



Behind the Wall

by Larry Baker #35021
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JOSEPH HARRIS, JR.

INMATE OF THE MONTH
"Behind the Wall" has chosen Joseph Harris, Jr. as "Inmate of the Month" at O.S.P.—for his dedicated work with the Black population.

Harris, Coordinator of the Black culture club (UHURU), has been a leader among his people in solving many of the problems Black inmates have with the prison administration and other inmates.

Danford, inmate at O.S.P. is also a writer whose talents are admired by many in the creative writing class at O.S.P. It is a privilege to present to you his latest work.

ORANGE MADNESS

by Donald Danford #32323

In the segregation unit of Oregon's penitentiary there are rules for every conceivable moment, thought or action. One of the rules is that no one is allowed to keep an orange in his cell. From time to time someone gets a notion to keep an orange to eat later in the morning. If he makes it without getting caught, the world goes on as usual; if he doesn't make it, all the experience of hundreds of correctional conferences by the experts in the genre is brought to bear on the problem.

The first thing that happens is that the orange is confiscated. No one knows if they hold it for evidence, eat it or put it in their lunch buckets. The orange disappears. The next step is to write a disciplinary report about the incident. They don't call such an offense something like "The Case of the Unauthorized Orange"; they call it disobedience of a direct order. It can be a major or minor violation. It depends on the correctional expert. A report is made, typed in triplicate—one copy for the records, one copy for the prison court, one copy for the convict—and passed out. Next, a "Notice of Hearing" is typed out in triplicate, passed out and a hearing is scheduled.

The day to go to court arrives. The staff escorts you to the courtroom and seats you before three solemn men who will now consider the case. The first thing the hearings officer asks is whether you understand your rights. (One of the "rights" of an accused prisoner is the right to call witnesses to testify before the "court" as long as the witnesses are not: 1) "inmates"; 2) "staff"; 3) "other prisoners." You say yes, you understand your rights as thousands before you have said yes, because you understand trying to reason with this type of intellect is futile.

"How do you plead?"
"Guilty." (Humor them, you think to yourself. Every once in a while there is a faint light in their eyes and an almost human expression comes over their faces. Maybe they'll come out of it for a few moments.)

"Do you have anything to say?" asks the Commandant.

"Well, I just don't know what came over me. I was sitting there looking at this orange. Suddenly I was gripped by passion, a wild desire came over me, an unexplained obsession held me in a vise-like grip! I... wanted... to keep the orange for... later! Oh, as I think of it, how could I have fallen so low?"

The court listens intently with all the attention it can muster. (One of the judges—at least one—is staring off into space at all times. Another one might be following the flight of a fly as it buzzes around the two guards standing behind you.) Then you are led out of the room by the two guards while the court ponders the case. Several minutes later you are re-admitted to that chamber and the ver-

dict is read. If the sentence of the court is more than seven days isolation, you have the right to appeal through the Public Defender's office to the Court of Appeals. Since so much of what the prison court does reaches the Court of Appeals, they rarely give over seven days for an unauthorized orange.

Effects of employment discrimination continue

(Continued from page 1 column 6)

the target of discrimination when he was passed over for an appointment as supervisor. He was later told that supervisors found white workers would object.

He later transferred to the VA Hospital in Vancouver, where he was assigned to head the lab after a poll of the white workers had been taken. Henson was forced to retire from the lab because of traumatic arthritis in his knees. Following surgery, he attended the University of Portland, where he graduated with high honors in 1956.

He had planned to continue in a clinical psychological program, but the educational program for World War II veterans in which he was enrolled was terminated.

After searching for work for some time, Henson accepted a position at the Umatilla Army Ordnance Depot near Hermiston. He attended Ordnance Management Engineering Training and other courses and was eventually promoted to GS-9. He

states that he was told he would receive no further promotions because white workers resented him, so transferred to San Francisco. Continuing to advance through his educational pursuits, he finally reached a GS-11 position.

Because of family illness, he sought another management position in the Portland area, and in 1961 transferred to BPA.

Henson says that while employed at BPA he was assigned superficial, make-work jobs even though he had management training. He received "excellent" and "outstanding" work evaluations but was passed over for promotion in favor of white men who often were less educated and experienced. In the six years he was employed there, he never progressed beyond the GS-11 he had when he arrived.

After all informal attempts to rectify the discrimination he felt had failed, Henson filed a formal grievance against BPA with the Department of Interior. An investigator by an equal opportunity office found

BPA had not discriminated, but Henson states that many of the facts in the report were incorrect. He states that prior to a formal hearing on the complaint, a Black man from the Undersecretary's office told him that his experience was common to Blacks but that harassment on the job would increase if he did not drop the complaint. On his advice, Henson withdrew his complaint.

The next year, 1968, deciding that he would never have opportunities for advancement, Henson took a disability retirement. His benefits were calculated at the GS-11 pay rather than at the GS-13 rating he felt he would have had had he not been Black.

Henson blames his wife's suicide, in 1972, and the disintegration of his family on frustration and bitterness over his treatment at BPA. His oldest son committed suicide in 1974.

He then began to attempt to pursue his 1967 complaint. The United States Civil Service Commission refused to reactivate the complaint, the Department of Interior said it had no authority to investigate it; and an attempt to file a new complaint was rejected by the Department of Interior.

Henson filed a suit in federal court asking that his pension be figured at the higher rate he would have earned had he not been the target of discrimination. The suit was dismissed because it had not been filed within the statute of limitations, six years following his retirement.

Henson explains that if he had not been denied employment opportunities throughout his career, he would not now be living on a minimal retirement benefit. After spending most of his life in federal service, he has nowhere to turn for assistance.

"I have tried all the government agencies that are supposed to help—the Civil Service Commission, the EEOC, and even hired an attorney and went to court, I cannot understand why the government I have served so well has refused to listen to me and refuses to give me the pension I have earned."

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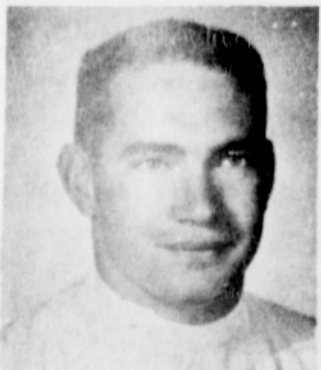
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