Stone walls do not a prison make when Jaycees organize

By BERNARD GAVZER
AP Newsfeatures Writer

Harry Tettamble tried on a white shirt and a tie for the first time in seven years and forgot to put down the shirt collar. Someone told him, and he remembered, a bit embarrassed.

Tettamble put on square clothes because he was one of two prisoners being given a day outside the 23-foot stone walls of the Missouri State Penitentiary to attend a state convention of the United States Jaycees, the national community service organization.

Tettamble and Robert White were delegates from the Jefftown jaycees, a chapter much like thousands of other U.S. chapters except that instead of the usual, typical young executive, its members are either murderers, burglars, holdup men or all-around thieves.

A few weeks later, Tettamble was dressing out—that is, trying on the street clothes he would wear when he was paroled—and as good as that felt, there was this gnawing thing: Could he make it?

"I have something going for me through the Jaycees," he says. "I'm going to go to school in Rolla, Mo., and I already know that I'll be with people who will know I'm an ex-con but it won't matter. To them, I'll be another Jaycee."

That, indeed, may be the thing to save Tettamble—who was imprisoned for assault with intent to kill-from the treadmill upon which so many criminals wear out their lives.

In Jaycee shapters in American penitentiaries, thieves of all kinds have done things beyond anything in their experience.

One chapter, moved by the plight of Indians at a Nebraska reservation where there had been a disastrous blaze, raised $2,500 for a fire truck. Another chapter took to its heart an 11-year-old girl who received a debilitating head injury in an auto accident. Another raised $1,000 for a special teacher at a school for retarded children. In many chapters, inmates repair toys for Christmas gifts for needy children. They have cake sales and cookie sales and chess tournaments to raise money for their projects.

The Jaycees also have succeeded in several prisons in bringing about a change which might seem minor to outsiders but which is phenomenal in a prison. This was doing away with screens in visiting rooms so that it is possible for inmates to visit face to face with wives, children and parents and friends. Some wardens resist this open visiting room because of the risk that money, drugs, contraband or weapons could be smuggled to an inmate.

"All the changes and activities are very good," says Joe Campion, who is serving 15 years in the U.S. Penitentiary at Terre Haute for counterfeiting. "But the main thing is that almost every inmate joining up is the kind of guy who wouldn't have been invited into, or wouldn't have wanted to join, the Jaycees on the outside. You think of Jaycees as guys on the way up who know how to get along and feel well-established.

"You learn through the Jaycees how to deal with your self and then the group and then the community. I never thought about anyone, not even myself, because I had such a low opinion of myself. Now I'm learning to deal with me."

The role of the Jaycees may play in breaking the circle of crime was examined at the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute (The Wabash Valley jaycees), the Missouri State Penitentiary in Jefferson City (The jefftown Jaycees) and the Nebraska Penal and Correctional Complex in Lincoln City (The 111 Jaycees).

The convicts and wardens and parole officers in such institutions require no statistics to confirm what they see day after day: the same guys coming back, older, tougher, ground down. The federal government underwrote a five-year followup study of 18,333 offenders released from the federal criminal justice system in 1963. Of those who were paroled, 61 per cent repeated offenses within the fifth calendar year after release. Of those who got out after serving full prison terms, 74 per cent repeated.

In the penitentiary, progressive penologists have sought to shift from merely warehousing humans to providing men with work and schooling and self-improvement activities aimed at rehabilitation and easing the return to society.

"But you go out and that label 'ex-con' hangs on your neck when you try to get a job," says Paul Mansker, an armed robber who was paroled from Missouri in late 1969 and returned 59 days later. "I had a job and the management of the company was okay. But the other employes bugged me. You know, 'Where you from, where you been,' all that kind of stuff. I couldn't handle it."

Mansker is one of the few Jaycees who have been paroled and brought back. He says the reason—at least one reason—is "that I didn't hook into the square Jaycee chapter because I guess I really didn't believe they'd accept me."

The Jaycees think they have powerful medicine for the social ailment of being ostracized. They say much of this sort of discrimination and fear and suspicion on the part of the public as well as the self-doubt of the inmate could be erased or handled more maturely if some men came out of prison as Jaycees, rather than ex-cons.

"We are not in the correctional business," explains Gary Hill, a supercharged, 30-year-old Lincoln, Neb., executive who works for the Jaycees as an unpaid consultant on corrections and who is a member of the Lincoln Jaycees and is the only square full member of the 111 Jaycees, a chapter inside the Nebraska penitentiary. Square is the label applied by inmates, as well as wardens and correctional officers, to noncriminals.

High school drop-out now ballet star

SARATOGA SPRINGS, N.Y. (UPI) —Gelsey Kirkland dropped out of high school two years ago at age 15 to devote her life to dancing. Today she is the child star of the New York City Ballet, dancing classical roles like a seasoned veteran.

The petite 97-pound dancer won critical acclaim earlier this year when she danced the lead in "Firebird," one of the most difficult and exacting roles in ballet. She received a rare standing ovation recently when she danced the role at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center, the ballet company's summer home.

The daughter of playwright Jack Kirkland, who wrote "Tobacco Road," Gelsey is one of two dancing sisters in the company.

"I guess seeing my sister, Johnna, dancing got me started," Gelsey said. "She's three years older than I am, and it seems like she was always dancing as far back as I can remember."

The younger Miss Kirkland started dancing at the age of eight when she was accepted at the American Ballet School, the academic side of the New York City Ballet.

It was there, when she was 11, that ballet director George Balanchine first saw his future Firebird dance.

"He said he wanted us to kick our leg up as far as we could, and because I was so tight and not very flexible, couldn't get it above my waist," she recalled. "Well, I kicked as hard as I could and my other foot went out from under me and there I was on my back.

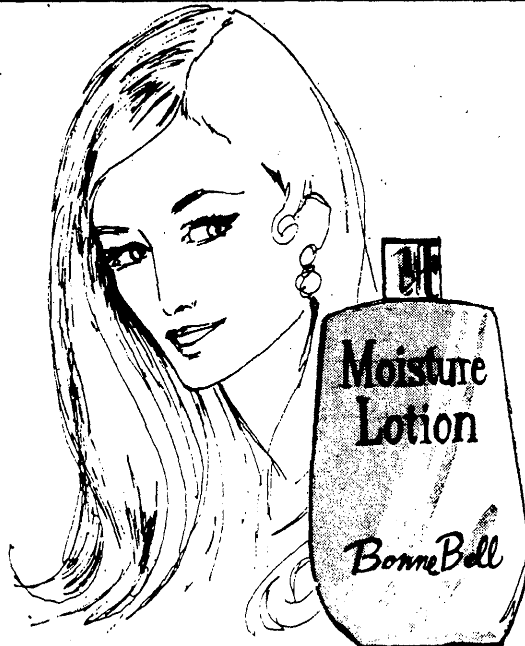
"But he said, 'See, that's right, she's the only one with the right idea,' so I didn't feel so bad."

She joined the ballet company at age 15, and dropped out of high school to devote full time to dancing.

"I never really wanted to do anything except dance," she said. "In the middle of fifth grade—I was about 10—I started to model to pay for my ballet classes, but I hated that.

"I could never smile. I had such a sad look the photographers didn't like me much."

Gelsey's first major role came at the age of 15 when Balanchine gave her the chance to do the sugar plum fairy in "The Nutcracker." But her big break came this year when she became the "Firebird," a role Balanchine created in dance for his first prima ballerina, Maria Tallchief, four years before Gelsey Kirkland was born.



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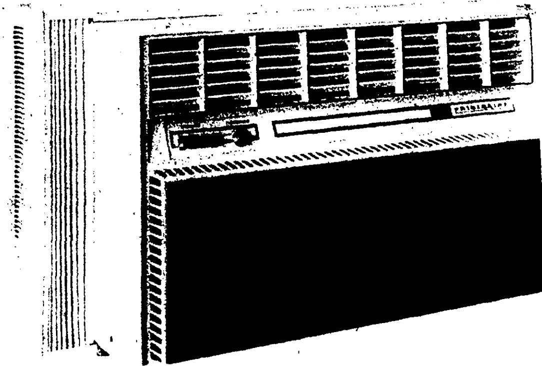

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