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Behind the Walls

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CELL TALK

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FROM A PRISON ARTIST'S POINT OF VIEW

By George Nagel

In this writing I would like to show my appreciation to those people that have been so kind to me, and have had thoughts toward fellow humanity. They are a credit to mankind.

I am an artist and I paint landscapes, and have for around thirty years, and to this date I have not had any recognition for what I do. Now since coming to OSP I have had the fortune to meet some great people, such as Mr. Whitley, chief of security, and Mr. Charles Keaton, the director of education at OSP, as well as many others, officers and inmates together.

I am in deep gratitude to all of those who have helped me to decide to use the talent that God gave to me. I feel that each of these people needs to be praised for their efforts in helping others help themselves.

I am not happy to be here in prison but while I am here my plans are to make the best of what I have, and to utilize the ability that I have in hopes of bettering myself for the future when I am released back to society once again.

Learning is a lifetime process and if we can take an objective look at what has transpired in our lives and learn from our mistakes, we will be in a bet-

ter position to improve if we but try. People, like those I have mentioned earlier in this writing, desire to help if one would but let them.

Not all people that are in prison are "cons." Some of us just got caught at some wrong-doing and ended up in here, cast out of life's race for a period of time, but that doesn't mean that we have stopped living or become of no use to others, and I thank God that there are some left in the world that really care and have a desire to help some of us that have lost the game and are now paying the debt that we owe.

My hopes are that someday my paintings will at least hang on the walls of some of your homes, mainly because it gives me joy to be able to make something that is somewhat related to life here upon this earth, and to the beauty that was created for each of us to behold every day of our lives.

I'm not the greatest artist in the world and probably rank very low in the field of art, but I do the best I can each time I pick up the brushes. My desire is to put a feeling in each of my paintings so that the beholder will be able to relate to what is said in the work that I have done.

In conclusion I would like once again to thank all of those persons that have given me help in being able to paint once again; it is very, very much appreciated every time I pick up my brushes. I thank you kindly.



Shirley Woodward, Assistant to the Governor, admires George Nagel's painting.

ISSUES AND OBJECTIVES

The prime objective of this column is to project—to project the images, voices, screams and pleas that exist behind these granite walls; inside this concrete tombs laugh, cry, dream and and put it in the street, in the classroom, in the church house and in the night clubs that black people frequent so often. It's not an easy task because all prisoners have a tendency to extol the negative and the negativity sooner or later destroys the objectivity of the reader and the writer.

It's important that we first understand and agree upon the fact that all prisons are extensions of society. That a complex society exists behind these prison walls and bars and that the prison society isn't much different from the society that exists at large. The men and women confined inside the concrete temple; to take the cell talk desire what every intelligent and civilized person desires—peace of mind, happiness, to be loved and to give love in return. They're not like the images that parade across your TV screen. The great escape takes place only in Hollywood with the big shoot-out climaxing the end of the movie.

The image producers go to great lengths to paint negative pictures of prisoners—and not necessarily prison—in the mind of free society. The mind of society is the mind of the people, mind is man, man is society. If everybody in free society thinks that prisoners are bad then there isn't any emphasis placed on building better prisons—more humane prisons—because common sense dictates that you don't keep bad people in good places. So instead of creating an atmosphere that enables a man to overcome the obstacles and weaknesses that lead to his incarceration, we have an atmosphere that enhances his chances of return to prison. We have an atmosphere that creates perversion, homosexuality, homicide and the moral, physical and spiritual genocide of the human spirit.

Prison is a cesspool of near hopelessness. The men who pass

through these confines are apt to commit more crimes. They will commit more crimes because prison itself is criminal. It breeds criminal minds, it strengthens the base desires in human beings. If prison or the people who extol the necessity in sending men and women to prison ever hope to achieve what they claim to be trying to achieve, then prison and the concept of confinement has to become legitimate. Legitimacy in its attempts to legitimize the criminal. It's very frightening as a prisoner to pick up a newspaper and read where some public official is exhorting the need for larger prisons and stiffer prison sentences, etcetera, etcetera. It's frightening because they don't know what it's like in here, they don't know about the loneliness, the denial of dreams, the homosexuality, the pain—the suffering of day to day prison life. If they knew these things or cared about them then they'd ask for better prisons to solve the illegitimacy.

Now listen to me; check this out; it's very important that black society, black minds, black people understand/recognize that prison is a very important issue. It's important because it's the sons and daughters of black society that the selfish political minds are destroying under the disguise of rehabilitation—when we speak of rehabilitation or incarceration as it relates to black people, we must underline our thoughts with the word *genocide*. "Don't take my word for it—investigate it, research it, check out the ratio and you'll find out who's really committing the real crimes in society." It seems as though someone is intentionally placing all the focus on the little criminals who're forced into criminal activities by the big criminal minds that run the country and produce the images.

Which brings us to the issue of whether or not we choose to believe the images that are being projected to us.

"If you are not careful, the newspapers will have you hating the people who are being oppressed, and loving the people who are doing the oppressing." —Malcolm X.



Judge Robert E. (Ice Man) Jones, Multnomah County Circuit Court, talks with Larry Baker.

PEOPLE AND PRISONERS, 1979

1979 has been an extraordinary year at Oregon State Penitentiary. The concrete and steel isolation has been penetrated, gates have been opened, and the public has responded to a need. State leaders have walked the compounds, ate in our mess hall and instructed in our classrooms—the most interaction between condoned and condemned in penal history. Inmates having personal access to public officials set a precedent in 1979, one we hope to continue through the 80s.

Behind The Walls would like to recognize a few of these individuals who have volunteered their professional services to this prison over the past year. We have chosen quotes from history that we feel are interesting and best portray our feelings about the service these men and women have given us.



Kay Toran, State Director of Affirmative Action, confers with Dwayne Samples.



Pina Williams, of Portland Public Schools and KGW TV host, raps with inmate on prison problems.

The Lucid Walls of Time

Editor: Julius Snowden

From the Editor, staff, and our crazy cartoonist we want to wish you all The Grandest of Holidays and a

Very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Julius



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DECEMBER



FROM EXODUS

Remember that in order to fully enjoy this holiday season your mind must be clear so that you will know in what manner you are presenting yourself to others, and in what manner you are receiving others.

Excessive use of alcohol and drugs distorts your ability to consistently present yourself to others respectfully, and to receive others respectfully in the true spirit of this joyous holiday season.

It is respect that is fundamental to peace on earth and good will to all human beings.