

# The Dallas Post

## EDITORIALS

### Keep life-sentence inmates behind bars

Residents of Jackson Township, indeed of the entire Back Mountain and beyond, have reason to be concerned that the state Department of Corrections is considering allowing inmates serving life sentences outside of prison walls. That idea is being floated around in order to attract citizen reaction, of which there should be plenty, most of it in opposition.

Assuming our criminal justice system works with reasonable accuracy, people are confined behind bars for life precisely because they have been judged to be a serious threat to people and property. Most of them have killed at least one person, and it's not an illegitimate belief that some would do so again, given the right circumstances, one of which is opportunity.

That isn't to say perpetrators of serious crimes can't be rehabilitated, some undoubtedly are. The problem is that true rehabilitation isn't the norm, and no one really knows how to tell with consistency when it has been successful. Until we can predict with certainty which prisoners are no longer a threat to society, it would be irresponsible to subject the public to the risk that even one mistake would be made.

Life-sentence prisoners were allowed outside the walls but still on the grounds of the prison at Chase until 1982, when a higher than acceptable rate of escapes ended the practice. Jackson Township police chief Don Jones remembers that time; he says his department was a lot busier then.

There are ways to reward truly repentant and changed criminals without putting the people who live and work responsibly outside prison walls in the path of potential harm. One of them is to give model prisoners more leeway and responsibility within the prison, but still under tight security. Why can't our prisons be home to more enterprises run for and by inmates who have earned the right to do so?

In the end, prisons aren't in the business of providing fulfillment to lawbreakers; they primarily are places to confine people judged too violent for the good of their neighbors. And, how a person behaves in prison, under close guard and rigid rules of conduct, may say little about their desire to escape once given an opening to do so.

Whether or not they have reformed isn't the important point; protecting the larger society is. It would be wrong to let our admirable tendency to see good in even the most hardened criminal lead us to place their interests ahead of the law-

### It's true, you can prevent forest fires

The weather pattern that caused rain and thunderstorms over the Midwest brought dry, sunny conditions here the past month or two, and along with them the potential for brush and forest fires. At this point, anything short of consistent soaking rain won't alleviate the danger, because the underlying forest floor has lost much of its usual moisture content. In extreme conditions, fire can smolder underground and travel great distances before erupting into open flame.

Most fires are man-made, and can be prevented by a dose of caution. Unnecessary burning should be avoided until the danger has passed. Campers must be certain that campfires are completely out before breaking camp. Smokers must be vigilant that a stray match or ash doesn't ignite the roadside or trail.

People who carelessly start fires are seldom the ones who have to fight them, or who lose valuable possessions to the flames. Be a fire-preventer, not a fire-starter.

### About the opinion pages

The Dallas Post attempts to publish opinions on a variety of topics in many forms. Editorials, which are the opinion of the management of The Post, appear on the editorial page. Cartoons are the opinion of the cartoonist and columns are the opinion of the author. Neither necessarily reflects the viewpoint of The Post.

Letters to the editor are welcome and will be published subject to the following guidelines. Letters must not exceed 500 words. Except in unusual circumstances, no writer may have more than one letter published during a 30 day period. Letters must be signed and include the writer's home town and a telephone number for verification. Names will be withheld only if there exists a clear threat to the writer. The Post retains the right to accept or reject any letter and to edit letters as necessary without distorting their meaning.

In addition to letters to the editor, we welcome longer pieces that may be run as columns. The author or the subject's relevance to the Back Mountain will be our prime consideration when selecting material for publication.

To submit an item for publication, send it to: The Dallas Post, P.O. Box 366, Dallas, PA 18612, or bring it to our office.



Barn on Idetown Road

Photo by Charlotte Bartizek

### Letters

### SCID inmate says article on lifers was inaccurate

Editor: Grace Dove's July 28 article, "Lifers may be let outside walls," contains factual inaccuracies which are both deliberately misleading and unfairly prejudicial to the interests of inmates serving life sentences at SCI Dallas.

The articles dealt with Dallas Superintendent John Stepanik's plans to allow deserving lifers, those not posing any meaningful threat to the neighboring communities or society at large, to again work outside the prison enclosure.

In the article, Pat Rusiloski, president of the SCID Concerned Citizens Committee, was quoted as stating that the practice of allowing lifers to work outside the fence was discontinued in 1982 because of the prison's high rate of escapes.

Donald Jones, the Jackson Township Police Chief and Hearing Examiner at SCI Dallas, was quoted as saying that they had a lot more business when lifers were allowed outside the fence.

The comments of both of these individuals, as they concern lifers at SCI Dallas, are greatly misleading if not outright untruthful.

First, to my knowledge, there have only been three escapes

involving lifers since 1974. Two of these, one in 1974 and another around 1980, involved lifers working outside the fence. The third escape, which occurred around 1981 or so, involved a lifer who allegedly snuck out from inside the institution with an outside work crew.

Although there may have been a few escapes from outside the fence over the years, a review of the records will clearly reveal that the overwhelming majority did not involve lifers.

In fact, the great majority of "escapes" from Dallas involve non-lifers given furloughs who didn't return or who were late getting back to the institution. It bears repeating that only two lifers escaped from outside work assignments since 1974. That hardly qualifies as a high rate of escapes involving lifers.

Secondly, Donald Jones was quoted as stating that they had a lot more work when lifers were allowed outside the fence. The facts, as outlined above, completely discredit his claim.

Lifers, as a rule, are the most stable inmates in the prison system. Most are first offenders with no prior criminal history. They

are the least likely to abuse positions of trust.

Chief Jones, from his work as Hearing Examiner at SCI Dallas, is well aware of the stability displayed by inmates serving life sentences. He is also aware of the fact that only two lifers escaped from outside work details between 1974 and 1982.

Clearly, if there was a lot more work to do while lifers were outside the fence, it had nothing or very little to do with lifers being outside.

Superintendent Stepanik is to be commended for his leadership in moving to allow deserving lifers to again work outside the prison enclosure.

SCI Dallas is a "State," not a local, correctional institution. Inmates at this institution have a right to be treated in a manner consistent with State policy. Pat Rusiloski and her local citizens group should have no say whatsoever in the manner in which residents of this institution are treated.

Unfortunately, past administrators, intimidated by Ms. Rusiloski's organization, abdicated their leadership responsibilities by allowing her in essence, to

dictate policy regarding the placement of lifers in outside work details.

At a recent meeting of the Inmate General Welfare Fund Committee at SCI Dallas, Superintendent Stepanik even observed to those present that until now Ms. Rusiloski has had a significant influence in the operation of this institution.

That, hopefully, will be coming to an end under Superintendent Stepanik's administration.

At most other institutions with lifer populations, lifers are allowed to live and work outside the prison enclosure. This practice, contrary to the concerns expressed by Ms. Rusiloski and Chief Jones, has never created a serious security problem for the institutions or communities involved. On the contrary, most wardens highly support the practice, as it gives lifers something meaningful to work toward.

Lifers at SCI Dallas are entitled to the same privileges afforded to lifers at the other institutions, where deserving lifers are routinely allowed outside the fence.

Franklin L. Castle  
State Correctional Institution  
at Dallas

### Reader praises BMT All Star team coach Snyder

Editor: I would like to take this opportunity to commend Mr. Jack Snyder, coach of the Back Mountain National "B" All Star Team who won five straight games and captured the Lower Valley 11-12 year old Tournament.

Jack had twelve young men,

Gregory Stanislav, Bruce Nagle, Chuck Whitehead, Damian Temperine, Russ Eyet, Matt Loftus, Mickey Snyder, Brad Jumper, E.J. Ishley, Russell Wenrich, Jim Davis, Scott Walsh, who did not make the "A" All Star Team. Some of the boys felt rejected. However,

these boys practiced hard and with Jack's compassion and his ability to teach the games fundamentals, they completed their mission by capturing the title as the Lower Valley 11-12 years old Champs.

I, as a grandmother of one of

the players am happy to congratulate all the boys. A special accolade to coach Jack Snyder and his assistant coaches, Rich Jumper and Doug Whitehead.

Mrs. Bettie Ishley  
Wyoming

J.W.J.

### Imagining an endless life with Phil and Sally

Editor's note: Because of an error in pastepup, some of this column appeared in the wrong order in last week's issue. It is reprinted in its entirety.

By J.W. JOHNSON

Life is a terminal illness. Let's repeat that for those of you just tuning into the latest tabloid TV show to hear about what's going to give you cheap thrills today, or kill you tomorrow. Repeat...life is a terminal illness.

Still and all...is anyone out there aware of a day in the last 10 years during which there wasn't...repeat, was not some dire warning or caution about what we should or should not eat, or should not do?

Don't think so. But, for the fun of it, here are a few of the items we've all heard about.

- too much bad cholesterol
- too little good cholesterol
- not enough fruits
- not enough fiber
- too much refined sugar
- cancer causing saccharin
- cancer causing sunshine
- cancer causing chemicals

on apples - fossil fuel burning causing acid rain and global warming - nuclear waste causing everything else

(Excuse, while I get my tongue out of my cheek...there.) Bet you just can't wait until tomorrow to hear the latest reason you should pull the dirt over yourself and go meekly into that good night.

Not that all the gloom is without merit. Obviously some of it has considerable merit.

But the Washington apple business was nearly put out of business by the Alar scare of a few years ago...that is, the misguided, misquoted and otherwise misinformed Alar scare.

It was reminiscent of the saccharin scare of the late 70's. You remember that! That was the one, where in concert, with all the scare shows and articles about being fat, we were told that one of the things we were using to keep ourselves from getting fat—saccharin—was, itself, bad for us...a known "carcinogen".

That's when the word carcinogen became part of the popular lexicon.

The problem was that when all the fizz had gone out of the soft drinks in which the allegedly

suspect chemical was found, it was discovered that saccharin did, indeed, cause cancer in laboratory animals, when it was consumed in enormous quantities.

All together now...how much would we have to drink to get cancer?

Would you believe about 700 bottles of soda a day? That's right, you would have had to drink about 700 bottles of soda a day to receive the equivalent amount of saccharin which caused the cancer in the laboratory animals.

Was that publicized? No. When did we hear about it? Long after the public had grown frightened of anything containing saccharin. Then along came the other artificial sweetener which, and oh by the way, tasted much better...and saccharin went to the garbage dump...for the wrong reason.

Yes, it tasted terrible. But it's cancer causing properties were dubious at best.

Then we've gone through the asbestos scare, particularly in our nation's schools where we've spent hundreds of millions of dollars to remove that which, had it simply been left alone, would have caused less of a problem than attempting to remove it.

The only time asbestos becomes

a problem is if you work with it on a daily basis, and for many years, and if you work with it in its free floating, fibrous form. The vast majority of the asbestos removed from schools was the hard wall-board or hard pipe wrapping variety...totally stable where it was, and causing absolutely no one any harm.

And now are you ready for the latest...radon in our schools! There is a growing movement across the nation to have all of our schools tested for radon...to be followed, of course, by the installation of enormously expensive ventilation systems should the levels even approach the possibility of one person perhaps...just perhaps, mind you...getting cancer from radon.

Uh, excuse me for pointing this out...but we are exposed to a major source of radiation all the time. Uh, I believe it's called the sun.

Uh, excuse me. Life is a terminal illness. And we can't continue to approach it as if we can scientifically or legislatively somehow become immortal.

I mean, just think of it. To be immortal would mean being subjected to Geraldo, Sally Jessy and Phil forever.]

What a revolting thought that is.

## The Dallas Post

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