



Friday, April 10, 2009

PENDLETON

The sacred art of living and dying

Hospice program helps inmates deal with death

By KATHY ANEY

The East Oregonian

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Gerald Smith is philosophical about having a fatal disease.

The Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution inmate knows he likely brought it upon himself, probably during a time of intravenous cocaine use and living homeless with a golden retriever in his Corvette.

But, during the year or so since his diagnosis of chronic Type A Hepatitis C, he's worked hard to heal the demons inside himself with the help of hospice volunteers Miguel Oseguera and Jon Johnston, also inmates at EOCI.

Smith, Oseguera and Johnston sat in plastic chairs in the prison chapel with 20 other inmates learning about the art of living and dying. One of the presenters, Rod Harwood, chaplain at St. Anthony Hospital, said the training has never before gone inside Oregon prison walls. The Sacred Art of Living & Dying is a four-unit program started in Bend by former Pendleton resident Mary Groves and her husband Richard in 1997.

Together, the men in blue, many of them hospice volunteers, learned how to die a good death, and in the process, to live a good life.

"The sacred art of dying is also the sacred art of living," Harwood said.

Learning to diagnose spiritual pain is part of the process. You don't have to look too hard to find mass quantities of spiritual pain in a prison setting, Harwood said, but there's plenty on the outside, too.

Spiritual pain comes when a person feels hopeless, feels a lack of meaning, refuses to forgive or is disconnected from something important, such as a person or a career, he said. The spiritual pain eventually manifests itself into physical symptoms.

"The ancients understood this full well," Harwood said. "They understood this 1,000 years ago."

Harwood often finds the phenomenon with men who retire and feel disconnected.

"A couple years after retirement, they're in the hospital ill," he said. "Oftentimes, they die - they've lost their connection, their community."

Western medicine, he said, has partitioned off the physical from the spiritual.

He gestured toward a framed print at the front of the room, next to a burning candle. The scene showed the medieval l'Hotel-Dieu (God's Hotel), a hospice in Burgundy, France. Because the hospice had a glass floor and was built over a river, patients could hear the soothing sound of rippling water.

Just about everything in the hospice - eating utensils, plates and even bedpans - were made of gold.

"They have something to teach us," Harwood said.

Dealing with inner turmoil pays big dividends for both the living and the dying, he said, but it's not easy.

"You have to lean into the pain to find the answers," he said. "If you run away from the pain, suppress it or deny it, you won't find them."

Smith, the prison's first hospice patient, credits Oseguera and Johnston for helping him work through his own spiritual pain.

The men, who have cells next to each other, often talk as they walk around the track and play chess. They pray together in the chapel.

Smith, in prison because of a kidnapping conviction, has had longer to work through his spiritual pain than he thought he'd have. Doctors originally gave him only seven weeks to live. He's survived for more than a year, but he knows the odds of living another year are against him.

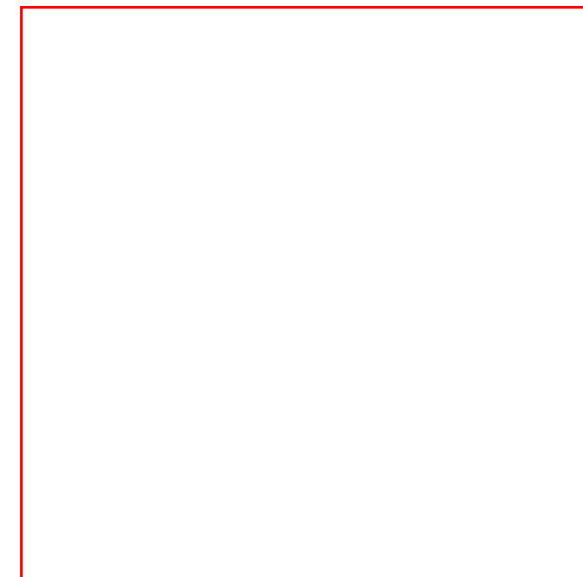
"My release date is 2019," he said. "I'm not expected to make it."

Since Smith's diagnosis, another inmate entered hospice care and died. Oseguera and Johnston said going the last leg of the man's journey changed them.

"As a person reaches the horizon, they're seeing things we've never dreamed of," Johnston said. "They can teach us."

Being part of the process "is a privilege and an honor," Oseguera said. "It teaches you how to accept death."

Harwood hopes to offer the program to the Pendleton community before the end of the year.



An inmate sleeps in the hospice room at Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution. Staff photo by Kathy Aney

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The shovelers

From Staff Reports

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CHARLESTON - Forty goldfish and 400 newts are in luck, thanks to people shoveling muck. They'll have clean living environs.

Oregon State Parks personnel, with help from the Shutter Creek Correctional Institute inmates, cleaned the Shore Acres State Park pond this week. The mud was 10 to 12 inches thick, requiring the mud-booted workers to scrape and sweep the ooze to the west end of the pond, but not down the drain.

The mud is dumped outside the botanical gardens and covered with mulch.

What happens to all those coins people toss in the pond? Well, there aren't many, said park ranger Supervisor Ellie Kinney-Martial. Park workers take the coins, which are stained black, and clean and tumble them. Then they donate the money to the Friends of Shore Acres.

The Shutter Creek inmates said they had seen 300-400 newts in the pond when they started cleaning. They rescued them and set the amphibians on the edge of the pond. Most wandered into the foliage. The park rangers expected to take two to three days to complete the annual cleaning project.



World Photo by Madeline Steege
Oregon State Parks personnel, with the help from Shutter Creek Correctional Institute inmates, clean the pond in the botanical garden at Shore Acres State Park on Thursday.

-- CLOSE WINDOW --

THE NORTHWEST

Pendleton inmates make time count

Prisoners at the eastern Oregon facility repair grandfather and antique clocks

By **RICHARD COCKLE**
THE OREGONIAN

PENDLETON — Time comes in two forms for a handful of inmates at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution. There's the time they serve — and the time they keep.

Serenaded by chimes, gongs and cuckoos, prisoners in the Clockmakers and Repair Training Program spend their days in the unlikely company of grandfather clocks and other antique timepieces.

And now they're gaining a reputation as among the few who can fix stately tower clocks like the ones in London's Big Ben and Portland's Union Station.

"Nobody knows clockmaking to the extent that we learn to be clockmakers," says inmate Michael S. Teague, 59, who will graduate from the 2½-year program Tuesday with six other inmates at the medium-security prison. "Anybody can buy a clock. But who can repair them?"

Inmate Jeff Halladay, 49, a graduate who mentors others in the program, says working in the clock shop "is a great way to make time count for something."

The program began 13 years ago almost by a fluke. Gary Kopperud, a master clockmaker in Pendleton, drove to the prison to install a timepiece in a grandfather-clock cabinet that inmates were assembling. The clock was to be raffled to raise money for a community organization.

While there, an inmate asked Kopperud about clock repair. Soon, Kopperud was volunteering to teach inmates the skills he began learning from his father at age 10. Now 63, he launched the program and still oversees it.

The prison shop fills a gap. Clockmakers and restoration experts began vanishing from



RICHARD COCKLE/THE OREGONIAN

Jeff Halladay (left) and Michael S. Teague, both inmates in the clock-repair program at the Eastern Oregon Correctional Institution, diagnose why a grandfather clock's mechanism is striking but not chiming.

"We don't cut any corners. Maybe they got here because they cut a few corners. It is kind of a lesson in life for them."

Gary Kopperud,
master clockmaker who oversees the program

the American scene in the 1980s, Kopperud says. The few left typically have backlogs of a year or longer.

Adding to that, he says, the nation is suddenly awash in boomers sentimentally attached to weight-driven and spring-wound clocks that once ticked and chimed in the homes of parents or grandparents. "They want them to run," he says.

Plus, says Kopperud, almost nobody west of Minneapolis repairs and restores tower clocks. The Seth Thomas clock company in Connecticut counts 3,000 remaining nationwide. Some no longer run, "and people have given up because nobody knows how to fix them," he says.

So officials in Petaluma, Calif., contacted the prison program after hearing that the inmates refurbished Umatilla

County's historic courthouse clock a few years ago in downtown Pendleton.

Petaluma's 127-year-old Seth Thomas clock, atop a city-owned building, hadn't kept time reliably since the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Workers trucked the mechanism to Pendleton in late 2007, asking only that it be returned for the city's 150th birthday celebration July 4, 2008.

It seemed like a tall order.

"You should have seen the doggone thing," says prison spokesman Doug Harder, on hand when 800 pounds of chipped gears, greasy brass, iron and steel arrived. "It looked like something from an archaeological dig."

Inmates refurbished the mechanism, rebuilt gears battered by the earthquake and

even restored the original gold pinstriping.

"When they picked it up, they were almost speechless it was so beautiful," Kopperud says.

Back in its tower in time for the celebration, it gains or loses only five seconds a week. "It works great!" says Shelly Kappel of Petaluma's public works department.

Seventeen inmates have graduated from the program, and 11 participate now as students or mentors. After Tuesday's graduation, 10 to 12 new students will join.

The program charges \$5,000 to \$12,000 to refurbish a tower clock mechanism, Kopperud says. The money goes to buy parts, tools and other materials for the self-sustaining program. The inmates, who must earn a spot in the program, are also paid a small hourly wage.

The work teaches the inmates values and ethics, he says. "We don't cut any corners. Maybe they got here because they cut a few corners. It is kind of a lesson in life for them."

Teague, a sex offender, and Halladay, who entered prison more than 20 years ago on a murder conviction, both plan to open clock-repair businesses when they're released.

The prison shop is "real soothing, very therapeutic," Teague says, because of the hush needed to analyze the tick-tock of clocks in various states of repair. At the 1,600-bed prison, the silence lies in dramatic counterpoint to "big yard" noise and cell door clanging.

And the symbolism of fixing clocks isn't lost on Teague, who likes to muse about how the instruments tick off the seconds, minutes and ultimately years that will bring an inmate's release date.

The clock's heart, he notes, is called an "escape wheel."

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