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# —Alan Breed Talking

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It is well into the afternoon of Allen Breed's last official day as director of the California Youth Authority. He is sitting at a long table in a hotel conference room, looking at his watch.

The watch is wrapped around a plastic water glass, the face turned toward him. Breed is a punctual man, and there is something of the ex-Marine in him even today.

"I can't begin to share with you how lonely the director's job is," Breed is saying. "It's a degree of loneliness I've never experienced before. It's particularly lonely when you can't determine what the truth is."

Allen Breed has worked in California's juvenile prisons since 1945, when he was an ex-Marine (private to major in the Pacific theater during World War II) waiting to enter law school.

He went to work as a "group supervisor" at the now-defunct Stockton Arsenal Camp, where youthful offenders worked alongside civilian employes distributing supplies to the military during World War II.

"It was one of the most sensible programs I've ever seen," Breed recalls. "The inmates were paid the same as civilians. They in turn paid

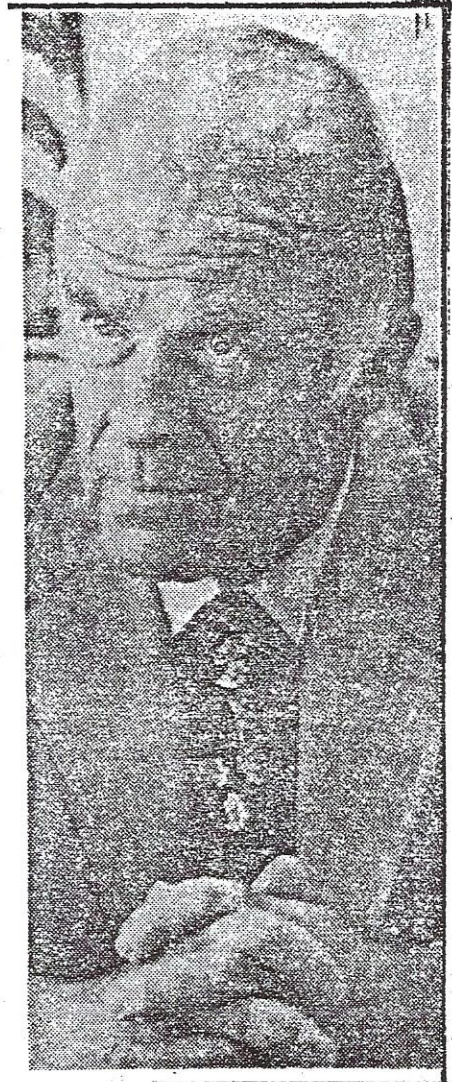
room and board and the cost of supervision, and were usually left with \$1,000 or \$2,000 in the bank when they went home."

A radical proposal today — when prisoners are paid only cents a day — but one which Breed points out is utilized successfully in Scandinavian countries.

"Those were the days before research," Breed says. "But, based on our own observations, the inmates in that program had a phenomenally high success ratio when they were released."

Breed never got to law school, instead making juvenile corrections his lifelong career. He has worked at virtually every level of the state system which currently houses some 4,500 young "wards" and supervises some 8,000 more on parole. In 1968, he was named to head the entire CYA system, a position which also made him chairman of the CYA parole board.

Somewhere along the way, he earned a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of the Pacific in Stockton. He has also



been a member of or headed a myriad of local, state and national organizations concerned with juvenile justice and delinquency.

Nationally regarded as an authority on juvenile corrections, Breed leaves for Washington, D.C., later this month to work with the U.S. Justice Department on national standards for delinquency prevention.

"One of my major interests has always been prevention," he says. "It's very disillusioning to always be at the other end of it."

He leaves his post as chief administrator of the largest state juvenile corrections system in the country with some reluctance.

"I'd really like to be director under Jerry Brown," he says, "but I have strong feelings about changing the bureaucrats every eight or 10 years. We need to throw the rascals out every so often."

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His successor is Pearl West, formerly vice-chairwoman of the Youth Authority parole board and the first woman in the country to head a juvenile corrections system. Breed is pleased with Brown's choice. "She'll be a breath of fresh air," he says.

His Washington fellowship runs for one year, which will also be a time for the 55-year-old Breed to decide what he wants to do after that.

"I'm a little burnt out," he admits. "I realized I was getting to that point last year, and that's when I went to the governor and told him I wanted out."

He also believes people who work in the emotionally-charged atmosphere of juvenile corrections should have "a sabbatical every year or so — so they can ventilate and then come back.

"The majority of people who work with kids are really caring people. They act like sponges. They absorb all the frustration of the kids, all the anger . . . You hear the kids' stories, and you empathize with them. But if you're not careful, you build up a wall of immunity.

"It's very difficult work. If we fail many times, that's just an indication that the state of the art continually needs to grow."

There is a framed cartoon on a wall in Breed's 10th floor office at 714 P St. It shows a park ranger talking to a bear. The bear is holding a shovel, wearing a ranger's hat and listening attentively.

"The old persuasive approach is out," the ranger is saying. "From now on, they put out their campfires or you BITE them."

The cartoon message says something about Breed's approach to the increasingly complex, usually frustrating dilemmas of his profession.

In the juvenile justice field,

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questions come more easily than answers.

*What is happening with kids today? What role does the family play in juvenile crime?*

"The family has ceased to be the center of things. Look at all the skills necessary to be a plumber, a doctor, a teacher. But what about a parent? You can become a parent with NO training for the enormity of the task

"Parents spend so much time acquiring wealth and finding personal satisfaction. Parents feel they become better parents by giving their kids material things . . .

"I'm not saying that mothers should stay home and care for children. I'm talking about both partners contributing. Maybe there are other ways to structure the work day.

"If we really want to do something about the problems of crime, we should work on strengthening the family."

*And the schools?*

"I don't want to dump all the problems on the schools. They're only a reflection of the society. But they are the only place where we can have a positive impact outside the family. And the achievement scores clearly show that something is wrong.

"In many ways, schools have not kept up with the times. But I'm conservative in the sense that we

haven't put enough demands on kids. Kids aren't going to grow and learn by some sort of osmosis, simply by being exposed to it. . .

"One of the things that bothers me so much about the public schools is their resistance to change . . . There are a lot of things that can be done in the curricula today without much money."

*What does increasing school vandalism tell us?*

"It depends. I can take you into some ghetto schools where there is no vandalism, no names on the walls, where the kids are responsible and possessive of their school. . .

"There ought to be a grievance procedure in the public schools, so kids felt they could influence change, really have a say in things. We've found tension is reduced in our institutions when kids feel they can object to something they think is unfair, and have something done about it."

(An inmate grievance procedure begun by Breed in 1973 was recently singled out by the U.S. Justice Department as "exemplary" in the nation.)

*What are juvenile prisons like? Do they deter crime?*

"I don't try to defend . . . any of these places. They're terrible places . . . One of the accusations is that we operate like country clubs or Boy Scout camps. That's ridiculous. These are prisons, not country clubs. One reason we aren't able to do better is that our institutions are dangerous, unfair places . . .

"Correctional institutions are concrete monuments to our stupidity in dealing with the problems of mankind. That does not mean we don't need them. . .

"We work in an extremely expensive business now. It costs us \$12,000 a year to keep a kid in an institution. How much more money should be put into correctional institutions is highly questionable."

*About half the kids in your institutions are repeat offenders. What about the other half? What works for them?*

"I have been discouraged that we have not been able to really help large numbers of people. But we're battling about 50 per cent. If a major league batter were doing that, he'd be a superstar.

"We can't really pinpoint what works for those 50 per cent. We know probation subsidy (community treatment of offenders) works, no matter what people say about it. It's gotten the 8- to 12-year-olds out of the institutions and a lot of the females.

"We try therapy, but in one intensive therapy unit some years ago, the recidivist (repeat) rate was 15 per cent HIGHER."

*Rehabilitation. Does it work? Ever?*

"All we can do is make these places as safe as we can — realizing that they can only be reasonably safe — then make them fair, then make them as normal as possible. If we have

anything left, we'll use that for treatment.

"I still want to believe in treatment, in rehabilitation. But I think we 'treaters' have to have limits on how long we can 'help' somebody . . . We have so misused 'time' that it really has no impact. There ought to be a limit to how long we can do all that good."

*The legislative trend is hard-line on crime, with stiff penalties for juveniles and adults who commit serious crimes. What about the future?*

"I see increasingly harsher sanctions being imposed. Basically, the American people are a punitive lot, and they have no understanding of what time means. . .

"The general public really doesn't give a damn about due process for inmates. They generally feel they deserve what they're getting and if they'll just stop hitting people over the head and stealing their property, they can have their freedom.

"It's not that simple."

*There is considerable effort in juvenile corrections to keep "status offenders" — kids who commit non-crimes like running away from home — out of juvenile prisons. How are these so-called "diversion programs" working?*



"Diversion looks good on paper. Before diversion was dreamed up as a 1970s concept, kids were diverted by cops who caught them stealing something, kicked them in the behind and told them never to do it again.

"Today, a cop stops a kid on a corner and the kid tells him he won't go home because his father is drinking. So the cop looks in his book

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of community programs and refers the kid to one. That's the first thing. The second thing is if the cop has a voucher to purchase some services for the kid. That's when diversion will really work."

*In other countries, drug and alcohol users and abusers aren't put in prison. What is your view on that?*

"When someone abuses alcohol or drugs, he needs help, and not in a correctional institution. There have to be controls, and I believe the law enforcement dollar ought to be put in controlling distribution and sale. . . .

"A lot of it has to do with a sort of moralistic approach to the problem in America. Using drugs, alcohol, gambling — those are bad, so we legislate against them.

"But I sympathize with my friends in law enforcement who contend that allowing all this to be conducted openly attracts a certain negative element, like pornography attracts organized crime."

*Your critics say you are too "in-mate-oriented." Is that true?*

"I was talking with a union representative the other day, and he said, 'All you ever think about is wards (inmates).' I said, 'Isn't that what we're here for? Isn't that what we get our paychecks for?'"

Breed and his wife Virginia raised three daughters in a house on the Mokelumne River in Lodi, while Breed commuted to his various jobs in the Youth Authority. The daughters are grown, have lives of their own, and he says the house on the river will be sold soon when he and Virginia Breed go to Washington.

He doesn't know how long they will stay, or exactly where they will live, or what he will do when the fellowship ends next year. He views the move to the heavily politicized, high-crime Washington area with some trepidation.

"We looked at places in Washington where they had four locks on the doors. Four locks! Many people don't like to entertain at night. They have a lot of brunches and lunches in Washington."