

# Our Criminal Justice System. What's Right And What's Wrong With It

By George A. Burns

(Excerpts from this series are taken from the Oct. 1983 Life Magazine.)

## A Night Of Drugs And Death

### Part I

Tinker Parker and Tommy Groover liked to swagger through honky-tonk Westside Jacksonville, Fla., as if they owned it, dealing drugs, dominating thir ragtag

hangers-on with fear. On the evening of Feb. 5, 1982, Parker, 29, who had been high for days on angel dust, beer, acid, coke, ludes and grass, suddenly turned on

Groover, 25, and demanded \$75 as payment for drugs. "You're gonna pay me or I'm gonna hang your ass," Parker warned.

The next day a nervous Groover sought out Richard Padgett, 22, another Westside floater, who owed him \$50. Padgett didn't have the money. His girlfriend, Nancy Lee Sheppard, sensing trouble, offered to help pay the debt but he said no. Instead, he joined Groover and Parker and Parker's ex-wife, Elaine, 31, and they drove from bar to bar, looking for someone to lend Padgett the money. By midnight their quest had turned into a leisurely rampage of slaughter.

The first to die was Padgett, shot three times by Groover. The body was left in a ditch, and the group went back to town to find Nancy Sheppard, who had seen Padgett quarrelling with Groover and Parker. Along the way, they picked up Jody Dalton, a 21-year-old drifter, who was in the car when they threw the murder weapon, a .22 pistol, into the St. Johns River. Later Joan Bennett, 21, another hard-drinking crony, joined them, began taunting Dalton and forced her to have sex with Groover.

Then Groover decided that Dalton knew too much, and he beat and shot her, crazed with liquor, drugs and blood. Parker and Groover's roommate Billy Long, 26, knew where Nancy Sheppard lived. She was lured from her home by Elaine Parker, who told her that Padgett was in the woods, high on drugs and screaming for her. When she saw her boyfriend's body, Sheppard fell to her knees and

cried, "Oh, my God!" Cooly, Parker told Billy Long, "Either you kill Nancy or you'll be in the ditch with Richard." Long took another .22 pistol from Elaine and emptied it into the weeping 17-year-old. Then Parker stabbed her seven times in the neck. Although the evening had yielded no money, Parker and Groover had settled their debt with a murder and killed twice again to cover that. What follows is the story of how a couple of tough prosecutors used the controversial tool of plea bargaining to pit friend against friend.

"Sometimes," says Ralph N. Greene III, Chief assistance state attorney who worked on this complex case, "I've got to make deals with sinners to catch devils." After the bodies of Padgett and Sheppard were found by a forester, Jacksonville police went to Parker's trailer because they had heard reports that he was on a rampage. Parker was not there but Elaine was, and she talked freely, telling police that Tommy Groover had killed Padgett and that Billy Long had shot Sheppard — omitting her ex-husband's role.

The police picked up Long, who admitted killing Nancy but claimed that he did it only because he feared for his own life. Prosecutor Greene had no physical evidence — the gun could not be located, suspects had burned their bloodstained clothing. So far, Greene had only statements from people of dubious character. To nail both Parker and Groover, he had to persuade Elaine and Billy to testify in court

under oath. The investigation ground on, turning up the murder of Jody Dalton, whose body was discovered by a fisherman, but there was still no way of tying Parker and Groover to her death. Both Greene and his boss, State Attorney Ed Austin, were convinced the two men were guilty. Austin speculated, correctly as it developed, "Tommy was a mad-dog killer on Tinker's leash. Tinker turned him loose to kill. Yet Greene knew, "I really didn't have a case. I couldn't have tried and convicted Tinker Parker or Tommy Groover of anything."

Austin and Greene had little choice but to plea bargain for testimony that would bag Parker and Groover. "If I have a weak case," Greene explains, "I have to have some testimony. And why should a guy testify for me for nothing? If everybody keeps his mouth shut,

they all go free. Sometimes I'm not fighting with both hands. I've got one hand tied behind my back. So I have to make deals." Greene knew, as he put it, that "people will say, 'but all of them are guilty of murder.' The fact is, sometimes bad people get deals and go free." She shrugs, "It's a practical world."

Greene's maneuvering in that world during his 10 years as Duval County prosecutor, in fact, have embroiled him in a federal investigation of judicial deal-making in northern Florida. The bargains involved are not connected with this case. Though the matter is still not settled, Greene has voluntarily resigned from the state attorney's office and entered private practice, specializing in criminal law.

Next Installment: Part II of *A Night Of Drugs And Death In Our Criminal Justice System. What's Right And What's Wrong With It.*

## Sentinel-Voice's Associate Editor Hosts Radio Talk Show

Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice Associate Editor George A. Burns is hosting his own radio talk show program on KCEP Radio entitled "Community Forum."

The weekly 30-minute program, which airs on radio station KCEP had as its impromptu inaugural guest, Congressman Harry Reid last Monday. Burns stated that the official beginning of the program will feature Las Vegas FBI Director and Special Agent In Charge, Joe Yablonsky next Tuesday.

The show will feature guests from different arenas in life, whether it be business, education, politics, law, finance, medicine, entertain-

ment or sports, and will focus its attention on West Las Vegas and how what they do can best benefit the community and in turn, how those in the community can "touch base" with those individuals, seeking out ways of communicating to them and getting more involved in their particular mainstream.

Burns noted that while the program is of 30 minutes in length, it may be expanded to receive calls from listeners, directed to his guests, once the availability of proper mechanisms in KCEP's studios are set up. He was also optimistic that if the program is successful in its initial stages, then it could conceivably become a semi-weekly feature of the station.

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## POSITION ANNOUNCEMENT CLARK COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE is seeking candidates for the part-time position of College Nurse

**RESPONSIBILITIES:** The College Nurse at CCCC is a part-time position sponsored by the CCCC Student Government to provide health information services and health advice for students. The nurse provides coverage at the Community College during the late afternoon and early evening hours, four days per week, Monday through Thursday. The nurse also provides general assistance in on-campus emergencies and health information.

The position pays \$8,500 per academic year and may be coordinated with other full-time employment.

### DUTIES:

1. Supervision of a first aid office on the CCCC campus.
2. Regular office hours on campus in order to disseminate information concerning health and general nutrition.
3. General recommendations and responsibilities concerning all emergency equipment on the campus including purchase of equipment for the new Nurses' Station.
4. Dissemination of the Student Health Insurance Program brochures.
5. At least three health related lectures based upon general student interest per year, not to exceed two hours in length.
6. To update and keep available a small health library for students, faculty and staff in the areas of health, diseases, nutrition, birth control, and related health information. Other special assignments as assigned by the Coordinator of Student Activities.

### MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS:

1. A Registered Nurse Certificate or LPN.
2. At least one year of experience in nursing.
3. An ability to work with a diversity of people in presenting health information and advice.

### APPLICATION PROCEDURE:

Forward a letter of application, copies of transcripts and three letters of reference to the Personnel Office at CCCC, 3200 E. Cheyenne, No. Las Vegas, Nevada 89030.

### TARGET DATE FOR EMPLOYMENT:

November 11, 1983

### DEADLINE FOR APPLICATIONS:

October 28, 1983

**NOTE:** Renewable each semester based upon ASCC funding.

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