

Prunty: A budding writer at age 11

By AUDREY L. WILLIAMS
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"Bad Days Happen To Everyone" is an illustrated story written by 11-year-old Eric Prunty, who says the title applies to himself as well.

Eric, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Prunty of 1536 Benbow St., will be honored Saturday morning at the Young Authors Festival Day at Sawtooth Center by the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County of International Reading Association for his writing.

Reasoning that sooner or later everyone will have "one of those days," the book's preface begins, "Dedicated to Anyone."

You might guess that his day is going to be a bad one when he begins his award-winning story with how he mistakes his morning cereal for his wash cloth and buries his head in the bowl, and the story goes on.

"Really," he says, "sometimes my days are just like that."

But Eric is also a success story to the delight of his parents, who gloat on their son's talents not only as an accomplished young writer, but also as an observant artist who attempts to capture anything he sees on paper.

"We're very proud of Eric," says his mother, Constance. "He started off making D's and F's. So we sat him down and talked with him."

"He told us he had to make an adjustment and, of course, going to the fifth grade is an adjustment," she says. "Now he's bringing home A's and B's."

Like any other typical youth, Eric goes into mischief,

and on the top of his list as far as entertainers are concerned is Michael Jackson.

"I'm an average student," says Eric, pulling up his white sweat socks and shrugging off a joke about them being like the famed singer's. "Sometimes I get into trouble and get my name on the board because I like to talk a lot."

For someone his age, Eric shows a lot of compassion for others and sets his sights high on solving some of the world's problems that have yet to be conquered.

"I'm not sure what I want to be," he says. "I might be an artist because I really like drawing a lot or maybe an inventor."

Young & Gifted

"I'd like to invent a way to stop tornadoes," says Eric, who was disturbed by the recent tragedy in the eastern part of the state, "or find a cure for cancer."

Eric, who attends L.A. Cook Elementary, says he enjoys soccer and basketball. He is a member of the the Wildcats, a local soccer team sponsored by the East Winston Noon Optimist Club. During the summer, Eric, whose parents say is an excellent swimmer, frequents the Patterson Avenue YMCA pool.

"I might go to college," says Eric, "if there's enough money to go."

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Budding Author

Eric Prunty: From poor grades to A's and B's, the young writer and artist's next move is finding a cure for cancer, he says (photo by James Parker).

Two broken legs led to his appointment as amputee Olympic coach

By ROBIN ADAMS
Chronicle Staff Writer

Robert Eller got interested in handicapped sports after he was in an accident which broke both his legs. He then had to find some way of participating in the sports he enjoyed so much.

After a little time, Eller's legs healed, but the desire he had to help permanently disabled people find a way participate in sports stayed.

Today, Eller, who is the recreation supervisor of handicapped programs for the City of Winston-Salem, has been selected as a member of the coaching staff of the United States Amputee Team, which will represent the United States at the 1984 International Games for the Disabled this summer.

"I really don't know why I was selected," Eller says. "There were a lot of people they could have selected who have a lot more experience and who have won national championships. I have never won a national championship."

"Maybe one of the reasons they chose me is because as the coach of the Smokers (the local wheelchair basketball team) I have one of the three best amputee players in the nation," he says.

But Eller's modest explanation doesn't tell the whole story.

Eller first got involved with the Smokers in 1978 when he was asked to drive them to a game in Laurinburg.

"I saw how totally disorganized they were," Eller says. "Some went in (the game) when they wanted to and came out when they wanted to. There was no organization. One of the players asked me if I would help them out and I said OK and started trying to organize them."

That first year, the Smokers won five games and lost 11, but that didn't dampen Eller's spirit. Instead, he spent the summer trying to plan strategy for the next year.



Olympic Coach

Robert Eller started out helping the Smokers wheelchair basketball team part time. Now he's been selected as a coach of the Olympic amputee basketball team (photo by James Parker).

Apparently, his hard work paid off. Since then the Smokers have won the regional championship for the last three years and placed each year in the sectionals. This year, Eller says he's going for the national championship.

"I consider it (coaching the Olympic team) to be the top honor as far as coaching wheelchair basketball," Eller says. "I will have a chance to coach players I have sat and watched in awe for a while. And besides, it will be good to coach a team where we aren't living from hand to mouth."

Living from hand to mouth is how Eller describes the Smokers financial plight. Without a sponsor, the Smokers and Eller use whatever imaginative means they can devise to find ways to raise money. But oftentimes they themselves have to bear the financial costs.

When asked if he and the amputee team were going for the gold, Eller says, "Oh yeah."

"With the talent we have, if we perform up to par and I do my job, we should win," he says.

After five years as the Smokers coach, you would think that Eller is finally getting some of the glory that he deserves, but not so. He says he accepted the offer because of the Smokers.

"When most people think of amputee basketball, they think of a bunch of cripples pushing chairs up and down the courts scoring points when they can," Eller says. "But amputee basketball is a highly competitive and highly skilled sport."

"And I hope that my recognition will wake up the stingy, uninterested and non-caring citizens of Winston-Salem and give the Smokers the type of support a team of their caliber should have," he says. "If that happens, then that's better than the gold medal."

"I'm not saying that this is not an honor for me, because it definitely is ... but it's also an opportunity for the amputees of the United States to prove they are the best in the world."

My trip to jail with young offenders: An experience not soon forgotten

By ROBIN ADAMS
Chronicle Staff Writer

"Good afternoon and welcome to the life group," said inmate D.

"We are not here to scare you," the 25-year-old convicted murderer continued, "but we just want you to know what it's like being in prison."

Several weeks ago, I, along with five other pre-teenage girls, was sentenced to five hours in the Women's Correctional Institute in Raleigh.

Unlike my grade-school companions, I had committed no known crime, gone before no judge or jury or even been arrested. I was there for the experience.

My traveling companions consisted of a 13-year-old black girl who stole, among other things, a hair-curling kit from the neighborhood grocery store; a 14-year-old white girl who assaulted a fifth-grade student; a 15-year-old white girl who stole \$400 in merchandise from Hanes Mall; a 14-year-old pregnant white girl with multiple charges of breaking and entering; and a 17-year-old white girl who was convicted of driving while impaired.

Once we completed the trip from Winston-Salem to the women's prison in Raleigh, a barrage of fences topped with bobbed wire awaited us.

The Wait

We were held up at the gate while Richard Martin, coordinator of the Work and Earn it Program, sponsored by the Forsyth Court Volunteers, signed us in. It was almost as if the extended wait is somehow planned, for the wait only made me and the others

nervous. For the first time, the girls expressed some reservation about going further. But it was too late. We were already inside the first electronically-controlled door and waited just outside another one. No turning back now.

Once the prison lieutenant arrived, we began. The courtyard was full of women in varying shapes and sizes. Most of them were black, and they appeared to be having a good time. Radios blared tunes from Culture Club and Gladys Knight and the Pips.

This can't be all that bad, I thought to myself, and I could sense that others felt the same way.

"The aim is to get them to realize that 'I don't want to be there, but I could see how I could be there.'"

-- Richard Martin

Inside The Prison

But once we took our first step inside the old brick building, my way of thinking changed.

Women, dressed in different colored shirts, to signal what grade or type prisoner they were, sat around in a crowded room with signs above them reading, "No talking. No visiting from side to side. Absolutely no infractions of the rules."

We soon found out that they were new prisoners waiting to be checked in and issued a room. Well, I thought, it has to be this way in order to make it feel like prison.

I was soon to find out that this is the way it is all

over. All inmates are assigned to a bunk and have to either work or go to school if they have no high school diploma. While work seems like an advantage, the inmates only make from 40 cents to \$1 per day and the money has to be used to buy personal items; they aren't furnished by the state. Going to school is no ballgame either because while in school, time for good behavior cannot be subtracted from your sentence.

For the women who have committed some rule infraction, they are in what is known as lock-up, which means they are locked in a single cell from 15-60 days, and only allowed to leave 15 minutes each day to take a shower.

Inmate Close-ups

After a brief tour of the prison grounds, we were ushered into a small basement-floor room, where six lifers (serving life sentences) were sitting in a semi-circle.

The obvious leader of the group, inmate D, said she was entering her sixth year of a 25-year sentence. "One of the hardest things was learning to be without the little things that mean the most to me," inmate D said. "No pets, no walks -- that's what hurts me."

Inmate A, who also led the tour of the facilities and who looked a little grandmotherish, said she also missed the smaller things in life.

"I'm a lifer and my earliest parole date is 2002," said inmate A. "I have three children, two of them teen-age girls. One of them is fixing to graduate this

year. And I can't be there for that. I miss that. Another one is having problems and I'm not there to help."

Said inmate S: "Ya'll are really lucky to be able to come in and see how prison life really is. It hurts not being able to see your family and children. When ya'll came in, you could see some of the women in the yard, with radios and dancing and acting like they havin' a good time. But it's really no fun. It's just something to make up for the loss they feel."

Intimate Conversations

The inmates continued with their speeches. One inmate, who was new to the lifers program and had only been in prison four months, started crying as she was telling the young girls the experiences that landed her in jail. When she started crying, some of the girls in the group, including myself, got all choked-up and the session was stalled for a minute until things got under control.

"You can't run the games here you can run on the street," said inmate D. "Saying it's a little rough (in here) is the understatement of the year."

When it came time for the girls to explain to the inmates why they were on parole, they barely spoke above a whisper and with an air of "Well, what I did is not as bad as what you did."

Inmate D could sense their cockiness and told them that they sounded very much like a young version of herself.

"I know some of the things you are doing because

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