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Cindy Serves Time,
Becomes An 'Andrew'

By Bonita Sparrow

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP)--Being 16 isn't so sweet if you're in a state Youth Development Center for Girls, pulling time for robbery and staring eyelash to eyelash at doing hard time in a woman's prison.

Cindy (not her real name) had been there nearly five months when she responded to a "Powerlin" offer to "write us if you have a problem."

She had a problem.

On New Year's Eve, during her 15th year and in spite of her mother's pleas, she ran away to live with an adored older sister. "I had no real reason to leave," she wrote. "I had everything at home. The only reason was to see what being on your own was like."

Her sister and her sister's boyfriend robbed a convenience store. Cindy was in the car. She was guilty as an accessory and sentenced to a state Youth Development Center. Because of the nature of her offense, she faced the possibility of being transferred from there to a state prison for women.

She discovered very quickly what it was like to be on her own. "I wish I'd listened to my mother," she wrote. "I'm real sorry I didn't."

She wrote to "Powerline," a program of the Southern Baptist Radio and Television Commission. Her letter was forwarded to Iona Richardson, one of the RTVC counselors. Richardson read the letter carefully and formulated a caring answer.

"A time of imprisonment can be a time for evaluating one's life and making a new start," she wrote. "It can't erase the mistakes of the past, but it can present the possibility of a better future."

"The essence of the gospel is that even in the worst of circumstances, there is always a saving possibility, that no matter what your past experiences have been, God can give you a new beginning."

Cindy shared the letter with her mother. Her mother was so pleased she took it to the Youth Development Center chaplain. The chaplain wrote a letter of his own.

"I serve in this institution as an endorsed Southern Baptist chaplain," he wrote. "For this reason I appreciate even more the kind of letter and materials you have sent. I had talked to Cindy and her family before, but on the Sunday they showed me the letter they requested we have prayer together. I want you to know how much you positively affected Cindy and her family and how grateful I am."

Richardson's letters continued to affect Cindy. When she was discouraged the letters urged her to believe she could be helped and her future did not have to be determined by her past.

Cindy shared her letters with other girls at the Youth Development Center. Several asked if they could write to Richardson as well.

"You remind me of Andrew in the New Testament," the counselor wrote Cindy. "His greatest talent was bringing others to Jesus. As you share your knowledge of Jesus and put your friends in touch with others who care for them and want to help, you are a modern day Andrew."

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Cindy did not get home for Christmas. But her family joined her for Christmas day and her letter indicated the maturity to accept that fact.

In March the chaplain wrote the RTVC again. "Because of the progress Cindy has made in rehabilitating herself, the obvious changes she had in her sense of self-worth and her relationship with others, she did not have to go to a woman's prison. During her entire stay here her faith was important to her and her relationship to God was of primary concern.

"She is now at home and indicated to me she planned to become actively involved in the local church. Her mother also assured me the family would be attending regularly. I am optimistic about Cindy's continuing her relationship with God and her chances of making a satisfactory adjustment in the community.

"It is my firm belief her Christian faith was strengthened while she was here and part of that process was made possible by the kind of concern you showed for her."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Radio and Television Commission.

Three Men With Knives
Steal Missionary's Car

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MADRID, Spain (BP)--Three men with knives forced Southern Baptist missionary Tom Baker in Madrid, Spain, to hand over his car keys, then stole his car while neighborhood children watched.

Baker, from Kinsley, Kan., was washing his windshield Sept. 3, when the men walked up to him. One put a choke hold on him, and all three held knives to his back. Such an event is commonplace in Spain, Baker said, though he'd never heard of it in his neighborhood. He filed a police report but neither the men nor the car have been found.

Baker and his wife, Phyllis, were appointed to Spain in 1980. He is business manager for the organization of Southern Baptist missionaries there.

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Seminary Course Introduces
Students To Urban Evangelism

By Marv Knox

Baptist Press
9/9/83

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (BP)--A new course on urban evangelism lured seminary students from their quiet campus and dropped them in the bustling heart of inner-city Chicago for 11 days this summer.

The purpose of the urban evangelism practicum was "to expose students to the problems and complexities of our major large cities and to confront them with those challenges first-hand," said Philip Roberts, assistant professor of evangelism at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky.

The course was sponsored jointly by Southern Seminary, the Southern Baptist Home Mission Board (HMB) and the Chicago Metropolitan Baptist Association. It was developed by Roberts and Dale Cross, HMB director of metropolitan evangelism strategy.

Roberts and Cross took the students out of the classroom and placed them in Chicago because of the city's diversity of ministries and its wide array of Southern Baptist churches with strong ministry programs.

They also took them to the Windy City because of a firm conviction that "evangelism is better taught than caught," Roberts explained. "The practicum gave the students the opportunity to actually go out and confront people with the gospel."

A major reason the HMB supported the course was because of its concern for the evangelistic ministry in U.S. cities, Cross said.

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"We need 10 times as many people ministering in our cities--people willing to tackle tough problems," he noted. "So many ministers have a jaundiced view of the city. They think, 'To go there is to lose myself, my effectiveness.'

"We hoped to help students see the city's excited, gifted people who are there making a difference in people's lives."

Cross and Roberts said the HMB and the seminary introduced the practicum with a sense of urgency, aware that "the core city now is where the suburbs will be; the problems of the city will be upon the suburbs in a few years."

Chicago Baptists supported and worked with the students because they want to strengthen ministry in the city and prevent young church leaders from becoming urban ministry casualties.

Pastors and other ministers "have got to be confronted" with the possibility of urban ministry burnout before they come to the city, Everett Anthony, executive director of the Chicago Association said. "And it's something they won't experience in a classroom or in the rural South."

Furthermore, the hands-on experience of a practicum teaches the students lessons of ministry which are impossible to learn outside the city, added Curtis Griffis, metropolitan evangelism associate for the Illinois Baptist State Association.

"You can learn every principle and law to evangelize people for Christ," Griffis said. "But you can never learn until you see the setting where you've got to minister. The principles and laws don't change, but the applications change with the situations."

The students who benefited from an examination of changing urban situations were overwhelmed when they first faced Chicago head-on. Soon, however, they learned to appreciate its unique challenges and problems.

They lived amidst turmoil, bunking at Uptown Baptist Church in one of the poorest pockets of the city. They visited in churches and talked to ministers, and they listened to reports and lectures by a wide variety of urban evangelism specialists.

Before their stay was up, they were on the streets themselves--witnessing and listening, leading people to Christ.

Reflecting, they remain impressed and challenged.

"The practicum exceeded all my expectations," claimed Sean Wright, a theology major from Tampa, Fla. "I never dreamed all those ministries were going on up there."

"Our eyes were opened, and we were given a whole new vision of what people in Christ can do," added Frank Hickman, a Paris, Tenn., theology student.

"We learned there are no obstacles which cannot be overcome through the power of Christ."

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(BP) photo mailed to state Baptist newspapers by Southern Seminary

Hunger Committee's Garden
Blooms Despite Summer Heat

By Robert J. Hastings

Baptist Press
9/9/83

CHAMPAIGN, Ill. (BP)--In spite of this summer's drought and heat wave, at least one Illinois vegetable garden has produced bountifully.

"We raised so much food for the poor we didn't have enough help to distribute it," said Bette McKown, chairman of the hunger committee of Temple Baptist Church in Champaign, Ill. "So we've been taking it to the Open Tomb, an interfaith ministry that aids people with furniture, clothing and home repairs as well as food."

The University of Illinois made a plot available for the committee's use.

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Temple's hunger committee started two years ago and is an ongoing ministry, not just a summer project. "We keep a food basket in the foyer where members may donate each Sunday," said McKown, "and we have a cash account to buy perishables."

A unique feature of Temple's ministry is that all foodstuffs are delivered personally, by members of the committee.

"We do this in Christ's name," McKown explained, "and we go into each home and give a witness, as well as share food."

"Another thing," she added, "is we don't judge people as to whether they are 'deserving'. If there're two cars in the drive and a color TV in the house, we remind ourselves that we, too, were undeserving when Christ offered us salvation."

However, if a family continues to ask for help, the committee suggests they might get budget counseling.

Before delivering food, the committee contacts each family to see if there are special dietary needs, or what staples they might already have.

"We've learned that some people are hungry," McKown said. "For example, we went into one home where the only food was a single bottle of ketchup in the refrigerator."

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Pockets The Clown
Serious About Christianity

By Adon Taft

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MIAMI (BP)--Attired in a basically green shirt and baggy, patched pants, Pockets the clown reaches into a colorful bag and pulls out a book. He flips through apparently blank pages and tells the group of children gathered around him, "If you never read the Bible, its pages might as well be blank."

Then he flips through the book again and there seems to be outlines of figures on each page. "If you read the Bible some times, you only get part of the picture," he tells his enraptured audience.

A final time he flips through the book and every page seems to have a full color picture on it. "If you read the Bible all the time, God will color your lives and your lives will be full," he says with a seriousness that only a clown can affect with children.

"Hopefully, they get the truth, not just the trick," says Dana Portante, the 32-year-old father of two who is the dedicated man behind the painted face, bulb nose and pin-adorned hat. He is a member of Village Baptist Church in Oklahoma City.

Portante is one of an estimated 25,000 "holy fools" that now don such colorful garb and practice the art of "clowning for God" and find justification for their ministry in the injunction of St. Paul to the Corinthians to become "fools for Christ's sake" because God has "made foolish the wisdom of the world."

The concept is not new.

Clowns often had an important role in medieval church services. They played the part of "holy interpreters," popping up to illustrate a theological point through mime, magic or even mockery for parishioners, most of whom were illiterate peasants.

Gradually, however, the clowns began to satirize the church and secular society and fell out of favor. Eventually they were declared satanic.

But there has been such a revival of the art form in recent years that Floyd Shaffer, pastor at Salem Memorial Lutheran Church in Detroit, lectures on the clown ministry in 40 seminaries and before professional groups such as doctors.

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He sees a deeper theological meaning for clowns. The word "clown" has the same root as the word "clod," a term many people use to describe the lowly country bumpkin.

Shaffer sees a relationship between "clod" and the Greek word "doulos," the lowest form of servant, that Jesus used to describe what his disciples should be.

Even the clown's makeup has theological meaning, he says. "The white face is the symbol of the death mask in every race and culture," he notes. "And the colors of the makeup are the symbols of new life.

"In the clown's face is the message of Easter. It is the journey from death to life."

Portante believes all of that, but he was not aware of all the history and theology behind it when he started clowning part time about five years ago.

"The main reason I used the clown character was to gain and retain the children's attention," explains Portante.

Six months ago he gave up managing a recording studio in Oklahoma City to clown full time.

"A clown can go to a setting that is not prearranged and draw a crowd," observes Pockets. "His appearance draws people to him.

"An individual out of the clown character might have the same talents, but the visual impact is different. In the proper setting, adults respond even better than kids. I enjoy working with entire families more than just with children or with just adults. They all get involved, and its terrific!"

The parables and biblical accounts of miracles lend themselves well to visual representations the clown can produce, according to Portante, and "I believe they are retained more by children because of the visual impact."

"Pockets" believes his ministry basically is using "object lessons that turn complex biblical truths into simple messages kids can understand."

His favorite is one in which he shows an empty bag into which he drops a black handkerchief, representing the sin in every person's life.

Then he drops in a red handkerchief, representing cleansing blood Christ shed on the cross that is applied spiritually to the heart of a believer.

Finally, he pulls a white handkerchief from the bag indicating the change that comes in the life of a believer because of the presence of Christ in his heart.

He shows the empty bag to demonstrate the black and red handkerchiefs have disappeared to become the white one. (He uses different colors if the church where he is appearing feels there are racial overtones in those colors).

Portante has taped a program that will be televised by the First Baptist Church of Perrine, Fla., and his coloring books and taped stories and songs in the Christian world label are available in Christian bookstores.

He sees his biggest challenge as developing a way to overcome the problems children face from the disintegration of families. "I've had to stop telling the kids to go home and tell mom and dad about what they've seen and heard. And it is becoming difficult for many kids to relate to the image of God as a Father," he says.

But if anyone can overcome such problems, he is confident "Pockets" can. After all, clowns have survived the changes of many centuries and still are ministering.