

Vacaville prison provided some eye-opening lessons

I believe I left off by telling you what a great place Folsom Ranch was and you'd be crazy to want run away.

Well, the three who did try to escape were all caught in a matter of hours. One made it to the freeway and the other two

who were hiding in trees were found by the dogs.

I was in the officer's gun sights once, but for a completely different reason. I was chopping weeds at the ranch and hit a hornets nest. Well

those hornets came out of that nest ready for war. There were about six of us working there, not including the correctional officer. Every one of us was being attacked.

I was swatting violently at the hornets, as was the officer, when out of the blue, dust was kicking up around me. I was being shot at by the guard in the tower! OK, so they weren't real bullets — but those pellets hurt like hell when they hit you. After being stung by one, I automatically hit the ground like any good inmate. The officer next to me saw what was happening and called to the tower with his radio to cease. Seems the ol' boy in the tower thought we were fighting when he saw our arms swinging wildly.

Other than that things were pretty routine around there. It was kind of neat seeing "Boot Hill" where the prisoners who were killed or hanged back in the Wild West were laid to rest. Why, the gunfighter John

Wesley Hardin even spent time behind the wall at Folsom.

Moving on, let me tell you a little about when I went through Vacaville prison in northern California.

Once again, it was "Paco" and yours truly being inducted into the prison system. Back in the early '80s, Vacaville prison was also used as a reception center, that is to say, some prisoners went through Vacaville to be entered into the prison system. You know, physicals, intelligence tests, background checks, yadda, yadda, yadda.

"Here we go again," Paco says to me. I simply grunted or something to let him know I had heard. Now, Vacaville was not a hard prison to do time in as far as California prisons go. Oh, believe me, ol' friend, there are much more violent prisons. However, it still is a prison. Vacaville has cells and dorms. I myself would prefer to be in a two-man cell. Usually dorms are for prisoners who are non-violent and can get along. However once in awhile the system screws up and you get placed in the wrong place.

Being as we just had gotten there and had yet to be processed Paco and I were in cells, but not together. We were close enough to be able to go to chow together.

Well, our first real introduction into how Vacaville operated was on our first trip to our evening meal. As Paco and I were walking casually down the long hallway, we chanced to see three different mess halls — or to the civilian, dining rooms. I asked Paco which one and he said, "Let's walk by and check them out." Well as we passed the first one, Paco yells, "Art, look! Girls!"

"Where?" I replied.

"There, look, he was pointing inside the mess hall."

Well you know, 'ol friend I couldn't believe it. But there were girls alright. Some were blondes, some redheads etc. Well we couldn't believe our eyes. Paco says, "Man this might not be so bad, Art."

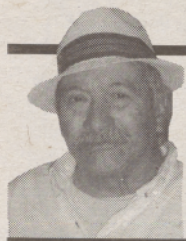
Just before we got our chance to enter paradise (we thought), this other prisoner had heard our remarks. Chuckling, he informed us that they were not girls — they are men — trying to become women.

Hell, we should have known better, the guys says. Where do you think you are?

That was our first letdown. Now my second came that very evening. Back in those days they didn't have DVDs. It was still movies on the big screen, which Vacaville prison showed on weekends in the basketball gym. Well, I don't even recall the movie anymore, I just know I wanted to see it and asked my cellmate if he was going. He said, "No. I'm tired. You go, Art. You'll enjoy it." So I went. And as soon as the lights went out all hell broke loose. By that I mean all the guys and their boyfriends went at it — right next to me, in front of me, all around me. I quickly exited the movie and went back to my cell where my cellie was looking innocently at me, saying, "Why, what happened Art? You didn't enjoy the movie?"

There is more that I would like to let you now about my stay at Vacaville, but it will have to wait till my next article, so please stay tuned.

Semper Fi!



THE DUBIOUS LIFE

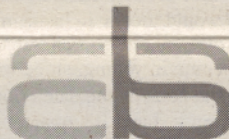
By Art Garcia

Art Garcia is a Vietnam War veteran who returned home to a dubious life involving some colorful incarcerations. He is the author of "Memoirs of a Vietnam vet," a collection of his columns published in Street Roots.



IMAGE COURTESY OF THE WESTERN REGIONAL ADVOCACY PROJECT.

"Freedom of Fear," a print in Art Hazelwood's series "Four Freedoms." The work is part of the Hobos to Street People exhibit in California that spans decades of artistic interpretations on homelessness. For more on this exhibit, see the story on page 8 of this edition of Street Roots.



APPLE AND DELL COMPUTER SALES
FACTORY CERTIFIED SERVICE AND REPAIR
LAKE OSWEGO, OREGON
(503) 722-2110
www.ABSComputerGroup.com



3035 S.E. Division • Portland, OR 97202
503.234.7499

Repairs, Renovations & Sacred Spaces

Invest in the infrastructure of your home!



CCB #151311

- ♦ Older homes ♦ Weatherization ♦ Energy conversion ♦ Pre-sell/purchase upgrades
- ♦ Raised garden beds & cloches ♦ Sacred spaces ♦ DIY consultation for your projects
- ♦ Kitchen, Living & Bath
- ♦ In-house Office ♦ Deck
- ♦ Custom Work ♦ Garden

"I am a licensed & bonded general contractor offering a full range of services from simple repairs to artful renovations."
~ Michael D'Angelo, GC

www.Repairs-Renovations.com
503.869.7505

We the People

When it comes to your civil liberties, you should hear what you're missing.

With Alejandro Queral, Joanne Zuhl
Linda Olson-Osterlund and Patrik Angstrom

Tune in to We the People, now at a new date and time, on KBOO, 90.7 fm 6-7 p.m. the second Wednesday of every month