

INMATES: Anderson learned how to adapt to life inside prison

Continued from 1A

outside. He is earning an undergraduate degree and studying for his electrician’s license. A string of jobs have included work in the kitchen, laundry and garment factory. He currently works as a technician in the prison’s HVAC shop.

On a recent day, Anderson rose before six, got dressed and headed for the chow hall along with many of the 180 inmates living in Unit H, an honor unit. All wore jeans and shirts of prison blue. At the chow hall, they filed into the large room where the hubbub of dozens of conversations enveloped them. Diners sat four to a table, their stools attached by long metal arms.

In a small, steamy room off the main one, ten inmates washed dishes by hand. Anderson grabbed a tray from the stack and stepped up to the serving line. A kitchen worker wearing a beard cover deposited potatoes, croissant and eggs onto the tray and ladled farina — a hot wheat cereal — into a bowl. The food is filling but not fancy. It costs the prison an average of \$2.13 per day to feed an inmate. Anderson made quick work of the food. The meal, along with a cup of strong coffee, vanished within the allotted 20 minutes.

Shortly after Anderson left the dining room, a fight broke out between two inmates. Ron Miles, the prison’s communications officer, who was following Anderson (and the *EO* journalist) at a distance as a safety measure, heard about the fight on his radio. The prison averages about one inmate-on-inmate assault each day, he said, though they often come in bunches.

“Fights usually last about 15 seconds, enough time to throw a couple of punches,” he said. Then staff descends on the combatants, stops the fight and metes out the punishment.

It happens quickly, Anderson said.

“You could be having a bad day and brush up against someone else having a bad day,” he said. “Small problems escalate into big problems. You just can’t get away from people. This place will stress you out. You learn to put a smile on your face and grow thick skin.”

Anderson returned to his cell and washed his hands, something he does a lot to ward off whatever cold du jour is circulating through the prison. Behind him, a dozen-or-so books sat on a shelf. A small flatscreen television attached to his bed frame offered 53 channels.

As Anderson walked back out into the tiled hallway, he pointed to phones mounted on the wall. ID number and passwords are required to call out. Red block letters spelling PREA (Prison Rape Elimination Act) and a hotline number were imprinted on the wall near each phone. The law was created to deter sexual assault of prisoners. There’s no sex, consensual or otherwise, allowed in prison.

A voice announced “work line” over the loud speakers and Anderson headed out again. As he walked to his job at the physical plant, swallows swooped around the buildings and the smell of bread hung in the air. A CO stopped Anderson for a random pat-down. The inmate joined his work line, a knot of five co-workers and a supervisor standing in a fenced enclosure. Electrical workers gathered a short distance away. Non-inmate supervisory members wore tan clothing.

“If they have a tan shirt, they’re the boss,” Anderson said.

The men funneled through a gate to their respective workplaces. Anderson entered the HVAC shop and picked up a stack of work orders. He would spend the morning changing filters and maintaining ice machines. He switched out his New Balance athletic shoes for



Above: Inmate Adam Anderson checks air-flow belt drives in the day room of one of the housing units at EOCL. He works in the HVAC department of the prison. Left: Anderson gets a pat-down before heading through a security checkpoint on his way to work at the prison physical plant. All 1,700 inmates are subject to random checks. Below: Anderson checks a Telmate kiosk to see if he has any emails in the commons area of his housing unit. He carries an MP3 player which can store photos and messages that have been approved by prison staff.

Staff photos by E.J. Harris



“I didn’t want my crime to become my legacy.”
— Adam Anderson, EOCL inmate

boots.

‘A perfect storm of what not to do’

Before heading out, Anderson agreed to talk about his life before incarceration and how he is reinventing himself in prison. Sitting behind a rustic particle board desk, he raked fingers through his blonde hair. He’d experienced bad stuff as a kid, he said.

“I started dabbling with drugs as a coping mechanism,” he said. “At 13, I had my first treatment for substance abuse. By 18, I’d been in several juvenile facilities. My life was a perfect storm of what not to do.” He numbed himself first with marijuana, then cocaine, heroin and LSD.

“The night I committed the crime, I’d been awake five days straight,” he said.

His blue eyes clouded as he thought about that night. In a suddenly shaky voice, he admitted he’d stabbed a woman 22 times and thrown her in a river.

“I live with that every day,” he said. “I own it.”

At first, he said, he continued down the wrong road even in prison.

“The first few years, I was easily swayed,” he said. “I was trying to fit into the herd. I made a lot of bad friends.”

But, finally, came a time of reckoning.

“I made the decision I wanted something more,” he said. “I didn’t want my crime to become my legacy. It was a come-to-Jesus moment.”

He said he changed course through education and the help of mentors. One important mentor was a blind Episcopalian priest named Doug Jerome who helped Anderson test out theological beliefs.

“Every Wednesday, we would meet for three hours to debate religion and theology,” he said. “We had knock-down, drag-out theological brawls.”

Also, unbelievably, Anderson found love in prison with a woman who came to EOCL to conduct a workshop on Sufism. They clicked and started writing back and forth, and later got engaged and married. He talks to his wife, Sherrie, each night on the phone and during video calls on weekends.

Daily grind

Anderson detached from the interview in order to get to work. He grabbed his tool

belt and headed to the tool room, filling his bag with tools and placing a chit bearing his name in each empty slot.

A hammer hung from his belt, clanking as he exited the shop. In the breezeway, he greeted Sgt. L. King, who had processed Anderson into prison on his first day at EOCL. The CO later retired, then returned to work part-time supervising inmates. Upon his return, Anderson was different. He “came up to me, looked me in the eyes and apologized for his past behavior,” said King.

“He’s changed a lot,” King said. “Before, he was just a mouthy youngster. He was angry. He has changed big-time. He’s got his life turned around.”

Anderson trekked to a dorm unit where he would maintain an ice machine. Partway there, he stepped into the East Gate, which divides one side of the institution from the other.

“What you got?” the female CO asked.

Anderson speedily recited the contents of his tool belt.

“Two adjustable wrenches, an Allen wrench, three channel locks, three standard drivers, a multi driver with all the tips, three end wrenches, two flashlights, hammer, level, three nut drivers, two pliers, service wrench, tape, tape measure, two bottles of cleaner and some rags.”

When he reached the dorm unit, he climbed the outer stairs and entered the third floor. He checked in with the CO and recited the contents of his tool belt once again. Anderson headed to the ice machine in the day room, removed the face panel, inspected the innards,

drained the sump of dirty water and started cleaning. As he worked, residents of the floor watched TV or sat in small groups near him.

Once finished, Anderson worked his way through remaining work orders, checking out a leak in the kitchen and a motor in the greenhouse. In Unit G3, where Anderson cleaned another ice machine, an inmate strummed a guitar in the corner of the day room. Another prisoner sat at a table drawing. The man,

tattoos visible through his close-cropped black hair, used pencils to sketch a Sioux medicine man. He had obvious talent. His drawing was frameable.

After his morning shift, Anderson needed to return to his cell for count. He walked past a metal detector meant to reveal any tools he’d neglected to return. Every so often, the machine beeps, detecting a forgotten screw or nail.

Anderson settled into his bunk with the Schecter guitar he’d bought at the canteen. His “celly,” Rich Lund, turned on his tiny television. It was time for the 11:30 a.m. count. The place was tomb quiet, devoid of chatter or even the flushing of a toilet. Outside the locked cell doors, CO J. Vandever walked along the hallway, pausing at each window to peer inside. She rapped sharply on one door. “No talking during count.”

Starving for the outside

After his afternoon session of work, Anderson trekked to the yard. He wore baggy blue athletic shorts, a color that indicates he has earned incentive level 3, the highest of the levels and the one that gives the most priv-

ileges. Incentive two and one inmates wear red shorts. About 1,000 of the inmates have reached level three, according to Miles.

As Anderson walked the fifth-of-a-mile track, a runner whizzed by. Anderson looked past the razor wire fence, sniffed the air and looked at houses high on a hill. “In the yard, you can look around and see life,” he said. “It’s not so confining. You see the trains go by.”

He strolled past a guy doing pushups on a concrete pad and a dozen men playing softball in the track’s interior. The bat was tethered on a chain. A bank of phones sat on one edge of the yard. Two shirtless men played dominoes.

Anderson passed a well-muscled inmate doing deadlifts and then a basketball game. He stopped at a kiosk on one side of the yard and inserted his MP3 player into the slot. Emails and photos, all inspected and approved by prison staff, uploaded into his player. He called the influx “my lifeline.”

He continued walking past orange cones that marked the border of “the dead zone,” an area that fringes the yard and is out of bounds for inmates. If a softball lands there, Anderson said, leave it alone, unless you want to go to “the hole.”

The hole, he explained, is slammer slang for segregation away from the general population. It’s not the movie stereotype of rough, slime-covered walls and almost total darkness with bread and water pushed in through a slot. Rather, inmates go into a small cell. They wear orange jumpsuits and don’t have access to their possessions.

“There’s a lot of yelling and banging on things,” Anderson said. “You starve for conversation.”

He hasn’t had to go there since 2001.

Instead of looking for trouble, he began taking advantage of opportunities for learning, recreation and even community service. Anderson trained to become a hospice worker. He started a metal band called Medline (“because music is our medicine”) and wrote songs. He helped start a prison Toastmaster’s International club to help inmates learn public speaking.

The inmate said he has growing confidence that his prison experiences will translate into success on the outside. He hopes to find a good job. As a man who entered prison as the father of two young children, he plans to prioritize family.

“What I see as important has really changed for me,” he said. “I’ll be a grandpa in October. With my son, there are a lot of things I missed. With my grandchild, I can start over.”

Please Welcome



Gwen Libby, MD
Family Medicine Physician

Now Scheduling Appointments
541-966-0535

Dr. Libby is originally from Hilton Head, South Carolina and graduated from Furman University in Greenville, SC. She attended medical school at the University Of South Carolina School Of Medicine, and completed her residency in Family Medicine at the University of Alabama, Huntsville. She then spent three years at Western Family Care/Lander Medical Clinic in Riverton, Wyoming. Dr. Libby is Board Certified, American Board of Family Medicine. She has a passion for rural medicine and looks forward to living in Pendleton with her husband Brandon and daughter Sophie Belle.



CHI St. Anthony Hospital
Imagine better health.™

St. Anthony Clinic
3001 St. Anthony Way
Pendleton, Oregon
www.sahpendleton.org