses that seem unexplainable. Finding the unique myth of ourselves is the same as whole peoples finding, and expressing, the origin myths that make them who they uniquely are.

Sources: Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995; Dominick LaCapra, "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity: What Remains?", *History and Theory*, 2016; Sofia Yashih Liu, "Performing Intercultural Trauma: State, Land, and Women in *Troy, Troy...Taiwan*," *Asian Theater Journal*, 2019; Harvey Shrum, "No Longer Theory: Correctional Practices That Work," *The Journal of Correctional Education*, 2004; Natasha Sindich, et al., "Offenders as Victims: Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Substance Use Disorder among Male Prisoners," *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology*, 2013; Frederic Vandenberghe, "Experiments with Truth: A Sociological Variation on William James's Varieties of Religious Experience," *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 2018.

Our Universe

(May 2 is Astronomy Day)



The Moon ("Luna") (NewScientist.com)



The moon lo (Science.Nasa.gov)



The Crab Nebula (Wikipedia.org)



The M-83 Galaxy (Science.Nasa.gov)



The Andromeda Galaxy (Space.com)



Asteroid Ida and its moon (JPL.Nasa.gov)



Halley's Comet (Space.com)



The Hubble Telescope (thanks) (Forbes.com)

The Kent State Shooting, 50 Years Later

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter



BEGINNING IN THE mid-1960s, normally tranquil American college life was thrown into an upheaval of political activism and frequently violent demonstrations; the continuing conflict in Vietnam was at the root of the protests. By the 1970s, education was regularly disrupted, many college buildings vandalized or occupied by protestors for days at a time, and some actually burned and bombed. On May 4, 1970, the college chaos reached a climax during a large protest at Ohio's Kent State University.

On Friday, May 1, university officials banned the scheduled Monday student demonstration. Over the weekend, the campus ROTC building suspiciously burned to the ground. On Monday morning, an estimated 2,000 students gathered. Relatively peaceful at first, one student made a short speech. Simultaneously, local police and units from the Ohio National Guard, ordered onto campus at the request of university administrators, moved in and deployed on two separate disorderly groups.

Several attempts by the guard to disband the crowds failed, including a jeep driving near the unauthorized gatherings and a bullhorn announcement made to disperse. Rocks were thrown at the jeep and one guardsman was struck. Their retreat was shaded by students singing, chanting, and displays of obscene gestures. Two rounds of tear gas were deployed, but failed to deter the unruly groups. Some canisters were lobbed back at the frustrated troops, though winds rendered the gas ineffective on either side.

Carrying rifles, shotguns, and a few pistols, the National Guard soldiers' weapons were "locked and loaded," bayonets affixed, as they advanced with orders for one officer to fire, but only into the air. They moved in aggressively to disperse the protestors as rock throwing reached its peak. One retreating National Guard company, feeling threatened, stopped and knelt down, pointing their weapons at the pursuing protestors. One shot was fired, possibly into the air by a guard officer; no verbal warning was issued. At 12:24 p.m., at least 29 of the 77 armed soldiers opened fire on the nearby students.

Many demonstrators dropped to the ground and others ran or hid behind cars. Chrissie Hynde, a Kent State student and later lead singer of The Pretenders rock group said, "I thought it was fireworks and a young man said, 'They (expletive) killed somebody.'" Hynde went on to relate, "We looked at them [the guardsmen] and they looked at us. They were just kids, 19 years old, like us, but in uniform. Like our boys in Vietnam." Four students died and many more injured before the crowd finally dispersed.

During subsequent and mostly inconclusive investigations, and a lengthy wrongful death/injury civil trial, guardsmen testified they fired because they feared for their lives. Some stated they were surrounded, the protestors "charged them," or "the sky was black with stones." Many also said they shot because others had opened fire. Later, an Ohio National Guard adjutant general told reporters that a sniper had fired on the guardsmen. This statement was never substantiated with evidence.

Several post-incident investigations, including by the FBI, failed to place specific blame and the wrongful death/injury trial resulted in acquittal of the Ohio National Guard soldiers. College protests and demonstrations continued around the world into the early 1970s, ultimately ending with peace talks and a draw-

down of American troops from Southeast Asia.

Sources:

Wikipedia,
February 2024;
Ohio Northern
University article,
"Untold Stories:
The Kent State
Shootings"



Midlife Crisis in Prison

By Dortell Williams, Post Reporter

MOST PEOPLE HAVE their own idea what a midlife crisis is, and most want nothing to do with it. I will define it and supply some avenues to not only get past it, but to get over it and thrive.

Kieran Setiya says midlife crisis can be something like stasis, burnout, regret, or a feeling of loss. According to University of Warwick professor Andrew Oswald, life can be measured by satisfaction. They assert that questions about life satisfaction are normal, tend to take the form of a U, and begin between the ages of the early 20s to the mid-40s. Questions about life satisfaction tend to dissolve as we age and eventually dissipate.

I could end here, concluding that most of us will survive if we just hang in there, but surviving midlife crisis isn't the sole goal. The aim is to satisfactorily navigate it and come out shining.

To get to that victory, it is best to understand the phenomenon. Elliot Jaques, the psychoanalyst who introduced the phrase *midlife crisis* in 1965, attributed the experience to dramatic shifts in the creative lives of artists, from Gauguin to Michelangelo. These artists, as great as we see them today, felt unfulfilled by their previous work.

From this perspective, life satisfaction can be a catalyst for improvement, a driver toward our highest potential. Yet, the crux of it appears to be attitude and perspective. For those who engage in self-help, we know that beliefs equal attitudes, and attitudes equal behavior. From that viewpoint, we must remember that like highs in life, the lows are finite. In an imperfect world, whether in a three-story mansion or on the third tier of a prison, life happens. In fact, life always seems to be greener on the other side. Yet, we rarely stop and think how much worse things could get. Perspective can change not what went wrong, but how we see it.

The Serenity Prayer is a great tool for a balanced view on life: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to

change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

Indeed, life is balanced with choices we can make and circumstances beyond our control. Yet, even with the choices we can make, loss or perceived loss is inevitable. To illustrate, we visit a fast-food eatery. We choose a hamburger over a taco; by choosing one, we exclude the other. There is a pang of loss. Now, let's escalate this dynamic to a car choice, a life partner, a career path — or some of the worst choices we could ever make. We can become fixated on what could have been, or intentionally choose to make the best of what we have where we are.

At the heart of any transient midlife crisis is satisfaction. And, satisfaction is a choice, a belief, an attitude that becomes our behavior. Thus, we can behave with new purpose: helping others, trying new hobbies or activities like reading, puzzles, exercise, even a new job.

The bottom line is that stasis, regret, burnout, or perceived losses are all actionable. A life well lived is not just life itself, it's what we do with life that makes the difference — no matter our station or social status. There are countless miserable millionaires, and innumerable people in prison who are so free in mind and spirit they are envied by the privileged. At the end of the day, it all boils down to choices. It's the one free thing accessible to all — choices.

Sources: Kieran Setiya, "Facing Your Mid-Career Crisis," *Harvard Business Publishing*, Special Issue, spring 2021; "Serenity Prayer" by M. Richard; *PTSD and Prison Stress*

Psych View

By Daisy Switzer, Post Columnist

PTSD and Stress

By Daisy Switzer, Post Columnist

IHAVE WITNESSED stories that would burn the ears off of people who don't work in this field (forensic risk assessment). I've heard and written stories that made me hide in bed for days afterward. Stressful situations in prison are real. People are killed in prison.

Some personalities are more vulnerable to stress than others, but in situations of extreme trauma, almost anyone could develop anxiety. This is especially true where the exposure is chronic. Some individuals have less effective coping skills than others. The suggestions herein will apply to those types. Some more macho types react to stress differently, perhaps by bullying others or creating a stronger presence in order to protect themselves. The suggestions apply to those types, as well.

First of all, if you are in a dangerous situation from which it is possible to remove yourself, it should be obvious that the best course of action is to get out. Rapist cellmate? Gang problems? Guard problems? Personality conflicts? Get a transfer. I'm not a magician, and I know that's overly simplistic. But it's real. Get an effing transfer.

If you have problems because of your gang affiliation, debrief. This also may be simplistic and dramatic. It is very difficult to stand alone in a dangerous place. I'm not your conscience, and if you need that to be who you are that's between you and God. But if you have PTSD because you can't handle it, do everyone a favor and take a new path. Also, pretty unlikely you'll parole if you are a noted and active gang member. Too bad. Some of you are lovely people, but most boards and judges will not see past that membership. I did not make that rule; don't argue it with me. I write to help you out. Take it or don't. Like I said, that's between you and whatever god you answer to.

If it is a personality conflict that's stressing you, relocate. If you keep running into personality conflicts, seriously investigate the possibility that the problem may be you. Ask someone. Ask two or three people. Work on yourself.

I've met some broken people. I've also met some people who overcame incredible challenges and presented themselves as stable and mature. If you're broken, fix it. Work on it. Make yourself safer. Grow up.

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.



Creative Arts Program

GUITAR!

If you want to learn how to play, or enhance already existing skills,

sign up now!

In Facility E Hobby Room:
9am until 12pm

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

Una Mapa de Programación (Parte 2)

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

SI CRECISTE EN un hogar con violencia doméstica, o fuiste parte de una relación donde hubo abuso físico, emocional, psicológico, financiero, sexual o espiritual, deberías tomar clases para entender la violencia doméstica y cómo tener relaciones saludables. Todos deberían tomar clases sobre el impacto en las víctimas. Si tuviste problemas con el abuso de sustancias, deberías tomar clases sobre el abuso de sustancias y entender la adicción. Los grupos de 12 Pasos—ya sean AA, NA o CGA—tienen algunas habilidades inherentes para la vida que se pueden aprender al trabajar los 12 Pasos. Hay pasos para hacer un inventario moral y realmente entender tus defectos de carácter, hay pasos para enmendar y para hacer tu propio inventario diario. Trabajar con los 12 Pasos te ayudará a entenderte mejor a ti mismo, y eso realmente es parte del objetivo a medida que desenredas tu criminalidad y haces cambios en ti mismo que puedas sostener. Los grupos de 12 Pasos realmente te enseñan buenas habilidades para la vida, y los recomiendo encarecidamente para todos mis clientes.

Para delincuentes sexuales: *El Camino a la Libertad* (4ª edición) por los Dres. Jill S. Levenson y John W. Morin es el libro que se recomienda leer y está disponible a través de Amazon.com. Lighthouse 9 Consulting también tiene recursos educativos disponibles para delincuentes sexuales.

Se deben tomar clases de manejo de la ira porque enseñan buenas habilidades para la vida, y todos somos propensos a la ira. El manejo de la negación es otra clase que se recomienda mucho, así como una clase que trata sobre el pensamiento criminal. Con todas estas clases, se deben repetir con la mayor frecuencia posible. Es común que las personas que se consideran aptas hayan tomado estas clases numerosas veces. Escucho de mis clientes que evitan estos grupos por una razón u otra, y lo que les digo a cada uno de estos

clientes es que deben inscribirse en las clases, participar en las clases y, si hay algo que falta en la clase, entonces deben ser parte de la solución al proponer ideas para lidiar con lo que falta. Tomar una clase una y otra vez a menudo brindará nueva información o nuevas experiencias cada vez, y puede ser lo que puede darle a otra persona, en lugar de lo que le aporta a usted. A medida que comience a tomar estas clases, comience a trabajar en el desarrollo de estrategias y habilidades de afrontamiento. GOGI es un programa excelente y se puede realizar a través de clases por correspondencia. PREP también tiene una excelente variedad de clases, al igual que muchos otros programas.

Una de las cosas más difíciles de superar durante una audiencia de idoneidad es la falta de programación. Simplemente no puede internalizar toda la información, cómo se relaciona con usted y su criminalidad, en unos pocos meses. Ciertamente, puede obtener algunos de los conceptos clave, pero cuando el panel hace la pregunta de una manera diferente, el cliente a menudo no ha internalizado el concepto, por lo que no entiende la pregunta en absoluto.

Mi primera hoja de ruta es que se inscriba en tantos programas como pueda, idealmente en persona. Si está en listas de espera, inscríbase en clases por correspondencia. Respalde su conocimiento leyendo libros orientados a comprender su criminalidad y convierta en un hábito diario hacer programas en Edovo y mirar los videos de Parole Justice Works.

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

What We Choose

Marty Williams, Production Editor

STANDING IN LINE at the canteen can be revelatory. Guys who go to the diabetic line twice a day are loading their walkers with cases of soda and 20 pounds of honeybuns. The canteen itself is full of items we have chosen — and rejected — over time, either by majority vote or the electoral college of our Inmate Advisory Council. Healthy alternatives don't exist because canteens only carry what will sell, and what sells is soda and honeybuns.

What I choose reflects what I am. If I'm self-indulgent and careless, my choices will be self-indulgent and careless. This doesn't mean I shouldn't have a honeybun or soda from time to time; but five of both every day reflects an inability to care about myself, or more importantly, my future self.

Self-identity drives choices as well, often based on identity laid upon us by our past and current circumstances. Our friends and homies influence choices more than family; we are usually seeking identity away from family and towards one that feels independent ... even if it's dependent on someone else's choices. Lana Xiangian Nan in the *Journal of Consumer Research* addresses this well: “We find that people have a greater tendency to conform to another's rejection than to another's choice, holding the decision outcome constant.” This implies that our choices are often influenced not by personal taste, but by proving to others how independent we are to avoid negative judgment. These can be anything: food, music, sexual preference, movies ... and even religion.

More times than I can count I've heard guys get clowned because they make a decision based on the concerns of their wives or girlfriends, such as to eat better, read heavier, behave safer. They get accused of being whipped, or controlled, and are made to feel ashamed for practicing self-care or self-love. Nothing proves independence like “I eat whatever I want,” or “do whatever I want,” or “go wherever I want.” It's the mantra of children in the growing stages, pulling away from parental controls. It's the cycle of life, and needs to happen for a person to fully form ... when we are children.

If as adults we're still stuck on eating or doing whatever we want for no reason than to prove how independent we are, then all we are proving is that we're stuck in childhood. People who love and care for us are the ones encouraging us to make choices that benefit us now and in the future.

We should be one of those people.

Sources: Stephanie Y. Chen, et al., “We Do What We Are: Representation of the Self-Concept and Identity-Based Choice.” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2024; Lana Xiangian Nan, et al., “Rejections Are More Contagious than Choices: How Another's Decisions Shape Our Own,” *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2023.

Missteps:

On page 2 of the April edition of the *Post*, in the lists accompanying the story “Celebrating Milestones of Success,” the name of AA degree recipient Michael Delerio was misspelled.

The L.A. Wildfires

By Scott D. Culp,
California Institute for Men



LOCATED DUE EAST of Los Angeles, the California Institute for Men is the prison closest to the recent L.A. wildfires. The facility’s main building is an art deco and glass cinderblock, Hollywood-esque edifice, with nearby Mt. Baldy and the San Gabriel Mountains conveniently set as backdrop. Within minutes of the ignition of the Palisades Fire, the violent Santa Ana winds fanned the flames and brought air quality alerts to the Inland Empire, shrouding the prison in smoke and uncertainty before the Altadena Fire ever ignited. James Smith, from Altadena, currently serves a life sentence at the prison and shared his L.A. wildfire experience.

Scott Culp: Did your family evacuate?

James Smith: Yes. Initially, all of my family and friends didn’t take the evacuation orders seriously. Every year the Santa Ana winds bring warnings. I think everyone got complacent and didn’t believe it would be so severe.

SC: Did your family see their home burn?

JS: Almost everyone I love lost their homes. The entire neighborhood I grew up in burned down; schools and all.

SC: Was your family afraid?

JS: When the homes began to burn in Altadena, nobody was there to put them out. The Palisades Fire began that morning and almost all the county’s resources were there when the Altadena Fire began later that afternoon. Altadena is more blue collar, and it seemed the L.A. County Fire Department was more interested in saving the richer areas.

SC: How are you coping knowing the chaos your family is going through?

JS: My children need the most support. One of the ways I make them feel safe is by maintaining our daily routine of phone calls and video visits to help them express their fears and uncertainties. After calming winds and the heroic efforts of firefighters, the L.A. Wildfires became the second and third

most destructive and deadly fires in California history.

If you or someone you know has a story about the deadly and destructive L.A. wildfires, the *Mule Creek Post* would like to share them with our readers.

Where Were All the Firemen?

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

IN THE ADJACENT article, “The L.A. Wildfires,” a fire victim offered an opinion on the commitment of resources to the elite neighborhoods in the Palisades Fire and neglect of the Eaton Fire: “nobody was there,” the victim said, when firefighters were absent and homes burned in Altadena.

In a subsequent TV news conference, L.A. County Fire Chief Anthony Marone, visibly shaken, defended fire managers’ choices, “There are not enough fire engines and personnel in the state of California to fight extreme conditions and multiple fires like this.” TV coverage supported this statement by showing crews from Oregon, Arizona, and Washington as they responded to help in this horrific once-in-a-lifetime fire event — the perfect firestorm.

First responders show no favoritism: “Save Lives” is paramount in the first responder’s motto. Fire managers assign units where life hazard potential is immediate — property is always secondary. The Palisades Fire began hours before Eaton, thus draining other areas of fire crews while commanders aggressively filled in vacant stations with out-of-region units.

A vivid example of the firefighter’s motto of “Save Lives — Protect Property”: On a warm October day in 1976, in a densely populated mountainous brush area of Glendale, a blazing garage fire spread aggressively to the attached home and rained flaming embers on adjacent wood roofs and wildland.

As the first three-man Glendale engine rolled up to the inferno, the elderly resident collapsed while holding a garden hose; backup units were minutes away. The captain called for paramedics and reinforcements, and then, without pulling a hoseline off the engine, the three firefighters started CPR — life safety came first. The structure was lost, homes next door damaged, but the man lived.

John L. Orr was a firefighter for over 24 years.

Opinion: Constructive Alternatives

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

HUMANS HAVE BEEN in a long-term love affair with wood. It’s cheap, plentiful, versatile, and beautiful; however, it’s time to rethink how we use it in the construction of homes and other structures due to the increasing occurrence of wildfires. Following the Oakland Hills fire of Oct. 19, 1991, California fire codes were amended to ban wooden shingles from the exterior of buildings due to extreme flammability. What about the other building materials and components that are also flammable and have not been replaced with new, flame-resistant materials?

When entire neighborhoods burn to the ground, what’s left standing? Chimneys, foundations, masonry walls; essentially concrete, brick, cinder blocks, and stone. Why don’t we make wider use of these materials along with steel? Is it only a question of aesthetics in a state where most of the houses built in the last 70 years are sheathed in stucco anyway?

Some do not care for the appearance of cinder block construction due to the joint lines that are “struck” when the mortar joints are still malleable. However, simply scraping the joints level with the faces of the blocks and then using a sand-impregnated paint will give the same basic appearance as stucco without the flammable sheer panel (plywood or wafer board) and two-by-four studs underneath to burn. This is one of many possible alternatives that will save lives, homes, personal possessions, and unnecessary grief for people suffering trauma. Within the homes themselves, wall-to-wall carpeting has been a culprit that sometimes spreads a localized fire into other rooms. Add to this the fact that an entire room or household with that sort of floor covering gets completely replaced when only the main traffic areas are worn. That’s perfectly good carpeting for which people have paid a premium price. Non-flammable tile or fire-resistant wood flooring makes a lot more sense financially and to avoid fire hazards. Area rugs of non-flammable wool will soften the areas you want to. Concerned about cold floors? In or under the floor radiant heating can deal with this as well as provide the most efficient home heating system known.

The whole point here is that we need to rethink how we build and what we

(continued on page 23)

(from **Construction Alternatives**, pg. 22)
 build with, in order to avoid the tragedies we've seen play out. So, if someone you care about is building or rebuilding a home after a fire has damaged or destroyed it, urge them to seriously consider non-flammable alternatives to the traditional building methods and materials. It might just save their lives.

Contributing to Society

By F. Orlando Wells, Feature Reporter

IN THE NEW California Model proposed by Gov. Gavin Newsom, there is a primary focus on rehabilitation specific to incarceration goals. This aligns with the mission statement of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, as defined in Assembly Bill 1104. This, in theory, leads to building a better bridge of reintegration into society. It is interesting that one of the aspects of rehabilitation is job-readiness skills, which is important to successful reintegration, and being a good contributor to society.

I thought this is a good discussion topic because I believe have taken this issue for granted. I looked up the definition and root of the word. No surprise it had multiple definitions, so I focused on what applies to this piece, which is "To help to cause something to happen," and "to play a significant part in bringing about an end result." This is derived from the Latin *con + tribuere*, which is related to "tribute," which better fits. To give or show respect or affection for someone is to give tribute or something that proves the good quality or effectiveness of something. Essentially, it is a form of payment that bestows respect. How does that apply to the incarcerated who are returning to society and need to contribute? Simple: Our "tribute" is a way for us to demonstrate our respect for our community, family, and society by giving selflessly to the ones we were disrespectful to through our criminal acts. I guess the point here is that contributing to society is an act of redemption, not just for what we took, but also to restore balance and respect.

Giving back to our community in meaningful ways is contributing to the greater good of

civilization as a whole, and supports the continuation of humans living in harmony, building respect across all borders and boundaries beyond our cultural differences. It is a universal part of the human condition worldwide.

When I started this project, I hadn't realized just how important this aspect of rehabilitation is, and what it is that I might bring to the table in terms of my contribution. I suppose that is part of the journey in rehabilitation in establishing your purpose in life, and that should translate to what your contribution will become. For instance, a college education, vocation, peer specialist, or self-help facilitator can translate to service once you are returned to your community. All it takes to find your purpose is to commit to the process of changing who you were to who you can be, and planning that is the beginning of pro-social change. Learning to be unselfish and giving of ourselves freely is not as difficult as it seems, given the shortcuts many have taken that led to incarceration. We already know how to be selfish, so the mindset must be, "What can I do for others?" Putting others before self is a good way to develop healthy connections, and I for one will always welcome new and healthy relationships with people who care about the well-being of others above themselves. I guess that's what the Board of Parole Hearings wants from us, to learn how to be empathetic, which is a definite way to demonstrate you are no longer a danger to the public.

Transforming Outcomes Through the Study of Communication

By O. Rick Bridges, Feature Reporter



AS THE FALL 2024 semester came to a close at the Transforming Outcomes Project at Sacramento State (TOPSS) Mule Creek State Prison campus, Dr. Mark Stoner, professor emeritus of communication studies, discussed his experience in the service of rehabilitating incarcerated California citizens. This is part one of a three-part series.

Mule Creek Post: Could you please describe the process or experience that informed your decision to teach classes here?

Mark Stoner: A few years ago, I think when the program was just beginning, Dr. Zuckerman was developing our piece of the program here. We were both Fulbright scholars, at slightly different times. My wife was terminally ill, and I had retired to care for her. And then, when my wife passed, I really needed to get busy again.

Getting used to the environment is something I need to be honest about. It's very tension inducing at the outset; the messages that the institution sends are pretty disconcerting at times. Getting past prior beliefs, stereotypes, that kind of stuff, are now really opening up a whole new understanding of what's happening here — at least in parts of the institution. They're very encouraging. I'm happy to take that information to other people and let them know that such positive things are happening here. [The TOPSS students] are really positively representing, I think, the potential of real rehabilitation.

MCP: What do you see as the potential social justice implications of the ongoing teaching of communication studies to incarcerated students?

MS: From what I'm seeing, the kind of intellectual development and personal development, the revelations that folks make in class or in their papers to me, are indicative of a very deep kind of change that's occurring. As far as social justice goes, the investment by the state in the program is a wise one. I think your citizenship in the institution remains for a while, that you salt the institution with a way of thinking and behaving that others can benefit from. Upon release, many of you are highly educated and, I think, will continue to contribute on the outside as well as the inside as you maintain relationships here. I see no downside to it, only upside. And, it's very, very encouraging to me.

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Hybrid Prison

By Philong Huynh, Feature Reporter

PENAL STATES THAT are also democracies have to strike a balance between rights and resources. Faced with overcrowding, the French decided to utilize various private sectors to build correctional facilities and provide basic and auxiliary services like food, clothing, hygiene, as well as educational and reintegration services while civil servants keep control of security and management tasks. That way the state controls the management of prisons, while private industries are given contracts on housing, maintenance, education, and job and technology training. This hybrid model promotes government efficiency while allowing for private companies to participate in providing services, according to advocates.

These complementary models of prison management between the private sector and the government are adopted in various states in the U.S. and many other countries around the world. In 2004, more than 150 facilities in the U.S. were staffed by private operators overseeing some 98,900 incarcerated people, while another 30 states have incarcerated people held privately.

There are advantages possessed by both the government and the private sector, and limited privatization frees up tax dollars while improving the efficiency and quality of prison management, as concluded by Bramandita et al. in their 2023 study of private prisons as an alternative. The study's authors concluded that private companies are usually not restricted by bureaucracy, taking less time to resolve problems when given latitude to independently run and manage their own affairs within the realm of their contracted services, thus allowing them to more efficiently manage complaints and take quicker action to resolve them.

Source: Riki Bramandita, et al., "The Fulfillment of Prisoners' Rights by Establishing Private Prisons as an Alternative to Prisoner Development Is Reviewed from Law Number 22 of 2022 Concerning Corrections," *Interdisciplinary Journal & Humanity*, Sep. 2023, vol. 2, no. 9.

What's the Difference Between Level II vs. Levels III & IV?

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

THE MULE CREEK Post's offices are located on a Level II facility where the yard's appearance is more like a college campus than a high-security prison. Incarcerated college students decorate the yard, sitting at park benches or leaning against walls, diligently tapping away on their laptops. There are dozens of jobs and educational or self-help opportunities at most Level II medium security facilities, including the popular dog training programs, Prison Industry Authority operations, and high-paying ADA-assistant jobs. Housing unit amenities include spacious windows offering views of the surrounding countryside, not narrow peek holes; study rooms; dayroom furniture and equipment (microwave oven, television, game tables, etc.); and unlocks every 30 minutes. Some serving life without the possibility of parole qualify for Level II housing, and successfully lowering your points and qualifying for assignment to a Level II prison speaks volumes to the Board of Parole Hearings about your goals and integrity.

Not surprisingly, the nonthreatening and advantageous Level II atmosphere is shunned by those at Level III and IV facilities; they do not want to move for a variety of deep-seated reasons, such as multiple cellmates (five to seven in most Level IIs). However, these unfortunate people overlook daily quality-of-life concerns that may tip the scales in favor of a transition to lower-level yards. If you have these negative views, you should reconsider them.

The reality of Level II accommodations, operations, and rewards are relatively unknown to those in the higher-level prisons. There are no travel brochures or pamphlets (unless you count the *Mule Creek Post*), or video to view and appreciate the stunning differences offered at these facilities, so the yards remain shrouded in mystery. Below are a few of the lesser-known and overlooked advantages offered at most Level II prisons, like Mule Creek:

Dining

Housing units are released in an orderly manner — no single-file line required. Walk to the dining hall at your own pace; wait for friends if you want. Upon arrival, sit wherever you want, with whomever; get a second cup of coffee or cold beverage if you wish.

Phones

Phones available to all from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. — no sign-up required.

Dayroom

Open 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. (except during 4 p.m. count), with seating and game tables available to all during these hours. Some Level IIs have "Quiet Rooms" for studying only; California Model soft chairs and tables are available at some Level IIs. At most facilities, a microwave oven is available in each dayroom for heating food or water for hot beverages.

Showers

Available 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. (except during 4 p.m. count)

Yard

Open continuously from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., with night yard from 7 to 9 p.m. and 30-minute unlocks. Yard/gym workout equipment usually includes stationary bikes, rowing machines, heavy bag (and gloves), stretch bands, medicine balls, and treadmills. Music practice rooms available. Yard concerts on many holidays. At some facilities, there are several dogs training programs on the yard at any given time, adding a special real-world atmosphere — a dog on a Level III or IV has a totally different effect. Sports leagues form year-round: basketball, football, baseball, handball, volleyball, and pickleball.

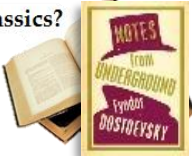
Living at a Level II facility improves the quality of prison life by simple day-to-day activities; dozens of available jobs; along with social, recreational, educational, and rehabilitative programs and possibilities; many adding to your ultimate board résumé and presentation.

Source: *Mule Creek State Prison Program Inventory*, Office of the Community Resource Manager, August 2019.

Editor's note: Not all Level II facilities offer the same amenities; however, most of those listed above are offered at most Level II facilities with some variation.



Why Read the Classics?



By Rob Sharp.
Feature Reporter

THE RUSSIAN NOVELIST Fyodor Dostoevsky is known for the stream-of-consciousness monologues in his works. This is also true in this collection, *Notes from the Underground*. The seven stories in this volume will get you thinking about the human condition, relationships, and loneliness. Prison is also a theme, though sometimes by the character's emotional condition and not due to actual imprisonment.

For example, in "White Nights," the main character has lived under a kind of self-imposed isolation and imprisonment within himself. The stream-of-consciousness style sometimes covers several successive pages, but the story is engaging and thought-provoking all the same.

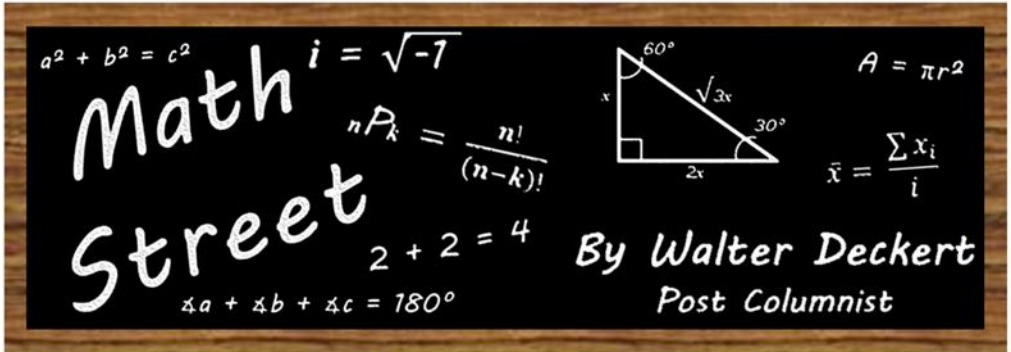
In another one of the stories, "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man," the author embarks on a journey of humility along the lines of false nobility that is, however, entertaining. One portion states:

And yet, looking ridiculous used to upset me very much. In fact, I didn't just look ridiculous, I was ridiculous. I've always been ridiculous, and I think I've known it from the day of my birth. Perhaps I became fully aware of it at the age of seven. I studied at school, and then at university, and the more I studied, the more I realized that I was ridiculous.

"Akulka's Husband" is a dark story about a tortured soul and the terrible situation that the meanness and pettiness of others brings to an awful conclusion; not only for himself, but also for his poor wife.

"Baklushkin's Story" is about a Russian army non-commissioned officer who ends up in prison and is recounting his crime and the circumstances leading up to it to another prisoner. It is told with great feeling and remorse. This is an excellent story for anyone wrestling with their own demons regarding their crime.

Notes from the Underground may be in your facility library.



IN LAST MONTH'S article, I posed the following problem: The earth's population increased by 71 million, to an estimated total of 8,090,000,000. What is the percent increase?

This gives us a chance to discuss the model I use anytime I do percent problems; I gave it last month: A of $B = C$, where A is the percent in decimal form, B is the base (sometimes called the "whole" or "reference"), and C is the "part" that results.

For instance, what is 9% of 18? Here the A is 0.09, B is 18, and C is the part we are trying to figure out. Remember, the word *of* means "multiply":

$$\begin{aligned} A(B) &= C \\ 0.09(18) &= C \\ 1.62 &= C \end{aligned}$$

In our original problem we don't know A , and B is hidden. C , in this case, is the increase of 71 million, so let's figure out B . If the population increased by 71 million, up to 8,090,000,000, then we can subtract to calculate the original population:

$$\begin{aligned} &8,090,000,000 \\ &- 71,000,000 \\ \hline &8,019,000,000 = B \end{aligned}$$

Now we know B !

Always think of B as the number to which the percent is being applied. Some percent of the population is 71,000,000. So:

$$\begin{aligned} A \text{ of } B &= C \\ \frac{A(8,019,000,000)}{8,019,000,000} &= \frac{71,000,000}{8,019,000,000} \\ A &= 0.00854 \end{aligned}$$

Now, convert this to a percent by moving the decimal two places to the right.

$$0.00854 = 0.854\% \text{ or } < 1\%$$

As an aside, this means if the growth rate remains constant, we can expect the world population to double in approximately 82 years. See my article on doubling time.

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



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The Return of Friends Outside

By O. Rick Bridges, Feature Reporter

THE ARRIVAL OF 2025 included a welcome and significant gift for the incarcerated citizens of the Mule Creek State Prison — the return of a renewed and retooled Friends Outside.

The Friends Outside family liaison is Armando Peraza. His office is located in the hobby room on Facility E. Office hours, at present, are Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; adjustments will be made to the schedule as Peraza develops additional office hours on facilities A, B, C, and D.

Peraza reports that his recent training included the facilitation of three very specific Friends Outside workshops to be developed and available as rehabilitative achievement or credit (RAC) groups:

- Conflict Resolution
- Parenting
- Reentry

The conflict resolution group is available to Facility E residents and meets each Tuesday 9 to 11 a.m. It is a 12-week program based on curriculum related to the Alternatives to Violence Project, a prison anti-violence program with origins in the Quaker faith. Cognitive dissonance theory is directly related to the group's methodology.

Additionally, Peraza trained on the development of the California Model. In his capacity as family liaison, he is available for related counseling and manages resources that include food, Christmas gifts, school supplies, and family counseling. Onsite services include some daycare and a clothes closet at the main visiting center.

Peraza's background includes extensive experience in Christian ministry. When asked what in his heart of hearts he would like to accomplish here, Peraza was thoughtful. "I'd like

to contribute more peace," he began, "better understanding, more education, and long-term transformation to the individual and to the culture here at Mule Creek."

Family and friends outside can contact Friends Outside by calling:

Outside Family Resources: (209) 955-0701 Stockton Office: (209) 274-4749

Ex-Offender Myths Deconstructed

Part 2

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.

In the first installment of this article, we pointed to studies disputing the presumption that sex offenders only commit sex crimes and that they are mostly mentally ill and dangerous requiring treatment. In sum, as to the mental illness presumption, most criminal offenders, including sex offenders, meet at least some of the criteria for antisocial personality disorder, for which there exists no effective treatment. To be clear, personality disorder is not the same as mental illness. Personality disorder is usually immutable or unchangeable whereas mental illness can usually be treated.

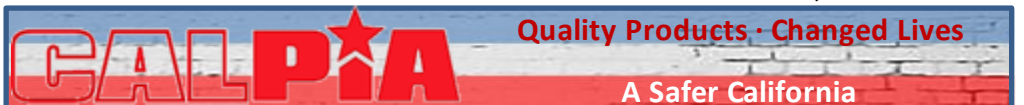
And as for prediction of dangerousness, mental health professionals only get it right one-third of the time when it comes to violent crimes that involved no sexual component. Thus, the professionals' chance of predicting recidivism for sexual crimes, which occur even less often than other crimes, is less than chance levels and runs the risk of over-prediction or false positives. Generally, individuals over 60 are at significantly less risk for re-offense with empirical data placing the risk for re-offense for those over 60 at less than 4%. Likewise, advanced age has been found to be a protective mitigating factor that indicates a "reduced risk of re-offense" as it relates to sexually dangerous offenses. The majority of studies on sex offender recidivism find that sex offenders are the *least* likely to commit another sex crime. For instance, a recent meta-analysis of 61 studies found that only 13% of sex offenders committed another sex crime.

As treatment goes, penile plethysmography is often used to gauge whether the elimination of deviant sexual arousal has been achieved. The fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* indicates that "the validity and reliability of this procedure have not been well established." Studies show that treatment does not reduce the rate of sex offenses; e.g., one published study by Steven P. Lab showed that there was no difference in recidivism rates between participants who completed the treatment program and those who did not. Sex offender treatment, like criminal offender treatment, has not been established to be effective. Criminal justice decisions that mandate treatment of unproven efficacy lull the victims and the public into a false sense of security.

The criminological theory of crime suggests that crime as a general phenomenon provides some pleasure to the individual committing an offense. The pleasure can range from mood enhancement to sexual gratification. Those who commit sex offenses (like many other types of offense) who operate to obtain immediate gratification regardless of long-term consequences lack self-control compared to other individuals who have deviant fantasies but do not act on them. As such, some authors advocate that treatment should address self-control in all problem areas of an offender's life.

Crime, as with any human behavior, can be addictive, and the treatment for addiction is an ever-evolving field of research and practice. As industries are spawned on myths and fear, the mundane search for truth is often buried in the annals of esoteric scientific literature laboriously compiled by those who do not make policies, while those who do make policies are often spurred by political and economic opportunism and expediency.

Sources: P.E. Meehl & A. Rosen, "Antecedent Probability and Efficiency of Psychometric Signs, Patterns, or Cutting Scores," *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 52, 1955; John Monahan, *The Clinical Prediction of Violent Behavior*, 1981; *United States v. Castle*, 2018 U.S. Dist. Lexis 133426, p. 46; *United States v. King*, 2012 U.S. Dist. Lexis 138811; R. Karl Hanson et al., "Long-Term Recidivism of Child Molesters," *Journal of Consulting & Clinical Psychology*, vol. 61, 1993; R. Karl Haanson & Monique T. Bussiere, "Predicting Relapse: A Meta Analysis of Sexual Offender Recidivism Studies," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 66, 1998; Steven P. Lab et al., "Research Note: An Evaluation of Juvenile Sexual Offender Treatment," *Crime & Delinquency*, vol. 39, 1993; Michael R. Gottfredson & Travis Hirschi, *A General Theory of Crime*, 1990.



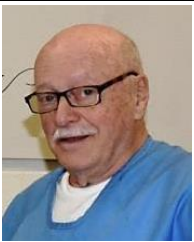
Business & Finances



Leah Ward-Lee



Carolyn Warren



R. Von Villas

ENTREPRENEUR'S WORKSHOP

By Leah Ward-Lee
Post Columnist

Treat Yourself Better #3

CHECK IN WITH Your Doc: Partner with your primary care doctor so they can help you stay well instead of treating you only when you're sick. If you only ever see a doctor at an acute care clinic or, worse yet, emergency room, they're treating the illness rather than working to keep you well. They're helping treat the symptoms instead of helping you identify and combat the cause.

Save Your Smile. Did you know that one of the methods of assessing the health of an animal is their dental health? Human animals are no different. In fact, the U.S. armed forces won't deploy a service member to a combat zone until any dental issues are corrected.

Yet many of us don't visit the dentist regularly. A little cavity caught at six months can easily be fixed. By the time it starts to bother you it's often already touching a nerve and requires invasive care that can weaken the structure of the tooth.

A professional dental cleaning every six months keeps plaque and bacteria from home-staying in your mouth. This helps to prevent not only cavities but also gum disease.

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



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Build & Protect Your Credit Like the Pros

Multiple Auto Loan Inquiries on Credit Report

By Carolyn Warren, Post Columnist

DID YOU APPLY for financing with an automobile dealership only to find out they created many inquiries by sending your name and Social Security number to possible lenders? Did they fail to inform you they would be pulling your credit report multiple times? Did they fail to get your permission? Here's how to handle it:

If they are older than 10 to 12 months, ignore them. Inquiries only impact your score for the first 12 months, even though they stay on your report for 24 months. If new and you want them removed, look online or in your auto paperwork to get the name of the sales manager. Write to that person and say:

On [date] I purchased a [kind of vehicle] from your dealership. The car is great and I was happy with my experience, except for one thing, which I want you to rectify. I did not give permission — nor was I informed — that the finance agent would shotgun my credit information to multiple lenders, causing my credit report to have [how many] inquiries on my report. I did not authorize this! I was not asked permission! I was led to believe my credit would be ordered only one time. Therefore, I need you to have your team delete the following erroneous inquiries from my credit report immediately:

[Name of loan company on your report]

[Next one, and so on]

I will be looking for a quick and amicable reply, so I can continue being a fan of [name of dealership].

Sincerely,

[Your signature and contact]

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

The Financial Corner



By R. Von Villas,
Post Columnist

AS DISCUSSED IN April's column, the first two years of the new president's term will be interesting. With new tariffs and many executive orders, the stock market has been volatile during the first quarter, and it remains concerned. Tariffs on imported steel caused American steel companies' share prices to rise. Cleveland Cliffs (CLF) share prices jumped 18%. Executive orders decreasing regulations on large banks saw a 3-5% share price increase.

Tariffs also brought retaliation by other countries, and the end result likely will be ongoing inflation (high interest rates) that hurts different sectors of the market, such as real estate investment trusts and utilities. Both borrow funds continuously to upgrade properties and services. High rates hurt profits; however, both should benefit when inflation and interest rates come down.

The utility UGI Corp. (UGI) is undervalued. There is no fee to invest and no fee to reinvest their quarterly dividend, but there is a minimum \$50 initial investment. UGI remained in the \$22 to \$24 range during 2023-24. I believe UGI's potential over the next 18 to 24 months is \$40 to \$50. I consider UGI a long-term, low-risk investment. If you are interested, contact Computershare at (800) 850-1774 and request an application and prospectus.

I also like Apollo Commercial Real Estate Finance (ARI). ARI primarily invests in and manages commercial first mortgage loans. I consider ARI a low/medium risk, long-term high-yield investment. Current yield is 10.5%; and has a \$15 to \$20 potential share price over the next 12 to 24 months. If ARI meets your goal

for a high-yield investment, contact EQ Shareowner Services at (800) 468-9716 and request an application and prospectus.

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.

Financial Corner Tracking Stocks (From Sep. 9, 2024 to Apr. 7, 2025)

●Apollo Comm. Real Est. Fin. Inc. (ARI)	\$10.30	→	\$8.72	-15.3%
●Baxter International Inc. (BAX)	\$38.96	→	\$28.79	-26.1%
●Comerica Inc. (CMA)	\$54.87	→	\$51.62	-5.9%
●CVS Health Corp. (CVS)	\$57.75	→	\$63.66	+10.2%
●Lumen Technologies (LUMN)	\$5.84	→	\$3.27	-44.0%
●Pfizer (PFE)	\$28.56	→	\$22.97	-19.6%
●UGI Corp. (UGI)	\$23.97	→	\$31.02	+29.4%
●Wells Fargo & Co. (WFC)	\$54.00	→	\$60.98	+12.9%

Creative Arts Programs

"Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now."

—Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

The Healing Power Of Art

Journey of the Jedi

By Gerald "Jedi" McKoy,
Feature Reporter

HAVE YOU EVER felt the Force, an energy, when the melody of a song — any song, your song — flies in the air into your ear? What do you feel? Emotional, soothed, pumped up, encouraged? Alive? Why do you feel this way? Why do different songs invoke different emotions in you, some more than others? Why is the article you're reading asking so many questions? With the exception of the last one, the answers to each of these questions will likely be different for each person. However, asking myself these questions has been critical for my self-growth, not only as a budding musician, but also as an aspiring, productive member of society. My dad attempted to teach me a number of instruments when I was young, but nothing stuck until I was around 15. By then, I had been heavily invested into Japanese animation and video games, especially the variety and diversity in Asian music, from edgy rock to bubbly pop, to intense orchestral arrangements and everything in between. That year, my dad "voluntold" me (i.e., told me what to do) to help my local church's youth ministry by playing guitar for their worship band once or twice a week. I wasn't ecstatic, but in the following years I practiced a lot more, both to make sure I didn't make a fool of myself in performances, and also to play songs from the Japanese artists I like so much.

I used these skills, the broad collection of music I was exposed to, the teachings of my dad, the experience of performing consistently, all to make attempts to create my own style of music. At the time, I wanted to create things that were original, that weren't just rehashes of something, like I believed mod-

ern music to be. I wanted to stand out, to mean something, and I wanted that reflected in my music. Unfortunately, I didn't get very far; other selfish motivations and poor decisions I made led me to incarceration at 22.

However, even while incarcerated, the passion of music never left. With no access to any instruments, computers, or other tools, I expanded in lyricism and basic melodies, allowing myself to be inspired by the books I read, the people I talked to, and the experiences I had. I practiced translating Japanese songs into English, and made English arrangements of the new lyrics using the original melodies, and made poems and songs out of Bible verses. I recognized nothing we have is truly original, but how you apply it can be. My focus changed from making something original and unique to making something I and others could feel, relate to, vibe with, and enjoy.

When I found the Mule Creek State Prison music program, my focus was amplified. For the first time, I was exposed to other musicians who had the same passion for their craft. They weren't distant artists on TV I would never get to talk to, they were — and are — flesh-and-blood people with their own stories, passions, and emotions they put into their music. Some play in different styles, from R&B to rock to rap to retro-Celtic. They display different methods in practicing and creating songs, but all are the same in their basic desire to create something they like and others might like, too.

This opportunity to listen to others' interpretation of the music that makes them feel, an outlet to create those interpretations of music, is important to many. For a number of us on the yards where it is offered, the Mule Creek music room is that outlet. I continue to learn so much by my exposure to other artists, engaging with them and finding out what makes them tick, what moves them, learning new techniques I can use to feel and make good music; for when we understand and uplift others, the Force is strong with us.

Resurrection



Untitled, by Stan Padilla (Jason Davis / Mule Creek Post)

You gotta resurrect the deep pain within you and give it a place to live that's not within your body.
Let it live in art. Let it live in writing. Let it live in music. Let it be devoured by building brighter connections.

Your body is not a coffin for pain to be buried in. Put it somewhere else.

— Stan Padilla

Research Studies College on the Inside

By Jason Davis, Lead Reporter

IN OCTOBER 2024, 11 incarcerated residents of the Mule Creek State Prison were randomly selected to participate in a research study, titled “The Phenomenology of Policy: Identities and Culture Change,” designed and conducted by Alec Griffin, a doctoral student in the Anthropology and Social Change Department at the California Institute of Integral Studies in San Francisco. The study has taken Griffin across the state, researching the impact of policy on prison culture and identities.

Griffin gathered information about the anthropology of policy, specifically California’s 2014 Senate Bill (SB) 1391 pertaining to face-to-face community college instruction of incarcerated students. He led discussions relating to the experience of face-to-face college and its impacts on lives, perceptions, and identities of incarcerated students. Griffin has been working inside prisons in Central California as an anthropology and sociology professor for the last six years. He believes “higher education should be a basic human right,” and that face-to-face college inside prisons is an opportunity afforded by SB 1391.

Since 2018, Griffin has been involved with the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation working on policy and advocating for carceral education. The study allows participants to engage in discussions that are thought provoking and an opportunity for reflection.

At the time of this writing, Griffin neared the end of his research goal of 50 to 150 individuals at Mule Creek, with the study drawing to a close. His dissertation was scheduled to be published this spring, with the hope to enlighten those interested in the benefits of higher education in the carceral setting.

In light of recent political events, it raises the question: What effect will the new administration have on funding for college within the prison system in the near future?

A Universal Recovery

By O. Rick Bridges, Feature Reporter

IN SEPTEMBER 2024, the *Mule Creek Post* interviewed Brendan Bagnell — director of admissions for SUM Bible College and Theological Seminary and acting director of the college’s seminary baccalaureate program at the Mule Creek State Prison campus. In part two of this three-part series (see page 3 of the March edition), we speak with the acting director about the new program at Mule Creek.

Mule Creek Post (MCP): In bringing your students into the light of ministry, it sounds like you want to modify and expand upon their past experiences or what we here would loosely refer to as their “street cred” — to make them credible messengers of the transformative power of the Gospel. So, to establish a bit of street cred for you, could you tell us a little about your personal and professional transformation and journey? What got you here?

Brendan Bagnell (BB): Well, it’s an interesting journey. I used to be a police officer for 10 years in Fort Worth, Texas. After leaving the police department, I ended up in ministry, on staff in a church. I came out here a couple of years ago to be part of a program called Evangelism Conference and Outreach. Due to a variety of circumstances, I became the SUM admissions director, which interested me with the men working on starting this program. That lead me to where we are now.

MCP: Many of the men here at Mule Creek are in different stages of recovery from substance abuse disorder, as with many of your seminarians. You mentioned that you were involved in Celebrate Recovery.

BB: Yeah, absolutely. Celebrate. I’m a product of Celebrate Recovery. I was bound up very much in pornography to the point where it was really destroying me. It was destroying my marriage and my life. I entered Celebrate Recovery not realizing what I was doing because of how I was introduced to it. A friend of mine asked me to go with him. I didn’t actually know what I was going to.

It was in that first meeting that I heard the testimony of how somebody’s life was transformed and that was just enough of a hook to get me to go again. That lead me to the process of actually going through Celebrate Recovery, where I, for the first time, discovered the power of freedom that I had in Jesus in a way I’d never experienced before. I did that for about two years. I became a leader. I did that for about three years and then became staff at the hosting church.

The healing process that I learned in Celebrate Recovery is something that I’m very passionate about and want to help other people experience, whether they’re in a recovery program or not. I know there are a lot of people who, just as I was, are still bound up — whether it’s addiction or other things. They haven’t really experienced that freedom that God can facilitate within them. That’s really my heart for everybody, that they would experience a transformation in their life.

MCP: I have a recovery sponsor who refers to 12-step recovery as “spiritual kindergarten.”

BB: To me, it’s a foundational process to discipleship. It really is. I know there is some stigma around them. A lot of people think, “Oh, I don’t really need that.” I think everybody needs those 12 steps. Again, they are foundational — to effect an authentic, healthy, and sustainable experience of spirituality.





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On Tour with Bob Hope, Phyllis Diller, and Playboy Bunnies

By Shane Sanchez, Mule Creek State Prison

WE LIVE IN a world where normal does not truly exist except as an idea or concept. For each of us, where and how we grew up plays a foundational role in our sense of normal, and only when we begin to experience the bigness and diversity of the world are we tempted to evaluate our roots. I thought the way I grew up was normal, but I think most would probably agree my history and journey was a bit unusual.

I was born in 1951, the youngest of three, and had everything a child could want. My dad was gone a lot, a sergeant in the U.S. Army's 82nd Airborne; my mother showered me with love and affection. However, my world was soon turned upside down due to my mother's mental illness. Being just a kid, I didn't understand there were outside forces tending to cause the end of my mom as I knew her. While my mother was going in and out of sanitariums, I was left with complete strangers with whom I experienced verbal, physical, and mental abuse. This went on for two years before my dad came home from the service.

About that time, I was bottoming out emotionally, and hanging around a negative crowd. My dad saw this and said, "Son, let's change directions." I respected my dad, so I became involved in music. I played bass guitar in a four-piece group and we played all around, getting exposure to the music business.



Bob Hope in Vietnam (LATimes.com)

In 1966, our manager got us more jobs including the Long Beach Naval Yard, where we played for officers and enlisted personnel. The money was great, and we were told this would be good for morale due to the war in Vietnam. An admiral liked us and offered a chance to join the USO Tour. We said, "Yes!"

We traveled to the San Francisco Airport where we were instructed what to do and not to do once the aircraft landed in Saigon, then we got on an Air Force C-141 cargo plane for band members only. Bob Hope was already over there with other entertainers with whom we would join on the tour. The flight was something like 17 hours with a layover, then on to Saigon.

Once there, it is something we will never forget. Saigon is a big city, with lots of people. Nice in some places, dirty in other places, too. The weather was always hot, raining off and on. Something we tried to get used to, but it was impossible.

We rotated on stage with two other bands in between the top acts. We met Bob Hope, Phyllis Diller, and five Playboy Bunnies. Back stage, Bob was real playful with everyone. It was an honor to be on stage and looking out over the hundreds of men and women. We were proud of our troops and hoped our music prompted memories of better times past and hope for those to come.

In 1969, we auditioned in Los Angeles on Channel 7's Dick Clark production, "Battle of the Bands," on a show called *Happening 69*. We appeared with Paul Revere and the Raiders, but we didn't win. Still, it opened doors to other music opportunities. Later on, a few of us auditioned with a company to perform on tour with stars like Tommy James and the Shondells and Eric Burden and the Animals, to play in between their performances. I was picked and, with my father's blessing, I signed a contract.

My father was proud of my involvement in this production. There was a lot of performance exposure and studio recording with the group. This was the most wonderful thing to experience at 19 to 20 years old, performing on stage for hundreds of people. Most of the musicians I played with were in their mid-20s and early 30s, and they respected my performance. They were kind and supportive. There was a lot of joking to keep our egos low, a great combination of voices and harmony.

Our group, Saratoga, began to move up and were considered a good band. With this came the privileges and special benefits: free drinks, parties, meeting so many people. Sometimes they'd ask for my autograph and pay all kinds of



(TogetherWeServed.com)

compliments. Many of the women invited us to party with them, some so beautiful I could not believe it when they gave me their phone numbers.

However, the nightlife had its negative side. I was the youngest, and I looked up to these great musicians. But the downside was three of them used cocaine and heroin. I chose to only drink beer and smoke a little pot because I would not compromise on hard drugs. In 1974, two of them died from heroin overdoses. When that happened, I could not go on. I left the band in 1975, went home, and started college. I love music and sometimes wish it could have worked out as a lifelong career. But the loss of my friends changed something inside me, caused me to seek a different, more spiritual path.

Now that I'm in prison, it's easy to think about what could have been. Yet, I did what I had to at the time. It has been many years since I've thought much about my youth. Longer still since I shared these memories of my short music career and the time I was in Vietnam on the USO Tour with Bob Hope.

Postscriptum

THIS MONTH, THE winners of the second annual Stillwater Awards were announced, recognizing outstanding journalism by incarcerated writers. Though the *Post* team did not win this year, we still want to acknowledge the winners from throughout the country for their work.

One thing that stood out about the individual winners was that they were all published in outside publications. In such cases, there is significant editing with professionals, and helpful research. Writers get a lot of help to make a story complete and award-winning.

If the contest judged incarcerated writers working with incarcerated editors on a publication run completely by incarcerated people, what might the winners' circle look like? By all means—congratulations go to the writers. But now we know what the *Post* has to do to step up its game.

Good luck to everyone in the next set of contests.

-JC, Editor-in-Chief

CINCO DE MAYO

Cinco de Mayo—the fifth of May—is celebrated throughout the Americas. Despite common belief, it is not a celebration of Mexican independence, but a major victory against French invaders attempting to expand the empire and install a new leader.



Fr. Miguel
Hidalgo y Costilla
(Wikipedia.org)

Sep. 16, 1810	Mexico declares independence from Spain, begins War of Independence	
Nov. 6, 1813	Supreme Congress established	
Feb. 24, 1821	Plan of Iguala under Agustín de Iturbide revokes viceregal rule of Mexico	
Aug. 24, 1821	Treaty of Córdoba by Juan O'Donojú recognizes Mexican independence	
Mar. 19, 1822	Iturbide crowns self Agustín I, emperor of Mexico	
Mar. 30, 1823	Gen. Antonio López de Santa Anna forces Iturbide into exile	
1823	Federal Republic declared	
1824	Constitution adopted	
Nov. 12, 1829	Monterey revolt	
Sep. 1831-1833	Alta California revolt	
1835	Siete Leyes reform the constitution	
1836	Constitution Laws reform the constitution	
Mar. 2, 1836	Texas declares independence	
May 8, 1846	Battle of Palo Alto begins U.S. War with Mexico	
Feb. 2, 1848	U.S. War with Mexico ends with Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo	
1850	Cholera epidemic	
Aug. 9, 1855	Revolution of Ayutla deposes Santa Anna, beginning La Reforma	
Nov. 23, 1855	Juárez Law (named for Benito Juárez) restricts power of Catholic courts	
Jun. 25, 1856	Lerdo Law (named for Miguel Lerdo de Tejada) allows state to confiscate Church land	
Apr. 11, 1857	Iglesias Law (named for José María Iglesias) restricts clergy	
Jun. 11, 1857	Juárez declared president by liberal party	
Sep. 16, 1857	Constitution adopted	
Jan. 11, 1858	Mexican Civil War, "Guerra de Reforma"	
Dec. 22, 1860	Pres. Ignacio Comonfort revokes portions of Lerdo and Iglesias laws	
Jan. 28, 1858	Pres. Miguel Miramón nationalizes Church property, makes schools & cemeteries public, subjects clergy to civil law, and makes marriage a civil contract	
Jul. 12-31, 1859	Miramón declares separation between Church and state, makes Church subordinate to secular government	
Aug. 11, 1859	Church subordinate to secular government	
1861-1867	Franco-Mexican War	
Jul. 17, 1861	Pres. Juárez announces <u>suspension of debt repayment</u> to foreign powers, to focus on domestic issues	
Oct. 22, 1861	Mexican government closes 25 churches in Mexico City, dissolves Society of St. Vincent de Paul	
Oct. 31, 1861	England, France, & Spain agree to seize and hold all Mexican ports and collect revenue until repaid	
Dec. 1861	England, France, & Spain set sail for Veracruz	
Jan. 1862	First Spanish troops (5,600) land at Veracruz	
Jan. 7, 1862	Remainder of Spanish troops (734) join under Gen. Prim	
Jan. 9, 1862	British troops (700) under Gen. Charles Wyke, and French troops (2,400) under Admiral Jurien de la Gravière land at Veracruz	
Jan. 21, 1862	Delegation (British Capt. Edward Tathan, French Capt. Thomasset, Spanish Brigadier Lorenzo Millans de Bosch) arrives in Mexico City	
Jan. 25, 1862	Mexico passes law to punish any seizure of land	
Feb. 19, 1862	Secretary of Foreign Relations Manuel Doblado allows troops to come ashore to avoid yellow fever on ships, providing no hostilities launched (Treaty of La Soledad)	
Mar. 7, 1862	French Gen. Charles-Ferdinand de Lorencez lands at Veracruz with 4,711 troops	
Apr. 9, 1862	During convention in Orizaba, England & Spain become aware of France's other ambitions and withdraw from London Pact	
Apr. 12, 1862	Spanish & English troops withdraw from Mexico	
Apr. 16, 1862	Gravière & Lorencez declare war against Mexico	
Apr. 25, 1862	Gravière writes to his government that they will take Mexico without needing to fire a single shot	
May 3, 1862	French troops encounter resistance at Puebla de los Angeles, by 2,000 local troops along with local civilians & Zacapoaxtla Indians under Gen. Ignacio Zaragoza	
May 4, 1862	Second attempt to take Puebla fails	

Fort Guadalupe
(Wikipedia.org)

2nd Infantry Division (1,500 troops)
 Brigada Berriozábal (1,082 troops)
 Brigada Lamadrid (1,000 troops)
 Brigada Díaz (1,020 troops)
 Brigada Álvarez (550 cavalry)

8 infantry battalions (≈500 troops ea.)
1 cavalry squadron (≈200 troops)
2^o Zuavo Regiment (2 battalions)
3^o Naval Regiment
99th Infantry Regiment
Marine Rifle Battalion
Hunters of Vincennes Battalion

England	68,535,044 pesos
Spain	9,460,986 pesos
France	2,430.987 pesos

May 5, 1862	Third attempt to take Puebla (Battle of Puebla) fails; France loses 500 troops, Mexico loses 100 troops
Sep. - Oct. 1862	20,000 troops land in Veracruz under Gen. Federico Forey and Aquiles Bazaine and Marshal Francisco and ally with 10,000 Mexican monarchist troops
Mar. 18, 1863	20,000 French troops begin two-month siege of Forts Guadalupe and Loreto at renamed Puebla de Zaragoza (defended by Gen. Jesús González Ortega)
May 8, 1863	Battle of San Lorenzo cuts off support from Gen. Comonfort to Puebla
May 18, 1863	Fortes Guadalupe and Loreto surrender to Forey
Jun. 10, 1863	Mexico City captured by Forey
Jul. 10, 1863	Puppet Mexican "Council of Notables" declare that Mexico chooses to be ruled by a Catholic prince, offering it to Archduke of Austria
Apr. 10, 1864	Napoleon III (Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte) installs nephew Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria as emperor of Mexico, ruling from Chapultepec Palace in Mexico City
May 26, 1865	U.S. Civil War ends
Oct. 3, 1865	Maximilian orders execution for all members of Mexican resistance
Nov. 8, 1865	Pres. Juárez declares he will remain president until order restored in Mexico
Jan. 1866	France announces withdrawal of troops after pressure from U.S. over Monroe Doctrine
Mar. 1867	Last French troops leave Mexico
Mar. 15, 1867	Querétaro captured by Mariano Escobedo
Apr. 2, 1867	Second Battle of Puebla under Gen. Juan Méndez and Juan Francisco Lucas
Jun. 19, 1867	Maximilian captured, tried, and executed near Querétaro
Jun. 21, 1867	Mexico City captured
Jul. 15, 1867	Juárez enters Mexico City
1867	Juárez reelected president, serves until his death July 18, 1872

