

The ECHO

Texas Prison News

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Distributed Free to Texas Prisoners

Hilltop Unit garment factory flags flying high

As one drives up to the Hilltop Unit, north of Gatesville, it is apparent this is a very unique site within TDCJ.

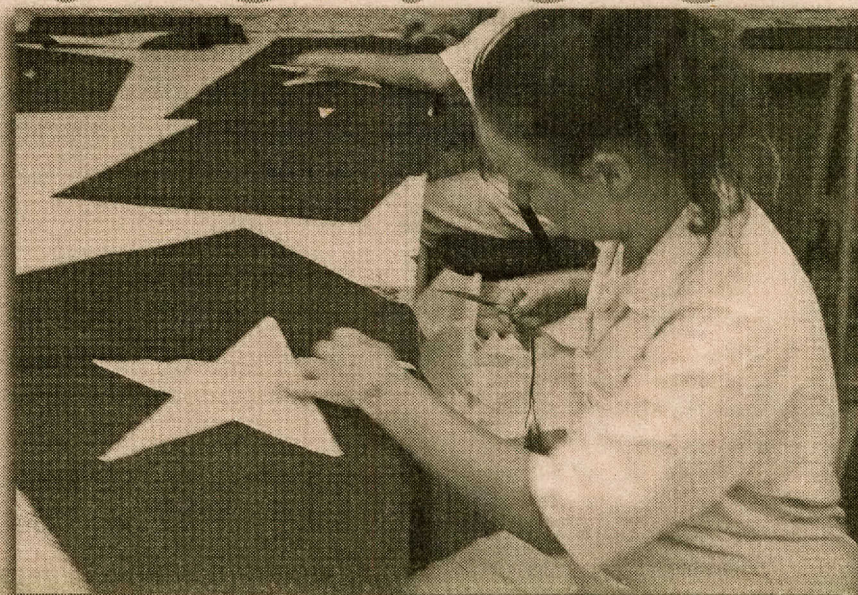
Four old, white, two-story, stucco buildings are built along the top of a hill and overlook the rest of the buildings of the unit and the beautiful Hill Country scene, hence the name. TDCJ acquired the complex from the Gatesville School for Boys in 1981, and it has been an operational unit for TDCJ ever since.

Within the unit complex sets a large Quonset hut type building known as the Garment Factory, the work place for approximately 120 female offenders. Bed sheets and gym shorts are produced here daily, but the unexpected star of this large factory is the flag making process.

In a large back corner of this location, approximately 25 female offenders are hard at work producing Texas and United States flags.

"These offenders take pride in their job, and that's what makes me proud," Assistant Plant Manager Savage said. Watching the workers, it is obvious that each offender takes pride in making the symbols that represent Texas and the United States, even though they are still in a prison environment.

The Hilltop Garment Factory produces approximately 12,000 -14,000 Texas flags per year and nearly 7,000 United States flags per year.



A Garment Factory worker prepares a Texas flag.

FLAGS continued on pg. 6

One man's story

*Richard Cloud
Released*

I have faced many struggles in life, but none compare to the challenges I faced after being released from 13 years of incarceration, including five in administrative segregation.

In 1997, at the age of 17, I became stranded in Texas after driving from Arkansas with a friend. In a moment of desperation I decided to steal a ride back home. There was a weapon involved as well as a victim. The rest is history. I didn't set foot on free ground again until April, 2010 at the age of 30. It was like stepping into a different world.

I had high hopes and dreams of how I was going to conquer the world once I got out. I had plans, goals, notes, addresses — the whole nine yards.

STORY continued on pg. 6

'Education changed my life'

The purpose of the Windham School District (WSD) is to assist offenders in meeting their educational objectives. To sign up for GED classes or learn a trade, Windham is the place to go. These opportunities are great, but WSD is so much more than that; for me it was a change of life.

I have been in and out of prison practically all my life. At a young age I began serving time in penal institutions but I never thought about my education. I could barely read or write and didn't even realize that I had given up on myself. But one day, a great teacher from WSD taught me how to believe in myself by showing me the importance of getting an education. She gave me the tools for my education and as a result built my self confidence

When I started this journey I was on the lowest level for the GED testing, so I decided to commit myself to learning. As a result of my hard work and dedication, I am now only three points away from being eligible to take my GED test.

This education has affected my life in many ways: my family has noticed the change in the way I walk

and talk; I have a healthier relationship with my kids. I recently read the "Twilight" series by Stephanie Meyer solely for the enjoyment of reading. That is a lot to be said for a man who could barely read and write just a few years ago.

It was the greatest accomplishment in my life to learn how to read and write. It has taught me to believe in myself and to conquer my fears. I was reminded of the old saying, "It's not how hard you fall; it's how quickly you pick yourself up!" I am thankful for this unique opportunity provided by WSD. Not only did they give me a chance to further my education, but they also selected the right teachers that changed not only my future, but my children's future as well.

I am extremely grateful that WSD is much more than trade certificates and GEDs. As a result of my teacher helping me believe in myself, I now have greater freedom in my life. I can be the father

my kids need, as well as a positive role model in my community. Most importantly, I can remain free upon my release.

*Personal reflections of
Chad Kennemer
Huntsville Unit*



'It was the greatest accomplishment in my life to learn how to read and write.'

The ECHO

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Offenders can write **The ECHO** by truck mail.

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To the editor,

Since my arrest and sentencing in 2009, I have come to find out just how very wrong I was about marijuana possession being a victimless crime. Actually, it is far from the fact.

The men, women and children who work the crops in Mexico live poor lives, getting little pay for their labor and living in fear.

The “mules” who pack bundles weighing 50-80 lbs. across the Rio Grande and the deserts run the risk of drowning, death from dehydration or hypothermia. The death toll is mind boggling. The mules are victims, too.

Because of my involvement with marijuana, my probation has been revoked, and now my wife, children and grandchildren, who I have not seen in over two years, are also victims.

I don't even use marijuana, but here I am as a consequence of dealing it. I am also a victim — a victim of my own stupidity for even getting involved with the stuff.

Sincerely,
Clyde McDonald
Middleton Unit

To the reader,

Thank you for your story and insight. Usually one bad decision always has a ripple effect, not unlike a stone tossed into the water. We think our one bad decision will only affect us, but usually many more people that we love and care about get hurt along the way. This is just another argument to always strive to make the right decisions.

To the editor,

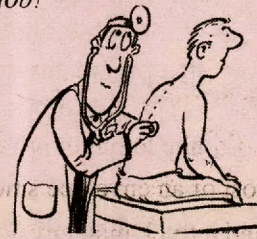
Around mid-May, en route to John Sealy hospital, an error was made in charting my medication, preventing me from getting my morning dose. Nurse Stanley stepped in and located the problem. Not only did she locate the problem, she went out of her way to

bring my cancer medication a considerable distance to where we catch the chain bus. Nurse Stanley was the only person who cared enough to find the problem with my medication, brought it to me and apologized for the mix-up. It's a shame she had to endure some verbal abuse from an arrogant young inmate; an example of no good deed going unpunished. Those of us with brains say “thanks” for the example of professionalism, strength and bullet-proof determination.

Joe Nathan Wilson
Telford Unit

To the reader,

Thanks for another positive article regarding medical personnel. They perform life and death functions in a very challenging environment. Thanks to all the medical personnel on all units. They do an awesome job!



To the editor,

Sometimes, as I lay here, I feel disconnected from the world; like my family, friends and associates are no longer thinking about me. Instead, they have moved on with their lives. I know I need to stay positive and think about those who love me; I just don't know why they can't or won't take the time to write a letter or send a card.

I find myself relying on my higher power more and more, but even then my faith dwindles.

I know I'm not the kid I used to be. I'm a man now and with that I have to accept the consequences of my childish ways. It is unfair to place responsibility for my actions on my family because it's my own fault. Even though I may not receive mail as others do, I have to pay for my mistakes, not my people.

I should be more receptive and appreciative of the help they have already offered, not what they haven't. The things I do have and the situation I am in are in the hands of a power greater than myself. I must rely on that inspiration to govern my actions and concerns.

I will strive against my addictions and vices so that I won't fall to the same snares that landed me here. Spending day after day in a place of restricted movement and being told what to do is no way to live. It creates a dependency. I choose to block out institutionalized thinking. I will not grow comfortable in this atmosphere; to do so would create my willingness to come back. If something causes me pain or agony, I know I will do whatever it takes to avoid going through it again. For now, I just sit back and wait on my chance to see where life will take me. Thank you.

Bryan Grockett
Bartlett State Jail

To the reader,

*I understand all the things you write about, but if you have read **The ECHO** for very long, you know that we would not condone the idea of just sitting back to see where life takes you. Get involved in activities that can change your life such as **Windham School District**, chaplaincy and all the other programs offered on all units. You must become active in improvement activities or your institutionalized thinking will only grow. Good luck!*



To the editor,

I would like to know if there is a list of job openings available throughout the TDCJ system for inmates. If you do have a list of respective job openings and their requirements, where can I get one? I'm looking for a tech-related position. I have Microsoft certification in information systems. Thanks for any assistance you can provide.

Philip Hernandez
Gurney Unit

To the reader,

*We are not aware of any “standing” job listing for offenders. **The ECHO** will occasionally publish ads for skilled workers when specific departments make the request.*

Dear Darby,

Here is a poem I wrote, Darbster. Please consider printing it.

*Some things we're
not meant to know,
yet we keep on
digging as we go.
For the truth, we say,
will help us grow.
We catch the ball
and give it a throw.
Outside, some lift
while others mow.
From Seg. to G.P.,
we pack and tow,
all the while
the questions flow.
Is the Ol' Thang
just for show?
Who or what is Darby?
We've gotta know.
Life is full
of unanswered mystery,
questions we'll ponder
for eternity.
What's at the center
of the galaxy?
Where is Hoffa?
Don't look at me.
The chicken or the egg?
They're endless you see.
The biggest, it seems,
involves Darby.
Is he a she or she a he?
The answer, it's as plain
as your anatomy,
neither and both,
that's the real mystery.
What she is to me,
he may not be to you.
Gender matters not,
if the answers be true.
Listen to the wisdom,
it'll get you through.
Look not for the anatomy
but instead the point of view.
Write a letter;
ask a question or quite a few.
Take the advice
and make a change or two.
Get back to your family
and tie a tiny shoe.*

*Don't worry 'bout Darby;
that answer's not for you.*

Les Cantrell
Coffield Unit

Dear Les,

*"Who and what I am?"!
I assure you, sir,
that I am
not a sham.*

*"A she or a he?"
I assert that I just be —
toiling away
for such as thee.*

*I do my best,
giving wisdom and wit
with answers that sting,
just a little bit.*



Dear Darby,

I'd like to put in my three cents (the cost of an envelope since I couldn't find a truck mail envelope) on two letters in the March issue of *The ECHO*. More specifically, I'd like to address the responses to those letters. First, the letter from the Wiz on late night rack up. Respect of our living areas ought to be observed anytime of day. Prison floor plans were designed with space economy in mind. The noise created in dayrooms permeates our living areas and depending on your housing location, can cause serious loss of sleep. Sleep deprivation can cause major health problems. Secondly, Old Anon's letter on sagging — has he got nothing better to do than worry about his cellie's fashion or lack thereof? Sagging is nothing new. They were doing that in Ferguson when I was there in 1980. They called them low riders back then. Your responses were terrible. The domino slammers and homeboys that want to ride with their road dogs (usually from one side of the dayroom to the other) are far more disrespectful than someone who sags. You roasted Wiz for complaining of disrespect by late night riders and then you agree

with Mr. Anon that sagging is disrespectful. What gives?

Dale Steadham
Hughes Unit

Dear Dale,

You've misinterpreted my answer to Wiz. I was addressing his sensitivity to normal activities, not exceptionally disrespectful behavior. I do not condone one being disrespectful to those around them. Never have. However, don't whine to me about folks engaging in normal behavior — whining is rather unbecoming.

Oh, and just a note to all you domino slammers — slamming is disrespectful, no matter what the time or how many points you made on a play. Show some consideration to those around you. Besides, slamming is against the rules!

Dear Darby,

Could you help me teach all the new boots how to act like true convicts? This will help them to stay out of a wreck. It seems that some people don't know what respect is. Here are a few things that people need to do to make parole.

1. Mind your own business.
2. Don't argue with unit COs.
3. Don't just walk up and look into someone's cell.
4. Don't put things on the benches to save a seat and not come back.
5. If you see an offender talking to an officer, butt out.
6. Don't cut in various lines.
7. Don't stand in the dayroom and yell across it.

John Collier
Neal Unit

Dear John,

I would have added "and do your own time." You absolutely have your head on straight, and your advice is sound. If people would "do unto others as [they] would have others do unto [them]," we all would live in a much more harmonious and productive place. We can only hope that some will see the wisdom of your letter.

DEAR DARBY LETTERS TO THE OL' THANG



Dear Darby,

I am writing to you because we have a serious problem. We need advice on how to handle a situation. In our dorm we have an offender that refuses to bathe. Once in a while he takes a bird bath in one of the sinks, but he smells bad. The officers say they can't make him bathe, but they don't have to live with him. Isn't there a policy about personal hygiene? Can't they segregate him so he can stink and be sickly by himself? We are at a loss on what to do. We need relief from the odor. Help; skunks smell better!

Skunked out

Dear Pepe Lepew,

Got one who likes to stew in his own juices, eh? That's a tough one. Back in the day there were various methods of dealing with this kind of outlier behavior, but those methods are now frowned upon. In today's TDCJ one has to handle things differently. First step: talk to him. Let him know that while you understand how much of a pain it is to get down to the shower, he's just a bit too cheesy for those having to be around him. If that doesn't work, consider talking to them folks about the issue, working your way up the chain of command until the problem is resolved.

On a side note, folks like Pepe make me appreciate today's hygiene standards. Hundreds of years ago regular bathing was frowned upon, and they didn't have antiperspirants/deodorants. Things must've been a bit ripe back then!

Famous Quote:

"It isn't so much that hard times are coming; the change observed is mostly soft times going."

—Froucho Marx

HEALTH NEWS — NUTRITION — MEDICAL UPDATES

Get fit in seven minutes

Bryan J. Moore
Staff Writer

Working out has long been a priority of the prison inmate. No stereotype of the inmate is complete without the depiction of a heavily muscled brute whose body is covered in tattoos. To get a massive physique like the inmates of old or the men you see in Flex magazine, without the benefit of expensive supplements and state-of-the-art exercise equipment, would require countless hours in the gym and a degree of commitment that the average guy just isn't willing to make. Besides, not everyone wants to look like a "baby Hulk", but would be content with just getting in shape. The problem is no one ever seems to have the time to exercise.

But what if you discovered an exercise routine that only took up seven minutes of your day? Would you be willing to exercise three days a week? That would be only 21

measly minutes of your life devoted to working out. Could you live with that? If so, rejoice. What follows is an exercise program pulled from the pages of Details magazine that requires no more than seven minutes to complete and provides a total body work out. It does not involve any special equipment and can be done anywhere; the cell, the dayroom, and of course on a crowded rec yard where there are two dozen people waiting for the same weight machine.

According to Details, "Perform this plan as a circuit, executing nine to 12 of the exercises below for 30 seconds each, moving from one to the next within 10 seconds. If you're aiming to burn major calories, go right into a second set and even a third set. Complete it three times a week, on nonconsecutive days, for best results."

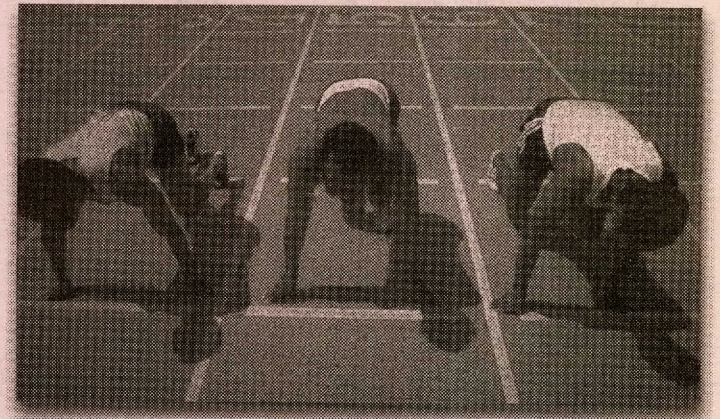
00:00-00:30 Jumping jacks
00:40-01:10 Wall sit
01:20-01:50 Push-ups
02:00-02:30 Crunches
02:40-03:10 Chair step ups

03:20-03:50 Squats
04:00-04:30 Triceps dips on a chair (back arms)
04:40-05:10 Plank
05:20-05:50 High knees
06:00-06:30 Lunges
06:40-07:10 Push-ups w/ rotation
07:20-07:50 Alternating side planks

This seven minute workout was created by Chris Jordan, C.S.C.S., of the Human Performance Institute in Orlando Florida.

"The sequencing—full body, lower body, upper body, core, repeat—is what makes it effective. It targets every major muscle group and keeps your heart rate up," Jordan said.

For best results, do variations of the moves to keep the work out challenging. For even better results, stick with the program and



prove to everyone that you really can get fit in just seven minutes.

Editor's note:

While this routine may provide a complete body muscle workout, it does not satisfy the requirements for a complete cardiovascular workout. The Centers for Disease Control recommends 20-60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity on three to five days per week for a cardio workout.

Sources:

- September 2013 issue of Details Magazine
- Web MD- Kick it up With Cardio Exercise

Type 2 diabetes and seniors

Danny Lee Duffy Sr.
Stiles Unit

As people get older, the risk for type 2 diabetes increases. In fact, in the United States about one in four people over the age of 60 have diabetes, which is 50 percent higher than any other age group. If a person already has diabetes, it must be managed as the years go by.

Food is broken down into sugar called glucose. Glucose gives the body the energy it needs. To use glucose as energy, the body makes insulin, which unlocks the body's cells so they can receive the glucose they need.

When a person has type 2 diabetes, the body does not make enough insulin or use it well. This means cells can't use the glucose as energy, so the glucose stays in the blood. Having high blood glucose can cause problems like eye, kidney and nerve disorders.

People with diabetes also have an increased risk for high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke, as well as other serious conditions. There is no cure for diabetes, but it can be managed. Balancing what you eat and medicine, if prescribed, will help control weight and can keep

blood glucose in the healthy range. This can help prevent or delay diabetes complications.

It is vital for seniors to take an active role in managing their diabetes. A diabetes care team can help, but day to day, diabetes care is up to the individual. Day to day care includes:

1. Choosing what, how much, and when to eat
2. Maintaining a healthy level of activity
3. Checking your blood glucose (if doctor ordered)
4. Taking medicine (if doctor prescribed)
5. Quitting smoking (if not in TDCJ)
6. Going to your medical appointments
7. Learning all you can about diabetes

If the doctor prescribes medication, there are many different types of diabetes pills. Each type works differently to help lower blood glucose. More than one may be prescribed because sometimes drugs work better when taken together.

Just as type 2 diabetes affects age groups in different ways, seniors respond to medications differently. The patient needs to work with the doctor closely to make sure their body is responding properly.

Sources: American Diabetes Association website
Wikipedia
Mayo clinic website
Pub Med Health website



AGENCY INFO — POLICY UPDATES — LEGAL NEWS

Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Ombudsman

In 2007, the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) Ombudsman was established by the 80th Legislature (Texas Government Code §§501.171- .178) and was appointed by the Texas Board of Criminal Justice (TBCJ). The PREA Ombudsman provides offenders, family and friends of offenders and the general public an independent office to report sexual assaults occurring in Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) correctional facilities, and to ensure the impartial resolution of complaints of allegations of sexual assault. The PREA Ombudsman reports directly to the TBCJ chairman and may be contacted at the following address:

PREA Ombudsman
P.O. Box 99
Huntsville, Texas 77342

Due to the serious nature of sexual assaults, and in accordance with TDCJ policy on "Zero-Tolerance" against sexual assaults, offenders knowledgeable of an offender-on-offender or staff-on-offender sexual assault that occurs within a TDCJ correctional facility are encouraged to immediately report the allegation to the facility administration or the Office of the Inspector General (OIG). ➔

Preparing for future: recognition of cold-related illness, injury

Editor's Note: The following information was provided by TDCJ Risk Management.

Frostbite

Not only can wind chill cause a rapid body heat loss, it also can cause frostbite, the freezing of body tissues. Frostbite can occur in 15 minutes or less at wind chill values of 18 below zero or lower. Offenders can be at an increased risk to frostbite because of factors such as exhaustion, hunger and dehydration, which further lower the body's defenses against cold.

Watch for the following symptoms of frostbite:

- cold, white and hard skin;
- pain;
- itching;
- loss of feeling in the affected area;
- spots or blotches on skin;
- swelling and blistering;
- skin becomes red and blotchy when warmed and
- tissue loss, depending on the severity of the frostbite.

Hypothermia

Hypothermia is a condition occurring when the body loses heat faster than the body can produce it. With the onset of this condition, blood vessels in the skin constrict (i.e., tighten) in an attempt to conserve vital internal body heat, thus affecting the hands and feet first. Hypothermia, the severe or prolonged loss of body heat, begins when a person's body temperature falls below 95 degrees. Because the temperature drop may be gradual, and an early symptom of hypothermia is mental confusion, the victim may not know a problem exists. If one's body continues to lose heat, involuntary shivers begin. This reaction is the body's way to produce more heat and is usually the first real warning sign of hypothermia. Further heat loss produces speech difficulty, forgetfulness, loss of manual dexterity, collapse and finally death.

Some offenders can be at an increased risk to hypothermia if they have predisposing health conditions or take certain medications. Some of these conditions include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, hypertension, poor physical condition, poor diet, and/or advanced age.

Watch for the following hypothermia symptoms:

- confusion;
- drowsiness;
- slurred speech;
- a drop in blood pressure;
- shallow breathing; and
- a pinkish tint to the skin.

Report all incidents of cold-related illness to a staff member immediately. ➔

**Revisions — Board Policy 03.91
 Uniform Offender
 Correspondence Rules**

The Texas Board of Criminal Justice approved the following revisions to the correspondence rules during the August 2013 board meeting. The revisions were effective Oct. 1, 2013, with the exception of the receipt of stationery.

1. Stationery

- **Effective March 1, 2014**, offenders will no longer be allowed to receive stationery through the mail.
- Stationery is defined as "paper and envelopes, to include carbon paper, purchased through the unit commissary by the offender, provided through the indigent correspondence supply program, or purchased by offender families and friends through the eCommDirect program."

2. Time Limits

- Incoming/outgoing mail will be processed within two business days of receipt.
- Packages will be processed within three business days of receipt.

3. Altered Photo

- Added a definition for altered photo; means "an image with content in violation of this policy that has been edited, including, but not limited to, by removing or changing the contents of the image with a computer software program or other means."

4. Sexually Explicit Images

- Revised the definition so photos showing intercourse without being able to see actual nudity can be denied.

5. Indigent Postage

- An indigent offender may use indigent postage to send five one ounce domestic letters per month to general correspondents.
- Removed references to the first 60 days that an offender is indigent. ➔

Sudoku Solutions

8	9	5	2	7	3	4	1	6
3	1	4	8	6	5	9	7	2
7	6	2	4	9	1	8	3	5
9	3	8	6	5	7	1	2	4
6	4	7	1	2	8	5	9	3
2	5	1	9	3	4	6	8	7
4	7	9	3	8	6	2	5	1
5	8	6	7	1	2	3	4	9
1	2	3	5	4	9	7	6	8

←
Easy

→
Difficult

3	7	5	2	1	9	8	6	4
9	1	8	6	4	7	5	3	2
4	6	2	8	5	3	7	9	1
8	2	3	1	9	5	6	4	7
5	9	1	7	6	4	2	8	3
6	4	7	3	2	8	1	5	9
2	5	9	4	8	1	3	7	6
1	3	4	5	7	6	9	2	8
7	8	6	9	3	2	4	1	5


FLAGS continued from page 1

Flags are crafted from nylon, cotton and poly-cotton, and range in size from three by five feet, to 27 by 40 feet. The flag making process includes 12 steps, each one building on the previous. The women fill their time cutting cloth, making patterns, sewing pieces together, hemming sides and placing grommets and special borders. Pieces of material begin the production, but flags emerge from the end of the production line in a most efficient manner.

"We take people with violent criminal minds and make them into productive individuals," said Senior Warden M. Nelson.

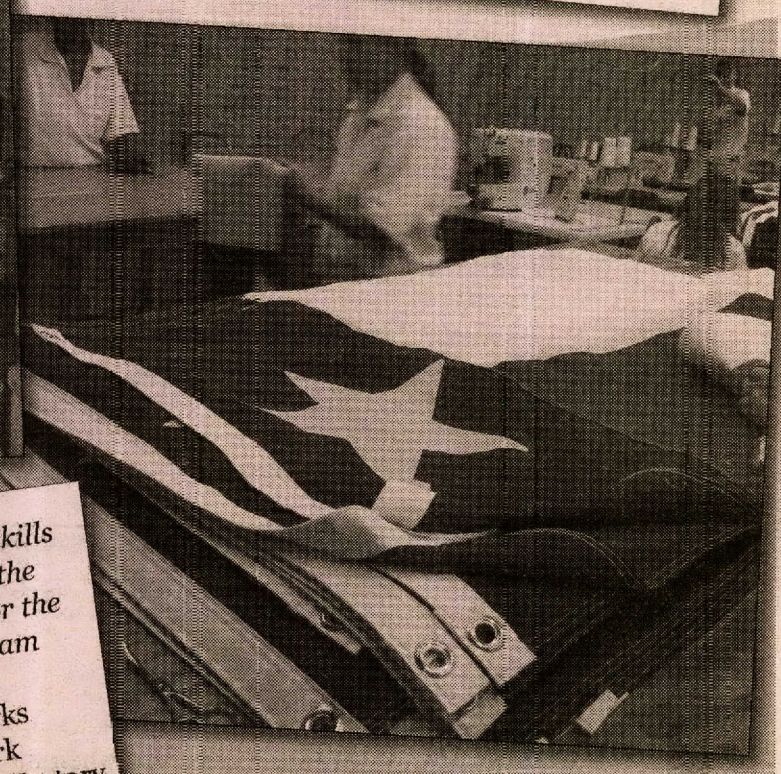
Actually, working in the Garment Factory is more than just making flags. This factory operates as a small business, with certain offenders performing functions related to accounting, shipping, quality assurance and mechanics. Offenders learn skills that will be useful in free world jobs. The ability to work together, communicate clearly and be production-oriented will only help in preparing offenders for outside marketplace jobs.

"Our main mission is to help reintegrate offenders back into society with these skills," Plant Manager Ms. K. Hunt said.

Eligible entities such as state agencies, counties and schools can purchase flags. In the end, flags produced behind prison walls at the Hilltop Unit will grace state agency buildings, flying high even above the Capitol in Austin. 



"I love my job. My supervisor has taught me skills that I can take outside of prison that will help me get a great job. I've worked here for eight years."
— Offender S. Belser
Shipping and receiving clerk
TDCJ Garment Factory



"My job is very important to me. The skills and knowledge I have learned through the years are priceless and I am grateful for the opportunity to be in the position that I am in."

— Offender J. Marks
Accounting clerk
TDCJ Garment Factory

STORY continued from page 1

As they say on the inside, "I had the easy part done." Then reality set in.

On the way home we stopped for gas and I found out I didn't know how to work the pump. When I got locked up all you had to do was pull up to a pump, flip the lever and pump your gas. Now there were buttons, a place for credit cards, and the pump was asking me if I wanted a 32 ounce drink and a car wash! I stood there for a few minutes staring at the machine in bewilderment before a family member came to my rescue.

I had gone through Project RIO, the Texas Workforce Commission and several other groups to better my chances for employment, so I was confident I would have a job soon. A few days after my release, I jumped on a bicycle and peddled from Benbrook to downtown Fort Worth. I rode down Camp Bowie Boulevard putting in over 40 applications that day. The only ones that even bothered to respond to me were the ones that told me no. I finally

landed a job working construction for minimum wage. But I was happy. I was employed. I got my driver's license, a car and moved out of my family member's house within eight months.


During all this I met a girl who would later become my wife and the mother of my children. I wish I could have read the warning signs better, but love has a way of blinding us to the obvious. There is no one as blind as someone who refuses to see. Six months after my daughter was born, my wife informed me that she was not mine. I forgave her. I loved my daughter and my wife, and she assured me that it was a mistake she would never repeat.

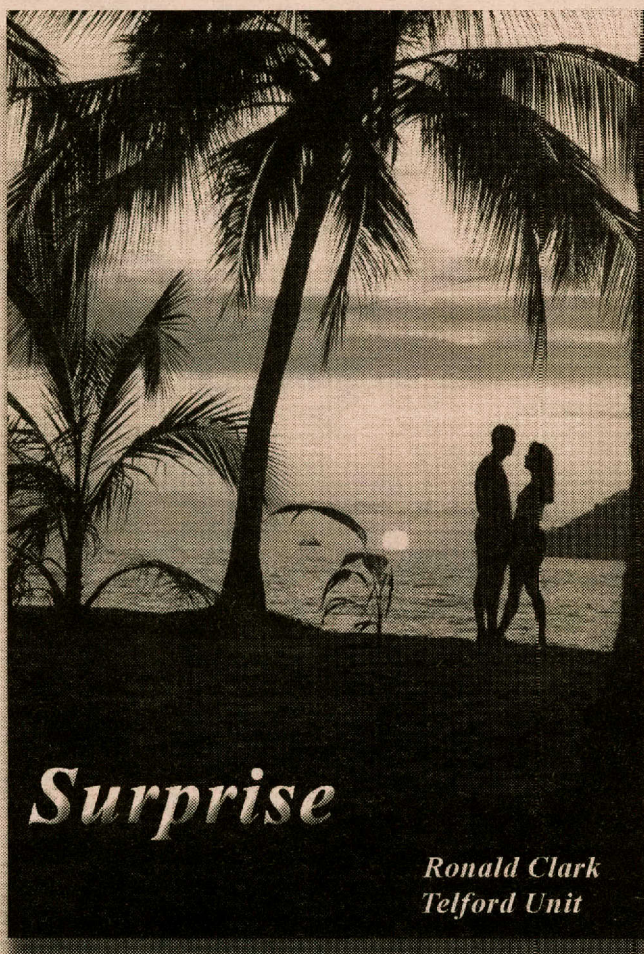
A year later she had my son. When he was a month old, she shook him so hard that it broke one of his collar bones, busted blood vessels in his eyes and gave him massive brain damage. The doctors told me he would not make it. The hospital chaplain came in and talked to me about pulling the plug. I refused. He

stayed on life support for a week and was in a coma for almost a month. They said if he made it he would be blind, possibly deaf and would likely never walk. I never left his side while he was on life support. Luckily he pulled through. Not only did he make it, but he can see, hear, walk, laugh and carry on as any normal child. So far, the only lasting damage that we can determine is that he eats through a feeding tube because his swallowing function was damaged. If he swallows liquid, it goes into his lungs rather than his stomach. My wife was sentenced to 20 years in TDCJ. Now I'm a single father with two beautiful children trying to pick up the pieces of my life and keep going.

I work full time now, having started a business of my own. I created a company called Bifrost Messaging Solutions that allows friends and family on the outside to write a letter using the phone. My company transcribes the recorded message into a letter and mails it to the offenders. So now loved ones can write

a letter anytime simply by picking up the phone and talking, anytime, anywhere. I always wanted to find a way to give back to the friends I left behind the walls, and to make communication easier for families. This is my contribution.

Someone once said that making a living is not the same as making a life. I'm inclined to agree. It's a struggle out here at first just to make a living. No one ever said it would be easy. But if one persists and holds to the truth that failure is not an option, it is possible to make a life. I am proof. After 13 years in prison, I was released only to face the greatest heartache I have ever known. But I am not afraid of tomorrow, for I have seen yesterday and have overcome it. I embrace tomorrow, because the sun will shine on my face as a free man, and my children will awake in the morning smiling. Though I will always remember the things behind me, my face points forward. And that, my friends, is what matters. 



Surprise

Ronald Clark
Telford Unit

I pulled out my phone when I was an hour outside of town. I had to call her, make sure she would be home and didn't have any plans. It'd put a big hole in my plan to surprise her if she wasn't even home when I did it.

But she was home when I called, and she said she didn't have anything special to do that day. She even told me she was probably going to be bored with nothing special to do and no one to talk to. She asked if I could chat on the phone for a little while, but I told her I had to run. I was driving, and I didn't want to get into a car accident because I was humoring her while she was bored. She said fine and let me go.

I pulled into a small gas station and asked if I could use the restroom to change clothes. The guy handed me a key. While I changed, I thought about the email I'd gotten early that morning.

Jasmine was going into the Air Force and would be leaving for basic training early Monday morning. I remembered from my own trip to basic that they meant early. It was an impulse decision, but I got paid that Friday night and took it as a sign. I cashed my check when the bank opened and left. Now here I was, 12 hours later, almost back to my hometown in Louisiana.

I'd changed into my suit and drove the rest of the way to her house. She still lived in the same house since I'd known her. She just graduated from high school after all, and I wasn't that far out of school myself. I pulled into her driveway and smiled. This was going to be fun.

I got out of my car and went up to her door and gave my most official sounding knock — three

hard, heavy raps on the door. She answered and looked surprised to see me. More likely, she didn't recognize me. It'd been a few years since she'd actually seen me, and I'd gone from a close buzz cut to long hippie hair in that span of time. Now my hair was pulled back into a tight ponytail, which went between my shoulder blades.

"Can I help you?" she asked cautiously.

I reached into my inside pocket of my coat and pulled out a small note pad, flipping a few pages at random. "Ma'am," I said, "I'm looking for a Jasmine Jameson. Do you know where she is?"

"I'm she," she replied, a little worried now. "Is there something I can help you with, Mr. ..."

"Agent Rogers, special forces. I was wondering if you had any information on a man named Vincent Garrett. I have reason to believe that he may have contacted you earlier this afternoon. Do you know his current location? He's wanted for questioning." I saw the color literally drain from her face as I mentioned my own name being somehow connected with something that would require questioning by a special agent. This was fun, for me at least.

"Ummm," she stammered. "Can you excuse me for just a second?"

"Certainly, ma'am."

I watched as she went to the kitchen phone and started dialing. I was pretty sure what she was doing and who she was calling, so I wasn't surprised when my own cell phone started to vibrate in my pocket.

"Hey Jas, what's up?"

"WHAT DID YOU DO!?" she screamed at me.

I tried to keep from smiling in case she looked out her still open kitchen door and saw me. "What do you mean?" I asked her.

"There's a guy outside my house who says that he's a special agent and that you're wanted for questioning! What did you do!?" She was actually getting really worried now.

"Took 'em a while, but they finally found me, huh?" I said with a hint of anger and surprise in my voice.

"Took who, what now?" Jasmine was really confused.

"Well, it might not be who I think it is." I was trying really hard not to smile at this point. "Is the guy driving a blue car? Without real plates, just those temporary ones?"

She quick poked her head around the door frame, then ducked back, answering me with a quick "Yes."

"Alright," I said, keeping this going just a little longer. "Is his hair kinda long?"

Again, she peeked around and quickly answered me "Yeah." "Is the hair pulled back revealing a face that's so devilishly handsome that it could almost be a sin just to look at it?" She was really quick with the answer this time, so quick it actually took me by surprise. "Yea..." then she paused. I could almost hear the gears in her brain working out everything that had been said on the phone, or even since I knocked on her door. She poked her head outside and said "Vin, get yourself here and come say hello for real now!"

I could tell I was in trouble, so I just said, "Yes

ma'am." I really appreciated Jasmine. I'd been crazy about her forever, but we never got past being friends. We smiled and hugged, and I realized that she looked exactly the same as the last time I'd talked to her face to face, even though years had passed. She still looked amazing.

We chatted about how things were going for each of us. I talked about my new job in customer service for a big time video game company, and she talked about getting ready to leave in a few days. I asked how she was handling that, knowing that I felt out of place before I left. She seemed to be okay, though.

I spent the next two days with Jasmine. I caught up with her sister and a few more of my friends while she was shopping. The night before I left for Austin, there was a big party for me in my hotel room, and an extra special surprise for me that night: a gift from Jasmine that I'll never forget — my first kiss with her.

Eventually my time with her was up, and I had to get back to my job. Driving out of town that morning was the hardest thing I'd ever had to do.

I got about half an hour outside of town before I had to hit the breaks. Nothing was wrong, I just couldn't drive anymore. I sat and had a 45-minute argument with myself about going back to my 'normal' life or starting over with Jasmine, wherever she got stationed. Finally, I made my decision, started the car again, and drove as fast as I could. I'd already lost too much time.

Before I knew it, I was back at Jasmine's house. I stopped to take a quick look around and make sure that this really was the decision I'd wanted to make. The people inside the house must have seen me through the window, because they opened the door for me.

Jasmine was surprised to see me.

"Just let me get this all out, okay?" I said. "This wasn't an easy decision to come to, but I've decided and I want to say this now while I'm on a roll and not really thinking about it because it hasn't sunk in yet. I don't want to go back to my sure life where I have to deal with boring routine stuff. I want you. I want to follow you where you get stationed and be the guy who you come home to, the guy you write when you're on a stupid deployment somewhere. I know that I probably should have talked to you before I made this very rash choice, but I'm only just now making this realization. So if you don't want me to stick around, I'll understand, but you know how I've felt for years now. So I just have to ask this: Got room in your life for me?"

I stood there for a long while. Or for no time at all. Time had no meaning while I waited for her to answer me. Days could have passed, empires could have risen and fallen in the time it took her to open her mouth again. But when she did...

"You had me at 'Hello,'" she said.

I was confused. "Not to question the Jerry McGuire reference, but I didn't say 'Hello' just then."

"Not then," she replied. "Back when we first met. That's when you caught me in your grasp. You want to come along with me, and I wouldn't have it any other way. I love you, Vin."

That was 16 years ago, and we were married a year later. I've told my kids this story so often they hate it now. So maybe you'll enjoy it a little. Who knows, you might make your own story like it some day. If you do, you're a very lucky person. ♡

Selective hearing

Jennifer Toon
Mountain View Unit

“Hello?” my best friend answered with an exasperated sigh.

“I’m just gonna go over there,” I said, picking up from our previous conversation. “What am I supposed to do? Sit here all night watching reruns?!” I fumbled with an outfit, nearly dropping the phone.

“You need to calm down.”

I continued as if I hadn’t heard her. “Yeah, well it’s not like I’ll make a scene. I’ll just sit at the bar looking very casual, maybe have a drink.” She didn’t say anything. “I need your opinion. That’s why I called,” I demanded.

“What does it matter, Jennifer? You’re not listening.” I motion for the cats to get off the bed and sit down.

“Yes, I am,” I said, defensively. “No,

you’re not, and I can’t babysit you tonight. I have to get up early for graduation. You know how the parking is at U of H.” She paused, then in an accusing tone, she said, “You promised me you’d be there.”

I finished putting on my shoes. “Look, I’ll be there. I’m going for one drink,” I said as I checked my hair in the mirror.

“Whatever.” She hung up.

After deciding on what I considered to be a brilliant course of action. I rushed about the apartment in preparation. My thoughts desperately tried to keep pace with my steps. *Where’s my house key? There it is... what else...oh, credit card. I’m not sitting here all night. I’m going out. I’m gonna...* A voice suddenly interrupted me. A quiet, yet unmistakably strong voice that spoke from a deep place near my heart. A voice separate from the endless chatter of my own mind. “This is not a good idea.” A faint uneasiness filled the room. I remained undeterred. I frantically rummaged a kitchen drawer searching for a credit card. “Found it!” I held it up triumphantly. The cats raced towards me in excitement, expecting Friskies treats to be issued out. “Oh, sorry, guys. Maybe when I get back.” I gave one last glance in the mirror, turned off the lights, and left home for longer than I had planned.

I walking in the direction of my favorite club. I grew anxious as I felt the seductive lure of liquor with its coveted ability to blur and confuse uncomfortable emotions into a massive swirl of false bliss. It was a temporary illusion I willingly accepted. Even the club, through the haze of intoxication, would resemble a shimmering starship pulsating with sensual energy. In the next morning’s light, its appearance would

change back to a vacant warehouse where the homeless slept on the steps, and litter lay scattered along the building. Such reality was conveniently forgotten on Friday and Saturday nights.

Halfway to my destination, the uneasiness returned. Again, I heard the same inner voice. “You are about to make a huge mistake.” I walked faster. I felt as though I was being followed, not in a rational way, only vaguely, but true nonetheless. Car horns beeped in annoyance at the growing crowds making their way

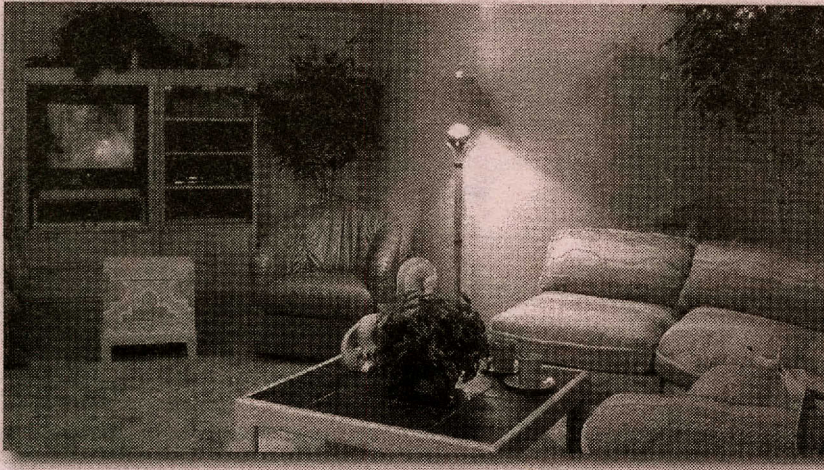
to the local bars and clubs. Impatiently I crossed the street. *I’m being paranoid* I thought. *I’ve got this. Just one drink. I’m responsible. I mean I never drive, I always walk. What’s the worst that could happen?* I took a misleading deep breath

and opened the entrance door. Music immediately thumped into my chest drowning out any further attempts the forewarning voice would try to make that night. I walked inside and walked out on my life.

I woke up. My head hurt. I tried to open my eyes, but they hurt too. They were swollen and dry. I was disoriented.

Where am I? I thought. I heard distant yelling and metal clamoring. A slow dread began to rise like a tsunami wave, and I was the curious onlooker who realized her fate too late. I realized I was in jail. I lifted my head. My face peeled away from the cement floor. I sat up and touched my cheek. It was tender and sticky with half dried blood. The familiar smell of despair drifted from the cracks in the cinderblock walls. Without looking, I knew the door couldn’t be opened from my side. Fragmented pieces of memory from the night before exploded in my mind. No! I repeated in disbelief, in dizzy intensity until the truth unleashed itself into my self awareness. “What have I done?!” I said in near hysteria. The empty space echoed my question back to me, a question that carried not only the weight of the night but of all my failures. Denial abandoned me as quickly as a friend who knew I was out of spending money. Alcohol had not, after all, been able to wash away my self-hatred. Outward success had never been big enough to hide my shame. The long resisted truth about my soul’s condition unmercifully seized my consciousness. In terror, in brokenness, I sank back to the floor. *I am alone* I thought. Then I heard a voice. A quiet yet unmistakably strong voice that spoke from a deep place near my heart. “Jennifer. I’m still here.”

Finally, I was listening.



***‘I’ve got this.
Just one drink. ...
What’s the worst
that could happen?’***

A Woman’s Perspective

The all-
important
self-
perception



Jennifer Toon
Mountain View Unit

Iwonder if men have as many insecurities as women. Are you as self-conscious as we are? I haven’t always been my own biggest fan. It’s taken years of therapy and prayer to be where I am emotionally, but I still struggle. I think I’m too thin; I’m sensitive about how much hair I lose because of a thyroid disorder; and I wish my posture was better. My mother should have followed through with her threats to tape my shoulders back. She used to say, “Honey, stand up straight. Walk like a Marine!” which was confusing, because daddy was in the Air Force, and we didn’t know any Marines. Anyway, the point is I can be a critic when it comes to my self-image, but when I’m listening to the girls, I’m stunned to hear how they ridicule themselves.

I’ve begun to really pay attention to how our lingering insecurities about our appearance, intelligence and capabilities creep into our conversations. Where does this come from? Perhaps the origin of our insecurities stems from the past when someone’s carelessness or cruelty invoked a sense of shame about our identity. Maybe some of us were called names when we had a hard time in class, even though we had a learning disability, which was not a reflection of our intelligence. Or maybe some of us preferred sports and books instead of dolls and make-up, and the other girls treated us like we were invisible, which was far worse than being called weird by guys.

It’s crazy how long those hurts stay with us, and how they’ve shaped our beliefs about ourselves. Even more amazing is our ability to change self-defeating beliefs. We can accomplish this through positive affirmations and proactive behavior. We should accept ourselves as we truly are, and we can change the things we don’t like about ourselves. Facing insecurity takes the power out of it. I decided I was tired of being sensitive about my small size, so I started working out. I still get teased. I’ll always be slender, but by doing something proactive, I changed my belief. I feel stronger and healthier, thus more accepting of myself. Try repeating an assertive positive affirmation, the opposite of whatever negative thing you’ve said about yourself. Instead of saying “I’m stupid,” say “I’m smart,” then add a corresponding behavior like reading and discussing mentally stimulating books. Challenge yourself. You’ll begin to cultivate confidence, and confidence overshadows insecurity. Remember — your words and behavior have to match in order to change and reinforce a new belief.

Please stop trashing yourself. It’s not others’ opinions that we live by, but our own judgment. That’s the only opinion that matters — yours.

The last round

"It is through challenges that we grow."

— Reverend Lakshmi Barsel

A reader's viewpoint on fighters, family, and facing adversity

Paul Jay Reed
Ellis Unit

When Sugar Ray Leonard first fought Thomas "Hitman" Hearns, the world of professional boxing knew he was out of his league. Hearns was younger, stronger, bigger and perhaps the hardest hitting middle weight boxer of all time. Few expected Leonard to win a single round, let alone finish the fight.

The critics were right. The fight was scheduled for 12 rounds, and for 11 rounds "Hitman" Hearns pounded Leonard, who couldn't win a single round. The fight would be over in one more round, and the "Hitman" would be crowned the world's champion. Leonard had no reason to come out for the last round. Realistically, the fight was over. The only way Leonard could win would be by knocking Hearns out — a possibility, but certainly not a probability. Leonard chose to come out for the last round, anyway.

Sugar Ray emerged with a new zeal and attacked his opponent with surprising gusto. Hearns was caught completely off guard. Leonard's punches came furiously, and the fight's momentum quickly swung in his favor. Halfway through the last round, Leonard backed the "Hitman" against the ropes and unleashed a flurry of punches, sending Hearns through the ropes and out of the ring! Somehow Leonard was able to summon all of his remaining strength at the last minute and defeat Hearns.

Looking back on this classic moment in boxing history, one can see this wasn't simply about two athletes in the ring, fighting for a belt. There is something deep and rich that emerges from this that is both inspiring and encouraging.

Like Sugar Ray's predicament in that match, many of us have been beaten over and over again by a seemingly bigger and stronger foe than ourselves. Some of us have all but given

up completely. Many of us are at the verge of throwing in the towel and accepting ultimate defeat.

Keep in mind that for 11 rounds, Sugar Ray fought with everything he had, but it wasn't enough. His very best was no match for Hearns. Sugar Ray's athletic skills weren't good enough to outbox or outscore the "Hitman" for the duration of the fight. Although Ray was losing the fight, he never stopped fighting. He kept coming out each round, giving his best. It is the nature of the fighter to keep fighting until the fight is over. The fighter realizes that, at any point, the momentum can switch in his favor.

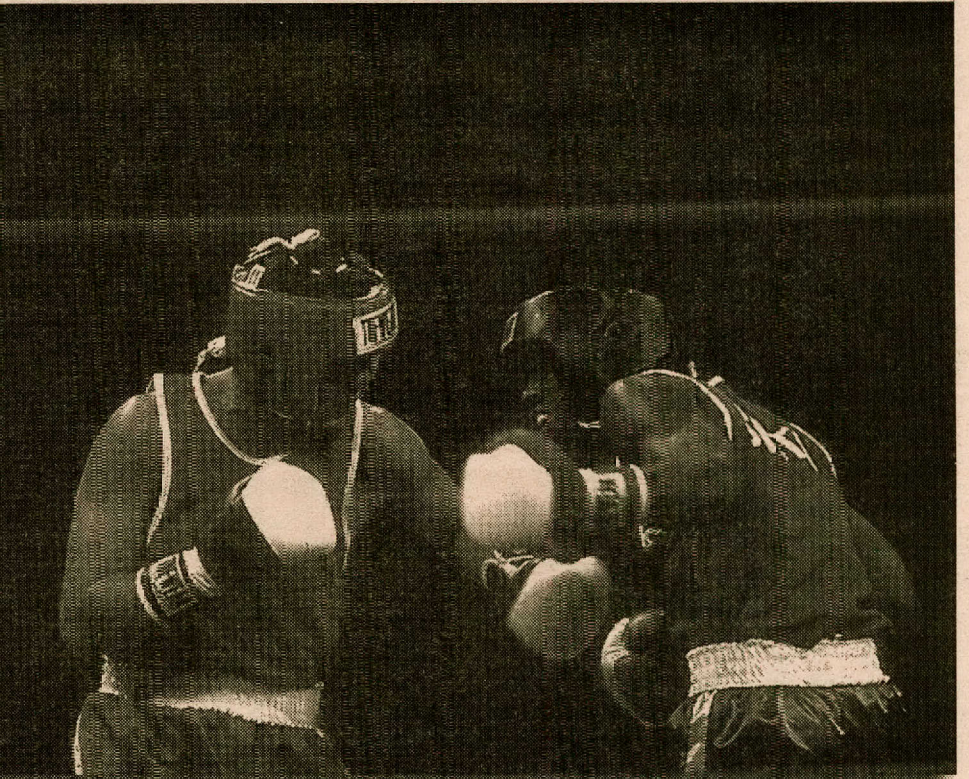
No matter how bad things are going in life, no matter how much of a failure someone seems to be, if they are still breathing, then the fight's not over.

I am reminded of my great aunt Irene, endearingly named "Aunt Krickett." One day I called her to see how she was doing, and she told me she had just come from therapy. I

assumed it was for her arthritis. "No, sweetheart, I didn't tell you? I have lung and brain cancer." Taken aback by this alarming revelation, I said in a weak, pathetic voice "Oh my, Aunt Krickett, I didn't know."

She quickly interrupted me, before I could finish, and said in a calm gentle voice, "Don't do that. Don't you dare do that. As long as I've got breath in my body, don't you ever feel sorry for me. This fight isn't over, as long as God is still good and I am still breathing."

I realized then that the petty problems I faced daily, whining "Poor lil' ol' me" were miniscule compared to her condition. Aunt Krickett faced death with more dignity, composure and fearlessness than most of us face life. It wasn't death she was fighting. Death is not an enemy to be fought, but a reality we all must accept. Rather, she was fighting against fear and hopelessness — the greatest opponents to the human spirit. It is our fear of death that must be defeated,



not death itself. It is our fear of success or failure that keeps us from giving our very best. It is our feeling of unworthiness that keeps us wanting to throw in the towel.

If you are reading this, then you are still breathing. If you are still breathing, there is at least one more round in you. If you have a round left, there is at least one more chance to win.

Despite what boxing analysts thought, Sugar Ray Leonard believed he could defeat Hearns. He trained believing he could win. And after 11 rounds of losing, with only one round left, he still believed he could win. He wasn't just trying to survive 12 rounds, accept his loss, and collect his money. He really believed he could beat the "Hitman", which brings me to my second point: No matter how great our opposition, we must believe we can overcome it. We must fight to win!

Some may ask, "If I've lost everything, including my dignity, freedom and self-respect, what reason do I have to keep fighting?" If you have nothing left to lose then you have everything to gain. So why not fight to win? Leonard had nothing left to lose — he'd lost every round — yet he came out believing, despite how badly he'd been beaten, that he could still win. Michael Jordan once said, "You have to expect things of yourself before you can do them."

How many of us have lost confidence in our strength of character? How many of us have lost faith in ourselves, resigning ourselves to just making it through another day? How many of us refuse to come out of our

corners because we refuse to face our fears, doubts, sense of worthlessness, etc.? Fear doesn't just go away; it must be challenged. Doubt doesn't stop beating us just because we've stopped resisting; we must challenge it. We must be willing to come out and fight back knowing that courage is stronger than fear, faith is greater than doubt, and virtue is always victorious over vice.

Some readers will assume that "the last round" is about those who, after 50-plus years of facing life's difficulties, need extra courage just to face another day. This couldn't be further from the truth. The feeling of being beaten, bewildered and beguiled by life is a very real experience whether you are young or old. The fact is, many of the youth in our culture are afraid to come out and fight, even after only a few rounds with life. The teen drug abuse and suicide rates are evidence of this sad reality.

The major difference between our lives and Leonard's match with Hearns is that we don't know how many rounds are still to come. Therefore, it behooves all of us to face each day, each challenge and each obstacle as if it were our last.

So whether you're 16 or 60, getting out on parole or just beginning a life sentence, brimming with perfect health or fighting cancer — no matter how badly you've messed up, get out there and fight with everything you've got, believing that you can and will be victorious. Nothing can beat your best efforts. Nothing beats failure like refusing to quit!

Merry Christmas homie

Submitted by Tim Jordan
Released

Dear Mom,
Send an extra fifty for Christmas
Dad's sick and lost his job???
You need the money to pay the bills instead???
But Mom, we're starving half to death here
And it's Christmas time!!!
You cannot come to visit?
Your job is on the line???
Mom, it ain't easy here
Some nights I feel so alone,
The house is up for sale???
Where will I parole to without a place called home???
Well Mom, I will close now
All my homies are counting on me,
Man, Christmas sure ain't what it used to be ...

Dear Son,
I am sorry to hear
You're being treated so bad,
Just be thankful you are loved
Pray to Jesus, Pray for Me, Pray for your Dad ...
Merry Christmas

Forgotten

Submitted by Brandy Maynard
Hilltop Unit

Eyes, permanently downcast,
gloves, all tattered and worn;
shoes with ragged holes in them,
and a heart of forgotten warmth.
He shivers while remembering
his life before that day;
The moments filled with broken goodbyes;
he lost his mind they say.
The nights are long and lonely.
the days are hungry and drained.
As he wakes from a numbing slumber,
he mumbles through his pain.
We hear his voice with words disguised,
And somehow, we can still despise.
We do not know his sacrifice;
His grief, his loss, our gain.
Or how he lost his precious mind
Where guns and bombs remain.
And so, we all keep plodding on,
blinded by our shame.
And the only thing he really wants
is for us to remember his name.

'Inside my head'

Submitted by Frank Prieto
McConnell Unit

I dream the dreams which no one else
but me can see.
To you they may seem as only a fantasy,
but they are my reality-
and no one is able to take them
away from me.
Because I live within a sphere of impossibilities,
where my soul has become saturated with
unspeakable tranquility as I gaze into
the eyes of the multitude of bystanders
who constantly surround me.
In their eyes I can clearly see a
crippled soul that is gripped by an
overwhelming sense of hostility,
struggling to survive within this
cruel world of uncertainties.
Their calamities have been unable
to entrap me,
because I live within the breath
of my faith-
a faith that resonates deeply within
the bowels of my being,
as it elevates my spirit to a
new beginning;
one that is unseen by the natural eye,
but which nevertheless exists quietly
behind the veil of deep blue skies.
And while some stand around me
looking mesmerized as they try to
understand how and why this can be;
all I can say is that the answer can
only be found in Him who inhabits eternity,
because He is the one who lives inside of me.

When does abuse stop?

Submitted by Desiree Gonzales
Hobby Unit

Incarcerated feeling distant
Distant from my family
Family missing the good times
Times that keep me at loss for words
Words better left unspoken
Unspoken love confusion persists
Persisting children thriving for attention
Attention going towards all the wrong things
Things getting out of control
Controlling husband getting jealous
Jealousy causing conflict
Conflict accompanied abuse
Abuse starting verbally
Verbal abuse towards the children
Children just wanting love
Love becomes the mother
Mother leaves the husband.
Husband blames the kids
Kids love Mom
Mom loves kids
Kids no longer being abused
Abuse stops.

Hear my cries

Submitted by D. Smiles
Lindsey Unit

Hear my cries now as I now realize my wrongs.
These tears that fall down my cheeks.
As the visitation days come and go with no visits for me.
As I wait for mail call, yet there is no mail for me once again.
As I walk back to my bunk, a single tear falls.
As the days come and go and time passes by, I still cry.
I cry because I now hurt, as I hurt the ones I loved so much.
I cry these tears to myself because my family is away because of my wrongs.
At the time they seemed so right and so easy to do.
Now I wish I could have known how much love I really had.
Now that I cry alone.
Wondering why I did so wrong. Now that I am alone and locked away I realize what I truly had.
So as you get your letter tonight, let them know that you cry for them.
As you get your visit, know they are the better things of life and then alone at night they still love you.

Invisible Chair

Submitted by Tammy Mueller
Dawson State Jail

Quietly searching for that invisible chair
Shamefully reflecting just how you got there
This wasn't quite the way you thought your life would be
Never thinking that your life was controlled by a disease

Resentful of others and not ready to share
Denying the problem in a haunting despair

Silent and sneaky
In your best stealth mode
Sitting back in the back
With your head hanging low

The sadness engulfs the void in your heart
So desperate to feel, but how do you start?

"One day at a time," a voice says with a smile
"The first thing you need is simply desire."

In a room full of strangers
With burdens to bare

Finding strength in each other
And power through prayer

The fellowship that embraced that soul
And washed away its fears

Was a blessing from our higher power
To learn on through the years!

Long road ahead

Submitted by Erin Quigley
Crane Unit

Long road ahead, at first I was devastated.
Then, I prayed, and the panic soon faded.
The next 18 years of my life will be spent behind locked doors,
Following directives, doing the state's chores.
By God's grace, though I can endure whatever comes my way,
He'll always be there when I need Him, anytime of day.
My spirit is more free now than it ever was.
The feeling is far greater than any drug-induced buzz.
For some, this may be incomprehensible,
But for those filled with the spirit, it's perfectly sensible.
Even though there is a long road ahead, he will never leave my ride,
His arms are forever around me, he's along for the ride.

A father's influence

Submitted by Hugh Gossett
Coffield Unit

I met my dad when I was nine,
beer in his hand, cigarette in his mouth.
Now I'm 29;
a beer in my hand, a cigarette in my mouth.
When I turned 10,
my father was in prison,
surly, bragging and tattooed.
At 30, I am in prison,
surly, bragging and tattooed.
Now I am 40, and Dad is gone;
cancer, cirrhosis then death.
My son was 20, and he is gone; death by meth.
A father's influence...

Our Own Worst Enemy

Submitted by Jeremy Biddle
Coffield Unit

They would rather see me in a cell
They don't want to see me in the world where I can excel
That's a cop out all us convicts try to sell
Take a look in the mirror,
the reflection you see is who put you in this cell
Running around the hood
taking other people's money with a pistol
Nextel chirping hustling hard and crystal
Just so we can support the habits
we think we got under control
And we wonder why we're in this cell
waiting on the door to roll
Praying that we make our first parole
Promising our loved one
that we're going to get out and do what it takes
To live right but after a few months
we're back on the grind making the same mistakes
Trying to figure out why everyone has lost faith in us
Once again we're riding thru the back roads on a prison bus
Surrounded by a gang of people we can't trust
It's time to man up and take responsibility
for putting ourselves in this penitentiary
We are our own worst enemy!

Stay out of prison

Submitted by Darren James
McConnell Unit

If you don't like not going to some place
And being able to leave when you want to,
Then you better stay out of prison!
If you don't like being told when to wake up,
When to go to bed, when to eat, when to shower, when to shave
Then you better stay out of prison!
If you don't like holding back tears from falling,
As loved ones are leaving because visitation hours are over,
Then you better stay out of prison!
If you don't like pain in your heart,
From missing your wife, kids, family and friends
Then you better stay out of prison!

TDCJ/Windham bulletin board

Cognitive Intervention Program — The Cognitive Intervention Program (CIP) is a 60-day program offered by the Windham School District that assists offenders in interpersonal problem solving. This program teaches personal accountability and responsibility, anger management, impulse control, overcoming criminal thinking, setting goals, and other important topics related to release.



Crain Unit Riverside Campus CIP graduates are A. Flota, V. Zuniga, A. Tracy, P. Garza, T. Moreno, D. Markee, M. McClain, J. Park, A. Marquez, M. Garcia, J. Wilcoxson, D. Dial, C. Lyones, K. Edison, R. Orr, D. Thomas, O. Hernandez, K. Davis and M. Miskimims.



Crain Unit Sycamore Campus CIP graduates are S. McInnis, S. Bohof, T. Reasonover, T. Hoffman, A. Eilers, J. Brock, M. Alexander, C. Lockett, N. Cowell, T. Roberts, J. Fenton, S. Summers, L. Sykes, D. Williams, V. Griego, D. Allen, G. Brown, A. Christopher and C. Anderson.



Crain Unit Sycamore Campus CIP graduates are S. Shaw, C. Rodriguez, Y. Chairex, G. Hernandez, C. Hillard, S. Trussell, S. Hawkins, R. Shripshire, J. Butler, S. Foux, N. Jones, J. Perez, S. Ortiz, S. Allan, T. Vanderbilt and K. Escott.



Allred Unit CIP graduates are F. Palacios, J. Harrell, J. Chapa, T. McGinn, N. DeWitt, D. Owens, S. Perry, T. Bishop, J. Pratt, H. Angel, B. Rogers, B. Mills, R. Bryant, J. Jasper, C. Stephens, J. Mead, R. DeLeon, S. Schumaker, W. Battles and A. Garcia.



Crain Unit Sycamore Campus CIP graduates are K. Woodard, M. Sevick, L. Stubblefield, N. LuForfe, C. Wilson, P. Hudson, T. Hodges, P. Perkins, D. Goins, J. Elam, K. Hall, M. Johnson, D. Skinner, S. Perales, K. Trevino, K. Cox, V. Moulder, B. Kraus, A. Zachery, J. Turngren and J. Dalston.



Crain Unit Riverside Campus CIP graduates are J. Warren, W. Culbert, K. Gregg, T. Valley, A. Rodriguez, L. Lombrana, L. Taisler, K. Robinson, P. McClain, C. Squyers, M. Garcia, T. Hagwood, T. Rothschild, L. Rodriguez, V. Horton, J. Griffin, V. Steele, L. McBee, L. Subirias, A. Walkser, H. Warden, K. Hannibal, and A. Diaz.

TDCJ/Windham bulletin board

GED — The General Equivalency Diploma (GED) test is administered by WSD and evaluates five subject areas. Windham School District awarded more than 4,600 GED certificates during the 2011-2012 school year.



Ney Unit GED graduates are J. Atkins, D. Dehority, J. Encina, J. Garza, D. Jackson, M. Martinez, R. Martinez, F. Medina, A. Moreno, T. Owens, C. Polster, K. Prevost, S. Russo, L. Simpson and J. Villareal.



Dominguez Unit GED graduates are R. Sanchez, E. Trevino, W. Tucker, C. Washington, A. Ybarra, K. Reese, J. Musquiz, J. Johnson, F. Octiveros, L. O'Bryant, S. Moya, J. Medellin, P. Martinez, J. Rodriquez, J. Ruiz, M. Sampson, J. Hernandez, J. Herrera, C. Hill, D. Holt, S. Lee, D. Reyes, D. Ramos, M. Perez, B. Frazier, J. Facundo, A. Duglosch, N. Douglas, J. Dixon, M. Green, E. Hernandez, E. Hernandez, D. Allen, B. Ard, E. Brister, F. DeLeon, J. Delgado, D. Green, D. Gonzalez, A. Gonzales, S. Polasek, A. Brice, R. Aviles, J. Balboa and B. Elizondo.



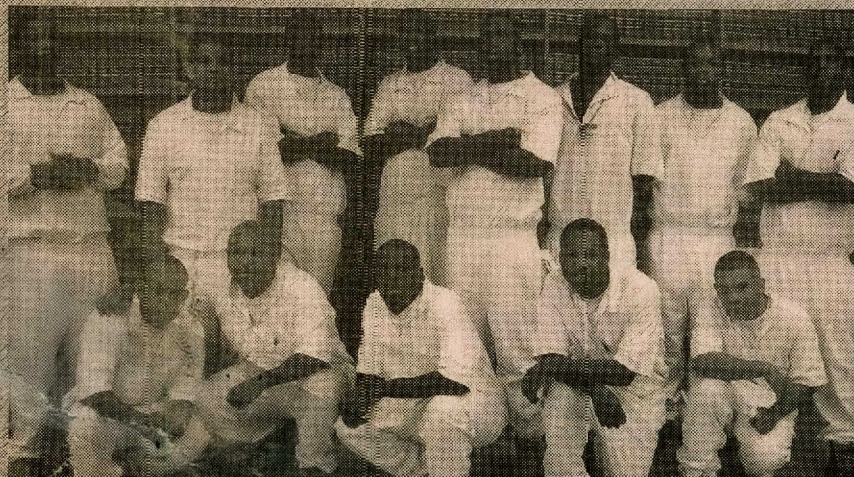
Allred Unit GED graduates are C. Black, K. Caddell, G. Cozens, salutatorian M. Gonzales, A. Hernandez Jr., valedictorian J. Herron, D. Jackson, M. Laffery, B. Latham, F. Lopez Jr., T. Martinez, E. Mendoza, A. Orosco Jr., D. Perez, R. Rhynes, T. Standberny, R. Williams and R. Williams.



Lewis Unit GED graduates are D. Smith, L. Willis, T. Courtney, M. Torres, J. Valdez, J. Fore, J. Murray, A. Jones, J. Hairrell, L. Durdin, J. Frisby, G. Gomez, V. Hadder, T. Wright, J. Nichols, K. Johnson, A. Belmontes, P. Olsen, J. Rex, E. Sazo, G. Silguero and E. Ramirez.



Ware Unit GED graduates are H. Medina, J. Sandoval, J. Coleman, R. Mallard, T. Young, S. Moore, E. Johnson, J. Tellez, B. Palacios, E. Rojas, R. Brown, K. Price, Q. Baldwin and C. Ruben



Torres Unit GED graduates are T. Collins, E. Elias, C. Gomez, J. Lopez, Q. Montgomery, T. Osoba, R. Page, C. Pleasant, V. Rodriguez, R. Sims, L. Ward, K. White and L. Woodward.

UNIT REPORTS

Duncan Unit joins faith-based dorm initiative

Jim Brannen

Duncan Unit reporter

The first thing you notice is the quiet. Gone are the blaring televisions, loud arguments and the slapping of dominoes. Instead, you find men studying the Bible, praying together, preparing for their classes or discussing spiritual topics with one another.

Welcome to O-dorm, the first faith-based dorm in the 20-plus years of the Rufus Duncan Unit, in Diboll. This 20-man dorm joins a growing list of faith-based dorms within TDCJ.

Offenders come from a wide variety of religious backgrounds, including Protestant, non-denominational, Roman Catholic, Jewish and Jehovah's Witnesses. All were required to be disciplinary free for at least a year prior to entering the program. They are expected to set an example of respect for authority and adherence to TDCJ policy. Those participating in the two year program take part in three weekly classes which may include the following: Celebrate Recovery, Experiencing God, Men's Fraternity, Master Life and Old Testament/New Testament Survey.

Once the two year program ends, those currently in O-dorm will return to general population and a new group will take their place. The goal for those completing the program is to take what they have learned back into general population. ♣

Odyssey Gavel Club hosts special event at Clemens

By Richard Luna

Clemens Unit reporter

Toastmasters International had a special event this year at the Clemens Unit. Hosted by the Odyssey Gavel Club, the theme was, "Awaken the greatness in you." Six speakers were chosen by club members to represent them at the event: L. James, S. Tutton, J. Polaski, D. Childress, J. Blanco, and R. Luna. Clemens unit staff members and guests from outside of prison were in attendance.

Toastmasters is an international organization "devoted to making effective oral communication a worldwide reality." Toastmasters provides people with the opportunity to master the arts of listening, thinking, and vital speaking skills that promote self-actualization, enhance leadership potential, foster human understanding and contribute to the betterment of society.

Individual clubs, like Odyssey at Clemens, have an individual mission to provide a mutually supportive and positive learning environment in which every member has the oppor-

tunity to develop and practice communication and leadership skills. These, in turn, foster self-confidence and personal growth.

The heart of Toastmasters International is servant leadership. Servant leaders never pursue a mission at the expense of their people. Servant leaders earn the loyalty and best efforts of their people by serving their interests and investing the development of those they lead. Servant leaders lead to see others succeed.

A Toastmasters club provides a practical where-the-rubber-meets-the-road attitude for its incarcerated members. Effective communication

and servant leadership are key to survival upon release. This fact is not lost on mentors J. Arnold and J. Higgins, who work tirelessly with incarcerated offenders. They recognize that today's offender is tomorrow's next door neighbor.

A special thanks is due to Clemens Unit Senior Warden T. Harris and Assistant Warden P. Sifuentes for making this event possible. Kudos to Chaplain Crocco for her dedication in supporting this program, and thanks to J. Arnold, J. Higgins, and Captain Lovette for providing refreshments. ♣



Cole Unit celebrates Passover with contest

T. Doescher and L. Starnes

Cole Unit

Members of the faith-based dorm on the Buster Cole Unit came together to hold competitions to test Bible knowledge. Three categories of competition were moderated by T. Doescher. The first was the Scholar League Bible Trivia. R. L. Banks came in first when he earned extra points by naming all 12 minor prophets as well as all Jewish feasts. A close second was earned by L. Starnes and third by P. Wetzel.

"Gospel League Trivia" focused on the four gospels, and contestants were so knowledgeable that each round of questions required a bonus question from the book

of Acts. After three rounds, R. Reeves won first place, F. Bland, second and A. Kinney, third.

"Sword Drills" was the final competition. After several rounds of competing to see who could find the announced Bible verse the quickest, a tie breaker was held. W. Yeokum finished first, with D. Villalobos and B. Jones finishing second and third.

Participants are thankful to Warden Dean, Warden Karl, Captain Prazak, Chaplain Newton, and dorm Pastor Simmons for the opportunity to live in the faith-based dorm.

"We are learning how to apply new values and principles to our daily lives that encourage positive change from the inside out," one offender said. ♣

Craftshops donate handmade gifts to charities

Lance Brown

Eastham unit reporter

Throughout the system, men in the unit craftshops are finding ways to give back to their communities through various charities. The list is long and varies depending on the unit. Some of the more popular charities are the Special Olympics, 4-H, FFA, Angel Tree, the Make-A-Wish Foundation, the Fallen Officer's Fund, and Children's Protective Services.

While most donations go to established ministries or charities, sometimes workers in the craftshop hear of a need and rise to the occasion to meet that need. Victims of natural disasters, such as fires, floods, tornadoes or hurricanes often receive donations. Inmates, and officers' families have benefitted from donations when a family member is stricken by cancer or other life threatening disease.

Meeting the needs of children is especially popular on the Eastham Unit. Offender Chris

Henderson, who works with wood, said, "We enjoy giving back to the community, especially the kids. Everyone has a soft spot for the children. The craftshop supervisor puts a box in there and we respond by filling them with craft items." Orphans and foster children always have special needs, and the men and women in TDCJ craftshops around the state are happy to help.

Only legitimate charities may solicit donations from craftshop workers and all donations must be approved by the unit warden. ♣



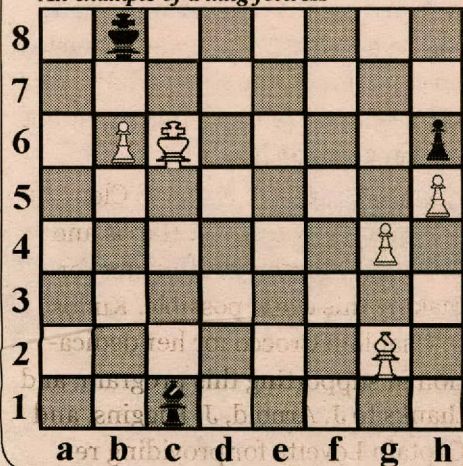
Crespo's Chess Corner: Bishops of opposite color

Richard Crespo
Terrell Unit

The most "drawish" of all endings are those with each opponent having one bishop travelling on opposite-color squares. Even endings with not one extra pawn, but two (or even three) are not enough to win. This is the result of the weaker side having, in effect, an extra piece for defense.

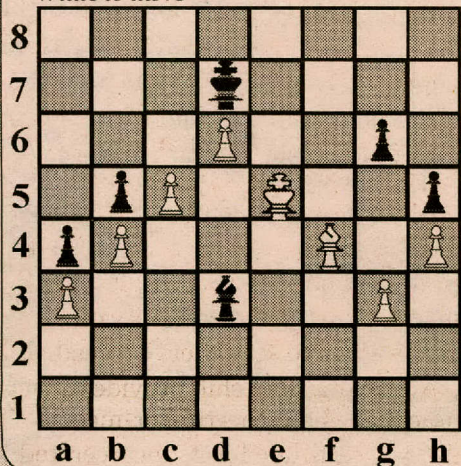
The weaker side often draws because he can construct one of two kinds of fortresses — the king fortress and the bishop fortress.

Diagram A:
An example of a king fortress



In an impregnable king's fortress the defending black's king stops the passed pawn, while his bishop guards his own pawn on the other side of the board and prevents white from creating a new passed pawn.

Diagram C:
White to move



White can try to get to e6 or e7 by sacrificing the c-pawn. This plan does not work immediately: 1. C6+ Kxc6 2. Ke6 Bf5+ 3. Ke7 Bg4, and black controls d7. White can try to take the f5 base from black's bishop. 1. g4 — if 1. ... hxg4, then 2. H5 gxh5 3. C6+ Kxc6 4. Ke6. Now black has to give up his bishop for the d-pawn and loses.

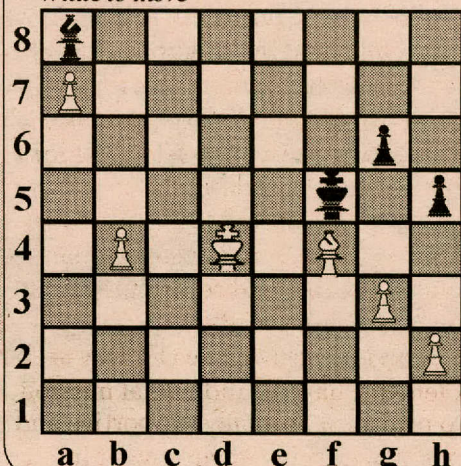
1. ... Be2. This knocks white's plan into a cocked hat. 2. gxh5 or 2. G5 Bg4 3. Kf6 Bf5= 2. ... gxh5 3. C6+ Kxe6 4. Ke6 Bg4+. Draw.

The great drawing potential of bishop of opposite color is well illustrated by the following position, an example of the second kind of fortress, the bishop fortress (See diagram D).

Answer:

1. c5 Bxc5
2. Bb3 e5
3. Be6 Kc7
4. Ke4

Diagram D:
White to move

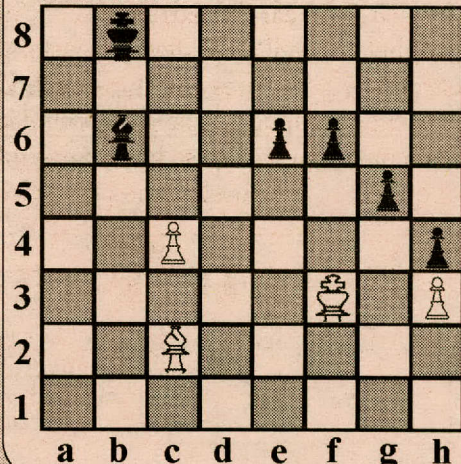


White cannot win because his opponent's king and bishop block his king and pawns.

For example: 1. Kc5 Ke6 2. Kb6 Kd7 3. B5 Kc8! Draw. Not 3. ... Bf3? because of 4. A8(Q) Bxa8 5. Ka7 Bf3 6. Kb8! Be4 7. B6 Kc6 8. Ka7, winning.

Now it's time for you to build your own fortress. (See diagram E).

Diagram E:
White to move



Answer: 1. C5 Bxc5 2. Bb3 e5 3. Be6 Kc7 4. Ke4

White has built an impregnable fortress that he can defend effortlessly. For instance, he can simply move his bishop from f5 to g4 and back.

RECIPES

REBECCA'S AUXILIARY CLUB

Rebecca Martin
Woodman Unit

Ingredients:

- 1 dill pickle (chopped)
- 1 jalapeno pepper (chopped)
- 2 lemon or grape cool downs

Directions:

Pour pickle juice into a peanut butter jar and stir in the two cool downs. Then add chopped pickle and pepper. Shake well and let stand for a day or two. Enjoy!



REBECCA'S PEANUT BUTTER OATLY OATMEAL

Rebecca Martin
Woodman Unit

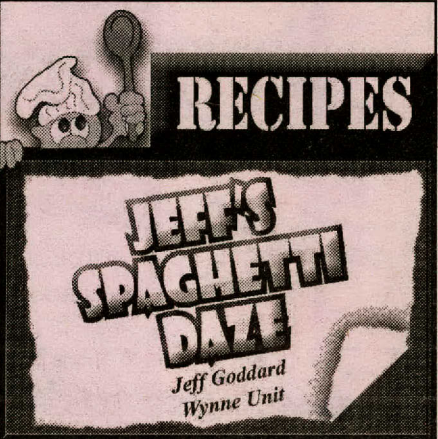
Ingredients:

- 1 envelope instant oatmeal
- 2 oatmeal cream pies
- 1 tbsp. peanut butter

Directions:

Put envelope of oatmeal in bowl. Add hot water and stir well. Mix in peanut butter until blended. Break up oatmeal cream pies and mix in as well. Enjoy the best oatmeal ever!!!





Ingredients:
 1 chili no-beans
 (substitute: chili with beans)
 1 can V-8
 2/3 bottle ketchup
 2 heaping spoonful garlic powder (more or less to taste)
 2 or 3 heaping spoonful onion flakes (to taste)
 2 jalapenos, diced
 1 summer sausage, diced (optional)
 6 chili soups, seasoning packets reserved
 Black pepper to taste
 1/3 to 1/2 bag jalapeno cheese puffs, crushed finely

Directions:
 Place first seven ingredients in an empty corn chip bag. Add 1/2 cup water and a chili seasoning packet, stir well. Place bag in a hot pot and cook for 45 minutes to an hour. Place two soups and one chili seasoning packet in each of three separate bowls. Add water and cover for eight to 10 minutes. Drain any excess water from the three bowls and sprinkle black pepper on the noodles to taste. Remove spaghetti sauce bag from hot pot, stir, and pour evenly over the noodles. Pour crushed jalapeno cheese puffs over the spaghetti sauce, mix well. Serve with snack crackers or saltines. Feeds three.



The candled egg

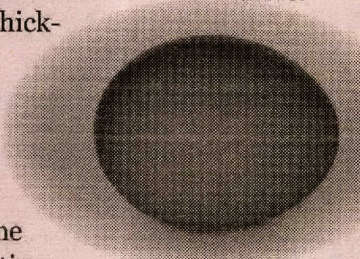
Submitted by Travis R. Beard
 Dominguez State Jail

I practically grew up on my grandparents' 150 acre farm. Mamma and Papa raised six girls and five boys. They also raised cotton, maize and corn for money and a few cows, one bull and the chickens for food.

It was my chore in the evening, after helping Papa with shucking and shelling corn, to gather the eggs. It was an adventure going from nest to nest to see how many eggs I'd find. Papa would smile at me as I ran to the house with the eggs. Collecting eggs meant eggs for breakfast and eggs for sale.

Papa took pride in washing each egg and making it shine. The most important part before putting an egg in the carton was to candle the egg. There was a single light bulb hanging down in the kitchen where Papa would pull the chain and the bright light would come on.

Papa would gently place an egg between his two palms and would hold the egg up to the light where one could see all the way through looking for any flaw or blemish.



Saturday was the day Papa and I would head to town to sell the eggs to all his customers who only ate fresh farm eggs. I had been on Papa's egg route from the time I couldn't see over the dashboard until I could almost drive.

The years slipped away as school, sports and girls occupied my Saturdays. I kept saying to myself, next Saturday I'll go with papa.

Finally college came. One day I received a call telling me Papa had a heart attack and was in ICU at the hospital in the same town I lived. I went to see Papa that night,

and I saw that same sparkle in his old eyes. He told me, "Bubba, I should be going home in the morning." I told Papa how much I loved him and promised when he got out he and I would go on the egg route.

Late that night I received another call with the news that Papa passed away in his sleep. All I could manage to do was pray and thank God for all the wonderful years I had with Papa. If God takes care of Papa, like Papa took care of the eggs, everything will be just fine.

The ECHO requests submissions

The ECHO attempts to reflect positive values to fulfill the expectations you have placed on our prison newspaper. We request that YOU consider writing quality articles, commentaries, etc., to be published. All submitted articles will be appreciated and considered.

Please do not send anything more than 1,000 words (five pages handwritten, or three pages typed double-spaced). Publication is not guaranteed, and it may take a few issues for an article to appear.

Suggestions:

Submissions	Description
Article	An article is an objective discussion in an informative manner on any number of topics, such as health, history or legal issues. New and detailed facts need to have cited sources.
Commentary	A commentary is a discussion of any number of topics, but it is based upon the opinions or experiences of the writer.
Book Review	A book review details the subject, style and key plot elements of the book and generally concerns relevant topics of the day. Opinions about the book are welcomed.
Extras	Extras refer to letters to the editor, letters to Darby, puzzles, recipes and short stories, to name a few.
Poetry	Poetry is a piece of writing chosen and arranged to create a specific emotional response through meaning, sound and/or rhythm. (The ECHO already has more than 100 poems approved for publication and always has an abundance of poetry submitted, but if you have a really great poem, go ahead and send it.)
Unit Report	A unit report discusses activities performed on a particular unit and is submitted by unit reporters only . The report must be submitted on the "Article for The ECHO form" with the proper signatures.

When submitting any of the above, write a heading at the top of the first page with your name, number, unit of assignment and the type of submission you are sending. For example:

John Doe, #1234567
 Huntsville Unit
 Letter to the Editor (or article, poem, etc.)

Don't hesitate to send us your work — even if you are not a professional writer. We will edit your submissions for clarity and effectiveness.

Thank you for your continued support of The ECHO.

Sudoku

Easy

8				3	4	1		
3				5	9			
	6	4						
9	8		5					
	4					9		
				3	6		7	
				6		5		
		6	7					9
	2	3	5					8

Difficult

	7	5						
9			6	4				2
					3			
8			1			6		
	9							
	4	7	3		8			9
2		4						6
			5			9		
		6			2		1	