

From behind the wall



by Larry M. Baker #35021

"ALL WORTHWHILE"

Usually, this correspondent never brings to publication "Behind the Walls," any of the many letters received from the general public, expressing their opinions and viewpoints on different topics or subjects printed in previous issues. Generally, this task is left to a small, but dedicated volunteer staff, who assist in writing and compiling each week's written material from prisoners throughout this prison at Oregon State Penitentiary. That they may answer each letter in a more personal vein, or the letter is referred to the prisoner who submitted the material. Also, we encourage many to direct their comments to the "Letter to the Editor" of the *Portland Observer*, so that more readers may grasp an insight on articles written. Communicating is the purpose for the birth of "Behind the Walls" — people meeting people in print.

But this week "Behind the Walls" will make an exception, because we believe it's worthwhile sharing. The letter comes from Ms. Evelyn Collins, director, Grace Collins Memorial Community Center, Portland, Oregon: August 2, 1977.

Dear Mr. Baker:

"Always enjoyed (?) ha) your 'input' in the *Observer*, July 28, edition was especially meaningful. I'm glad your efforts to bring Black people together and awaken them to the needs of 'our' youth. 'Times are changing' was well done — with the triumph there remains the sorrow! 'We have come this far by faith.' Surely God will help us in our current fight if we seek his guidance. Larry, may I, in love, make a suggestion? You write well. You use good grammar. You have

picturesque ways of putting things. I'm sure you can do an excellent job of writing without the use of profanity. You don't use it often. Please don't use it at all. We need God on our side, Larry, let's not use language unbefitting to His child, OK? Lovingly with prayers."

It is only fitting that I, the O.S.P. Correspondent take the full responsibility and privilege to personally answer Ms. Collins' beautiful letter. No, I have never met the woman, but yet, I hold the knowledge of her superior contribution to the youth within our so-called Black ghetto of Portland, and to the underprivileged young people throughout the whole city — regardless of color. Ms. Collins' center has a child care — "infants through kindergarten," a before and after school, "Latch Key Program," "Teen Recreational Center" — plus more.

Dear Ms. Collins:

Such letters like yours make whatever path we, who contribute our time and gut-level feelings through the eyes of our ball-point pens in the confinement of our 6x9 cement, barred, dusty cells, each week, for publication in "Behind the Walls" truly all worthwhile. Thank you, for your welcoming comment and wholehearted criticism, for it's only through communication that we may know, who might be reading what is written in our column. Please try, with understanding, this being my first experience of trying to write a column, as such, neither having any training or courses of journalism, as many of the other inmates who submit their articles. Although this is not a valid excuse, because from time to time our educational program does provide such.

Noted, the profanity in the column is never done in an intentional manner to insult God or his faithful followers, but only to relate from a natural state of mind (meaning: as gut-level and with truth as I can possibly offer).

But once again, you are right, because it is time I realize our readers come from all walks of life. No, I am not a Christian, but I would like to be — even though I have a Bible within my cell, which is seldom open. Our O.S.P. Chaplain Reverend R.W. Helseth, last Sunday morning related to me who attended his sermon, "By our words shall we be justified and by our words shall we be condemned," while guards sat patiently monitoring our conduct inside the Chapel, just as I also watched the prisoners stroll up to the altar from their racially chosen sections to receive "Holy Communion." Or to listen why our Catholic priest, Father Stephen Bartory, last week, submitted

his resignation to the Archbishop, or why he no longer wants to work here, or for the reasons, the visiting weekly Presbyterian Reverend Dobson comes? Let us not forget it was only last year that the first Black minister's church (Church of God in Christ) tried to establish its congregation here in our state capitol, home of prisons and mental institutions — only to be burned out.

No, Ms. Collins, I am not a Christian, but I would like to be.

Yet I have faith, but not the answers. Faith that our prisons and jails in the State of Oregon will improve, faith that our NAACP, under the leadership of Reverend John H. Jackson, will hear every Black child cry for hunger, every Black youth plea for an equal education, every Black fathers loud voice, who is denied a decent job he's qualified for, every Black mothers prayer. Faith in Barnard Richardson, Salem NAACP Branch, to see that every Black prisoner behind these walls has received a fair trial, and every Black mental patient receives the best psychiatric treatment, and see that Black old folks never leave this earth without the knowledge that they have been properly cared for. Faith in Calvin Henry, Corvallis NAACP, with Oregon Assembly For Black Affairs will organize all organizations who service Black people, so we might know our Roots in Oregon, present and future. The same faith my Black mama had in donating one fourth of her weekly earnings to the NAACP, when scrubbing floors on her hands and knees, during the depression. Or my Black pappy donating part of his earnings after fourteen hours in the fields, with a sack on his back. Faith that the NAACP will give their Black babies a better Tomorrow.

I have faith that Reverend Alfred Henderson will always keep the Black press free, faith in Reverend Strayhand, Reverend Griffin, Reverend Dever and Reverend Peterson, along with Reverend Sam Jackson to restore the 'faith of God' into the conscious of, we few Blacks in Oregon, so I can try to become a Christian.

In closing, I have faith in you, Ms. Collins, to guide our Black children in their early years away from the knowledge of prejudice, racism, and greed, for that child might be mine. Faith may be all any prisoner has to comfort his sanity in a dingy cell, but it's beautiful and rare. Thank you for your letter, it only makes our effort with the development of "Behind the Walls" all worthwhile.

Respectfully,
Larry M. Baker

County Planning Commission vacancies announced

Multnomah County is seeking applicants for two vacancies on its nine-member Planning Commission, County Chairman Don Clark announced.

The Planning Commission reviews County land use policies and makes recommendations to the Board of Commissioners on land use questions. In addition, Clark explained, it coordinates planning efforts with local, regional, and state agencies and will prepare and supervise the citizen involvement program necessary to comply with the State and Conservation and Development Commission's goals and guidelines.

Planning Commissioners serve four-

year terms without pay. They meet at least bimonthly and are also required to attend public hearings, accept committee assignments, and view sites under consideration for development.

Clark invited any County resident interested in serving on the Commission to write him at the County Courthouse, 1021 S.W. 4th Avenue, Portland, 97204 before September 15th. Letters should explain the applicant's interest in the appointment and detail any previous experience or demonstrated interest in the areas of land use planning, urbanization, and environmental quality.

The County Charter requires that Planning Commissioners be representa-

tive of the County geographically and that not more than two have the same occupation.

Current members include: Gerald Brewster, Sauvie Island, Architect; William Cooley, Parkrose, Builder; Gussie McRobert, Gresham, Registered Nurse; Louise Miller, S.E. Portland, Teacher; Charles Sax, S.W. Portland, Architect; Sister Mary Gregory Hanson, Bridal Veil, Hospital Service Administrator; and Barbara Wiggan, Wilkes area, Office Service.

For additional information about the role and function of the Commission, Clark asked citizens to call County Planning Director, Martin Cramton at 248-5259.

by Gary Chipman #39187

Empathy — The Healer Of All Wounds (Opinion)

Contrary to the old adage, time has been discovered to be a concealer of psychic wounds; like a three stooges dresser drawer scene, the pain is pushed deep into the psyche only to pop out again in an almost unrecognizable form. It is this phenomenon of neuroses, psychoses, and character disorders. However, if the pain associated with a psychic wound is shared with a friend, parent, or therapist who truly understands and empathizes, often the wound will heal naturally, leaving no scar; hence, a lack of empathy lies at the root of most mental illness. Each of us must experience the feelings of those around us in order to understand how we ourselves feel. When we become isolated unto ourselves, we not only lose the ability to relate to others, but we fall out of touch with our own feelings as well. Unless the empathy of others intercedes, we become less humane and less human.

Recently I was locked in a Multnomah County jail cell with a seventeen-year-old boy. He was an affable fellow, and before long we got around to discussing how and why we both found ourselves in jail. He admitted to thievery, and when I asked him why he stole, his response was, "I don't know." His perplexed expression told me that he genuinely didn't understand his problem. I told him that I wouldn't accept that answer and neither should he. By asking a few inviting questions, I got him to tell me the story of his life. Many times I stopped him and asked for more detail. The whole process took eight consecutive hours.

The pivotal period in the boy's life began when he was seven. His mother drank, couldn't cope with children, and finally had a nervous breakdown. Because his father, a long haul truck driver, couldn't care for the children on a daily basis, the kids were made wards of the court and put in foster homes. The boy was lucky in that he drew a family that cared for him and accepted him as one of their own.

For three years all went well and then, when the boy was ten, his father reappeared. The boy spent a few weekends with his father; the father began making overtures about getting together again. The foster family understandably felt threatened by the father. They put pressure on the boy to stop seeing his father and to stay with them — "we want you!" they said.

It was at this point that the boy began his long history of thievery. He started by stealing from his foster parents and he kept it up until they rejected him. From then on the cycle was always the same — whoever befriended him or tried to help him he would burglarize. Finally, even the father was not immune. From juvenile detention hall, the boy graduated to MacLaren School for Boys and then to the County Jail. Out of all eight hours worth of listening, this brief summary captures the gist of his problem.

Though it was obvious to me what had happened, it obviously was not to the boy. Instead of telling him my thoughts, I asked him a series of pointed questions, getting him with his answers to put all the important pieces together in his mind. When I finally asked him, "when was it you started stealing and from whom?" His face lit up with recognition. Again I asked the big question, "Why do

you steal?" His response was, "to get people to reject me!" "Bravo!" I said. Then, and only then, did I tell him the terrible news, "now that you've figured it out, you no longer have any excuse to go on stealing." We talked about substituting some sort of positive behavior for stealing — the kind that would gain him the acceptance he so desperately needed.

The boy was not miraculously healed, but for the first time in his life he had a conscious grip on his own destiny. He was no longer a complete slave to his childhood traumas. Everyone has ambivalent emotional feelings but, as in the case of this boy, at ten years of age these can be overwhelming. To unlock his feelings so he could understand them, all I had to do was listen, understand, and actually feel what he must have felt when being pulled in two emotional directions at once.

I don't wish to condemn the state correctional system, for its people are doing a seemingly impossible job rather well; however, it is also true that the state is making only a half-hearted

by Lee Boyd

Our greatest problem that we're facing is the System. I mean the ways and means of the institution. From what I can see the whole thing is geared for the white man himself. You see, upon entering this institution, he first dehumanizes us. By taking away all of our human rights, and any other rights we might have. Such as being able to stand up for our manhood. Then he expects us to abide or govern ourselves to his way of life and living, in and out of the institution.

See, he fails to realize that our life aspects are entirely different than the life aspects of his own. There's no way possible we could ever leave here with the pretense of devouring our life style and expect to make it. These are some of the rules laid down for us, and he expects us to abide by them. I could name more but I want to get into that, placing emphasis on the inside of the institution and on getting out.

You see I truly believe that the man is afraid of us, or having some kind of inferiority complex toward us or something. I think, he doesn't want to let us enter his so-called law abiding society. He might use the word rehabilitation for an excuse — its meanings — to bring or restore to a state of health or construc-

attempt to understand and empathize with its incarcerated. Empathy and understanding must come from the whole heart. Perhaps if we, the people, allocate more funds for correctional psychological programs, the correctional system will prove to be more correctional. We have renounced punitive action and not yet truly shouldered the correctional responsibility; this is what makes the job of correction seem impossible.

Each of us has a well of experience, a wall built of frustrations, a mine of desires, a forest of sorrows, a sea of joy, a mountain of pain within himself — a virtual empathic bank account upon which to draw for understanding of the emotions of people around us. Shared pain is lessened; shared joy is heightened. Sharing is the key to empathy — share yourself with others and they will share themselves with you. Daily exercise of your empathy fill your cup with compassion. If we can purge ourselves of our cynicism, future historians may yet write that this century marked the beginning of man's humanity to man.

tive activity, to put back in good condition. It seems like he's got it all by the tail end. There is no rehabilitation here. If any, the only one would be self-rehabilitation.

I strongly believe in that, because I am the only one who knows my mind, and its capabilities. This goes for each and every one of us I'm sure. But they haven't awakened to this fact. I guess you're wondering where does that leave us. Like in a game when you're check-mated, only the object of the one he's playing is to divide and conquer. From the way things look if we don't wake up to this fact we'll all be running around like a chicken with his head cut off.

Wait a moment, let me say this, we do have a faithful few left who can help. And I mean a very few. The ones who haven't are sure to turn into snitches, then used to conspire on, or against us to save their own souls. Maybe I should say, to get some of that time cut off, if not all. Anyway let's get back to the few, what we call hope to die ones. It's a fact that we can't change the System. But — I do believe if we could somehow make a small sacrifice, like all the fun and games. Direct our minds to a little more positive thinking, on one aspect in general, mainly on getting out. I believe even that would enlighten our burdens in this frustrating situation.

The Good bread



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Youth law kits available

The Oregon Council on Crime and Delinquency has announced the publication of a revised *You and the Law* topic kit. The topic kit is a curriculum package for sixth graders which has received national attention. It is designed to help students understand their relationship to the law, their rights and responsibilities and the juvenile justice system.

First published by OCCD in 1965 as a small pamphlet, *You and the Law* was expanded to a 23-topic "kit" in 1973. After the 1973 edition was published, copies were requested from 42 states and three foreign countries. The new edition has undergone substantial revision to accommodate several law changes, new topics and changes of emphasis.

The topic kit acts as a platform for

discussion of specific topics (such as "vandalism," "theft," "alcohol and drugs," etc.) and more general topics (such as "what is law?" and "why are laws necessary?"). Each topic provides a teaching goal, vocabulary guide, suggested discussion items and learning activities. A glossary and annotated resource list will also be included.

You and the Law is being distributed statewide to every elementary school and local criminal justice agency. As a United Way agency, OCCD will be making a limited number of copies available to other interested organizations.

For further information contact the Oregon Council on Crime and Delinquency office, 718 W. Burnside, Portland 97209 (228-5397).

Notice

Mr. and Mrs. James L. Brown are the parents of a son, James, Jr., born August 29th. The nine pound, six ounce boy is the Brown's seventh child — the first boy.

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