

To Our Readers

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

WELCOME TO THE January edition of the *Mule Creek Post*, and welcome to 2026. As California parole board grant rates drop to 25%, we are reminded that, to the degree we are able to keep ego out of our reactions to an adverse situation, we are guarded from them. Adversity must be met not only with calm indifference, but also with positive forgiveness and active love. In doing so, good will emerge from difficult situations and interactions. Dealing with difficult circumstances is never easy. Learning to choose our responses wisely pays dividends.

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Peer Support Specialists on Facility E. From Left: Standing—Jacob Robles, Poly Sanchez, Jerry King. Seated—Trevor Heard, Sean “Sharif” Neal, David Robles, Michael Owens. (G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)

Peer Support Specialist Program
Earns State Certification

By Sean “Sharif” Neal, Post Columnist

ON JULY 31, 2025, the Peer Support Specialist Program (PSSP) on Facility E at the Mule Creek State Prison received the news they had been waiting to hear for more than 30 days: They all passed the state certification examination by an average score of 95%.

The exam, administered by the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA), was the final step in the process of implementing the third pillar of the California Model, and it was not an easy exam to take.

“I’m glad I prepared myself, because it was a difficult exam to take,” said



Marshall Harper is the only Peer Support Specialist on the Minimum Support Facility at Mule Creek. (G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)

Jerry King, who serves as an alternate in the program. “My hope would be to use my certification to better the lives of those around me.” Trevor Heard had a similar reaction. “This exam was more difficult than I thought it would be, even with all the studying we did. I thought I failed. I’m so glad I studied. Now, I feel accomplished, marketable, and proud.”

Since the inception of the California Model as a new way to do incarceration, the governor’s plan was to create professionals inside the state’s prisons who would be ready to succeed upon release in a society where most unprepared parolees are destined to recidivate. That lack of preparedness was due in large part to the absence of realistic and reliable resources and support that ensured incarcerated citizens returned home with marketable skills to stay out once they got out.

“I was happy when I heard I was certified. I felt accomplished,” Mike Owens said. “I feel like now I get a chance to turn all the

(continued on page 2)



(from *Peer Support Specialist Program Earns Certification*, pg. 1)
turmoil I caused to good. It means being a big brother-mentor on a professional level. It means being responsible.”

Poly Sanchez had this to say about hearing the news: “I was grateful. For me, it means I’m gonna step onto the path of living a life of service. My family is proud, and now I’m not a financial burden on them.” Jacob Robles told a story of gratitude. “I felt validated. It means people see me, and that now I’m gonna be given a chance to serve others.”

Among the prisons that sat for the June exams were the Avenal State Prison, Calipatria State Prison, California Medical Facility, Valley State Prison, California Men’s Colony, Folsom State Prison, California State Prison–Sacramento, Substance Abuse Treatment Facility, Kern Valley State Prison, San Quentin Rehabilitation Center, and the Wasco State Prison. The Mule Creek State Prison and the Central California Women’s Facility were certified at the same time.

This is only the beginning. Gov. Newsom plans to have peer support specialists in every prison with the state paying the way to full certification.

For those interested in becoming peer support specialist, David Robles had this to say: “Continue to stay positive in your program. Set your sights on the path you want and base your goals on that. And you, yourself, can become a peer support specialist.”



Peer Support Specialists on Facility D, L-R: Christopher Reed, Jeff Garrett, Meliton Rualizo, Steven Leang, Adrian Torres, Shannon Jacobs, Ian Sitton, and Michael Heath.

Criminal Offender Reform Establishment (CORE)

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

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

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California Model



The Pillar of Normalization

By Marty Williams, Production Editor

J CLARK KELSO, federal receiver, law professor, and an architect of prison rehabilitation in California, describes succinctly what the “pillar of normalization” actually means:

Normalization aims to bring life in prison as close as possible to life outside of prison. The more life in prison resembles life in the community, the easier it will be for people to transition and adjust to life in the community upon release.



J. Clark Kelso
(ConstantContact.com)

Prison is not normal. It isn't typical, and it isn't the standard for any social theory or existing society. Yet, especially in California, prison has become both a culture and a lifestyle. What makes this so insidious is the fact that prison is also an industrial complex that provides jobs for tens of thousands of people, economic census numbers for towns and cities, and represents a medieval philosophy that divides people into categories of good and evil.

For many, both in blue and in green, prison is a cultural construct; making it “culture” plays directly into the machine that requires this culture to persist. By making something “culture,” it provides its own “normal,” as well as social rules that must be enforced, usually through peer violence, but also through weaponizing regulations and laws. Custody prefers “convicts,” because a convict immersed in the prison culture guarantees employment for thousands of people. Over the years, otherwise socially normal custody staff begin to identify with prison culture. They get tattoos, they use prison slang, they adopt some of the in-house rules

that dictate what is and isn't acceptable in prison culture. Kelso says that

It is a place built to punish people every day of their sentence, and the environment essentially encourages staff to treat inmates as less than human which inversely dehumanizes the staff.

There are those who believe that these cultural rules of prison provide discipline and structure for the incarcerated. Jane Anderson of the School of Population and Global Health at the University of Western Australia, a country steeped in an carceral history, writes about the failure of rules and structure cultures in all prisons.

Not only must they obey correctional officers, but they must also submit themselves to the ranking that prisoners give to each other — some to avoid, others to befriend, with each arrangement curtailing communication and sociability. Such rules encourage, rather than discourage, coercion, brutality and violence among prison staff and prisoners, with the latter becoming victims.

For those who have been incarcerated for a long period — for years and even decades — they learned early how to adapt and survive within the often-alien “normal” of prison. Compliance toward custody rules as well as prison rules dissolves all personal and social identifiers. Clothing, social roles, transactional relationships, and the rewards for criminal thinking are designed to habituate people into a dehumanized way of being that will not succeed anywhere but in prison. This culture extends into communities that normalize prison culture within families, neighborhoods, and racial identities. Prison becomes a rite of passage; prison rules become a form of morality and integrity. Role models are victim-heroes of incarceration, fathers and uncles scarred and illustrated with proofs of their victim-heroism.

The lack of true normality in prison is further expressed in the lack of technology available to prisoners common to even preschool children. In Sam Hidde Tripp's well-researched article for *Information Technology and Libraries*, he addresses the false presentation of California prisons as having open access to technology and communication:

Regardless of how much one can access in prison, it's absolutely not “open.” While one can understand the reasoning behind barring certain types of sites like social media, heavily scrutinized access to news, creative outlets, and scholarship is baffling. Having access to information and technology is a means for individuals to exercise self-agency, re-establish a sense of normalcy, and is linked to better outcomes once released.

The pillar of normalization is a critical foundation to any attempt to create citizens instead of convicts. The shared trauma between staff and prisoners is a bond, not a wedge. And those who deem themselves a member of a supposed camp are invited to ask themselves what kind of people they want in the world around their children, or even themselves. Custody staff are not surviving this culture as it exists; prisoners are breeding trauma, hopelessness, and more prisoners. Those who hate “the man” can't see how devoutly they serve him by giving him prisoners to cage, and those who hate the criminal can't see how devoutly they serve him by keeping him a criminal.

Normal doesn't mean becoming boring or lame. It doesn't mean becoming square, or whitewashed, or goody-goody. It may not even mean “normal.” It means honoring the future of our children, the communities we live in, and ourselves after the trauma of prison. It means honoring education, the opinions of others, and our bodies. It means no longer holding prison as an achievement, a lifestyle, a rite of passage, or normal.

We in prison know how to survive. We can survive just being normal.



No one's normal. (Blogs.icrc.org)

Sources: J. Clark Kelso, “Bringing Humanism to California's Prisons,” *California Legal History*, 2024. Jane Anderson, “Exploring Exemplarity in In-Prison Restorative Rehabilitation to Recovery Normativity,” *International Journal of Restorative Justice*, 2024. Sam Hidde Tripp, “Open for Who? Reality of Knowledge Access in the Prison Industrial Complex,” *Information Technology and Libraries*, 2025. Tim Stelloh, “California's Great Prison Experiment,” *Nation*, 2013.

Discipline Manufactures Misconduct

By **Brian Nam-Sonenstein**
and **Nell Haney**,
Prison Policy Initiative

PRISON DISCIPLINARY SYSTEMS are supposed to provide safety, security, and the orderly operation of correctional institutions. In some cases, they're even supposed to aid in rehabilitation. However, our analysis of policies in all state prison systems and testimony from dozens of incarcerated people show these unfair and unaccountable systems are counterproductive, traumatizing, and lengthen prison stays.

In our report, "Bad Behavior: How Prison Disciplinary Policies Manufacture Misconduct," we found the following: Every prison system has a lengthy disciplinary policy laying out the rules incarcerated people must follow, as well as the procedures and punishments they will face if they don't. If we think of prisons as miniature walled-off cities, then disciplinary systems can be understood as the quasi-legal system within them, governing the daily lives of incarcerated people. These policies are supposed to ensure safety, security, and order by deterring and punishing misconduct. In practice, however, prison discipline is a system of petty tyranny with devastating long-term consequences. Corrections officers enforce rules arbitrarily, often doling out punishments for mundane behaviors and survival strategies while interrupting access to programming and services that can make a meaningful difference in people's lives. Harsh sanctions are handed down following unfair and unac-

countable proceedings wherein it is nearly impossible to defend oneself from the charges.

The end result is a disciplinary system that plays a key role in keeping people in prison longer. Misconduct records discredit incarcerated people and clemency proceedings, while traumatizing disciplinary punishments, like solitary confinement, increase the chances they'll be arrested again someday in the future. These outcomes are never seen as failures of disciplinary systems; instead, they are interpreted as personal failures to live up to the system's expectations.

In the report, we examined the landscape of disciplinary rules and punishments in all 50 state prison systems to get a big picture view of how they are designed and how they function as a central aspect of prison life — one that has been overlooked for too long.

Our analysis shows that most states organize rules into at least three severity classification levels (low, medium, and high). Nine out of 10 people (90%) in prison who reported being written up for a violation in the past year, in a 2016 "Survey of Prison Inmates," also reported receiving some form of disciplinary action. These harsh punitive sanctions, which include solitary confinement, loss of good time credits, fines and fees, forced labor, and lost access to programming and services, are destabilizing and traumatizing. Fundamentally, even in the fairest circumstances, they respond to undesirable conduct by inflicting physical, mental, and financial pain on incarcerated people and their support networks. These punishments are costly in the long run as well: Misconduct records make it harder for people to be released via clemency, parole, or early release through the accrual of time credits.

Recommendations

- Fewer misconduct rules — especially redundant and vague rules
- More constructive responses and an end to inhumane punishments, including ending solitary confinement.
- Limit the influence of misconduct records on release decisions
- Institute basic fairness, impartiality, and accountability
- Improve transparency through regular reporting
- Subject fewer people to the harms of the disciplinary process by incarcerating fewer people

This extensive, informative eight-page report can be obtained by writing:

Prison Policy Initiative
P.O. Box 127
Northampton, MA 01060

Or through the website at: www.prisonpolicy.org.

The title of the report is "Bad Behavior: How Prison Disciplinary Policies Manufacture Misconduct." Including a self-addressed stamped envelope with your request may expedite a response.

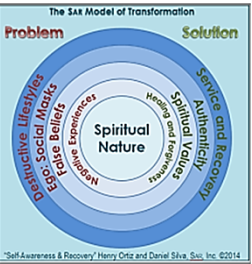




Self-Awareness & Recovery

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

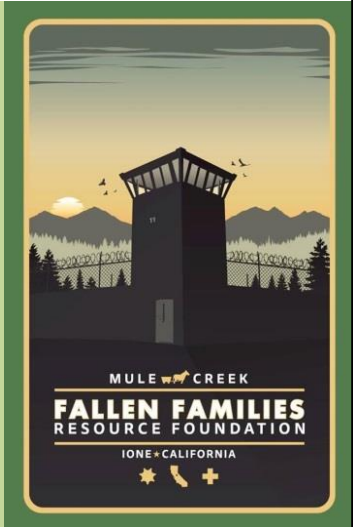
Fill out an Inmate Activity Group Program Request (CDCR 2016) if you'd like to be on the waiting list for this group.



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

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Peer Support Brotherhood

By Jasper Stallings, Valley State Prison

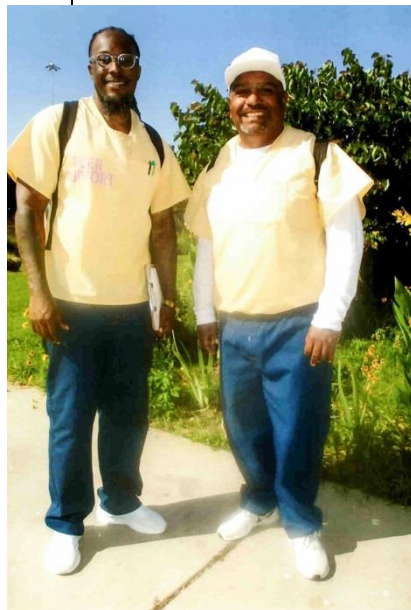
THE CALIFORNIA MODEL has had some mixed reviews lately, but few from a peer support perspective. In the Peer Support Specialist Program (PSSP), we are a brotherhood, passing on knowledge to survive life's challenges.

Within the California Model, peer support is pivotal to changing the culture inside institutions. By respecting an individual as a person, by encouraging support within a community, growth can occur. It's important when dealing with people in order to facilitate groups, and it sets the stage for positive change by suggesting it is OK to have a positive interaction with staff. Some are concerned such interaction may lead to security issues or overfamiliarity. Peer Support Specialists promote the idea that these interactions are simply organic in nature; that living civil is not illegal.

The Valley State Prison recently facilitated a PSSP workshop with the dental team. Studies show poor oral health can lead to poor overall health. I, along with fellow Peer Support Specialist Tomas Rodriguez, created the RAC Attack group and coordinated events to address it. We developed interactive workshops by inviting dental professionals to come to the housing units and present good practices for maintaining healthy teeth.

Prison management has been instrumental to the success of the PSSP. Director Annette Lambert and HPM-III Alverta Bayliss have provided quality leadership and contributions bridging the divide of carceral society. Additionally, those employed within PSSPs are being certified through CalMHSA, and are now more capable of earning better wages. This only builds feelings of normalization in a place full of trauma and drama.

The California Model can work if we all work together for the greatest good of society, contributing to a brotherhood committed to passing it on.



Peer Support Specialists Jasper Stallings and Tomas Rodriguez. (Courtesy of Jasper Stallings)

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."

Becoming a Free Agent

By Mohammed Ali, Mule Creek State Prison

Mohammed Ali entered the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation at the Kern Valley State Prison in June 2021, following four years in the Alameda County Jail. With a 20-years-to-life sentence, he doesn't expect to have a chance at parole until 2029. In July 2025, after serving nearly four years on the mainline — about two years each at North Kern and the California State Prison—Solano — Ali was transferred to Facility E, a Level II facility at the Mule Creek State Prison. Below, he shares his journey.

MY FIRST TWO years in the system were at Delano where it was constantly stressful with lots of lockdowns and rampant violence. They had a dog program, college, and plenty of vocations, but program interruptions were pretty regular. When my points dropped me to Level II, I was sent to Solano. The prison offered the Occupational Mentor Certification Program (OMCP), which I soon became involved in. The prison also had a tremendous amount of self-help programs available. There were in-the-building rehabilitative programs, and their college classes were running well. It was still mainline mentality, however, so there was constant stress, including violence and drugs — especially fentanyl and spice — and gangs ran the yard.

I'm from Fiji and ran with the Pacific Islanders. We had a large group of about 80 to 100. In spite of all the violence and trouble on the yard, I was able to stay clear of trouble and didn't pick up any rules violations.

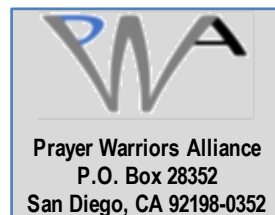
When I finished the OMCP, in order to participate in the internship program that's offered, I found out I would have to transfer to Mule Creek, a non-designated facility (NDF). On the mainline, you hear that NDFs are more violent, that there's no structure, that there are gangs and a lot of trouble — fights for no reason — and that it's worse than the mainline. The determining factor for me in transferring was the OMCP. It's an amazing career opportunity; there are jobs available earning \$20 an hour once you're certified. It's a 2,080-hour course; I've got 300 hours in and work about 38 hours a week.

Since arriving at Mule Creek, I haven't witnessed any violence. When the yard goes down, it's always medical issues. The people I've met are kind and authentic. When I arrived, I was immediately assigned and asked what programs I was interested in. Everyone is education-oriented, it seems. There's a bachelor's and a master's program. This fall I begin the bachelor's program.

People are so peaceful and respectful, and they're willing to talk things out and use conflict resolution skills. The gym and the yard are open most days and there is night yard. There's no stress or violence here; it's better than I expected.

Here's my advice to those still on the mainline: I loved Solano, and everything here is similar, but the best part is there's no threat of violence, no judging or dictating what anyone can or can't do. I'd recommend Mule Creek to anyone who's interested in programming and furthering their education or interested in getting out.

It feels great to be a free agent.



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Oakland, CA 94609

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News and Happenings

Prop. 50 Passes in CA

By Dale Hurd, Post Reporter

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—On Nov. 4, 2025, California voters passed Proposition 50 by a wide margin. Prop. 50, the “Election Rigging Response Act,” tackled mid-decade redistricting in Texas in 2025 intended to give the incumbent Republican Party five more seats in the U.S. House of Representatives. Gov. Gavin Newsom said California would redraw its congressional maps to neutralize any Republican gains from Texas redistricting. Prop. 50 asserts: “President Donald Trump has called on Republican-led states to undertake an unprecedented mid-decade redistricting of congressional seats to rig the 2026 United States midterm elections before voting begins. ... President Trump’s election-rigging scheme is an emergency for our democracy. ... The 2026 United States midterm elections are voters’ only chance to provide an essential check and balance against President Trump’s dangerous agenda. ... California has a duty to defend democracy.”

Prop. 50 requires California to temporarily use the congressional districts reflected in California Assembly Bill 604 for every congressional election until boundary lines are redrawn by the commission in 2031.

Texas Republicans redrew their U.S. House districts in advance of the midterm elections in 2026 even though Texas was already one of the most gerrymandered states. With districts typically remapped following the census every 10 years, Trump praised Texas for its new voting maps calling it a “huge victory.” The Trump administration, based on dubious legal arguments from the Department of Justice, insisted state Republicans adopt this even more partisan approach that could give the GOP as many as five additional seats and prevent Democrats from retaking the U.S. House of Representatives in the 2026 midterm elections.

Facility E Hosts Second Annual Suicide Prevention Walkathon

By O. Rick Bridges, Interim Lead Reporter and Michael Griff, Mule Creek State Prison

IONE, Calif.—On Saturday, Sep. 13, 2025, the Mule Creek State Prison peer support specialist team invited the population to walk in the warm light of the lone sunshine at the annual Suicide Prevention Walkathon. The turnout was significant, and the mood buoyant; the motivations were personal, and the music was upbeat. The participants walked in the light to honor, to remember, to support, and, importantly, to prevent.

Peer Support Specialist Mike Owens explained. “To participate in a suicide prevention and awareness walk is important because too many of us are conditioned to suffer in silence,” he wrote. “We as the human species are not designed to make it through life all on our own. Seeking help when we need it is a sign of strength, not weakness. It is the ultimate act of self-love.”

LaQuann Hamilton dedicated his walk to a beloved family member. “This past week, suicide prevention has been at the front of my mind,” he said in a statement. “My wife has been struggling, and is still struggling. At times I feel helpless, hopeless, distant, and overwhelmed. This is something that I can do to support her in reflection and prayer.”

Peer Support Specialist Poly Sanchez, in his second year as a sponsor of the event, was expansive in his thoughts. “I’m glad we are continuing this event,” wrote Sanchez. “Maintaining mental health is very important, especially in prison. But also, mental health is crucial for a healthy and productive life inside and outside prison. Mental health affects all areas of our lives from social to spiritual. We must help and support each other’s mental health.”

Ivan Gonzalez walked to remember. “I participated in the suicide walkathon because I have had a loved one commit suicide,” wrote Gonzalez. “The experience of my loved one’s passing allowed me to have compassion and understanding about these unfortunate mishaps. Participating in this event to spread awareness can be a humbling way of giving back, and a moment to reflect in remembrance of when they smiled from the good times.”

All human beings have experienced personal episodes of toxic shame, grief, fear, anxiety, and depression. At times, they struggle with these episodes, which can isolate them from the restorative truths of hopefulness. Left unresolved, people can experience overwhelming episodes of foreboding, doom, and darkness. Sometimes, they feel there is no light at the end of the metaphorical tunnel. And then, there are the darker times when — in the absence of light — they have to feel their way through that tunnel, hopeful that they can rely upon the light stored within just to move forward a few more feet. Of course, the value of the experience lies in both confronting and overcoming the darkness.



The Peer Support Specialist Program sponsored the Suicide Prevention Walkathon in September. From Left—program coordinator S. Ortez, Jerry King, Sean “Sharif” Neal, Poly Sanchez, David Robles, Michael Owens, Jacob Robles, and Jackie from the office of the Community Resource Manager. (O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)



LaQuann Hamilton walked to support a loved one. (O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)



Joseph Trefry walked, despite personal struggles. (O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)

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



MULE CREEK POST

News and Happenings

The Prisoner Philosopher

New CA Laws to Take Effect in 2026

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—In late 2025, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed several bills into law.

AB 321: Makes a crime a misdemeanor if, before trial, the court declares it so.

AB 572: Law enforcement and attorneys must show official ID when interviewing witnesses of crime.

AB 799: The survivors of an incarcerated firefighter who died while on active deployment or in training camp receives death benefits.

AB 812: Incarcerated firefighters are to be referred for resentencing by the courts.

AB 1036: Prosecutor and defense attorney must provide defendants reasonable access to trial materials.

AB 1071: Clarifies procedures, attorney standards, access to information, and remedies for Racial Justice Act.

AB 1094: Those convicted of torturing a child must serve a minimum of 10 years.

AB 1269: County jails must notify specified people within 24 hours of medical emergency or death of an incarcerated person.

SB 75: Requires CDCR establish a pre-apprenticeship program to train in building trades at designated facilities.

SB 245: When incarcerated firefighter crew members complete training, their court pleading is to be dismissed and they are released from the penalties.

SB 551: Declares the “primary objective of adult incarceration is to promote personal growth for all residents in the department’s care.”

SB 553: CDCR must create standardized clearance forms for legal professionals and short-term clearances for the governor and cabinet, legislators, their staff, and current state judges.

SB 634: Makes it illegal for cities to make/enforce laws prohibiting support services for the homeless.

Sources: Legislative Bill Room, Ella Baker Center

Facility D Celebrates Disability History Week in November

By Al Rice, Copy Editor
and Frank Lopez, Mule Creek State Prison

IONE, Calif.—On Nov. 5, 2025, as the rain poured and the wind blew, several dozen incarcerated residents of the Mule Creek State Prison gathered in the Facility D gym to celebrate Disability History Week.

Disability History Week is recognized during the second week of October, and brings awareness to the disabled population and the disability civil rights movement. The observance recognizes the pioneering efforts and achievements of California advocates like Ed Roberts and the Rolling Quads, the Federation for the Blind, the California Association of the Deaf, the Prison Law Office, and others.

Roberts was a disabled U.C. Berkeley student who became an advocate and activist for the civil rights of the disabled. California is the bedrock of disability civil rights in the United States, and civil protest actions are an integral part of the disability rights movement.

Attendees and ADA participants competed for prizes in various games, such as bowling, basketball skills, cornhole, softball roll, and ADA bingo. The ADA bingo game was unique; instead of numbers, bingo cards contained ADA-related terms, organizations, and equipment. In fact, several items of ADA equipment, devices, and aids were on display during the event.



CDCR Updates List of Authorized Religious Property Vendors

SACRAMENTO, Calif.—In January, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation announced its annual update to the list of approved vendors of religious property.

Islamic Bookstore 3918 Vero Road, Ste. 1 Baltimore, MD 21227-1563 IslamicBookstore.com/cdcr.html	Muslim religious headwear, religious beads, prayer rugs
Jewish Supply (Aleph Institute) 260 95th Street, Ste. 212 Surfside, FL 33154 JewishSupply.com	Jewish religious clothing and headwear
Jewelry and Gift Depot 1100 Kings Rd., Box 40002 Jacksonville, FL 32203 JewelryAndGiftDepot.com	multi-faith religious medallions and chains
Prime Products USA (Modern Products, USA) P.O. Box 6588 Wilmington, DE 19804 PrimeProductsReligiousItems.com	multi-faith religious oils, religious headwear, religious medallions and chains, prayer beads, prayer rugs, miswak, spiritual herbs/resin
Righteous Kingdom 8726 S. Sepulveda Blvd., Ste. D-335 Los Angeles, CA 90045 RighteousKingdomBooksAndThings.com	Muslim religious headwear, religious beads, prayer rugs, religious oils
Union Supply Direct Dept. 100 – P.O. Box 901 Rancho Dominguez, CA 90224-9018 CalifornianmatePackage.com	multi-faith religious oils, religious headwear, prayer rugs, religious medallions and chains
Universal World Jewelry 17119 Red Oak Drive, No. 90942 Houston, TX 77290 UniversalWorldJewelry.com	multi-faith religious oils, religious headwear, religious medallions and chains, prayer beads, prayer rugs, miswak, spiritual herbs/resin
Walkenhorst's 445 Ingenuity Avenue Sparks, NV 89441 walkenhorsts.com	multi-faith religious oils

The Wordsmith

By Rob Sharp, Post Reporter

WHY NOT HAVE fun with your words when you speak or write? Not just in the forms of jokes and amusing stories, but in your everyday speech. Do you ever ask someone an amusing question just to get a laugh? Laughter can be a great ice-breaker, and it opens up a whole world of conversation.

For example, try this one: “If a dongle dangles, does it become a dingle?”

You are probably wondering *What does that even mean?* Well, here are the meanings of these three funny-sounding words: A *dongle* is a noun and means “a small device that plugs into a computer and serves as an adapter or as a security measure to enable the use of certain software.” The word was first used in 1981. There aren’t any current synonyms for *dongle*.

Dangle is an intransitive verb of Scandinavian origin that was first used in English in 1565. It means “to hang loosely so as to be able to swing freely.” Likewise with *dongle*, there aren’t any synonyms for *dangle* at present.

Dingle is a noun. It was first used in the 1400s and comes from the Middle English originally meaning “deep hollow.” Its current meaning is “a narrow wooded dale or valley between hills; a small secluded valley.” *Dell* (a wooded dale) is the only synonym listed for *dingle*.

So, back to the original question: The answer would be *no*, even though there is such a thing as a hanging valley, it wouldn’t swing freely, and therefore: “If a dongle were to dangle, it would not become a dingle. Not even if it were a dingle-dangle.”

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



The Uncaged Writer

Easy Essaying

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter



COMPETENT ESSAY WRITING applies as fundamentally to journalism as it does to academics, and the most interesting and effective essays pull A’s in the classroom as well as enabling acceptance letters from publishing outlets. To be concise — good essay writing pays dividends.

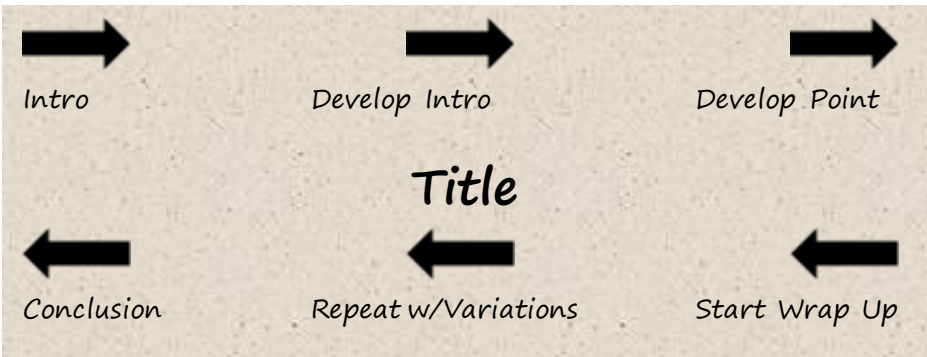
A Sep. 29, 2025, *New Yorker* article by Zadie Smith delves into the intricate particulars of essaying, with Smith writing on what the essay is to her — “a stumbling intent to re-create, in language, a common space, one that is open to all.” She’s talking about being able to write in a manner which allows everyone, or at least most, the opportunity to become a part of the community dialogue, to feel involved, not marginalizing or instituting requirements for admission to the party. Smith recognizes that our commonalities may be tiny and hard to nail down, most especially in these disparaging times, but are still there, and language is the vehicle that drives us to the meeting place.

One of the most useful tips on essay writing may be a very simple lesson provided by Smith’s English teacher as she sat down to take her 1990’s equivalent to the SATs. Realizing her entire future teetered on her ability to compose coherent paragraphs in thousand-word essays on topics as esoteric as “the rise of the Chartists,” within a three-hour time limit, her panic was evident and the kindly instructor offered some sage advice.

He took her aside and drew a rectangle on a scrap paper, placed a shooting arrow on each corner of the rectangle, plus one halfway along the horizontal top line, and one in the same position below. He told her, “Six points, going clockwise, the first arrow is the introduction, the last arrow is the conclusion. The second arrow you are basically developing whatever you said in the intro. The third arrow you either develop the point further or play devil’s advocate. The fourth arrow, you start seeing the finish line so start wrapping it up, summarizing. The fifth arrow, you’re almost done, so repeat the earlier stuff, but with variations. The sixth arrow, you’re in the home stretch, that’s the conclusion. Remember to put the title of the essay in the box to keep you focused.”

Six little arrows centered on one topic. Arrows 1 and 6, the intro and the conclusion, are already settled. You know what you want to write about and you know how you want to end it, so write the opening and ending lines first, that only leaves four points to fill in. What’s difficult about that?

Think impassioned and expansive while writing as if you are talking and presenting a controlled, impersonal, reasoned, and honest narrative. Don’t rely on your first draft. Your first thoughts, while your most earnest, will become more elegant with each draft that you compose. And remember, don’t get boxed into any version ... not unless the box is rectangular.



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





Addressing Mail Issues

By F. Orlando Wells, Feature Reporter

NAVIGATING THE MAIL system of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation is often a source of great frustration for many incarcerated people. Here are some helpful tips so that you can promptly send and receive mail.

Question: How many stamps does it take to mail letters or legal correspondence?

Answer: Generally, it takes one stamp per every seven pages of documents (see the June 2024 Backpage). Once you get to excessive amounts, such as for legal document submissions, you will need to send Receiving & Release (R&R) a CDCR Form 22 Inmate/Parolee Request for Interview, Item or Service requesting a mail-out. R&R should issue you a ducat. Be prepared to bring the amount of stamps you need or sign a CDC Form 193 Trust Account Withdrawal Order to cover mailing costs. You cannot do a mail-out if you do not have the funds in your inmate account.

Q: How can I find out why I didn't receive mail that I know was sent?

A: File a CDCR Form 119 Mail Record with a Form 193 to the mailroom. Specify the approximate date that the mail might have arrived at your institution. This applies to general and legal mail. The mailroom will send you a detailed copy of the information you requested through institutional mail.

Q: What do I do if I have issues with getting my mail?

A: File a CDCR Form 602-1/1824 Grievance/Reasonable Accommodation Request and send it to the mailroom sergeant. Refer to the California Code of Regulations, Title 15 to help you find all the necessary policies regarding your mail issue. Having an understanding of your rights and the procedures will help you navigate the system and correct any issues that you are experiencing.

Source: California Code of Regulations, Title 15, §3130-3137

GOOD WRITING BEGINS with the basics. Here in my grammar guide are more things a writer should know. Last month, we began a series on the parts of speech, beginning with **verbs**.

Verbs Pt. 2

As I explained last month, verbs are the words in a sentence that express the action, among other things. We looked at the simple tenses of verbs: past, present, and future, such as "I *dropped* the ball," "I *drop* the ball," and "I *will drop* the ball." For a moment, let's look at the past tense. It describes an action that was completed the moment the ball hit the ground. Very useful. But what if we wanted to describe a completed action from the point of view of a different moment in time? For that, we use the *perfect tenses*. No, I don't know why they call them that. The perfect tenses are formed by using the conjugation of the verb "to have" with what is called the past participle, another strange term. The past participle is often the same as the plain old past tense, but sometimes not. Let's not worry about that right now. So, the perfect tenses for *drop* are:

Past Perfect: I *had dropped* the ball yesterday.

Present Perfect: I *have dropped* the ball today.

Future Perfect: I *will have dropped* the ball next Tuesday.

You can see that each of these views the dropping of the ball at a certain time (past, present, or future), but from the perspective of when the statement is made (now). The perfect tenses give us a little more information than the simple tenses did.

Other important aspects of verbs are person, number, voice, and mood. In the above examples, I've used the first person, singular, active voice, and indicative mood. Maybe later, I can talk about how person, number, voice, or mood change verbs, but first we need to look at a couple more tenses. For example, what if we want to describe an action that was ongoing at a particular time? In that situation, we use the progressive tenses, which we will talk about next month.

Bodacious Beards Raise Cancer Awareness at Mule Creek

By Gerald McKoy, Feature Reporter

AS THE SEASON starts to turn cold, a number of Mule Creek's residents have followed the missive of No-Shave November to raise awareness of cancer once again. Even without a sponsor, promise of recognition, or outside aid, incarcerated residents of Facility E dedicated themselves to growing out their beards and hair for the month.

Resident participant Michael Frausto shared that his grandmother lost her fight against cancer, and his father is currently fighting colon and liver cancers. "No-Shave November is my way of showing I'm thinking of them," he says.

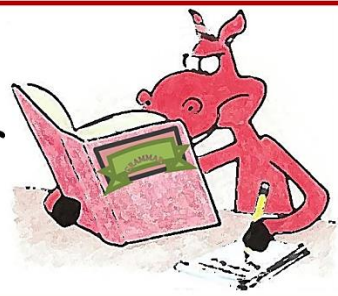
Another resident, Elohim Martinez, also had family members pass from cancer, and remaining members fighting it, but believes the common issue can unite many people. "They go through so much dealing with cancer, and there's only so much we can do while incarcerated, but raising awareness? I'm with it," he says. "If [not shaving] is what we can do, what I can do, then that's what I'll do to show support and awareness on my part."

Some did so not just for the cause of raising awareness within the walls, but for personal reasons as well. One resident, Dominique Butler, shaved off the hair on his head in preparation for No-Shave November; both in solidarity with those fighting cancer, and in honor of a family member who had passed away days before.

Another resident, Matthew Lawrie, noted he did it for the holidays, in honor of the movie, *The 10 Commandments*. He says he did it "to look like Charlton Heston [who plays Moses] when he comes down from Mt. Sinai."

See pictures of participants on the Community Corkboard (pg. 12).

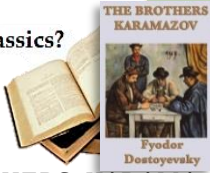
Big Red's Grammar Guide



EDUCATION

Why Read the Classics?

By Rob Sharp,
Post Reporter



THE BROTHERS KARAMAZOV by Fyodor Dostoevsky is a premier Russian novel that has stood the test of time. This is a big novel, as Russian works tend to be, and it has comedic moments as well as sad ones.

Basically, what you have is a horribly dysfunctional family. The father is a drunkard and notorious carouser who is a local source of gossip and amusement. It turns into a murder mystery and a courtroom drama along the way, and there are some fun plot twists. It is a good read and challenges one's vocabulary, so keep a dictionary at hand. It will give you many hours of reading enjoyment and plenty of new words to toy with along the way.

Here are a couple memorable quotes:

In most cases, people, even wicked people, are far more naive and simple hearted than one generally assumes. And so are we.

What then is an Elder? An Elder is one who takes your soul, your will into his soul and into his will. Having chosen an Elder, you renounce your will and give it to him under total obedience and with total self-renunciation. A man who dooms himself to this trial ... in the hope that after the long trial he will achieve self-conquest, self-mastery that he will finally ... attain to perfect freedom — that is, freedom from himself — and avoid the lot of those who live their whole lives without finding themselves within themselves.

Give it a try, get into the style, and you may find you really do like Russian literature.



Basic Self-Revising Features on College Laptops and Computers

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

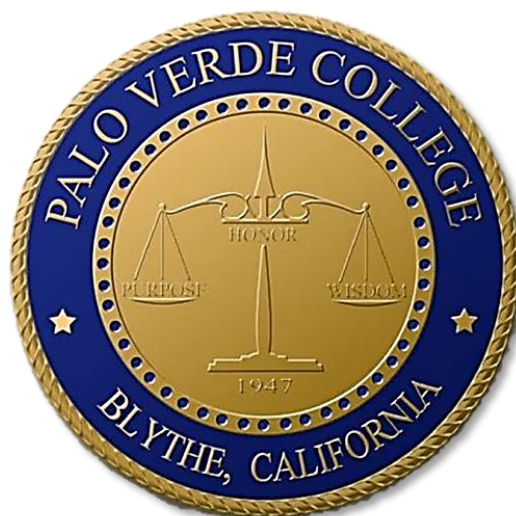
ANXIOUS TO GO home, many incarcerated people find themselves enrolling in higher education classes, but are forced to face their insecurities with spelling, grammar, and punctuation knowledge; this can be intimidating. Thankfully, college-issued laptops offer the benefits of Microsoft Word, word processing software that helps with writing basics many of us have forgotten. Writing is a lot like dancing: If you are self-conscious of your skills and do not perform well, others can be extremely critical. Even penning a simple letter to a friend is challenging to some incarcerated people; however, your laptop is user friendly.

Microsoft Word instantly alerts the user to errors, offering solutions with a simple click of the mouse. Many students do not realize it, but some common misspellings are automatically corrected as soon as you hit the space bar. For example, intentionally misspell *collaboration* as “collaberation” on your laptop and the word is underlined in red on your screen. As soon as you hit the space bar after typing the word, the autocorrect function of Word kicks in and enters the correct spelling. However, other errors require a few extra steps. Enter “irregardless” (which is not really a word), then place your cursor anywhere on the word and right click once. A drop-down box appears and offers you the correct word. Left click once on the new word offered and it replaces your error.

Word also contains an automatic grammar checker. As you type, if the grammar watchdog detects poor sentence construction or grammatical and punctuation issues, a wavy green line is inserted below the sentence. Place your cursor anywhere on the wavy green line and right click once. A suggested correction appears at the top of the box, and a left click on the option replaces your error. Sometimes two or three choices present. Occasionally, the offering does not agree with how you want the structure presented. In this instance, click “Ignore Once” and move on.

Another frequent occurrence is wavy-green underlining designating the sentence as a “Fragment (consider revising).” You can ignore any offered suggestions. Occasionally, your questioned sentence construction contains errors and two alternate sentences will be displayed for your selection. Make your choice and replace if you agree the offering is better. Sometimes it will not be. By the way, a rare squiggly blue line appearing generally indicates a needed punctuation mark such as a hyphen, as in “self regulating.” Right-clicking your mouse once produces a recommendation to insert the hyphen.

Incarcerated students have a laptop instructor constantly looking over their shoulders and guiding them through the writing experience, even at 5 a.m. Let's dance.



(www.csudh.edu)



Where Has Joint Venture Gone?

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

IN 1990, THE Prison Inmate Labor Initiative of 1990 (Proposition 139) was passed into law, creating the Joint Venture Program (JVP) whereby emerging California industries provided minimum-wage jobs in state prisons. Today, only a handful of institutions maintain Joint Venture programs.

There are several good reasons to revive the sleeping benefits of the JVP throughout the state:

- Reimburse the state of California or counties for a portion of the costs associated with their incarceration.
- Provide restitution and compensation to the victims of crime.
- Encourage and maintain safety in prison and jail operations.
- Support workers' families to the extent possible.
- Learn skills which may be used upon their return to free society.
- Assist in their own rehabilitation in order to become responsible law-abiding citizens upon their release from a state prison or a local jail.

At a time when many companies are leaving California due to heightened tax burdens, it would be wise to incentivize companies to stay and increase the number of active taxpayers by reviving the JVP in California prisons. This would be in line with rehabilitative intentions of the California Model.

Source: Department Operations Manual, Chapter 5, Article 40, §§53140.1 – 53140.31.



Prison Workplace Leadership (Part 1)

Mixed Messages and Limited Opportunities

By John L. Orr, Feature Reporter

BEYOND THE WALLS of prison, business and industrial workplaces operate primarily with supervisors who earn merited leadership. A superior must delegate responsibilities to ensure productivity is constant, quality control guaranteed, and customer/client relations maintained. Prison jobs require the same efficiency for smooth operation, but incarcerated people (IP) cannot supervise other IP, leaving these responsibilities to staff. Title 15 of the California Code of Regulations §3022 states:

No inmate or group of inmates will be given or be permitted to assume control over other inmates. This does not preclude the use of inmates as aides or lead persons on work and training assignments when the activity is directed and supervised by responsible employees.

An appointed lead person can only suggest another perform a task without suffering a common trait: resentment of authority. There are no IP bosses in prison. Thus, getting documented leadership experience in the workplace for parole board presentation is problematic.

Contradictory to the decrees in Title 15, newly imprisoned IPs in Level III and Level IV institutions are indoctrinated by their peers on what to do immediately upon arrival. Veterans on these yards, so-called shot-callers, dictate placement of IPs into already established racial, cultural, or even state geographical origin factions. This well-entrenched hierarchy determines where the IP can go, with whom they can associate, and even with whom to share meals. The shot-callers are, in essence, prison yard supervisors. IPs are left dangling between two masters: yard politics and state law.

With limited or no work experience prior to prison, many IPs have little opportunity to gain skills in management and supervision by learning these needed attributes. At the Board of Parole Hearings, workplace achievements are closely examined, particularly via work supervisor reports. Work ethics are sure predictors of post-release expectations. Supervisory leadership skills can be absorbed from actual workplace experience, but no formal training in these strategies is documented and rehabilitation groups provide only cursory instruction.

In Level II prisons, a less-restrictive supervisory attitude has evolved in the workplace that imitates real-world practices; however, the “inside” tradition persists. While researching this article, Peer Support Specialist Program (PSSP) team members were approached to pass on a document to their staff sponsor. Mike Owens, 52, was asked to accomplish the task. He turned to Poly Sanchez, 30, a nearby co-worker, and said, “You’ll wanna talk to the boss about that.” Sanchez smiled and put a hand out, fingers splayed, and responded, “I’m not the boss. I’m just a liaison.” Even with these friendly team members, prison custom prevailed. Based on Sanchez’s 11 years of lived incarceration experience, he added, “There are no bosses in prison.”

This encounter was an example of the acknowledged and evolving model of the “servant leadership” workplace relationship and validates its relevance and application in prison. Mutual respect and trust of each other’s abilities to effectively perform without direct staff supervision eliminates the need for a ranked function in these groups. Common in the real-world workplace, servant leadership adapts readily in some Level II prison job settings having no daily staff presence — the *Mule Creek Post* newsroom, the PSSP, and other workplaces, too. However, servant leadership skills must be documented specifically, in the “comments” section of your Work Supervisor’s Report, for presentation to the parole board panel.

Prison rehabilitative groups like Job Skills, Life Skills, and Transitions offer little workplace supervisory preparation. This potential conflict for a parole candidate is simply not addressed; release into a supervisor/subordinate real-world atmosphere can be detrimental to a parolee’s workplace success. Next month, in part two of “Prison Workplace Leadership,” we’ll offer some solutions.

The author held many supervisory positions in the military, public service, and the fast food/restaurant industry. Employed in seven different prison jobs during 33 years of incarceration, he never considered himself “the boss.”

Sources: J.W. Michael, et. al, *Servant Leadership and Cooperation: A Moderating Role of Leader Group Prototypicality*, 2025.

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



Community Corkboard

LGBTQ Tea Time

By Frank Lopez,
Mule Creek State Prison

ON OCTOBER 16, 2025, Facility D members of the LGBTQ Tea Time Together group had a Halloween party. Participants dressed in costumes, played Queer Halloween Bingo, shared scary stories, and even did some trick-or-treating. Bingo winners walked away with sodas, while sponsors of the group, Julie Hubbs and Shawn Hawk, passed out treats for everyone.



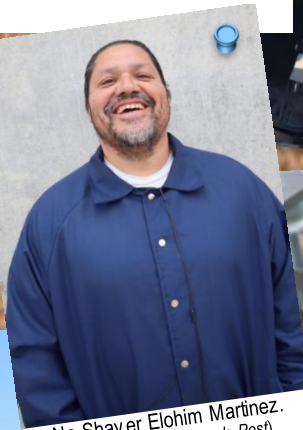
No-Shave November participants (before). From Left: Back Row—Matthew Lawrie, Kevin Anderson, Eric Ettleman, Brian Matheis, Elohim Martinez, Melvin Lee, Carlos Gomez, Dominique Butler. Front Row—Jonathan Stephens, Michael Frausto, B. "Amin" Smith, Randy Rizzo. Kneeling: Robert Cortez.
(G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)



CRM J. Ross (O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)



No-Shaver Orlando Anderson.
(G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)



No-Shaver Elohim Martinez.
(G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)



(O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)



Facility E Native Circle (G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)

Larry Salkeld, 80, paroled in January 2026 after serving 46 years of a life sentence. To those he left behind, he says: "I did it my way ... Hold on to whatever gives you hope, and Godspeed."





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

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

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

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

Division of
Rehabilitative Programs

DRP programs available
 on institutional channels
 21.22. 23. and 24

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any.

— Alice Walker

The Work Pays Off In Dividends

By Maya Emig, Post Columnist

EVERY TIME I sit down to write these articles, I picture you sitting quietly in your cell or dayroom, reading every line not just to pass the time, but to understand yourself more deeply. That commitment to study your thinking, to trace the roots of your pain and choices, and to take ownership of your healing is what real rehabilitation looks like. It's not easy work, but it's the kind of work that changes everything. As I often say, the work pays off in dividends.

You may not realize it, but your willingness to reflect and to ask "Why did I think that way?" or "Why did I do what I did?" is the kind of insight the Board of Parole Hearings is looking for. Each time you choose honesty over excuses, humility over pride, and growth over comfort, you're quietly rewriting the story of your life. I often tell clients to make good decisions moving forward, and that true growth is outside of their comfort zone.

The board measures change in actions, not words. Keep building your positive choice patterns. Keep showing up to your groups. Keep mentoring others. Keep learning to pause before reacting, to forgive when it's hard, and to see the humanity in you and others. Every small act of integrity is evidence of suitability, whether anyone notices.

If you've been denied parole, don't let that stop your growth and determination. "Not yet" does not mean "never." It means more time to strengthen your foundation. One thing I often encounter is unrealistic expectations of oneself and the board process. I often hear, "I have done enough time," except that is not the standard in a suitability hearing. I am going back to the basics and get us on the same page as we go in depth each of the 11 steps to unraveling your criminality.

I want you to encourage each other in your individual processes. There isn't a scarcity of suitability findings. I have been through weeks where everyone has been found suitable because they individually earned their finding of suitability. I have had hard weeks where no one was found suitable, and weeks in between where some were found suitable and others were not.

Driving 100 mph into a brick wall is not productive. Nor is it productive to go to a hearing where you are not going to be found suitable — perhaps because of a recent serious rules violation report involving violence or cell phone possession, or a lack of programming, or an inability to understand your criminality. Your attorney is best suited to help you decide the next steps in this process.

When I meet a client, I spend time trying to figure out where they are with respect to their criminality. It's an important analysis moving forward. Spend time with your attorney working on understanding your deficiencies because, again, it's not the good stuff that keeps you in prison.

I go back to this again: Be encouraging of one another. Incarcerated people who appear before the board can use your encouragement. One of the interesting things I have seen in the last 20 years is incarcerated people who compare themselves to other incarcerated people. The murderer doesn't think they are as bad as the sex offender or the third-striker; the third-striker certainly doesn't think they are as bad as the sex offender or the murderer; the sex offender doesn't think they are as bad as the third-striker or the murderer. This comes up when my clients compare themselves to other people and then draw conclusions from it. What I say to them and what I will say to you as the reader is to run your own race, and concentrate only on yourself.

Sometimes in life we are ahead, and sometimes we are behind. Comparing yourself to others and being critical of them is not conducive to change. You should be lifting others up. Lift up the trailblazers who are forging their way from life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) to life *with* the possibility of parole. You may or may not agree, but wishing them ill, or saying they are less deserving than you, is not conducive to change. In fact, if you truly understood, those trailblazers are making things better for you. You will see and hear a lot more about those with LWOP sentences going through the clemency process, and going through the suitability hearing process with resentencing. Encourage them, stand with them, cheer them on. Show your character and find the good in what they are doing and how far they have come.

As for you, continue to do the work. Keep learning who you are and remember, insight, empathy, and patience are the quiet proofs of suitability. I want you to be successful, to learn about yourself and earn your freedom.

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

California Coalition for
Women Prisoners

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

36 STRATEGIES of SUITABILITY

BY JOSEPH R. HAYTAS

Write Your Autobiography

THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE of writing your autobiography is to discover insight into the person you were during the time of your commitment offense and the person you have become today. Honesty is key. You must not censor the expression of feelings, motivations, and insights into your past. If you do not feel comfortable in revealing the entire truth to yourself, you are not ready for this exercise.

First, your story is simply a sequence of events that need to be told in order. Write about the parts that move the story forward, from beginning to end.

Second, every story has an emotional core, and that core is how you feel about the events you are describing. Internally, we all have needs, fears, desires, goals, motivations, and prejudices. These feelings and emotions are the "content" that occur in the "context" of your story. Our interaction with others and varying circumstances is the context for our emotions and actions which make up the events of our lives.

Third, think about motivation. What was your desire at the time of your crime? What did you want? Was it fame, acceptance, love, something material, or perhaps reputation? What were your fears? What scared you the most? What scares you today? What does shame mean to you and what does shame feel like? Were you ever in a position of power, or did you feel powerless?

Writing your autobiography is an opportunity for an exploration of your past criminality and the development of character that now disallows criminal conduct. Dig deep and tell your story.

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

Strategies to Suitability, and Inside/Outside, both available on Amazon.com.

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El Trabajo Paga Sus Beneficios

Por Maya Emig, Post Columnist

Traducido por Martin Torres, Spanish Reporter

CADA VEZ QUE me ciento a escribir este artículo, te imagino se todo en silencio en tu celda o en la sala. Leyendo no solo para pasar el tiempo, sino para entender más profundamente. Ese compromiso de estudiar tus pensamientos, de rastrear las raíces de tu dolor y tus decisiones, y de tomar posesión de tu sanidad es como realmente se mira la rehabilitación. No es un trabajo fácil, pero es la clase de trabajo que lo cambia todo. Como lo digo a menudo, el trabajo paga sus beneficios.

Tal vez no te diste cuenta, pero tu voluntad en reflejar y preguntar "¿Por qué pensaba de esa manera?" o "¿Por qué hice lo que hice?" es la clase de conocimiento que la mesa de libertad condicional busca. Cada vez que escoges honestidad sobre excusas, humildad sobre orgullo, y maduras sobrela comodidad, cuidadosamente estas reescribiendo la historia de tu vida. A menudo les digo a clientes que opten por buenas decisiones siguiendo adelante. Y que la madures verdadera está afuera de su zona de comodidad.

El comité mide el cambio en acciones, no en palabras. Sigue edificando tu patrón de decisiones positivas. Sigue asistiendo a tus grupos, sigue enseñando a otros. Sigue aprendiendo a pausar antes de reaccionar, de perdonar aun cuando sea difícil, y de ver la humildad en ti y en los demás. Cada acto pequeño de integridad es evidente de responsabilidad, aunque no sea notorio.

Y si la junta de libertad te ha negado, no permitas que eso detenga tu crecimiento y determinación. "No todavía" eso no significa "Nunca". Significa que hay más tiempo para fortalecer tu fundación. Algo que a menudo encuentro son falsas expectativas propias en el proceso de la junta de libertad condicional. A menudo oigo, he hecho el tiempo suficiente, excepto que eso no está en los estándares para que seas hallado fiable. Regreso a lo básico para que estemos en la misma a página conforme vayamos a lo profundo de cada uno de los 11 pasos escondidos de tu criminalidad.

Quiero que se animen el uno al otro en su proceso individual. No hay escases de motivos para ser hallado apto de tu libertad condicional. He pasado por semanas en donde todos han sido halados fiables porque individualmente se han merecido su fiabilidad. Y he tenido semanas en donde nadie ha sido hallado fiable y entre semanas que algunos han sido hallados fiables y otros no.

Manejar a 100 mph hacia una pared de ladrillos no es productivo. Tampoco es algo productivo ir a una acita con tu comité de libertad condicional sino vas a ser hallado fiable—tal vez por una seria violación reciente y el reporte envuelva violencia o la posición de un celular. O la falta de programa o la inhabilidad de entender tu criminalidad. Tu abogado es le que está mejor capacitado para ayudarte a decidir cuál sea el siguiente paso en este proceso.

Cuando me reúno con clientes, invierto tiempo tratando de encontrar en donde están con respecto su criminalidad. Es un análisis importante para seguir adelante. Pasar tiempo con tu abogado trabajando y entendiendo tus deficiencias, porque, otra vez, no son las cosas buenas que te mantienen en prisión.

Regreso a esto otra vez; anímense el uno al otro. La gente encarcelaría que han estado en frente de la junta directiva de libertad condicional podrían usar tu animación. Una de las cosas interesantes que he visto en los últimos 20 años es que la gente encarcelaría se comparan con otros presos. Por ejemplo; los asesinos creen que no son tan malos como los ofensores sexuales o los de tercer strike. Y viceversa, el de tercer strike cree ciertamente que no es tan malo como el ofensor sexual y el homicida. Y el ofensor sexual cree que no es tan malo como el homicida o el de tercer strike. Esto sale a relucir cuando mis clientes se comparan con otros y hacen una conclusión deseo. Lo que les digo a ellos y lo que te diré a ti como lector, es que corras tu propia carrera, y concéntrate solo en ti mismo.

Algunas veces en la vida vamos adelante y otras veces estamos atrás, comparándote con otros y criticando a los demás no es conductivo al cambio. Deberías de levantar a otros, levanta a aquellos pioneros que han forjado su forma de vida sin pasibilidad de libertad (LWOP). A vivir una vida con la posibilidad de lograr la libertad. Tal vez estés o no de acuerdo, pero deseándoles mal, o diciendo que ellos se lo merecen menos que tú, no es conductivo al cambio. De hecho, si tu verdaderamente as entendido a esos pioneros que hacen las cosas mejor para ti, veras y escucharas mucho acerca de esos con sentencias LWOP atravesando por el proceso de clemencia. Anímalos, apóyalos, aliéntalos, muéstrales tu carácter y encuentra lo bueno en lo que están haciendo y lo lejos que han legado.

Y para ti, continua haciendo el trabajo. Sigue aprendiendo quien eres y recuerda, conocimiento, simpatía, y paciencia son las pruebas claves de ser encontrado apto y fiable a tu libertad. Quiero que seas prosperado, en aprender de ti mismo y ganarte tu libertad.

We Make and Change Habits

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

HABITS — WE ALL have them; some good, others not so good. They hold us back from being our true selves. We are hardwired with certain behaviors, default settings in our DNA, permanent things like eye color and height. But learned behaviors we take on and practice, some become habits that take over our lives. One definition of *habit* comes from the Latin *habitus* and means “a behavior pattern acquired by frequent repetition or physiological exposure that shows itself in regularity or increased facility of performance.” We convince ourselves we need habits. They become shields, which can also be used as weapons, even against the ones holding them.

Now consider how we cultivate our habits. For example, in Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, there is the quote, “How use doth breed a habit in a man.” We feed a habit, water it; it takes root and grows until it fills us. One synonym for *habit* is “second nature.” Pascal wrote in *Pensées* (1670), “Habit is a second nature and it destroys the first.” Our habits will take us over, control us, and destroy us if we let them. Ovid (43 B.C. – AD c. 18), in *Ars Amatoria*, wrote, “Nothing is stronger than habit.”

So, we become lesser, bit by bit, as we give up our senses of self and surrender to habits. In *The Tragic Sense of Life* (1913), Miguel de Unamuno wrote, “To fall into a habit is to begin to cease to be.” There is nothing easy in being enslaved by habits that drive away those we love, leading us in pursuit of things that harm us. We ruin ourselves with self-destructive habits. Mohandas Gandhi wrote, “Your actions become your habits, your habits become your values, and your values become your destiny.” Habits are insidious, creeping around, making our lives a living hell. We rely on them and are repaid for loyalty with pain, loneliness, and despair. We feed them — they bite our hands. We nurture them — they hound us for more. We trust them — and they betray us.

It is time to cultivate what will help us get where we want to be, replacing bad habits with better ones. We must choose which to keep and which to replace. Habits won’t bend to our will. If we try to make them, they will resist. It would be great to toss unwanted habits away like a rag we don’t want; however, nature abhors a vacuum. You can’t remove a habit without replacing it with another. The old one will return to where it is comfortable. If you are a person who prays to God, he knows this better than you do. He won’t give you what won’t help. He won’t take away the habit. Instead, pray for strength to endure and that is what he will provide. Now, find the opposite to the habit you have and begin to work with it to replace the one you don’t want. That is a recipe for success.

Mark Twain wrote in *Pudd’nhead Wilson* (1894), “Habit is habit, and not to be flung out of the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time.” It is a process, not an isolated act to get rid of a habit. The first habit that needs replacing is focusing on other people’s issues so we don’t have to see our own. Also in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, “Nothing so needs reforming as other people’s habits.” Twain was referring to other people looking down their noses at habits they disliked. But there is truth in what Twain related on habits.

A nearly universal thing that causes great pain is the tendency to negativity, which robs us of peace of mind, looks outward to assassinate others’ character, and alienates us from those we care about. You can’t be happy if everything seems bad. It takes no more energy to be positive than negative. Gratitude is the opposite of negativity. With practice, it will replace negativity. Remind yourself that you are worth the time and effort to change old habits. Meditate on the good things that you have. Give yourself the gift of happiness. You will see it’s more fun and will move you to where you want to be.

Finally, Elbert Hubbard wrote in *The Roycroft Dictionary and Book of Epigrams* (1923), “Happiness is a habit — cultivate it.”

Sources: *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations*; *The Harper Book of American Quotations*; *Merriam Webster’s Dictionary*.

Psych View

By Daisy Switzer, Post Columnist

Psychiatric Disability

By Daisy Switzer, Post Columnist

HOW MUCH ACID have some of you done? There is an element in the prison that all seem to have an intense monologue channeled from the 1960s. While I agree that nature is important and people can be lame, I can say that in eight words. If it takes you a manifesto to express your ideas, you might consider having a friend advise you on how many of them are getting through. Some of you seem like you might benefit from medication.

I’m not saying you should all beat a path to the pharmacy. Some medications won’t work. Some people have other problems. But if close friends, family, treatment professionals, and maybe even that little inner voice suggest that you might try it, then you might try it.

I understand you because I speak Crazy. I know a lot of Crazy. But not everyone speaks Crazy and, frankly, no one on the board wants to hear your manifesto. If you can’t express yourself clearly and completely on a page, consider medical intervention. It’s hard to help you if I can’t understand you.

Some of you are delusional. There are threads of common grandeur among prisoners. Big news flash: Being evil isn’t that creative or cool. You’re not the next Big Deal. Sorry. Even if you are a famous person, you’re not the only one.

Some of you are psychotic. Your statements are entertaining, but they won’t secure your release.

Some of you are both crazy *and* angry. That will keep you in prison forever. Perdition is not pretty. No one appreciates being followed about, catcalled, thrown sexist comments, or sent ill-spelled porn. You are not nice. You need to learn to be nice if you want to be part of the free world.

If you have an organic mental illness and you’ve been in prison more than a decade, someone has likely documented it somewhere. You might not agree. You might feel and look alright some of the time. But if a diagnosis is out there, consider asking yourself if it might be true. Consider trying medication just to see how things change for you, if others relate to you and understand you better. Some of you need medication. Some of you take it. That’s cool. That’s taking care of yourself and owning your problems. I respect it.



Justice Fallen Through the Cracks

By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

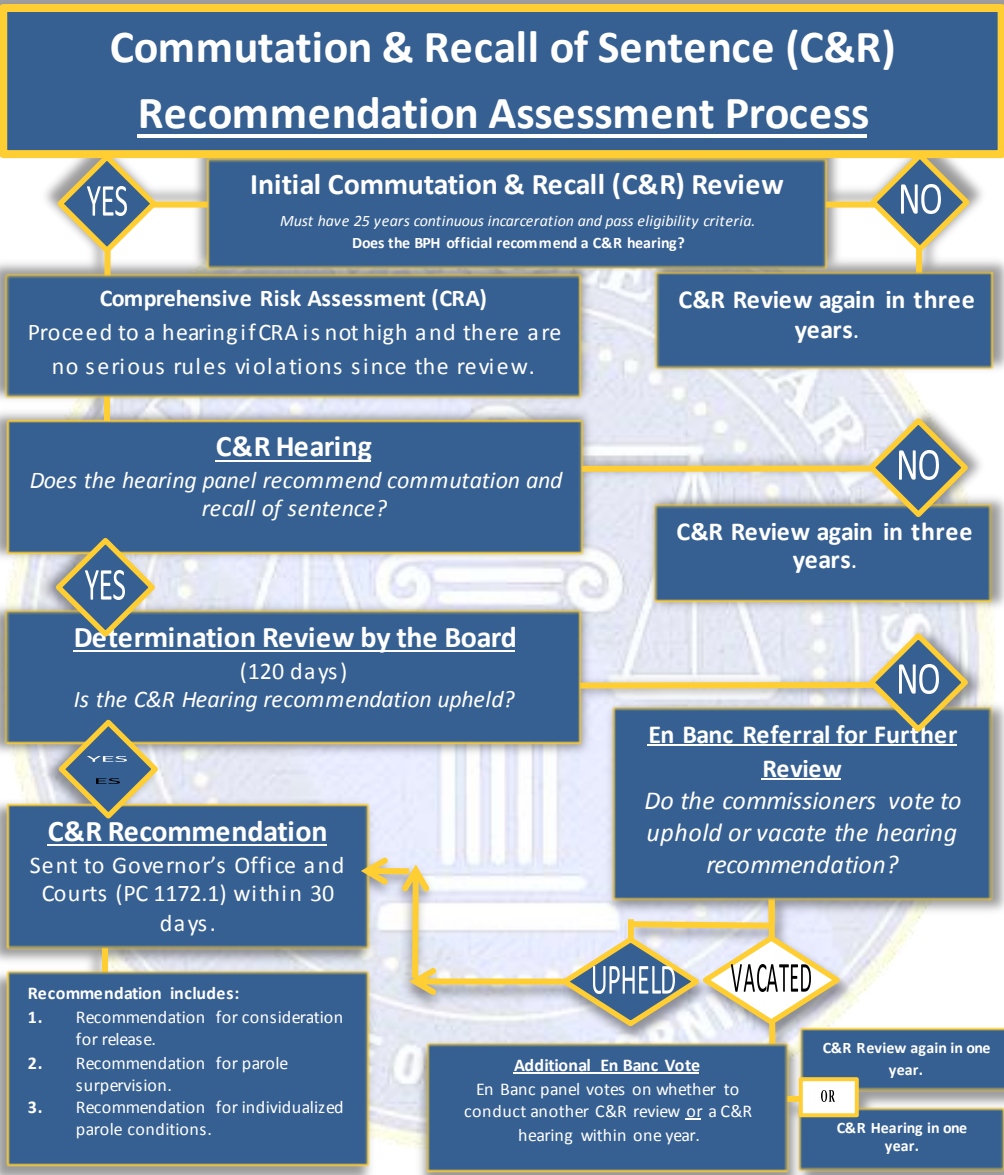
EVERY SO OFTEN we hear about a person who has fallen through the cracks serves more time than they were sentenced to. While rare, this is a problem that may grow worse with the ever-increasing reliance upon technology: “Well, the computer says” This is a result of GIGO (garbage in, garbage out): errors are human failings, and when someone digs in their heels and refuses to correct an obvious injustice by passing it on to the courts, we all become a little less secure in our rights. Excuses become habits and habits become custom.

What about when the courts — even when faced with overwhelming evidence — passes on someone who is illegally held? If you have been experiencing this kind of problem, get everything documented, with a copy of the abstract of judgment showing what your total sentence is, requests for interview, grievances, and copies of any court decisions you have already received on the issue.

Familiarize yourself with the correct process: not habeas corpus, but petition for a writ of mandamus under CCP §1085. This requests an order for a lower court or administrative agency (such as CDCR) to do what is required by law. In this case, to follow due process under the 5th and 14th Amendments and your actual sentence, and correct records that don’t comport with what the sentencing court actually ordered.

In the meantime, however, you are serving time beyond what is lawful and stuck with no one listening to you; it is frustrating. You may have to file a civil rights violation lawsuit under 42 USCS §1983. The important thing is to rely on the process. Whichever of these options you choose, expect that it will be a long and painful process and you may keep asking yourself, “Is my liberty and future worth all of this work and frustration?” Your answer should be a resounding “Yes.”

Sources: CCP §1085; U.S. Constitution; 42 USCS §1983.



BOP Hosts Mock Job Fair

By F. Lee, Federal Correctional Institute-Englewood, CO

IN THE FALL of 2024, the Federal Bureau of Prisons held annual mock job fairs to coincide with GED graduations. FCI Englewood in Colorado invited business leaders from the local community to participate in the event to provide real-world experience for the incarcerated participants. Those interested in the job fair enrolled in numerous Adult Continuing Education (ACE) classes. Those within two years of release who had not taken these classes were provided a two-day abridged preparatory class. All were provided with a professionally typed resume on the day of the event. During the fair, participants rotated in groups and met with as many as three interviewers.

“Some of these guys have been incarcerated for a minute or never held a traditional job,” said ACE clerk R. Otis. “They need to have some exposure to what to expect in a job search, resume; some never had an actual job.”

When discussing criminal history, answer honestly. Emphasize your accomplishments and rehabilitation, how you’ve taken responsibility and turned your life around. In some states, they are prevented from asking about criminal history. Use your background to stand out, if possible. Be sure to focus on your strengths and skills, and less on past criminal experiences. When discussing weaknesses, use professional language to talk about time management or organization issues. It is important to highlight your vocational skills, experiences, and support system, especially on your growth and development. Talk about how you have improved your life, changed directions, and what motivates you.

Finally, be confident and forgiving in your first interview, as it will likely be the hardest. Be sure to dress professionally and use your best attitude and language. Be authentic when you talk about yourself and your goals. It is OK to be vulnerable; companies are not just hiring an employee, but a coworker as well. Be aware of body language such as eye contact, posture, and tempo. Most of all, do not let your background put your back on the ground.

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Famous Sci-Fi Characters

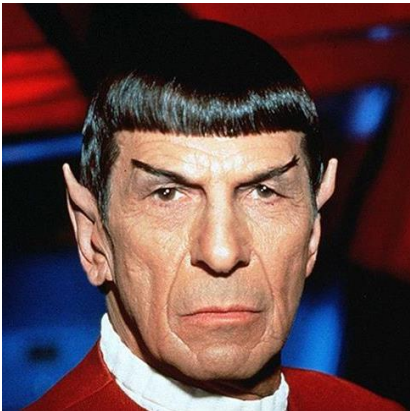
(National Science Fiction Day, Jan. 25)



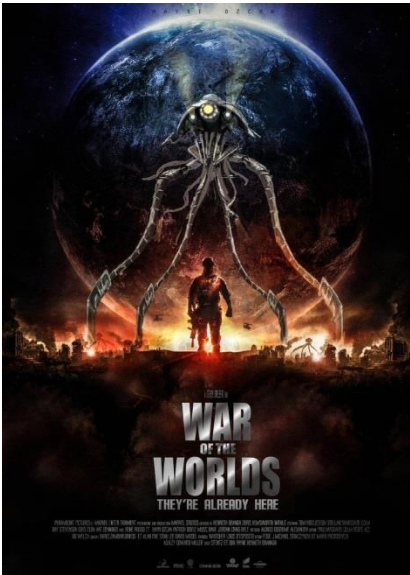
The Xenomorph from *Alien* (Space.com)



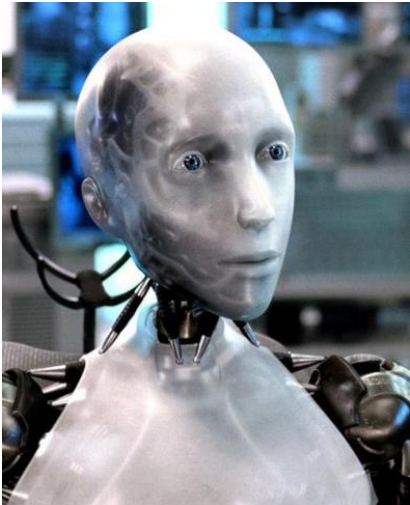
Martians from *Mars Attacks!* (Space.com)



Mr. Spock from *Star Trek* (AA.com)



War of the Worlds (InspiredPencil.com)



Sonny from *I, Robot* (FanPop.com)

Soldiers of the Cross Return

By Rob Sharp and Bob Gay, Feature Reporters

SOLDIERS OF THE Cross (SOTC), an outreach ministry, returned on Saturday, Aug. 30, 2025, to bring their message of hope and love to the incarcerated on D and E facilities here at the Mule Creek State Prison. Among them were Jack Bower and son, Marcus, who were excited and enthusiastic about the opportunity.

Marcus Bower told of his commitment to the group and how he has grown closer to his SOTC brothers. “They help me stay on the right path and bring many opportunities to preach the word to others,” he said.



The rumble of motorcycles heralds their auspicious arrival. (O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)

out of our mouth, we have nothing to say. Our new lives are all about Jesus.”

Sean McGuire spent 33 years in prison. Now he loves to bring the redemption and salvation message into prison to share with others. “God speaks to us if we just stop and listen to him,” stated McGuire. “My relationship with Jesus is one I’d like to share with as many as I can.”

Eddie Soto was drawn to the brothers of SOTC because of the unity he immediately felt with them, an acceptance and love he never felt in traditional churches. Keith Arruda moved to Idaho where there is a second chapter of SOTC. He met SOTC members at church and felt drawn to them. “It is about faith in service to others,” he said.

Tony Sousa was led to Christ in 2000. He initially thought SOTC was about bicycles. “We aren’t about the motorcycles,” he began, “but about the kingdom of God. We don’t stagnate; we go out and serve. We all need Jesus.”

Rodney Miller grew up a Catholic, but he was rebellious. “I could not find workable answers anywhere until I went to an SOTC Bible study,” he said. “For the first time, I felt I belonged.”

The men of SOTC have sacrificed their time, energy, and resources to be here because they have a passion to bring hope inside to others. We should listen to their stories, and draw inspiration and hope from how we are more similar than different. Looking back to last year’s visit, it is clear that the SOTC brothers keep their mission front and center: To look for those who have tried it all and still search for their purpose in life.



(J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)



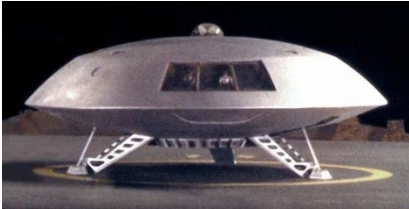
F. Orlando Wells, Buffalo Cortez, and Angel Ponce enjoy the sun and food. (O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)



The Soldiers of the Cross on Facility D. (O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)

Famous Sci-Fi Characters

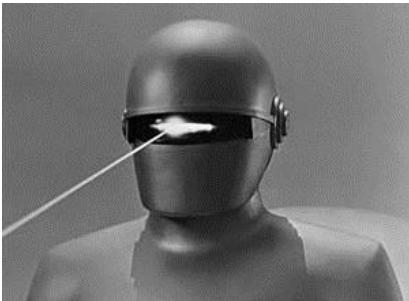
(National Science Fiction Day, Jan. 25)



Jupiter 2 from *Lost in Space* (Pinterest.com)



Rod Serling, creator of *The Twilight Zone* (People.com)



Gort, from *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (WikiWand.com)



Frankenstein's Monster (Animalia-Life.club)



The Borg Queen from *Star Trek* (Space.com)



2001: *A Space Odyssey* (InspiredPencil.com)

The Establishment Clause

By Philong Huynh, Feature Reporter

RECENTLY I ATTENDED the second annual prison barbeque put together by Soldiers of the Cross, whose parent organization provides a degree program in theology here at the Mule Creek State Prison.

The Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, in the 2007 case of *Americans United for Separation of Church and State v. Prison Fellowship Ministries*, ruled that a program (InnerChange) dominated by Bible study, Christian classes, religious revivals, and church services, which was housed by the prison in superior living quarters (the former “honor unit” of the prison, which afforded greater privacy than other living units), and whose participants received greater visiting and other privileges than other prisoners, violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which prohibits state endorsement of religions to ensure separation of church and state.

Courts apply a three-part test to determine whether government aid has the effect of advancing religion. First, does the aid result in governmental indoctrination? Second, does the aid define its recipients by reference to religion? And third, does the aid foster an excessive government entanglement with religion? The court in *Americans United* above ruled, “In administering aid, a government may not define recipients by reference to religion. The aid must be allocated on the basis of neutral, secular criteria that neither favor nor disfavor religion, and is made available to both religious and secular beneficiaries on a nondiscriminatory basis.”

The Mule Creek State Prison currently provides spaces for both bible college and secular college education. Courts have ruled in various cases, including in *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* (2002), a U.S. Supreme Court case, that state programs such as school funding or voucher programs that allow for true private choices, including the choice to choose education provided by religious entities, do not violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Sources: *Prisoners’ Self-Help Litigation Manual*, Fourth Edition (2010), Oxford University Press, Inc.; *Agostini*, 521 U.S. at 234-35

2025 SUM Event: Voices from the Crowd

By Fred Munch, Post Columnist

GLENN KAUFFMAN READS the Bible and accepts it as the word of God. He came to prison with multiple degrees and is a master musician who plays the organ at Sunday services while also playing the keyboard in several bands. Despite being a believer, he questions organized religion and its dogma. He’s critical when it’s politicized, which he sees happen everywhere. “Instead of drawing lines between people, it should be drawing them together,” he observed. His focus is on the real tenets of Christianity: mercy, grace, and tolerance.

At the 2024 SUM event, Kauffman noticed it was well-organized. “It lifted the residents’ spirits with food and fun to give them hope,” he said. He appreciated the sponsors’ generosity in sharing “time and treasure” with the population who are isolated and forgotten. This year, Kauffman played keyboard on stage with Penanz, a Facility D band. He praised the diversity of performers and enthusiasm of listeners, including the bikers who thanked the band for their support.

Todd Pate goes to Christian services every Sunday. Yet, he also attends the weekly Buddhist group. He doesn’t want to fit under a specific religious label. “I’m a soul playing different roles,” he explained. The SUM event impressed him because it created “an inviting atmosphere with positive energy.” In his opinion, the Soldiers of the Cross motorcycle club members were “trustworthy, genuine, and good listeners.” He thought the event had “good logistics,” which is a big accomplishment considering the long lines of hungry residents waiting for their beef hot dogs. Best of all, he signed up to enroll in the three-year seminary course and obtain a bachelor’s degree in theology.

Born and raised Christian, Kenneth Moore, “believes in God and Jesus” even after “all I’ve been through incarcerated 46 years.” He chose not to participate in the SUM event this year or last and explains why. Over his time served at various prisons, he went to dozens of revivals, barbeques, bike shows, and “spiritual gatherings.” While he takes religion seriously, he says most of these events offer nothing for the “soul or salvation” and remarked, “If a hot dog and a bottle of water is the best they can do under the California Model, why bother?” Moore doesn’t want to sound negative or snobbish and explained, “If they really want to be their brother’s keeper, they need to focus on the other 364 days of the year.” He then asked, “Why couldn’t the event leave us with something more tangible than a memory of Harleys parked in a row and hot dogs cooking on the grill?” If this is the prospect for future events of this kind, Moore won’t be there.

Famous Sci-Fi Characters

(National Science Fiction Day, Jan. 25)



E.T. (Space.com)



Robbie the Robot from *Forbidden Planet* (DailyMail.co)



Wall-E (UCSD.edu)



Doctor Who (David-Tennant.co)



Godzilla (Super7.com)



Alternative Christian band Penanz on Facility D. From Left—R-Che Archuleta, Darron Armstrong, Eric Mitchell, David Grey, Jason Rosacia. (G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)

Yard Filled with Sounds of Worship

By Gerald McKoy, Feature Reporter

ON SEPT. 9, 2026, the SUM Seminary Event on Facility D provided a festive atmosphere, with its own residents providing the occasion’s music. SUM hosted another great affair in tandem with volunteers of the Christian biker group, Soldiers of the Cross, ministering and providing food to residents of the Mule Creek State Prison’s D and E facilities. Residents of both yards stepped up to perform uplifting worship music for everyone, spreading the positivity and encouragement of SUM’s mission.

The bands from Facility D included Voces del Desierto, the Hispanic worship team; Word of the Most High, the alternative worship team; and Penanz, the positive alternative Christian band. In addition, performances from Facility E



Hispanic worship team Voces del Desierto. From Left—Christian Alviz, Gilberto Estrada, Martin Torres, Moises Amezcua-Manzo, Javier Tinajero, Jason Rosacia. (G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)

included the SUM Ministry worship team; Integrity, the alternative gospel team; and Joint Heirs, the revival/contemporary worship team. Each band performed a number of songs for the yard, from classics like “Amazing Grace” and “Lord I Lift Your Name on High,” to more contemporary songs, gospel, and originals.

Some of the bands have been invested in the program for a while, such as SUM’s worship team. Initiated by Mule Creek resident and SUM student Albert Bell, SUM started an inmate-led worship group for the seminary. Their goal was to provide additional opportunity for people on the yard to worship, and to encourage others to become interested in the word of God. “We believe in worshipping God in spirit and in truth,” says Bell.

Penanz is also a unique group composed of Facility D residents. The band performs original Christian and positive music, and express themselves through alternate rock and pop genres. By fusing each instrument in contemporary ways, they emphasize the idea that there are, as coined by founding member Jason Rosacia, “many ways to praise.”



Facility E worship team Joint Heirs. From Left—Gary Whiteside, Michael Hull, Andy Austin. (O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)



(O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)

Ben Hardister: Soldier of the Cross

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

“WE WANT TO speak to the person who sits in darkness and we want to bring the light of Jesus Christ in life — at all points of life,” said Ben Hardister, president of Soldiers of the Cross.

The Christian group Soldiers of the Cross (SOTC) came about because a group of bikers possessed a deep, abiding, and unassailable faith in Jesus, and because they did not feel welcome in most mainstream churches. Living in full recognition that they are breaking the stereotype of rough-looking, leather-clad, Harley-riding guys, they wore their faith on their backs while enthusiastically talking to people they engage with about the unconditional love of Jesus. They were also blowing minds and changing hearts in the process.

For many in the biker community, God, religion, and church can be anathema; however, there are people on custom Harley Davidson motorcycles who see their place in the world as one of changing the negative image through good works and positive community engagement, while living lives of purpose, faith, and joy.

“They teach you, they explain to you, that if you make reparations, everything can get better,” began Hardister. “They teach that in Twelve Step; they teach you all these things. For example, if you cheat in your relationship, own it. If you take things that are not yours, and you knew you were not supposed to take it, you say, ‘I’m

sorry.’ And that is supposed to make everything okay.”

Hardister goes on to point out that the problem with that line of thinking and behavior is that it allows so many people to think that when they get to the gates of Heaven, that they can negotiate their way in. However, it is their lack of absolute faith in Christ that is going to keep them from entering heaven, the belief that they can negotiate their way into God’s kingdom.

“If you wait until your last breath to accept Christ into your heart and behavior,” said Hardister, “it’s too late. You will sit in darkness for the rest of eternity.”

We didn’t come to Mule Creek today to save the entire prison. We came looking for one man, to find that one person who is living in darkness and is ready to accept the light of Christ into their life, right here, right now. And when we find that man, and introduce him to the light and love that is Jesus’ acceptance, we have done our job.”

Death and Rebirth

By Al Rice, Copy Editor

THE SUM SEMINARY College event of Aug. 30, 2025, was a celebration of the second cohort of seminary students on Facility D at the Mule Creek State Prison. Much like the first event held a year earlier on Facility E, the men of Soldiers of the Cross brought their custom motorcycles onto the yard and set up a portable grill to barbecue hot dogs for about 1,200 incarcerated residents and guests in attendance.

Among the attendees were students of cohorts one and two, professors, administrative staff, and board members of SUM Bible College & Theological Seminary; representatives of Paid in Full California, the nonprofit that provides financial support for the seminary school; members of New Hope Church’s prison ministry who were there in support; and Mule Creek’s community resource manager, Jason Ross.

By late morning, this smaller group of approximately 100 gathered in the Facility D chapel to focus on the incoming students of cohort two.

After an opening prayer, introductions, and several short speeches, Pastor Juan introduced New Hope Church’s Brian and Johnie McAuley, father and daughter, to give their compelling testimony of death and rebirth. Brian started with a favorite Bible quote, John 8:32: “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Then they began to tell their story ...

On March 4, 2025, despite feeling sick with what he guessed might be the flu, Brian went to work. Then, when the illness seemed to get worse, he left work for an Urgent Care, but it was full so he decided to go to the emergency room instead. On the way, he stopped at a red light. When the light turned green, Brian pressed on the gas pedal and that’s the last thing he remembered.

“I was dead,” said Brian. “I died at the steering wheel.”

Brian was told afterward that first responders performed CPR for five minutes before the EMTs put him on a CPR machine for another 25 minutes. He was eventually stabilized from the massive heart attack, but remained in a coma for two days. The good news was that he was alive, though the doctors and his loved ones worried because most people have severe brain damage after 20 minutes without a heartbeat. Only a miracle and time would tell the outcome.

“There was a moment in that time I was in a coma when my daughter cried out to God,” said Brian. “She said to me, ‘You need to get up, to wake up, and adopt me.’”

Johnie was Brian’s stepdaughter, but their relationship had grown. They had become close, and she longed to make him her legal father and join him in the ministry. “I cried out to God,” said Johnie because she needed this miracle as much as Brian did. Then it happened; he woke up and there was no brain damage. “I found peace,” said Johnie, “and now I get to serve the Lord alongside my dad.”

Brian still has a way to go in his recovery from death, but he’s making great progress with this new lease on life. Alongside him on this day, Johnie has taken the first steps in her new life as Brian’s daughter, and in the ministry that is her calling.



Johnie and Brian McAuley.
(O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)



Guiding Rage Into Power

By Jacques Verduin (M.A., Psych.), GRIP Training Institute

The ID Moment

Imminent means “about to happen.” The root meaning of the word *danger* has to do with the fear of being harmed or dominated. The Imminent Danger moment is the moment between:

- anger and violence
- craving and using
- expectation and reality

In that moment there is a small window of opportunity to act skillfully, one that is over very quickly, frequently in seconds or even a fraction of a second.

There are three characteristics of experiencing the moment of Imminent Danger:

- everything speeds up
- everything intensifies
- there is a moment of regret afterwards

Other names for this moment are “The Moment I Lost It,” “The Flashpoint,” “When I Got Triggered,” “When My Buttons Got Pushed,” or “The Moment of Fatal Peril.”

The key to defusing the moment of I.D. is to identify it (ID it) and hit the pause button in order to create space in which you may be able to choose how to respond in a skillful and non-violent way.

In the GRIP curriculum we describe in detail how to effectively pause that moment each time it occurs.

Why It Matters

How long were you in the moment of I.D. when you “lost it” and committed your crime? Measure this from the moment you harmed someone else, crossed a boundary without permission, and committed your crime. Do not include planning the crime or thinking about it; we are counting the act, not the thought. Write down how long

that moment of actually crossing someone’s physical boundary lasted. You may have lost it more than once or committed a series of crimes, but for the purpose of this exploration, count just the period of time that started with you crossing a boundary, crossing the line that made you violate another person and that caused you to go to prison.

Go back to the moment that you committed your offense, and estimate the amount of time your moment of Imminent Danger lasted.

Some of us have been in prison for over 30 years because of not tracking our actions during a moment of Imminent Danger that may have lasted as little as 3 to 10 seconds.

The goal of GRIP is to get you to a place where you won’t lose a moment like that again. Or, if you do, how to very quickly undo that transgression.

Jacques Verduin is a subject matter expert on mindfulness, restorative justice, emotional intelligence, and transforming violence. The father, community organizer, and teacher created Guiding Rage Into Power (GRIP) after he began his work in San Quentin in 1996. GRIP, which existed in its first complete form in 2012, provides a comprehensive and trauma-informed approach to healing with the fourfold goal of stopping violence, cultivating mindfulness, developing emotional intelligence, and understanding victim impact. The GRIP Training Institute helps prisoners and challenged youth create the personal and systemic change to transform violence and suffering into opportunities for learning and healing.

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Guiando La Rabia En Poder

Por Jacques Verduin (M.A., Psych.), GRIP Training Institute
Traducido por Lucía de la Fuente, GRIP Training Institute

Peligro Inminente

El Peligro Inminente (PI) es cuando hay un gran riesgo de que un daño mayor suceda. La palabra *inminente* significa “a punto de suceder; que amenaza; que va a pasar pronto”. La palabra *peligro* significa “riesgo; lugar, paso, obstáculo o situación en que aumenta el riesgo de un daño”.

El peligro inminente es el instante entre:

- la ira y la violencia
- la ansiedad y el consumo de sustancias nocivas como el alcohol o drogas
- mis expectativas y la realidad

El PI tiene tres características que lo identifican:

- todo se acelera
- todo se intensifica
- hay un momento de arrepentimiento

Hay otras formas para hacer referencia a este momento de peligro inminente: “el instante justo cuando me perdí”, “el momento cuando me inicié en esto”, “cuando me provocaron” o “el segundo en el que sentí peligro extremo”.

El PI es una pequeña ventana de oportunidad que se cierra muy rápido y con frecuencia, en fracción de segundos. Cuando esta “ventana” se cierra (es decir, que ya cruzamos la raya), hay un momento de arrepentimiento que hace que nos sintamos inquietos. El remordimiento es un “pesar interno que queda después de realizar lo que se considera una mala acción”.

La clave para hacer que el peligro inminente no ocurra, es identificar dicho momento y hacer una pausa lo suficientemente larga, para tener la capacidad de decidir cómo responder con astucia y sin violencia—más adelante describiremos a detalle cómo *hacer esa pausa* cada vez que el momento de peligro inminente se nos presente.

Le meta de GRIP es ayudarte a que vivas en un lugar en donde no sea necesario que te “pierdas”, cruces la raya o “hagas corto circuito”. Este lugar está adentro de ti y puedes llegar a él a través de autocontrol. En GRIP aprenderás a dominar la habilidad que te va a mantener en un lugar seguro fuera del peligro inminente, siendo capaz de controlar esos momentos de peligro con destreza. También aprenderás a transformar cada momento de peligro en un momento para tomar decisiones astutas, eligiendo lo que es más sabio y lo que te llevará a hacer lo correcto, cada vez que estés en peligro inminente.

¿Porqué me Importa?

¿Cuánto tiempo estuviste en el momento de PI?—ese momento cuando te “perdiste”, justo antes de cometer tu crimen. Probablemente te “perdiste”, cruzaste la raya o cometiste otros crímenes durante el tiempo que has estado en la cárcel; sin embargo, enfoque únicamente en el momento de peligro inminente cuando cometiste el crimen que te trajo a la prisión. Para medir este

(cont. en pág. 22)

(viene de **Guiando La Rabia**, pág. 21)

tiempo de peligro inminente, cuenta desde el momento en el que te pusiste violento o “cruzaste la raya”, hasta el momento en el que te detuviste. Escríbelo en una hoja y haz la que de los segundos o minutos.

Recuerda que esos momentos de PI no se recuperan nunca. Sin embargo, puedes comprometerte a sanarte a ti mismo con la ayuda de GRIP y experimentar restauración y sanación.

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If You're Not Part of the Solution...

By O. Rick Bridges,
Interim Lead Reporter

CHRISTOPHER BRYSON IS a problem solver. As a resident of the Mule Creek State Prison, he was confronted with personal behavioral problems. After a rough start in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Bryson decided that if he wasn't part of the solution, then he was the problem. With this recognition, he embraced a willingness to work on himself. He remembers, “Like many of us, there was a time that I saw myself as being too cool to ask for help. Now I recognize that helping one another is a fundamental function of community.”

Bryson's work began in earnest in the Enhanced Outpatient Program (EOP), a departmental mental health program. There he learned the value of metacognition as the practice of assessment and analysis of how he thought, or failed to think, about things. He graduated from EOP and, still having found the quality of his thinking deficient, he enrolled in every self-help group he could.

Next, Bryson enrolled in community college where he thrived in the objective context of developmental learning. He enrolled in the California State University, Sacramento (CSUS) Transforming Outcomes Program Sacramento State (TOPSS)

at Mule Creek. He attended his first parole hearing while a junior student, prevailed, and has since completed his studies at the main campus, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology.

Now in transitional housing, Bryson viewed parole as a bed move. He had petitioned Board of Parole Hearings (BPH) to allow him to benefit from rehabilitative opportunities in the greater community that do not exist in custody. He reflects, “I am grateful that in custody my perspective changed. I learned to appreciate having access to rehabilitative opportunities. I was no longer and am no longer afraid to seek them out or use them.”

He also had concerns — as an older student transitioning from a carceral setting — about being accepted on campus. Those concerns were unjustified. Everyone Bryson met at CSUS went out of their way to welcome him as a student and support him as a person.

It was back in the TOPSS program that Bryson decided that he wanted to develop curricula to support the rehabilitation of his peers. He began developing the Suitable Solutions Program curriculum for his peers, organizing study groups to support this work. It was a living amends, a much needed service, and a labor of love.

Looking back, Bryson is grateful. “The fact that BPH had placed me in a position where I could choose proved very impactful,” he stated. “My grandpa sat me down and said, ‘Have you thought about a discourse discipline and degree that can be applied to different career paths toward immersive engagement?’ The logical change from communication studies to psychology motivated me, and equipped me to grow and develop personally and professionally. That informed, facilitated, and enhanced my approach to curriculum development.”

The Suitable Solutions Program curriculum is available for correspondence and in-person group study in the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and in carceral settings throughout the United States.

The Evolution of Indeterminate Sentencing

By Philong Huynh, Feature Reporter

IN THE 1800S, indeterminate sentencing laws were often invalidated by many state courts as unconstitutionally vague and voided for uncertainty, because the courts reasoned such sentencing laws were unconstitutional delegation of legislative authority. In addition, the courts reasoned it infringed on the pardon power of the governor when a prison board had the authority to grant or deny parole without the governor's involvement. Many state courts saw indeterminate sentences as a threat to the basic principle that crimes and punishments should be defined by clear rules, not left to individual discretion. State courts in Michigan, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Oklahoma, and Vermont were among the first to invalidate these indeterminate sentencing statutes.

By the 1900s, state laws evolved to create parole boards with input and approval from governors to get around the issue of pardon power infringement. Thus courts began to adopt the “separate-parole principle” that interpreted an indeterminate sentence as a sentence for the maximum term that was definite and certain and therefore not voided for uncertainty.

The U.S. Supreme Court has affirmed that life sentences are not cruel and unusual for certain crimes. Parole in California continues to be an uncertain affair with low parole rates that hinge largely on inexact factors like insight, where courts have found “[t]he very concept of insight is inherently vague” and “can be shorthand for subjective perception based on ... undefined criteria that are impossible to refute.” In 2011, the California Supreme Court recognized in *In re Ryner* that “social science does not support a generalization that an inmate's lack of insight into causes of past criminal activity or failure to admit the official version of the commitment offense is itself a reliable predictor of future dangerousness.” The same court found that at some point in an elderly inmate's incarceration, due to advanced age and infirmity, he is no longer capable of being dangerous, no matter how little insight he has into previous criminal behavior.

(continued on page 23)



Alamy.com

(from *Evolution of Sentencing*, pg. 22)

In practice, the California Board of Parole Hearings rarely applies these findings even as its own elderly parole regulation, §3055(c), requires that commissioners give “special consideration” to an inmate’s age, disabilities, and amount of time already served. Elderly parole is required by the California Supreme Court to be conducted under the purview of §3055 as decided in *People v. Contreras*. The term “special consideration” means “weight” as interpreted by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Salve Regina College v. Russell*.

As I have read a few parole hearing transcripts, in my experience some panels merely cite these special consideration elements in §3055(c) just to say they have considered them. However, some elderly incarcerated people with multiple health and cognitive problems are still being denied for lack of insight even as some of them are in their 70s and 80s and can barely move.

California Senate Bill 81 (2023) would have allowed those denied parole to be appointed counsel on habeas, but Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed it. Those who are denied parole unreasonably have the option of taking it to court by filing a habeas petition and have the courts decide whether there is “some evidence” that the person is still dangerous or that the board’s decision is unreasonable. The habeas form, HC-001, is available in the law library.

The U.S. is only one of few industrialized countries with life sentences that are often subject to the uncertainty of parole boards. Some states and the District of Columbia have no parole boards and, instead, utilize a point system to more fairly grant parole based on prison behavioral history and rehabilitation.

Sources: K. Bell, “The Forgotten Jurisprudence of Parole and State Constitutional Doctrines of Vagueness,” *Cardozo Law Review*, vol. 44, no. 5, 2023. *In re Ryner* (2011), 196 Cal.App.4th p. 533. *In re Shaputis* (2011), 53 Cal.4th p. 192. *People v. Contreras*, 4 Cal.5th p. 349. *Salve Regina College v. Russell*, 499 U.S. p. 225.



In Memoriam: Terry Prince (1954-2025)

Friend, Mentor, and Brother

By Mark Daigre, Post Columnist

ON TUESDAY, OCT. 28, 2025, the Mule Creek State Prison’s Catholic chaplain, Deacon Ray Moreno, presided over a memorial service on Facility D for Terry “TP” Prince, who succumbed to cancer in September.

To all who knew him, Prince’s commitment, care, and concern were evident in his daily walk and engagement with the incarcerated population and staff. He spent much of the last 30 years tirelessly advocating for the incarcerated population through the Inmate Advisory Council (IAC) on facilities A, B, and D.

Deacon Moreno spoke of God’s promise delivered through Jesus, and of everlasting life for those who accept that promise into their hearts and lives. By all accounts, Prince took God’s promise to heart.

Anthony Wimberly knew Prince for some 40 years, starting at Old Folsom in the 1980s, then Pelican Bay, and finally here at Mule Creek where they were on A, B and D together. “On the surface, TP could seem like a very private person,” said Wimberly. “Some people have interpreted his self-containment as being standoffish or stuck up; however, that is the furthest thing from the truth. TP was funny, engaging, and personable.

“For TP, his position as IAC chairman was his ministry,” said Wimberly. “Using his elected position, TP constantly advocated for the incarcerated population. While he didn’t always get the result he was looking for, TP was consistently willing to bring issues to the administration given to him by the population.”

Louis Farias spoke of how, while he lived with Prince, he didn’t know him anywhere near as long as others. However, Farias noted that Prince was always welcoming. It was Prince who invited Farias to move in and share space. In their shared space, Prince showed great humility, always generous with his time and material stuff, his wisdom allowed for a different perspective of prison life in specific, and life in general. Farias also spoke about how Prince would make himself available to anybody who let him know they needed him.

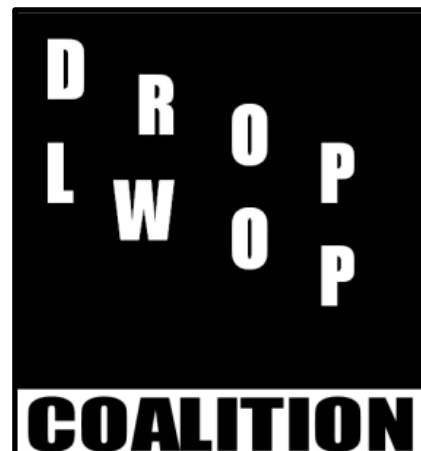
For those who shared living space with him in the housing unit, it was plain to see that Prince absolutely loved his wife Lottie and their dog Gucci. More days than not, his voice, filled with happiness, could be heard echoing across the day-room calling to Gucci, saying “Hi Baby!” to his wife, and telling the people on the other side of the phone just how much he loved them.

Ray Corona has known Prince for just about 30 years. Corona knew his former wife, Janice; they met when he and Prince were at Pelican Bay. Corona was also there when Janice passed. He remembers how deeply hurt Prince was at the time, but how he kept himself together so that he could continue to serve the population. Corona noted how those who know Prince know just how committed he was to the people who he loved and loved him. It was through his loyalty to the people in his life that he maintained decades-long relationships.

Kirby Box didn’t get to know Prince until after he had moved to Facility D and they began working together on the IAC to serve the population. Through their working relationship, Box came to call Prince a true friend, and that friendship has grown over the ensuing years.



Terry “TP” Prince. (H. Kim / Media Specialist)



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How to Reduce Violent Crime

(Part 1)

By Scott Dyleski,
California State Prison–Corcoran

IN THE POLITICAL fervor to stop crime, partisan bickering has often drowned out the real progress that has been made by policymakers and researchers. If one watches the news regularly, one may be doubtful of these facts: The FBI Uniform Crime Reports show homicide deaths were cut by about half from 1995 to 2014. Similar and even more impressive reductions have been made around the world in recent decades. How were these results accomplished?

Such encouraging data — and the analyses based upon them — led criminologist Manuel Eisner, working with the World Health Organization, to set the goal of cutting the world murder rate in half within 30 years. Eisner synthesized a huge body of evidence and summarized his strategy for reaching this goal as “[a]n effective rule of law, based on legitimate law enforcement, victim protection, swift and fair adjudication, moderate punishment, and humane prisons....” These elements defy the systematic philosophies of political parties that claim to know the root causes of violence. Analyzing each of Eisner’s principles reveals the importance of adopting policies grounded in the evidence found in communities rather than ideology.

A rule of law is a system of government in which no one’s above the law; justice applies to everyone fairly and in a clear, transparent manner. Certainly, no such legislative system is perfect. Yet, implementing policies that encourage equality under the law and personal self-control do work. When European countries adopted such rules, there was a 40-fold decrease in violent crime.

At a psychological level, this makes sense; people have an innate sense of fairness, and thus are more willing to follow rules when those rules are basically fair, even if the outcomes are unequal. Most people, for example, do not resent a pro-

fessional athlete getting paid more than an amateur, but consider this fair based on their performances. Yet, most people expect a man and a woman doing the same job with the same effectiveness to be paid the same. Both situations are fair based on the merits of those involved. A sizable portion of violence is an effort to achieve personal justice, and when people trust the laws to fairly deliver justice for them, they are willing to give up violent options.

People must trust not only the legislative systems that create laws, but also the ones that enforce those laws. The police and government agencies must be considered to be rationally worthy of deference. It’s more than trusting the law in itself; when people believe others will follow the law, they are themselves more willing to refrain from seeking retribution on their own violent terms. In a society that loses its police force, violence has been shown to increase. Such findings challenge the various proposals to greatly defund police forces or outright abolish them. In 1764, Italian reformer Cesare Beccaria (1738-1794) proposed state police as a means of giving equal justice to all. Before, private forces were kept by nobles who used them to get justice for themselves and their property at the expense of ordinary individuals. Often, the punishments were quite draconian. If the police and other agents of law enforcement lapse into similarly selective enforcement for a choice elite, they lose general legitimacy and violent crime increases. Legitimacy is a golden mean of evenhandedness.

Sources: *FBI Uniform Crime Reports*, 2016; “World Crime Trends,” UN Economic and Social Council, 2014; M. Eisner, “Reducing Homicide by 50% in the Next 30 Years,” Univ. of Cambridge Global Violence Conference, 2014; N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, Cambridge, MA, 2000; C. Starman, et al., “Why People Prefer Unequal Societies,” *Nature Human Behavior*, 2017; D. Hay, “Property, Authority and the Criminal Law,” *Albion’s Fatal Tree*, New York: Pantheon Books, 2023; R. Roth, *American Homicide*, Harvard University Press, 2009.

Look for part two of Scott Dyleski’s “How to Reduce Violent Crime” in next month’s Mule Creek Post

Abrams Outlines Path to Autocracy

By D. Razor Babb, Feature Reporter

IN HER *TIME* magazine essay, “We Can Stop the Rise of American Autocracy” (August 2025), former Georgia House of Representatives’ leader and author Stacey Abrams argues that the United States is “in the midst of an authoritarian regime.”



Stacey Abrams (NPR.org)

Subsequent to the *Times*’ article, Abrams appeared on *Amanpour & Co.* to discuss authoritarianism and detailed how the attack on women’s reproductive rights is part of a broader authoritarian agenda to strip fundamental freedoms, also noting that indicators include curtailing the press and firing civil servants. Her podcast, *Assembly Required*, focuses on fighting authoritarianism and she outlines (across the media landscape) a 10-step authoritarian playbook, drawing on concepts compiled from research and observation how authoritarian figures such as Vladimir Putin, Rodrigo Duterte, and others operate.

Steps to Autocracy

1. Winning an election
2. Expanding executive power
3. Weakening other branches of government
4. Gutting the government
5. Installing loyalists
6. Controlling the media
7. Identifying scapegoats
8. Attacking civil society
9. Incentivizing violence
10. Cancelling future elections



During the *Amanpour* telecast, a sound bite was included of President Trump from the Oval Office in August 2025, confidently declaring, “I’m the president; I can do whatever I want.”

With National Guard troops in Washington D. C. and elsewhere and threats of this becoming routine; a proposed death penalty for D.C. murderers; a full-frontal assault on educational institutions, the media, blue states, and the Democratic party; and divisive immigration issues that are having very significant effects on thousands of people, Abrams insists the U.S. is facing its greatest existential threat of our era. She warns that citizens must understand the current threat and brace to take action, messaging that authoritarianism is not a looming threat, but is actively happening in this country.



Trailblazer: The Isle of Oroblaze

A MCSP Original Interactive Tale — Chapter 3

Presented By Gerald "Jedi" McKoy, Feature Reporter



For rules how to play, refer to Chapter 1 in our November 2025 issue.

LAST TIME... YOU have awoken on what appears to be a giant floating island high in the sky! You can't remember how you got here, but your impression is that you might be in some sort of super-realistic VR game. This idea is strengthened after seeing a mysterious jeweled bracer on your arm, and seeing monstrous creatures terrorizing the area. Together with a young woman named Lana, you journey forth to help a nearby village, but another creature bars your path!

The wolf pounces at you; you swing at it, but manage only to hit its side before it tackles you over. It lunges at your neck with a growl, and you narrowly throw up your chosen tool between its jaws. The wolf snarls and presses into you, its teeth inches from your face. Its ferocity jars you, and your fights in the state pen come to mind; whether against a human or animal, your body recognizes the need to fight for survival. A sharp cry rings out; the wolf yelps in pain. "No ... free meals ... today!"

You grunt, shoving the wolf off. Lana stands at its flank, a long knife dripping thick black fluid in her hands. The wolf jumps up, the pitch-like fluid seeping from its wounds as it turns toward you, but you're ready now. You jump toward the wolf, delivering a swift blow that fells the beast.

“Haaah. Ha-hah ... sunuvagun. Even its breath smelled like death. This game really overdid it on the realism ...” You note to never wrestle with a wolf again as you watch its body dissolve into dark motes of shadow, like the goblin. Another distant boom interrupts your reprieve; Lana gasps beside you. You turn, and in the distance, a large, fiendish red ... *thing*, is visible towering over the smaller village buildings in the distance. Under her breath, Lana whispers, “Wh—what’s an ogre doing up here?!”

Even from here, the ogre's destruction is evident; it smashes at the ground and bashes into buildings with

concern for little else. “Where did it even come from? The castle town gates are still closed! Where are the guards? I thought the sacred stones were supposed to keep creatures out, and now all this?!” Lana’s voice starts to rise as her body tenses. Sensing a nervous breakdown, you step toward her. “Look, I know it’s kinda scary, just don’t freak out now.”

“Freak out? I’m past freaking out, I’m gonna kick that disrespectful lug off the edge of the island, and maybe those sluggard-arsed knights sleeping through duty, while I’m at it! Chased by a goblin, saved by a rockman, ruined my whittle knife ... Pithy-feckin day!” And with those choice words, Lana dashes off down the path that winds near the castle walls and toward the village.

“Wha—?” You watch her run, dumbfounded for a second, before running after her. While not fond of being considered a “rockman,” you’re also not fond of getting jumped on by monsters, and figure there’s safety in numbers. You both run along the path; Lana discards her paring knife for a hunting bow at some sort of tool shack before rushing onward. As you pass the very large, very closed front gates of the castle town, Lana shouts a few more choice words to the unmanned walls before running onward ... wait. Movement from the walls. *There is someone up there.* “H—Hey! The village needs help, open up!” you call.

The figure approaches the wall, peering down at you, and both of you flinch as you recognize each other in an instant. A torrent of emotions and old memories start to flow through you, and you freeze there. It's been years since you saw his face, and you dreamed of the things you'd say, you'd do to him when you would see him next, but right now, you can do nothing but stare. He does nothing but stare back.

"Sky ... Sky! Leave the scaredy blights alone, they're not gonna help us!"

There's no time!"

"Trail, get away from there, it's too dangerous!"

Lana pulls you back to reality (or to fantasy), tugging you away right as a fearful-looking guard atop the walls does the same for your once closest friend. *Trail ... Is that what they call him here?* You stumble away, unable to stop yourself from looking back at the ledge where the person who sent you to prison once stood.

Still reeling, you're suddenly thrown to the ground by Lana, narrowly avoiding a flying rock. "Get over yourself, what is wrong with you?! Stop being a dumb rocky lump and help me! That thing's destroying everything!" The giant ogre is much more imposing from up close. Horns protrude across the thick sinews of its immense body. It smashes nearby shacks and buildings, before throwing the rubble to cause more destruction. Cries of fear from fleeing villagers are overpowered by the ogre's roar. Somehow, the chaos calms you, centers you; as your bracer glows, you ready for battle.



- **Lana Abilities:** *Nice Shot:* At end of combat round, ogre takes 2 damage, ignoring Defense.
- **Ogre Abilities:** *Collateral Damage:* Even if Ogre misses, take 1d6 damage (minus your Defense) due to flying debris.
- *Second Wind:* Ogre gains +1 speed once it gets down to 15 health.

Having a hard time? Tune in next month for a helpful trick and try again!

SPORTS AND RECREATION



(J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)



(J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)



The competition was fierce on Facility D, with Christopher Simpson and Marcus Caldwell both seeking to gain control of the ball.
(J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)



(J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)

Championship Flag Football



Facility E football champions. From Left: Standing—Referee Chris Garcia, Chauncey Crowder, Guillermo Brambila, David Lewis, Damon Williams, Angel Burnett, Keith Millet, Brandon Thomas, Jerry Lemasters, Eric Ettleman. Kneeling—Facility E Rec Coordinator B. “Amin” Smith, Bobby McHenry, Dejarne Smith, Demetrius Anderson, Chris Simpson, Delvon Hammond, Desmond Perry . (J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)



Facility D vows to topple Facility E next Season. From Left: Standing—Demetrius Johnson, Taurus Baker, Dashawn Thomas, Archie Lee Thomas, Maxwell Garrett, Marcus Caldwell, Dillon Wymer, Abel Rios. Kneeling—Jeremy Alderman, Mikey Simmons, Alfonso Gonzalez. (J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)



Facilities D and E battled it out for over three hours on a cold, rainy Saturday . (J. Carson / Mule Creek Post)

Facility E vs. Facility D, Facility D, November 29, 2025

Facility E 34, Facility D 0

Facility E 6*0*6*22-34

Facility D 0*0*0*0-0

Referees: Garcia, Jones, Leyva, Robinson.

Lineups

Facility E: G. Brambila, D. Smith; D. Anderson, A. Burnett, E. Ettleman, D. Hammond, J. Lemasters, B. McHenry, K. Millett, D. Perry, C. Simpson, B. Thomas, D. Williams. Coach: C. Crowder.

Facility D: D. Wymer, M. Caldwell; J. Ackerman, T. Baker, D. Cole, M. Garrett, A. Gonzalez, D. Johnson, G. Maxwell, J. Milliken, A. Rios, M. Simmons, D. Thomas. Coach: A. Thomas.

Business & Finances

ENTREPRENEUR'S WORKSHOP

By Leah Ward-Lee

Post Columnist

Debunking the Myths

Myth #3

I'm Too Old to Start a Business

If starting a business is something you're doing just to make money rather than because there's something you want to do or try, compare what you'd make working at a full or part-time job to what you'll make with your own business. There are some businesses you might not feel comfortable starting:

- Those that require a lot of physical strength or activity. If, for example, carrying heavy ladders and spending time at the top of them gives you pause, don't be a window washer.
- Those that require you to learn a new skill. If the thought of learning to write grants sounds overwhelming, don't be a grant writer.
- Those that require you to commit to specific hours and spend more time on a daily basis than feels right for you, keep looking. Don't start a business you know will take more time than you can comfortably devote.
- Those that require more customers or clients than you can comfortably support. In this case, think through your product offering and determine how you can increase the services or price.

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



Leah Ward-Lee



Carolyn Warren

Build and Protect Your Credit Like the Pros™

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

Carolyn Warren

Bestselling author of Repair Your Credit Like the Pros™



Repair Your Credit Like the Pros

By Carolyn Warren, Post Columnist

Title Reports Reveal Information to Mortgage Lenders

ON THE TOPIC of “how did they find that,” I should explain something about title reports. When you apply for a purchase loan or a refinance, the bank or mortgage lender orders a title report from your designated title company. Oftentimes, information shows up on title that was not on the credit report. For example:

- Past foreclosure or short sale
- Bankruptcy
- Tax lien
- Lien from a construction company, remodel company, roofing company, or anyone who did work on your property who never got paid—or they did get paid, but they neglected to remove their “safety lien” when everything was done.
- Lien from an unpaid attorney bill or other professional service
- Judgment for an unpaid bill, including a credit card

This type of negative information can be attached to your Social Security number and follow you even if it doesn't appear on your credit report. This is why it's best to be forthright about any negative financial events that occurred in the past 10 years. An experienced loan officer can check it out with one phone call to a title company and then advise you on the best course of action. Additionally, falsifying a mortgage application is felony fraud, so don't be tempted to try it. If you had a foreclosure in the past that does not appear on your credit report, discuss it with your mortgage broker. The big advantage of not having it on your credit report is that you will have a higher score and qualify for a lower interest rate. By telling your loan officer up front, they will know what type of loan (FHS, conventional, non-QM) you can qualify for based on the date of the negative event. Your mortgage broker is your advocate and ally.

To be clear, you do not order your own title report or dispute information with a title company. You buy title insurance when you get a mortgage (as part of the closing costs), and the title company insures your title against false liens, errors, mistakes, and everything else that could threaten your ownership. They are the ones who will get any false items removed. So, this is not a “to do” item for you; it is simply an explanation of another source of information about your financial history.

While you're waiting to receive all your credit reports, take steps to create positive credit or to strengthen your existing positive credit.

BONAFIDE
Building lives together

Bonafide provides gate pickup, a backpack with supplies, and transition assistance for those being released from prison. To request a pre-parole questionnaire, write to:

Bonafide
548 Market Street
PMB 33356
San Francisco, CA
94104-5401
BonafideLife.org
(415) 659-8406

Financial Corner Tracking Stocks (From Sep. 9, 2024 to Dec. 1, 2025)				
● Apollo Comm. Real Est. Fin. Inc. (ARI)	\$10.30	→	\$10.13	-1.7%
● Baxter International Inc. (BAX)	\$38.96	→	\$18.74	-51.9%
● Comerica Inc. (CMA)	\$54.87	→	\$80.38	+46.5%
● CVS Health Corp. (CVS)	\$57.75	→	\$80.36	+39.2%
● Lumen Technologies (LUMN)	\$5.84	→	\$8.11	+38.9%
● Pfizer (PFE)	\$28.56	→	\$25.74	-9.9%
● UGI Corp. (UGI)	\$23.97	→	\$39.55	+65.0%
● Wells Fargo & Co. (WFC)	\$54.00	→	\$85.85	+59.0%





The Importance of Integrity

By Sean “Sharif” Neal, Post Columnist

INTEGRITY IS SOMETHING held in esteem by many in the world. It means the quality or state of being of sound moral principle, among other things, and is commonly understood as someone doing the right thing even when no one else is looking.

Integrity is also a group of gospel singers on Facility E who are the face of gospel music at the Mule Creek State Prison. Since the group came together in 2023, they have wowed churchgoers at numerous chapel services where they performed contemporary gospel music for the faithful from both D and E facilities. They’ve performed at more than 15 yard shows, and were one of the Christian ensembles at the 2024 and 2025 SUM Bible College & Theological Seminary celebrations, where they performed for more than 1,500 people.

The inspiration to form Integrity came from the group’s personal testimony. In mid-2023, Jeremiah Jones (director, keyboardist) attended a Father’s House service where he observed many worshipping in the dimly lit Facility E chapel. “I’ve never been to a place in prison where people felt so free to worship,” said Jones, “but I didn’t feel a connection.” He was instead inspired to create something that would connect with the form of worship he was used to.

“My goal was to sing gospel music,” noted Robert Taylor (writer, tenor). “I’ve been writing gospel music since 2017, so it seemed like a natural partnership.”

“Jones approached me in the dorm,” began Duwaun King (first tenor lead), “and he said he felt pressed in the spirit to come up with the kind of service we were used to. I thought it was a great idea.”

“It stuck, it was catchy, and it aligned with the word of God

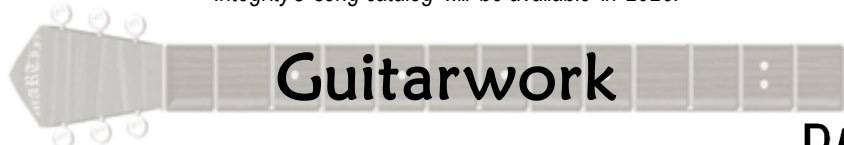


Integrity at work in the Facility E music Room. From Left—Duwaun King, Jeremiah Jones, Frederick Dew, and Robert Taylor. (G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)

in which we sing about,” added Jones.

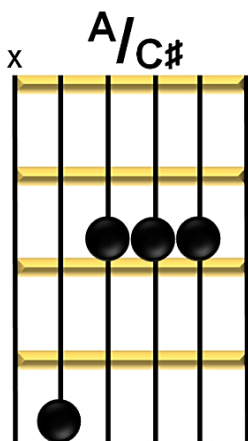
Along with Frederick Dew (old school baritone), this was the beginning of an exciting assemblage of four unique voices, creative songwriting, and prosperity. Integrity currently writes and produces their own music, expanding to other yards to transform the hearts and minds of those who have never heard the message of the Good News.

Integrity’s song catalog will be available in 2026.



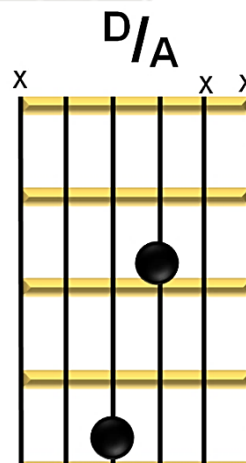
By Rob Sharp, Feature Reporter

THIS MONTH, WE will move to D/A. This chord is one that you will find used often in heavy metal tunes. It does have an interesting sound that you may find useful. It is a simple chord using only two fingers. The notes change from the standard E-A-D-G-B-E to E-A-F#-A-B-F. Index finger second fret, third string; third finger, fourth fret fourth string. You may find it useful as a transitioning chord from a standard D or its other variants. However you use it, enjoy.



Our second chord is an A/ C#, an A major chord with a C# in the bass. You can use the first, second, and third fingers to make the A major, stretching the pinky across to the fourth fret position, or you can cover the second fret notes with one finger in a partial barre, and use a second or third finger on the fourth fret. The notes change from the standard E-A-D-G-B-E to E-C#-E-A-C#-E. This is a great transition chord either up to D, as part of a walk to the E chord, a B minor chord, or just as a cool alternative to the regular A major chord.

Have fun.



Source: Guitar World Magazine



Creative Arts Programs

Image creates desire. You will what you imagine.

—J.G. Gallimore

The Healing Power Of Art

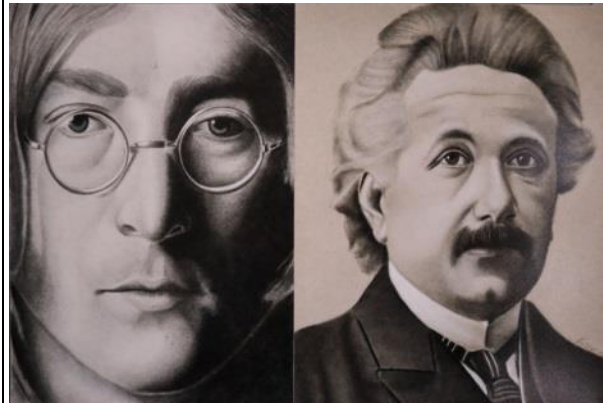
Finding Freedom of Expression

By Fred Munch, Post Columnist

THE PROLIFIC WORK and creativity of Facility D and E yard artists was on full display during the October 13 art show in the Facility D chapel. Every visitor who walked in was given color-coded tickets corresponding with eight categories so they could choose their favorites. There were so many entries, it was difficult to decide on the best.



Luke Waite and a collage in ink.
(G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)



John Lennon and Albert Einstein. Luke Waite, stippling with ink.
(G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)



Keith McRory and his motorcycle. Found and sculpted parts.
(G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)



Jarrod Wyatt and his San Francisco 49er poster. (G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)



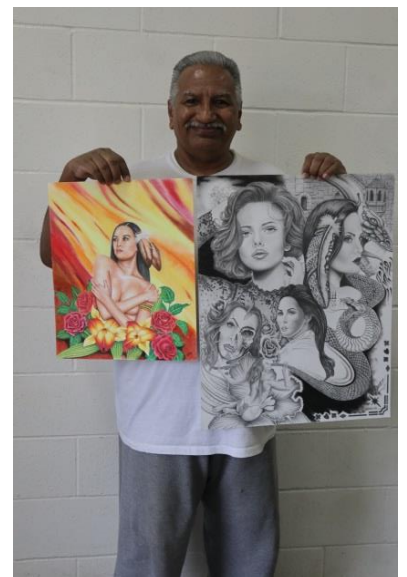
Various pieces were displayed throughout the day as people filed in to view and vote. (H. Kim / Media Specialist)



Stanley Mason, with his crocheted dog.
(G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)



Robert Arthur Clark and his beaded flower.
(G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)



Frank Diaz with a painting and an ink collage.
(G. McKoy / Mule Creek Post)

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.

Creative Arts Program

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

In Facility E Hobby Room:
Creative Writing Tuesdays 12-1:30pm
Poetry Tuesdays 2-3:30pm
Painting Tuesdays 2-3:30pm
Painting Tuesdays 6-7:30pm

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

Suicide Awareness Walkathon

In Their Honor and Memory

By Al Rice, Copy Editor

ON SATURDAY, SEPT. 13, 2025, several dozen men on Facility E, at the Mule Creek State Prison, walked in solemn support of suicide awareness and prevention. A few walked with heavy hearts — in honor and in the memory of loved ones lost to suicide.

“Nobody loves me,” cried Benjamin Reyes over the phone to his uncle, Caesar Lopez, who was then incarcerated at the Calipatria State Prison in Southern California. It was the late 1990s, and Lopez’s nephew was in crisis. “I tried to get through to him,” said Lopez. “I tried my best, but I felt helpless. It tore my heart out. For two days, I tried to convince him that we loved him, that I loved him. I pleaded with him. Two days later, Benjamin was gone.”

“I support suicide awareness and want to lead a healthy life,” said Dawaun King, who walked for a dear family member. “Her name was Muffin,” he added. “She was my cousin.”



Rob Fairweather and his daughter Ariana.
(Courtesy of Robert Fairweather)

“I believe it’s for the kids,” said Robert Fairweather about suicide awareness and what he wants to do about it, a commitment born from personal grief. “It should be taken seriously. I really want to help the youth, as there’s a problem with low self-esteem and mental health issues. I had a family member commit suicide,” added Fairweather. “My son, Rob, ten years ago. He was fighting demons of depression.”

Vernon Barker has not lost anyone to suicide, yet he walked side-by-side and in support of these men

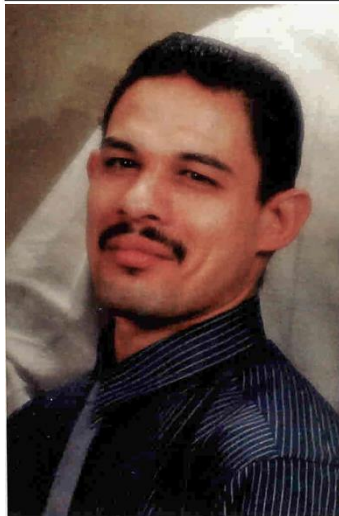
who could put names and faces to this tragedy. “I’m walking to support suicide awareness,” he said. “I think it’s a good cause, as suicide is a sad thing. Depression and loneliness are horrible when they lead someone to take their life. Wherever they are in their lives, they should never feel they have to end it. Through our adverse childhood experiences and other issues we face as we grow up, these things make us perfect in our own ways. People shouldn’t be judged on these things; we should show people our lovingkindness instead.”

In honor of Benjamin, Muffin, and Rob, we echo Barker’s words and the quote he once heard years ago: “The happiness in your life depends on the quality of your thoughts.”

We wish for everyone to have good thoughts.



Robert Fairweather during the walkathon. (O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)



Benjamin Reyes (Courtesy of Caesar Lopez)



Vernon Barker walked to support the cause.
(O Bridges / Mule Creek Post)

Postscriptum

WELCOME TO 2026 and the beginning of the ninth year of the *Mule Creek Post*. Over nearly a decade of publication, we have strived to present a brighter view of a world that sometimes seems too dark, and to remind our readers that there is always a potential for human greatness.

The year 2025 was one of those that the *Post* found it hard to write about. It was overflowing with the kind of news that can fill a person with anxiety. Wars continue throughout Europe, the Middle East, and Africa, and appear to be brewing in the Pacific and here in the Americas. Economic challenges continue to keep people unhoused, hungry, and in poverty. Political figures on both sides of the aisle continue to accuse, bully, and grandstand, ultimately helping no one. Justice seems somewhere distant, visible but unreachable like where the horizon meets the sky.

This year can only be better, though, right? Like every day, it is a new opportunity to focus on the things that really matter and make a lasting difference in the world. Do we continue the kinds of choices that feed fear and resentment and isolation? Or do we make choices that affirm, encourage, and unite?

It is up to us how we will face this new year, and up to us what opportunities we take advantage of. Let’s all make good choices.

-JC, Editor-in-Chief



(O. Bridges / Mule Creek Post)

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



THE BACK PAGE | What you need to know about

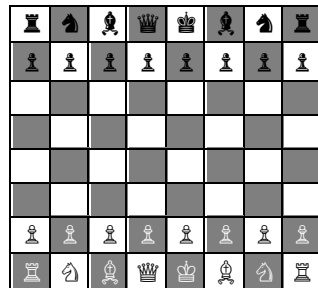
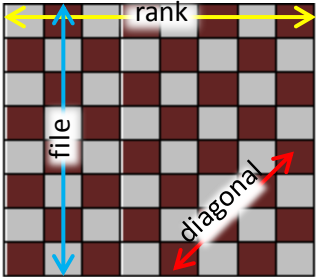
CHess

Sources: *Encyclopedia Britannica* (11th ed.); Andrew Paul, “Chess Isn’t Fair—So Rearrange the Pieces,” *Popular Science*, Jan. 15 2026; *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* (2018); *World Book Encyclopedia* (2017)

It is believed that the game known as chess (from the French for “checks”) originated in India in the seventh century, then found its way to Persia where it spread to nearby countries after Persia was conquered by the Arabs in the 640s. The game was brought to Spain by Muslims in the early 700s, and by the year 1000 it had spread throughout Europe as far as Scandinavia. It was in the 1500s when chess as we know it today took form, with the rules for movement becoming standardized.

The Board

Chess is played on a board divided into 64 squares, eight rows of eight squares each, alternating light and dark in color. Rows running across the board are called *ranks*; rows running up and down the board are called *files*; and slanting rows are called *diagonals*.



Pieces

Each player has 16 pieces on the board. The players’ pieces are differentiated by color, with the lighter pieces being referred to as “white” and the darker as “black” regardless of their actual coloration. The placement of pieces on the board is shown here.

Movement

The player with the white pieces always moves first. A *pawn* moves forward only, one square at a time (except on the first move, when it can move two squares). A *knight* moves in an L shape: one rank up or down

and two files left or right, or two ranks up or down and one file left or right. A *bishop* moves as far as its path is clear along any diagonal, but must stay on the same color square as it began the game. A *rook* (from Indian *rukḥ*) can move along any rank or file as far as its path is clear. The *queen* can move in any direction, along any rank, file, or diagonal, until its path is blocked by another piece. The *king* can also move in any direction, but only one square at a time, and cannot be adjacent to another king. No piece can move in such a way as to leave the king exposed to capture.

Piece	Name	Quantity
	king	1
	queen	1
	rook	2
	bishop	2
	knight	2
	pawn	8

Castling is a move that allows for protection of the king. To castle, a player moves the king two squares toward either rook, and places the rook on the square the king passed over. A player may castle only if the king and rook have not previously been moved, and if no other pieces stand between them. A player cannot castle if the king is under immediate attack or if the square it passes over or lands in puts it into check.

Capturing

A piece captures an opposing piece by moving into the space occupied by it, removing the opponent’s piece from the board. A piece in danger of being capture is *under attack*. A *pawn* captures pieces that are one square to the left or right of the square in front of the pawn. All other pieces capture pieces that stop their progress. A pawn can also capture *en passant* (“in passing”), as long as it is in the fifth rank and the opponent’s pawn moves two squares; the pawn can capture the enemy pawn as if it had moved only one square, as long as it does so on the next move.

Check: If the king is under attack, it is *in check*. When a king is in check, the player can only move to rescue the king, whether by capturing the threatening piece; moving the king out of check; or interposing a piece between the king and the threat. If these moves are impossible, the game ends in a *checkmate* (from the Persian *shah mat*, “the king is dead”).

The English word *check* actually derives from the game of chess: The custom of warning an opponent that their king—or *shah*—was in danger by naming the piece led to use of the word to denote a hostile or restraining action

Chess 960

It is well documented that the “first-move advantage” gives a small but often decisive advantage to the player using the white pieces in chess. To combat this, chess champion Bobby Fischer devised “Chess 960” in the 1990s. In this chess variant, the pawns remain in their standard starting positions, but the pieces in the back row are placed randomly (the name derives from the 960 possible arrangements). Though a French study found that 99.6% of arrangements still provide an advantage to the player with white pieces, the variation allows for much more challenging games.

Notation

So-called *English notation* (or *descriptive notation*) is the most popular way to keep a written record of games. In this system, the pieces beside the king are called the *kingside*, and those beside the queen are called the *queenside*. Pawns are named for the pieces they stand in front of at the beginning of the game.



Position 226: most complex

Position 198: most balanced

QR8	QN8	QB8	Q8	K8	KB8	KN8	KR8
QR7	QN7	QB7	Q7	K7	KB7	KN7	KR7
QR6	QN6	QB6	Q6	K6	KB6	KN6	KR6
QR5	QN5	QB5	Q5	K5	KB5	KN5	KR5
QR4	QN4	QB4	Q4	K4	KB4	KN4	KR4
QR3	QN3	QB3	Q3	K3	KB3	KN3	KR3
QR2	QN2	QB2	Q2	K2	KB2	KN2	KR2
QR1	QN1	QB1	Q1	K1	KB1	KN1	KR1

Descriptive Notation (from the perspective of White)

a8	b8	c8	d8	e8	f8	g8	h8
a7	b7	c7	d7	e7	f7	g7	h7
a6	b6	c6	d6	e6	f6	g6	h6
a5	b5	c5	d5	e5	f5	g5	h5
a4	b4	c4	d4	e4	f4	g4	h4
a3	b3	c3	d3	e3	f3	g3	h3
a2	b2	c2	d2	e2	f2	g2	h2
a1	b1	c1	d1	e1	f1	g1	h1

Algebraic Notation

Players record moves by naming the piece and the squares they move to, using symbols such as — for “moves to,” × for “capture,” † for “check,” and ‡ for “checkmate.”

The squares in each file are named for the piece that occupies the first square in that file at the beginning of the game.

