



by John Ritter,
O.S.P. Librarian

Every human being engages in some form of mental escape, whether it comes in the form of an afternoon cocktail or an annual vacation to the beach. People who have their physical freedom can choose several alternative routes of escape, but in prison a convict has no physical freedom, therefore his escape must be mental, via his own imagination. The mental escape in prison has to come in some other form and for a large majority of the prison population that escape is formulated, via printed material. The mental escape from prison has to come in some form other than physical and for a large majority of the prison population that escape comes from reality through books, via, the prison library.

I was discussing this question of the importance of a prison library with several inmates in my library one afternoon, and they had some really interesting and compelling comments. One old man, a lifer said, "time passes slowly in the joint, days are the same, weeks are the same." He passes his time by traveling to distant lands, cooking exotic dishes, living an adventurous life through the books he reads in the library. He said, "I have been most places on earth, and am familiar with a thousand cities and cultures. I have been reading books for the last twenty years, six books per week, one per day, over forty books per month and over 500 per year."

"You read for enjoyment and education, people in prison read for their lives," another inmate told me, "Man if I didn't have books I'd be dead, I'd just lay over and die, I'd give it up."

I go home to a nice dog and a pretty girlfriend every evening and I enjoy life in a myriad assortment of recrea-

Behind the Wall

by Larry Baker #35021
O.S.P. Correspondent

tional activities too numerous to name. Inmates at O.S.P. can count on their fingers their only recreational activities. They can go to the yard, play cards, watch television, or read. The passing of time is a big issue with inmates, they frequently talk with me and discuss the philosophical aspects of time. When you stop and think that some of these people are doing 10 years or more its overpowering. How anyone can stay in one restricted oppressive, and small place for that long and have any mind left is really amazing to me. I'd go stir crazy if I had to spend one week locked up or at least that's what I think. Maybe I wouldn't or maybe I would be able to adjust as these people do, slowly but steadily. I'd find ways to make the time pass, possible by reading books and spending time in the library.

I have talked to several inmates who have done time in other institutions and I always ask, "Hey, what about the library?" Some say the O.S.P. library, "ain't shit," some say, "it's okay," others say, "It's great," but time and time again, I hear people say, they need it to exist, to help pass time, to escape.

The library serves over 2,000 inmates in one main institution and in three separate satellite facilities. The library consists of over 12,000 hard-bound books of which there is yearly turnover of 150%. There is presently 130-150 magazines and over 30 various newspapers from all major areas of the state and several out-of-state areas are in circulation. There is also a complete law library, and a reference area that contains 700 telephone books and reference volumes from nearly every major city.

The O.S.P. library relies heavily upon the State Library Collection and the entire S.L. Collection of over 45,000 volumes are available for



John Ritter, third from left, at work in the O.S.P. library.

check out, via the mails. The S.L. also offers research, periodicals, and film service to the inmates and through S.L., the inmates have access to books in any other library in the state.

The library operates under the educational department with one professional librarian to administer the library with 18 clerks who operate a complete book bindery, state library, reference room, magazine, newspaper and paperback check-out areas and the legal library and regular library. The library is open five days per week processing some 500 books and handling approximately 250 inmate requests.

The light fantasy thriller is the most popular type of book read, but all books, magazines and newspapers are well used.

An inmate reads on the average of two books per week, so in a population of 1,500, that means that over 126,000 books are read every

year. This above all would seem to substantiate the importance of the prison library. No community with a population similar to the prisons utilize a library so much. Though the library is used in a large part as a means to escape the daily boredom of prison, it is also used heavily by inmates who are in school doing research and by prison staff as a resource facility. The library is used as a vehicle through which inmates can maintain contact with the outside world, via newspapers and magazines.

The library is an integral part of the rehabilitation program in that for some people this will be the only opportunity for them to use a library or have access to one almost anytime.

I am equally correct in stating that the present administrator (Mr. Cupp) of O.S.P. also places the library high on the list of priorities for the prison, in that he has seen fit to give the library a more then adequate budget and staff.

MHRC holds annual meeting

The Metropolitan Human Relations Commission's Annual Meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m., June 21st at the Coliseum Thunderbird, 1225 N. Thunderbird Way. Dinner will be preceded by a no-host social hour.

The City-County human rights commission was originally established as the Intergroup Relations Commission in March 1950 under Mayor Dorothy McCullough Lee. Ms. Lee has been invited to be a special guest at the meeting.

Highlighting the evening will be a speech by Dr. Thomas E. Gaddis, noted author of *Birdman of Alcatraz*.

Special recognition will be given to the citizen volunteers of the new and highly successful Mediation Project, and the Commission's committees on Education, Employment, Equal

Justice, and Housing.

The Commission's 1978-79 Annual Report will be presented; copies can be obtained by calling 248-4187.

Langston U. seeks president

The A&M Board of Regents is now accepting resumes or applications from any person who is interested in being considered for the presidency of Langston University. Langston University is located about 45 miles north of Oklahoma City. Langston University is a four-year institution with a current enrollment of about 1,100 students.

Any person desiring information concerning this position should write to the A&M Board of Regents whose office is Room 452, Oliver Hodge Building, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105.

For a person to be assured of consideration, applications or resumes must be received by the A&M Board of Regents on or before July 23, 1979.

All communications should be in writing to the address listed above.

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ON THE DIMENSIONS OF THE WORLD:

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Leigh Hunt

ON REPUTATION:

To disregard what the world thinks of us is not only arrogant but utterly shameful.

Cicero

ON REPUTATION:

A person has a reputation, and is no longer FREE, but must respect it.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

ON REPUTATION:

The solar system has no anxiety about its reputation.

Ralph Waldo Emerson