

A Woman's Life In The SC County Jail

By Margaret Koch

The desk sergeant pushed an electric button to release the door lock.

"Go to the right and up the stairs," he directed.

I went through the door and turned. The steps rang with a hollow echo under my high heels. Outside, the sky was clear and over Pacific avenue the tinsel Christmas decorations swayed and glittered in the sun.

But I was in jail. I was there to find out how women prisoners spend the holidays. The jail was clean. It was freshly painted and scrubbed. But the sun was not allowed in through the frosted glass

windows. And the feeling of being imprisoned seeped through me. It was jail. That's not a pretty word.

Thief, drunk, pervert, child-beater—those are not pretty words either. But they describe some of the people—men and women—human beings—who find themselves in Santa Cruz county jail when they run up against the wrong side of society's laws.

They celebrate birthdays there. They ate their Thanksgiving turkey there. They will open their Christmas cards there.

I was headed for the women's section. Several locked doors and bare painted corridors later, with the keys and guidance of Lt. C. J. Wood who is chief jailer, I found it.

Things were quiet there this week. Instead of a "full house" of 10 female inmates, or an "overflow crowd" of 15 or more, there were four.

One was at the county hospital

for treatment—one was in court. That left two; one in-and-out sitting quietly in her green and white cotton uniform dress, and one new prisoner just entering. She still had on her "civilian" clothes and while I stood there Matron Marjorie Dellamonica took the new girl's spike-heeled shoes and brought her a pair of sandals.

"Those heels make real good weapons," the matron commented.

Women prisoners are not allowed to keep rat-tailed combs either, and when they sew and mend the scissors are carefully watched. There was an elderly sewing machine with a jigsaw puzzle sitting on top of it. There were two tables, some chairs, a stainless steel mirror bolted to the wall—and the inevitable frosted glass windows. The windows bothered me most of all. My eyes kept bumping into them. Frosted glass is necessary but it's an awful thing not to be able to "see out." The women are taken to the courthouse annex roof once or twice a month for a bit of sunshine.

Iron-bunk furnished bedrooms and a tiled bath opened off the sitting room. Everything was spotless and freshly painted. When disciplinary measures are necessary for a particularly vicious prisoner, the "blue room" is used. It is painted battleship gray-blue and has no windows at all. Lt. Wood said that just the possibility of solitary confinement in this room is usually enough to guarantee good behavior.

The women may earn "good time credits" and shorten their terms by working at mending and by good behavior. They do their own laundry. One day each week they are allowed visitors—they talk through a round metal grid in a glass wall. They also are allowed \$3 spending money each week. They may receive mail, books and magazines.

"Men prisoners get out to work a bit under a rehabilitation plan," Lt. Wood noted. "We would like to have a rehabilitation setup for the women but we have no space for it."

Last Thursday the women ate Thanksgiving turkey prepared by Charles C. Cole, jail cook. The food is unusually good for jail fare with menus that are both balanced and nutritious. At Christmas a special meal will be served again. And last year the women used scraps of colored pa-

per to make place cards for their table. They taped their Christmas cards to the wall and put up a green cardboard tree in the center of the table.

They got bags of fruits and candies from the Salvation Army and several church groups. They listened to Christmas carols sung by a church caroling group. And that was Christmas for them.

"A real tree with lights is prohibited because of security measures. We have had women threaten to start fires—all sorts of things," Lt. Wood explained. "We do try to treat our prisoners like human beings," he added.

The door clicked shut behind me. I stepped out into the late afternoon air. The Christmas tinsel swayed and sparkled over Pacific avenue. I took a deep breath of fresh air. And looked up at the frosted glass windows just a stone's throw away from the pulsing life of the street.

Young trees may be killed or stunted by porcupines which gnaw into the inner bark or cambium layer.

A Cardboard Christmas



It will be a "cardboard Christmas" next month for women prisoners at Santa Cruz county jail. Real trees are not allowed because of necessary security measures but the women will put up a cardboard "tree"

and will receive gifts of candies and fruits from several local organizations which never forget their less-fortunate fellow citizens. The matron shown decorating the tree is Mrs. Marjorie Dellamonica.

Merchants Warned About Counterfeit Bill Passers

The passing of a series of counterfeit bills by three suspects has been found in the central California area, as close as San Jose, and Santa Cruz merchants should beware, city detectives said.

The bills are in denominations of \$1, \$10, \$50 and \$100, but the biggest problem are the \$10 bills, Detective Richard Overton said.

The \$10 bills, which have turned up at San Jose and Salinas, are narrower than normal bills, the shadow on the Treasury building is blurred, and the letter "Ten" is smaller.

The \$1 bills, which have been passed in the San Francisco Bay area, have heavily inked serial numbers, old appearance and a spicy odor, Overton said.

The suspects include a woman of Latin descent, 35 to 40 years old, five feet three inches, weighing about 125 pounds, with dark shoulder-length hair.

She also has a scar on the right side of her neck.

Another Latin descent woman is described as 35 years, weighing about 120 pounds, five feet two inches with short dark hair, last worn in curls around the face. A Caucasian man, age 35 to 40 years, five feet 10 inches, with brown hair is also a suspect, Overton said.

The trio usually operates by buying small items, such as jewelry, passing the \$10 bills and receiving the change. They have never been seen together.

Overton also reminded merchants to be particularly careful about cashing checks during the holiday season. Positive identification should be required, and clerks should be wary of strangers. Out-of-town bad checks are very hard to trace down, and the merchant runs a risk of not being able to collect, Overton said.

