



Behind the Wall

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BUS ME? BAD, BITTER AND BLACK

His name was Leo Smith—alias Richard Smith, Thomas Henry, and William Thomas—but we'll just call him "Home Boy," a nickname he acquired from fellow prisoners while incarcerated at O.S.P. from 1956-1959. He served a five year sentence for the sale of narcotics (heroin).

As a child, Home Boy lived in Medden, Louisiana. Home Boy was the oldest of three children belonging to Leatha Mae and Tom Smith. Tom was shot and killed by a white farmer who caught him stealing chickens from the henhouse. The year was 1937, the middle of the Depression. Home Boy was 7-years-old at the time, and remembered the county sheriff beckoning his mother from the cotton field on that hot summer day to break the news of his father's death. He also remembered how she had been thrown into the back seat of a car and taken away for questioning. His father had been killed less than a mile from where Home Boy, his two sisters, and mother had gone to pick cotton early that morning. He remembered that no one had had anything to eat that morning because the farmer from whom the Smith family rented a small one room board-up shack had demanded all his father's money the night before, to make up a months back pay in rent, leaving them with no money for food. After walking five miles to the field that morning, Home Boy overheard his mother pleading with his father, not to worry, because after that days cotton picking she would go and beg the owner of the cotton patch for an advance on the weekly pay to buy food. Home Boy and his father could go rabbit trapping and catfishing. It wasn't long after they started picking that his father disappeared and his mother picked nervously with tears in her eyes, Home Boy never forgot those tears.

Home Boy's mother was returned to the field after a couple of hours, took her children and walked back to their little shack. His mother immediately placed all the family belongings into a flour sack and they went to a nearby freight yard to catch a freight train to his mother's sisters place in Baton Rouge. During that trip another tragedy struck Home Boy's life. In the middle of the night the boxcar Home Boy, his mother, and his two younger sisters were huddled in was suddenly invaded by four white hobos in their mid-40s, who were drinking. He remembered how his mother fought them off as they made sexual advances to her. All of a sudden he watched two of those men throw his baby sisters, aged four and five, out of the boxcar into the night while the train was moving at a very high rate of speed, and how he was torn from his mother's arms and thrown out also.

The next thing he remembered was waking up in a hospital only to be questioned about the deaths of his sisters and the rape-death of his mother. Home Boy's aunt, a prostitute in Baton Rouge, was located, and she retrieved Home Boy and he lived with her for awhile before she placed him with a Black minister and his family.

Home Boy was forced to go to a tenthouse church meeting every

night, and work hard in the fields each day. He was forced to pray forgiveness for the wickedness of his father's stealing and his mother's submitting to sex before her death. If he didn't he was beaten by the minister. Finally, Home Boy ran away, only to be caught a day later breaking into a grocery store for food. He was placed in jail and sent to the state reformatory.

Home Boy was already well acquainted with hard work in the field, so 12 hours a day regardless if it was picking cotton or digging stumps, he knew he was going to get three meals a day and a place to sleep at night. Never having attended school was no loss, because as he put it, "How can you lose something you never had." He even knew how to handle the lashings he would receive by the white guard who would catch him talking to a fellow inmate when he wasn't supposed to. He didn't even mind being called "Nigger" by white folks because he thought that was what all Blacks were automatically called. Even red beans and rice became his favorite meal when served.

Home Boy was only at the reform school three years before he was attacked by a Black crew boss who tried to force Home Boy into a homosexual act. Home Boy ended up splitting the big Black prisoner's head open, causing instant death. Then he was told by a court that he could not be released until he turned 21 years of age.

For the next few years, Home Boy learned one lesson and learned that lesson well. How to hate whites without letting that hate be known.

Home Boy's sentence was cut short by the conflict of the Korean War. At the age of 20, he was recruited right out of the Louisiana State Reformatory, straight into the Army and was sent to Ft. Lewis, Washington.

It was there that he met and married Leatha May Jackson, a Black girl of 18, who worked as a maid for a high-ranking officer. Leatha became pregnant and had twin boys while Home Boy was overseas. Home Boy had a good Army record, because he was used to taking orders all his life. But in March 1952, Home Boy was seriously injured in the back by a grenade and was sent back to the states, receiving a medical discharge. It was while recuperating in the Army hospital that he was first introduced to drugs.

Home Boy, his wife and children eventually settled in Portland, but because of his back injury, he was spottily employed. He began to sell the drugs that he was issued by the hospital. Drug sales brought in enough money to allow his family a decent living. More drugs, more money, and in a short time Home Boy started buying and selling drugs from other soldiers who received medical treatment from the hospital. Many of the wounded soldiers would obtain large quantities illegally.

Another child was born to Home Boy's wife, and in 1956, Home Boy was arrested, tried and convicted for selling drugs and sentenced to five years at O.S.P. By this time Home Boy himself was a drug addict.

Leatha May and their children were placed on Welfare and waited



for Home Boy's release.

It was here at O.S.P. that this Correspondent first became acquainted with Leo Smith, better known as "Home Boy." All these years Home Boy had never learned to read or write, and he would pay me a pack of cigarettes for each letter I wrote to his wife and children for him.

Leatha May would bring money for him, and Home Boy would buy drugs, either from the inmates or the guards. In fact, Home Boy started using more drugs in prison than he did prior to his arrest. He became a professional in his dealing, even to the point where he was sending money home to his wife and children.

But shortly before Home Boy was to be released, Leatha May became pregnant with an illegitimate child by ney. The attorney had become romantically attracted to Leatha May and had helped her out financially on many occasions without the knowledge of Home Boy.

After returning home, Home Boy and Leatha May had a stormy relationship, but to Home Boy's children he became a hero. Unable to gain employment for lack of education, ex-felon record, and medical problems, Home Boy went back into drug dealing and his children received almost anything their hearts desired. But in 1963 Home Boy and Leatha May were divorced. She remarried a year later. She allowed Home Boy to have his children on weekends. One of his sons would even run away from home occasionally just to be with Home Boy.

I did not see Home Boy until ten years later. A beaten man with poor health, one could see that drugs had practically destroyed him. He had been in and out of jail, hospitals, and prison on numerous occasions during those ten years, but he was still the hero in his children's eyes.

In 1974, Home Boy was found dead in a Portland park, due to an overdose of drugs.

None of his children finished high school and Leatha May's second marriage ended in divorce. She had in many ways lost control over her daughter and two sons lives because they blamed her for not being true to their father. They wanted to live the high style life they thought their father had once lived...with plenty of money.

The life of Home Boy is only the beginning to a tragic story plaguing the Oregon Black youth today. Because it's important to note what has happened to Home Boy's three children, in order to observe a clearer picture of the human genocide that is building up in prisons and jails, year after year. And the problem is going to continue and perpetrate the Oregon Blacks as long as it is not recognized as a problem.

Home Boy's sons can be found today serving time in two state prisons, Oregon and Washington. Both are known drug addicts. One son has fathered four children and the other has three. Home Boy's daughter is the mother of four children and is also a drug addict. She has a long extensive police record of prostitution and forgery.

Today, Thomas and Leatha Mae Smith's twelve grandchildren range in age from one to twelve years. All

are being pumped with the 'hate whitey and police' game for the downfall and incarceration of their parents. All the children live in the Black community of Portland, known as Albina. Seven of the twelve children are enrolled in the Portland School District. And five of the second children are being bused and all five have become major disciplinary problems to the schools.

As I write this true story, I cannot help but remember how the percentage of the Black population has exploded within this prison over the past ten years, and what it will be like ten years from now. Is this the answer to why the Black population at O.S.P. is 14% in a state where the Black population is less than 1.3%? Is this the reason O.S.P. holds the distinction of having the second largest population of concentrated Black people in this state? Are more Black children doomed for these prison gates by the built up prejudices, hate and greed that may plague the Black families of today?

The story about Home Boy and his family is not an isolated story in Portland. In fact it is a very common one among Black families who are underprivileged, uneducated and unemployed. To survive everyday living it becomes so easy to become trapped into the illegal activities that may come their way.

And now that the busing issue has become the hottest event in years, the question becomes will Black children be given the chance to escape the downfalls implanted by their knowledge of seeing what has happened to their parents who are in prison?

This Correspondent isn't going to end this story on a negative note, because once a problem has been exposed, it is always best to offer a suggestion. Parent training within our penal institutions. Why? Because there are just too many Home Boys today rotting away behind these bars. Or face the possibility of—father like son—trend ten years from today. Believe me, I am witnessing each and every day just too many Home Boys being herded through these guarded steel gates each year.

Moon eclipse visible Sept. 6

Garry Stasuik, director of the Kendall Planetarium at OMSI, reports that the moon will be totally eclipsed in the Portland area during the wee hours of Thursday, September 6th.

The moon will enter the penumbral shadow of the earth at 1:20 a.m. P.D.T. on September 6th. Nearly an hour later, at 2:18, the moon will move into the earth's umbral

shadow, which will appear as a reddish coppery light across the moon.

The total eclipse will occur by 3:31 a.m. and end at 4:17, with the moon leaving the umbral shadow at 5:30.

According to Stasuik, the reddish coppery glow that will light up the moon during the eclipse appears because the earth's atmosphere absorbs all the colors radiated by the sun except red light.

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Prison Poets

Julius Snowden, Editor

WEB

Spinning in one's solitary orbit,
Surrounded by a measure of
Memories still too full to bear
And tangling one's web of life

O' sphere of agony that permeates
Essence of being and self—
It holds its own with a control
Too tight to let go,

Swallow the echoes that must be borne—
Ignore the mind that wanders on—
O' world that only holds more
Of the same waste, waste, waste.

Where will it all end? Must there
Always be a tomorrow for pretending?
It is only games I play...
And tears of bitterness are welling.

by Robert Benjamin Franklin

LEGACY

I don't know where I'm going,
And almost know where I've been—

But the moment that the world
Stopped for thee
And went whirling on for me—
Has made the difference,
For time cannot stop, and not
Leave a part of me;

To linger and swell in memories:
This, then is the legacy.....

by Robert Benjamin Franklin

On Aspiration/Responsibility

No bird soars too high if he soars with his own wings.

William Blake

On Conservatism

People are conservatives when they are least vigorous, or when they are most luxurious. They are conservative after dinner.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

On Conservatism

What is conservatism? Is it not adherence to the old and tried, against the new and untried?

Abraham Lincoln

On Ancestry

I don't know who my grandfather was; I am much more concerned to know what his grandson will be.

Abraham Lincoln

On Talk

Words once spoke can never be recalled.

Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon

On Truth

Be so true to thyself as you not be false to others.

Francis Bacon

On Time

Time ripens all things; no person is born wise.

Cervantes