Number 4

by Anonymous

The quiet dignity of everyone
facing their days
Is enough to bring me to tears
On this annoyed city bus
Life does not allow for
A lack of participation
It will find its way to you
I'm confused, too

VENDOR PROFILE

Jeff Childre

BY HELEN HILL
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

If the definition of a hard life is six years in the infamous "SHU" – a windowless, solitary housing unit at Pelican Bay where inmates spend 23 hours a day in cuffs, with no human contact – Jeff Childre has lived a hard life.

"I couldn't keep out of fights," he said, "so they kept throwing me back in."

He believes prison should never be "glamorized." He should know; he's spent 25 years in and out of San Quentin, High Desert and Pelican Bay.

Jeff has nothing but love and respect for his parents. He says he was given every opportunity and "the best parents anyone could want." He remembers his boyhood home in Crescent City, Calif., as the place all his friends wanted to be. They loved being around his mom and dad.

"There were no problems at home," he said with honesty. "I rebelled against love. It was the '70s. Rebellion was part of the culture."

"My father was a real badass," Jeff recalled with pride. He was a paratrooper in Korea who jumped out of planes, carrying a machine gun, then later a firefighter with the Civilian Conservation Corps and the California Department of Forestry. He coached Little League when Jeff was growing up. His mother was "an angel." She was a great cook and would sit around the kitchen table with his dad for hours. They were always there for him when he was released from prison, he recalled, helping him with college, a place to live, a job, a truck. But he just couldn't seem to "stop doing stupid stuff."

Jeff relocated to the Pacific Northwest earlier this year for a "geographical change" to try to finally beat his drug habit. He's been clean for some time now.

"I cry for no reason now. I've got my emotions back," he said.

He said he suffers from bipolar disorder and sometimes stays awake for days. He has aches and pains from old fractures and broken bones, but "I'm a tough old convict."

Street Roots has been a big part of getting grounded and staying clean, Jeff said. His desire to use decreased when he started working.

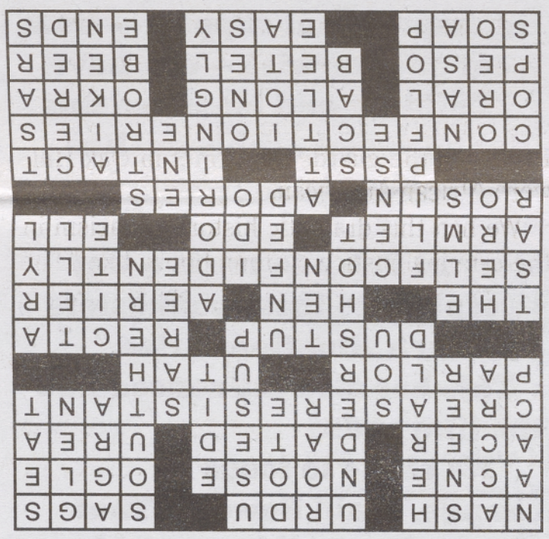
"I like to come in every morning and talk to the good people at the front desk, and I like being around folks who aren't part of a drug scene. Everything I've accomplished here is because of Street Roots."

Now that he has a little money in his pocket and a job he likes to show up for every day, Jeff is planning to save his money, buy a car and return, clean and sober, to visit his children and grandchildren down in California. He looks forward to taking them on an outing to the Smith River, "the cleanest river in the world."

"I just want to go home," he said, "but I don't want to be strung out when I do."

Who knows, if things keep going well for Jeff, he might just be swimming with his family in the clear waters of the Smith River before too long.

Answers to Page 15 Puzzles



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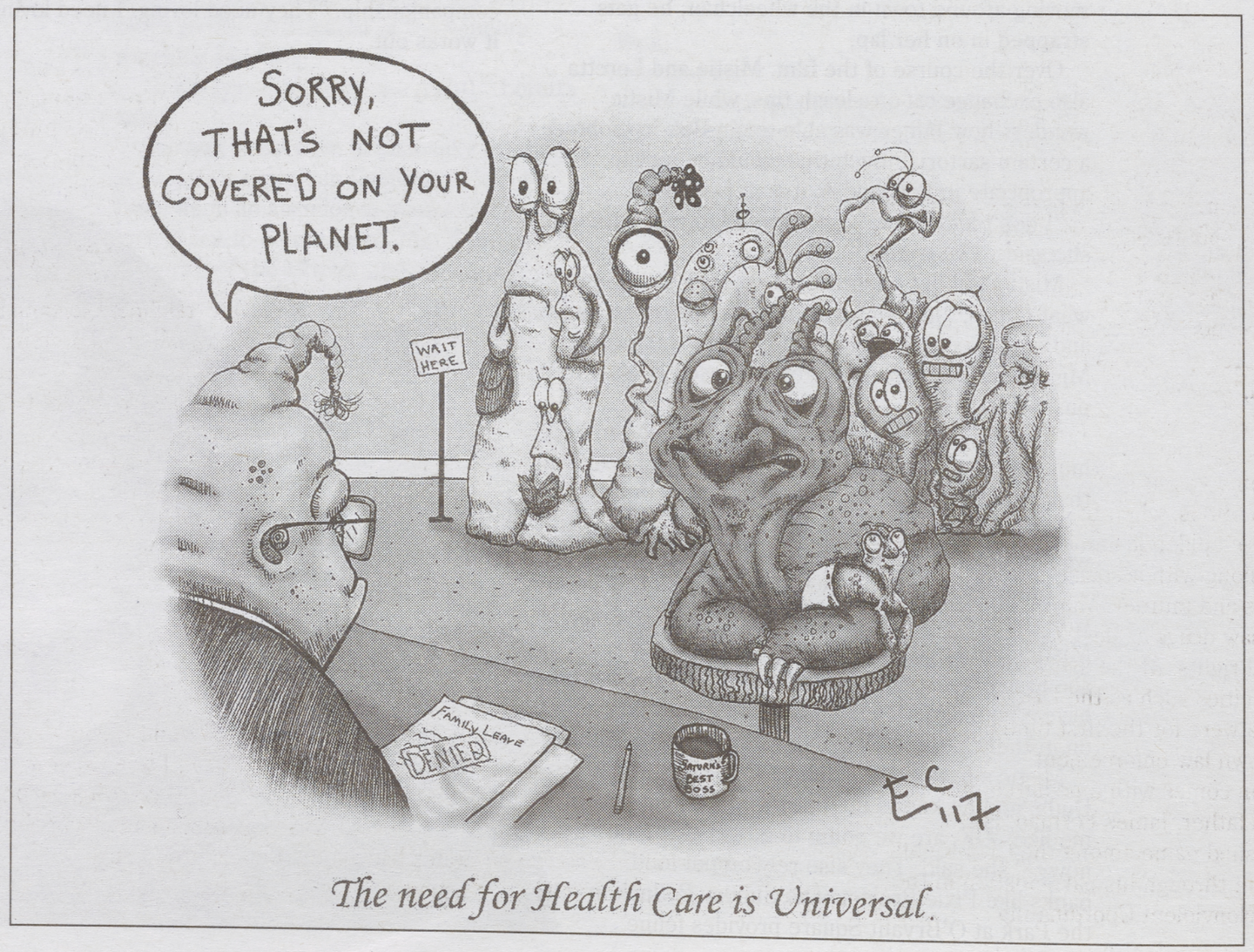
Sheeptoast

by Elizabeth Considine



The need for Health Care is Universal.