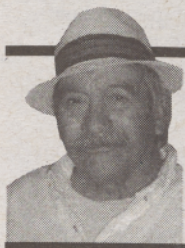


A gentleman's agreement over a fire; and meeting Mr. Tina



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.

Last article I was at California Men's Colony fire camp. Well I decided to return us there once again. Not at the fire camp but at the minimum security yard which was the next yard over. Actually, I

hadn't returned to the "Men's Colony" in San Luis Obispo, Calif., until several years later but I thought, what the heck, let's just wrap up my other visit to the "Disneyland of prisons."

This time around I was in a dorm with about fifty other prisoners. Actually it wasn't bad at all. Everyone had their own job and for the most part minded their own business. Yours truly worked on an outside crew. That is to say I was able to leave the prison grounds every day like I did when I worked at the fire camp.

Before a person was able to work outside the prison walls he was checked mighty thoroughly on his background. You know, no prior escapes, arson, rape etc. on his personnel file. I mean, that was suppose to be the case, but no sooner had I arrived at my new home than I learned that three people had walked away from their job site. The three prisoners were chopping weeds somewhere around the city of San Luis Obispo. Seems they got tired of it and decided to steal a car and disappear. Two of them were caught within a few hours. Never did hear if they ever caught the third one. Probably, though.

The thing is, two of them weren't even suppose to be outside the walls. They both had holds from other states. The one who hadn't been caught wasn't even a U.S. citizen. He was from Mexico. Maybe he went back there and never got caught. You see, though, how sometimes the "system" isn't as thorough as it lets on.

Anyway, I was assigned to an outside crew. Some days I would be the concrete man putting in new headwalls under small bridges or wherever one was needed. I really had the easiest job. Some of the others had to go get the rocks for me. Some had to dig, some mix the concrete, all the while I would just sit and wait until everything was ready for me. It would take me about three hours, and then I could sit

in the bus, and wait or I could help the others, which I chose to do. You learn to help one another in prison because if you don't, it will certainly come back on you.

My favorite work detail at C.M.C. was picking up papers along the beaches. There are a number of beaches around San Luis Obispo. Pismo beach is one of them. Maybe you have heard of it. It's a nice tourist attraction, therefore there were plenty of beautiful women to ease our eyes. Come on, people, we were all in prison where we don't get to see women unless they are on TV or working as correctional officers. We loved walking the beaches. One time, our day was cut short because we were picking up papers and enjoying the breeze from the ocean when we came upon some sand dunes. They were like a lot of little bitty hills. We couldn't see what was on the other side. That would explain how about four of us almost stepped on the three naked girls who must have thought they were well hidden from view. In fact, they were, except that, like I said, we were combing the beaches.

Well, we all got so excited. The girls started screaming. We were whistling, making cat calls — however men who really haven't seen a women for over a year would act. Well, the correctional officers got really distraught with us, so they loaded us back on the bus and back to the prison we went. The officers were just in a bad mood that day. That was what they said the next day.

Most of the time the officers who took us out were really cool. Let me give you an example. We were once again cleaning up the beach at Pismo. This time, however, we were also burning brush. Well, out of nowhere comes the shore patrol carrying a cardboard box. He stopped at our little fire and said something to the effect, "I really hate to do this in front of you guys," while all the time smiling. In this box he had dozens of beautiful roach clips, pill bottles, and numerous little baggies with marijuana in them. He informed us that he had confiscated all of this from the people along the beach and it was time to dispose of it. He then began pulling out items from the box and describing them (no doubt to irritate us) before tossing them in the fire. First, he would say "is a beautiful roach clip," "here's a bottle of pills," etc. Now he was really having fun with this. The ol' boy was at the top of his form when he said

"Oh, how I hate to do this to you guys." It was a big bag of marijuana, part of it buds. Then he said, laughing, "The guy I took it from was almost in tears." About this time a gust of wind came up grabbing the bag, and I took this as a cue, slapping for it while it was flopping in the wind. It fell from his hand and went in all different directions.

"Sorry," I said. "Just trying to help."

To my surprise he said, "Ah, hell with it," and dumped the whole box on the little fire and turned his back and walked off. Well, a few of us prisoners close to the fire started stomping on it in order to get to the weed. The corrections officer in charge noticed. "Hold on there, gentlemen." (They liked to use that term.) "Nobody gets anything out of that fire, (our hearts sank) until you get me the roach clips." Seems he collected the pretty one with feathers.

Well, shave my head, ol' friend. We were working harder than we had all day in order to perform our new task. After all was accomplished and we were on our way back to the prison, the officer said that if any of us got caught with the weed he would deny any knowledge of it. If we could accept those terms we could keep it. If not, we would have to return the weed to him and he would dispose of it. Yeah, right, we thought. However, it was a pretty generous offer so we agreed.

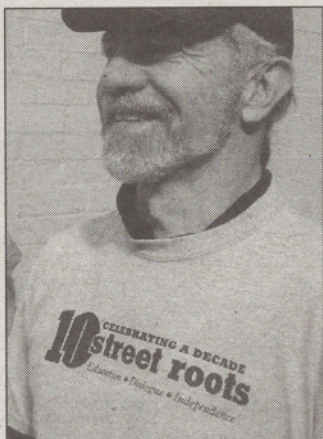
Back at the prison, the five of us who divided the weed had a nice little income for a while. You have to realize that in prison, an inmate will pay five dollars for a pinner, which is about one fourth the size of a regular joint. Very small, hence "pinner." Prisoners were damn glad to have some weed to smoke, and I was damn glad to make the five dollars. Even ole' Ike bought a couple. Whose Ike, you ask? Well none other than the former husband of Tina. Yep, seems Ike got busted for cocaine and was doing a couple years here at C.M.C. and in my dorm! The first I had seen Mr. Turner was when I was walking to my dorm the first day and someone said, "Hey, that's Ike Turner there." He was under a tree posing for a picture with some others.

The guard who was walking us to our dorm said we had gotten here just in time. The prison fair is going to start in a week. Then he laughed just like the streets, almost.

There's more to come. Semper -Fi

Street Roots
T-shirts
are here!

\$15 each
plus \$4 shipping and handling
Allow 2 to 4 weeks for delivery.



Sport grey with black lettering

Please send this order form
along with a check or money
order to:

Street Roots
Attn: T-Shirts
211 NW Davis St.
Portland, OR 97209

Name _____

Address _____

Size: S M L XL

Repairs, Renovations & Sacred Spaces

Invest in the
infrastructure
of your home!



♦ 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

**JOIN THE MEDIA
REVOLUTION!**

KBOO 90.7 FM

PORTLAND: 90.7 FM • CORVALLIS: 100.7 FM
COLUMBIA GORGE: 91.9 FM

LISTENER SPONSORED
COMMUNITY RADIO