

# State Prison Holds a Father-Son Picnic Inside Walls: State Prison Holds a Father-Son Picnic Inside Walls

By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY Special to The New York Times

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By PAUL L. MONTGOMERY  
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STORMVILLE, N. Y., Aug. 5 —When Billy James was 2 months old, the state took his father away to serve his time at Green Haven. Today, 14 years later, in a sunlit corner under the state prison's gray, 30-foot walls, father and son had their first man-to-man talk.

It was the first father-son picnic and outing in the history of the state's largest maximum-security facility, an afternoon of shouting and laughter among the fathers and the sons they rarely see, and in early evening a moment of heartbreak as the gates clamped shut, establishing again the separation of years.

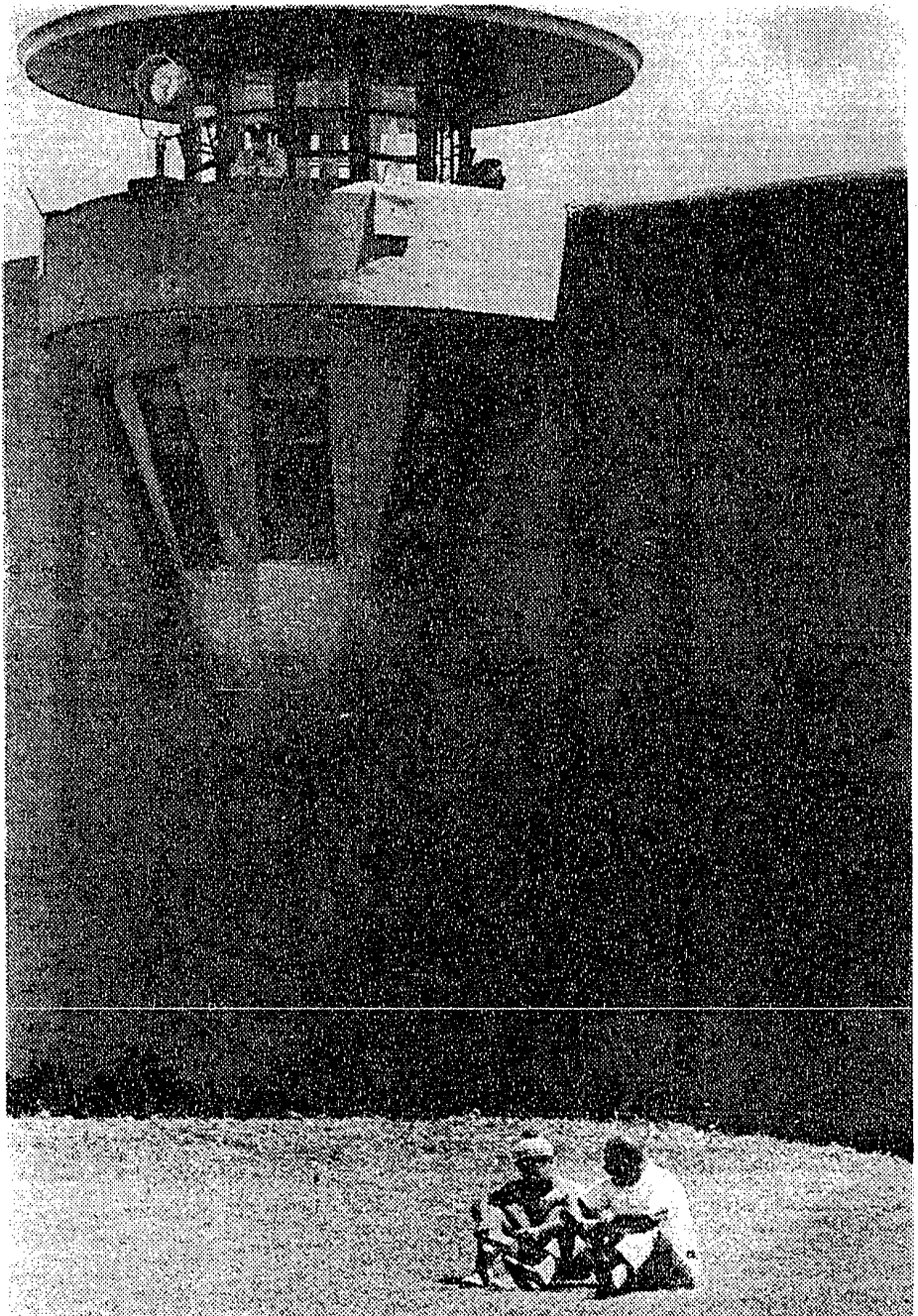
Billy and his father, Joe, didn't take much part in the ball games or wait around for the hotdogs and hamburgers roasted by inmate volunteers. They walked slowly around the prison athletic field, heads close together, talking. Joe is getting out next year, so there was a lot to talk about.

### Advice From Father

"No," said Joe, putting a big arm around his boy's shoulders and hugging him close, "I'm not telling him to be good. I'm telling him about these places, and I'm telling him what to look for in the street, how he can tell when somebody's lying to him. For being good, that's something he's got to do for himself. You can raise them, but you can't live for them."

Joe is one of the more dedicated members of a pre-release program sponsored by the South Forty Corporation, a non-profit group active at Green Haven. When his time is done, he hopes to do antidelinquency

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An inmate chats with his son during the first father-son outing at Green Haven prison

The New York Times/Edward Hausner

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work, perhaps with a police department. He has other plans, too.

"Do you like walking?" he asked his son. "I hope so, because next year we've got a lot of walking to do."

The picnic was a cooperative effort of South Forty and Leon Vincent, the new superintendent of Green Haven.

Among the corporation's activities this summer is a camp for 24 sons of Green Haven inmates at a lake 10 miles from the prison. David X. Spencer, chairman of the governing board of Harlem's Intermediate School 201, is the director, and three former inmates hired before they left jail serve as counselors.

## 'It Was a Natural'

Mr. Vincent, who came to the 1,900-inmate prison five months ago after being deputy superintendent at the Attica Correctional Facility, heard of the camp and suggested the picnic. "It was a natural," he said. "The kids were so close, and God knows the men were here, so why not bring them together?"

Eventually about 70 inmates were chosen—the fathers of boys in the camp, fathers whose boys were turned down at the camp for lack of room, and others to help with athletics, cooking and a six-piece rock band.

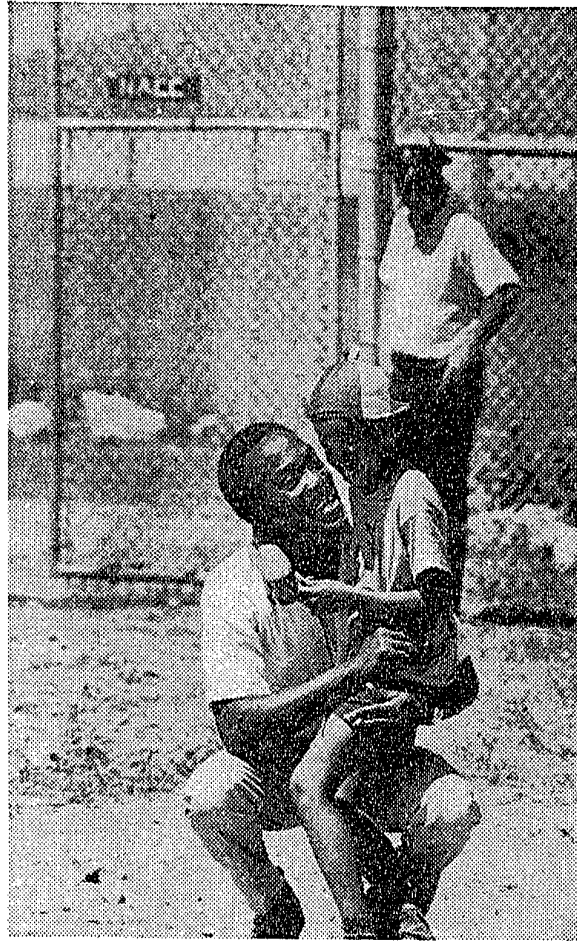
Although only a handful were selected, Mr. Vincent said, it seemed in the last week that the entire prison was caught up in the excitement. The four inmates in K Gallery—the state's "Death Row"—painted a picture for each child—careful water-colors of lions, herons, dogs and smiling faces.

The flag shop, which produces American flags for state use, and the tailor shop collaborated in producing multi-colored caps of ingenious design for the children. Other inmates donated plastic models and African masks. In G Block, and later in the whole prison, the inmates gave up their evening snacks of cookies and candy for use at the picnic.

## Children Mingle Freely

The children arrived at a side gate in the massive walls, which extend 30 feet both above and below the ground. Guards scanned the visiting children with metal detectors and passed them through. "Don't worry, we'll let you out," said one.

The children did not appear



The New York Times  
At the ball field of Green Haven prison, an inmate embraces his son during the facility's outing.

awed by the grim surroundings. One went up to Mr. Vincent and asked, "Do you know my father?"

While the children waited for their fathers to be released from the noon headcount, they talked with the inmates who were cooking the food and setting up the softball equipment.

Bobby Monroe, a huge man who has spent 15 years at Green Haven for armed robbery, had a talk with a 12-year-old. "What was it, a bank?" the child asked. "Payroll," said the inmate.

"I don't take nothing that don't belong to me," said the boy.

The inmate placed a large hand gently on the child's head. "That's good, son," he said. "You don't ever want to do anything like that."

Another child talked with the inmate who was cooking the hamburgers, a lawyer who has been there 10 years.

"If the President of the United States did something, would they put him in here?" the child asked.

"Even the President is not immune from the process of law," said the lawyer.

"I want to get in here," the child said softly. "I want to see my father."

"You don't want to get in here ever," said the inmate. "Ever. Jail is not an honor, you know."

When the fathers began coming down from the cell blocks, there were many hugging reunions. One inmate took all three of his sons in his arms. "Come on," he said. "Let's go jump over something."

Carmine Cataliotti, who has spent 29 of his 49 years in prison and had found a way of getting to the picnic, watched it all from behind impenetrable wrap-around sunglasses.

"This is the best thing I ever seen," he said from the side of his mouth. "The people out

there, they got some idea we're animals or something. You could see that we're not. Listen, before they fixed the visitors' room, the kids used to come up and the father would try to squeeze his finger through the grille trying to touch his son. Who are the animals in that situation?"

## Prison Rules Liberalized

Superintendent Vincent has brought considerable liberalization to Green Haven. The wire mesh in the visitor's room has been removed, so that men and their families can sit around a table. Visiting hours have been expanded and telephones made available.

On weekends most inmates may go where they like in the halls and yards of the 50-acre compound. Today the halls were filled with inmates carrying guitars and books, wisecracking with the guards. In the yards there were games of basketball and boccie, and later a showing of the film "The Gang That Couldn't Shoot Straight."

Mr. Vincent attributes the relaxation to the backlash of the Attica uprising in September, 1971. He is satisfied with progress so far, but remains cautious. "In this business anything can happen," he said. "You can have the best programs in the world, and they'll rebel on you. You never can tell."

He says the South Forty programs are among the best at the prison. The group was organized by Mr. and Mrs. William H. Vanderbilt of New York City and Williamstown, Mass. Mr. Vanderbilt was Governor of Rhode Island from 1938 to 1940. The Rev. Edwin H. Muller, a Green Haven chaplain, is the executive director of South Forty.

The Vanderbilts and Mr. Muller were visitors at the picnic yesterday.

When the outing was over, the fathers going back to their cells and the children walking out with their pictures and prizes, one of the children went up to Chaplain Muller and asked for the address of the Parole Board.

"I want to write them a letter," he said. "I want to tell them to let my daddy out."