

B arred from society: Prisoners speak up

By KATHY PETERS
Features Editor

From afar, the building is a looming stone structure, with a double row of twisted metal fences lining the periphery of its walls. From inside, it's silent and guarded. Official.

Doors shut visitors in with a quiet but resounding confirmation. At every corner, more doors appear, and by each, another figure in a light blue uniform. The hall, cast in a shade of green light, is quiet except for the sounds of a few prisoners allowed to roam.

Guards lead visitors to an elevator, upstairs, down a hall and into a closed room. Led by another guard, two clean-shaven, uniform-clad prisoners walk in.

Bryon Joganch, 28, and Scott Duke, 25, take their seats between the table and the bare cinderblock wall. Both are serving time in North Carolina Central Prison, the institution with the highest security of any of North Carolina's 87 prisons. Joganch is in for a 40- to 50-year term, and Duke is serving a life sentence.

Joganch was transferred to Central after stabbing a man who didn't pay him overdue poker debts.

His original sentence - second degree murder - was for another stabbing, killing a friend. "We were fighting constantly," Joganch said. "We argued over money, a girl in my trailer, drugs - all the things society blames things on - but that's not an excuse to kill."

"I always carried a knife with me, and one night when I was pretty messed up, we got in a fight, and I stabbed him."

After 10 years in prison and four relocations, Joganch is becoming an expert on life behind bars.

"At first, I was very bitter. They set down all these rules, yet everybody who was telling me was doing just the opposite of what they said."

Duke said he is still in shock after three years in prison. Convicted for second-degree murder and second-degree rape, Duke said he had a conventional life as a teen. He described his relationship to his family as very close, and he graduated seventh in a class of 785 at Roosevelt High School in St. Louis, Mo.

"I didn't care about material goods," he said. "I cared about my family. The little world I was living in was just that - a little world. Then, when I went into the service, I found there were some cold-hearted people out there."

"Especially in business, they don't care. They want you to have so many engines fixed in so many minutes. You are walking around like a time bomb."

"All I can say for people out there

like me is there's a very, very cold world waiting for them."

Duke's schedule is the same every weekday, which makes boredom a constant problem. He wakes up at 6 a.m., eats breakfast at 6:45 a.m. and for eight hours a day makes car tags in Central's industrial section. After work, he eats dinner and then attends classes. At 11:30 p.m., he is locked in his cell for the night.

The rest of the inmates' lives seem to be as tightly controlled as their time. Security rules abound. Phone calls aren't allowed, incoming mail is opened and inspected and personal property is restricted, with rules about even the number of shoes a man may have.

Both men feel that privileges are hung over their heads as rewards for good behavior. And both say they are working for the privileges and to get out on parole, but neither sounds hopeful about their future.

"Nobody really knows when you are going to get out. In prison, you just live in limbo," Duke said.

"What choice do you have?" Joganch chipped in. "I can get mad and shut somebody out. But that won't get me anywhere. I try to use my time best to serve me."

Social pressures have a big influence on prison life, Duke said. "If you don't do the things that are popular, you won't be accepted." Duke said different social networks exist within the prison, each with its own set of values, so inmates have some freedom to choose their own set of values.

Does he classify himself in the same category as Joganch? "I'm not as mean as he is," Duke said, grinning.

Duke said friendship plays a big part in prison life. He said that while he was in "lock-up," confined 20 hours a day, he felt a sense of

closeness to the men around him, even though they were separated by bars from each other. "It was a unique experience - almost like a family."

But trust between prisoners is a different matter for Joganch. It isn't something that comes easily. "You can . . . trust people, but it's not a good idea, because what happens when you do, is they violate that trust."

Prison violence is not as extensive or frequent as the media makes it out to be, according to Joganch. He said the general population, the men allowed to stay outside their cells most of the day, usually are not violent.

"This place is changing," Joganch said. "People (prisoners) are a lot more tolerant."

The single-cell set-up at Central is another reason for fewer problems,

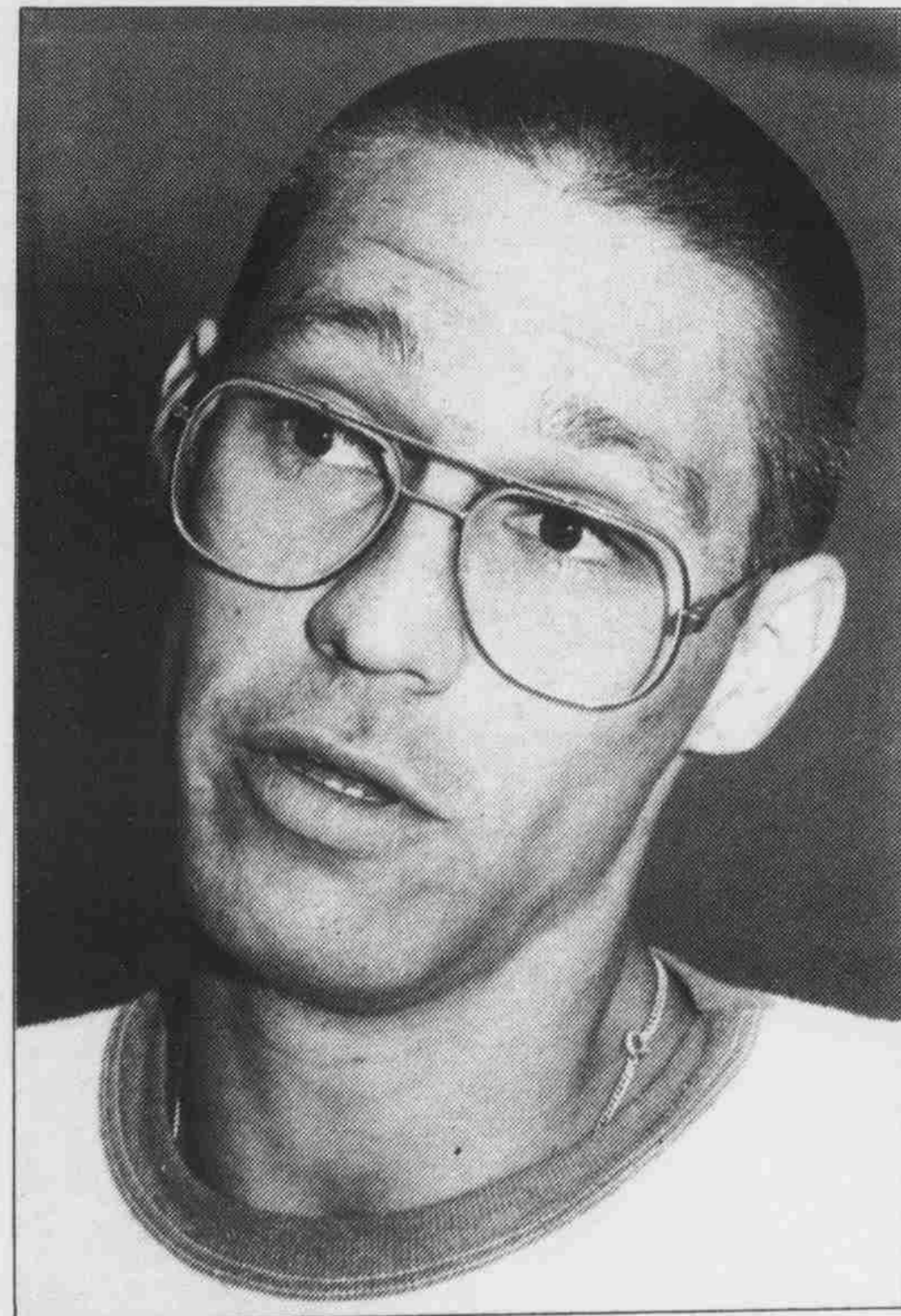
he said. The other prisons he has lived in were dormitory style.

"You're living right on top of each other, and things happen," Joganch said. "The problem here is that, if you're gonna fight, you're gonna get caught."

Still, he said, some inmates in lock-up get violent. "Some people say, 'Hey, what else can they do to me?' Every time you get out of a cell, you've got chains on you."

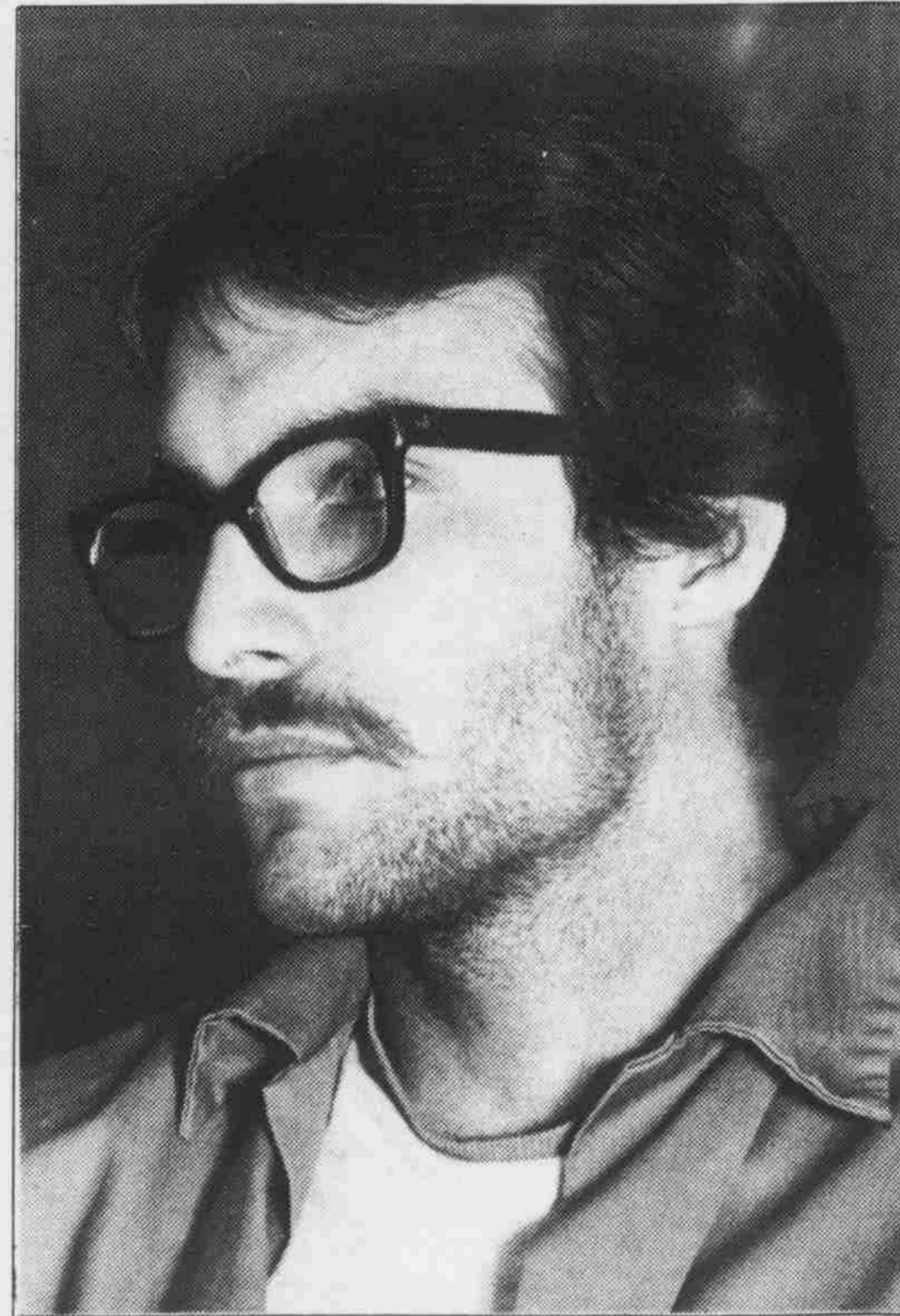
Duke and Joganch said a lot of the men won't change their negative opinions about the law. "You can get into a sort of mental rut in prison," Duke said. "You can look at that policeman over there," he said, pointing to the guard listening to his conversation, "and say 'I hate him' 'cause he's got a blue uniform on."

But it is these same guards who, Joganch said, provide some inmates with alcohol. Drugs, too, aren't that



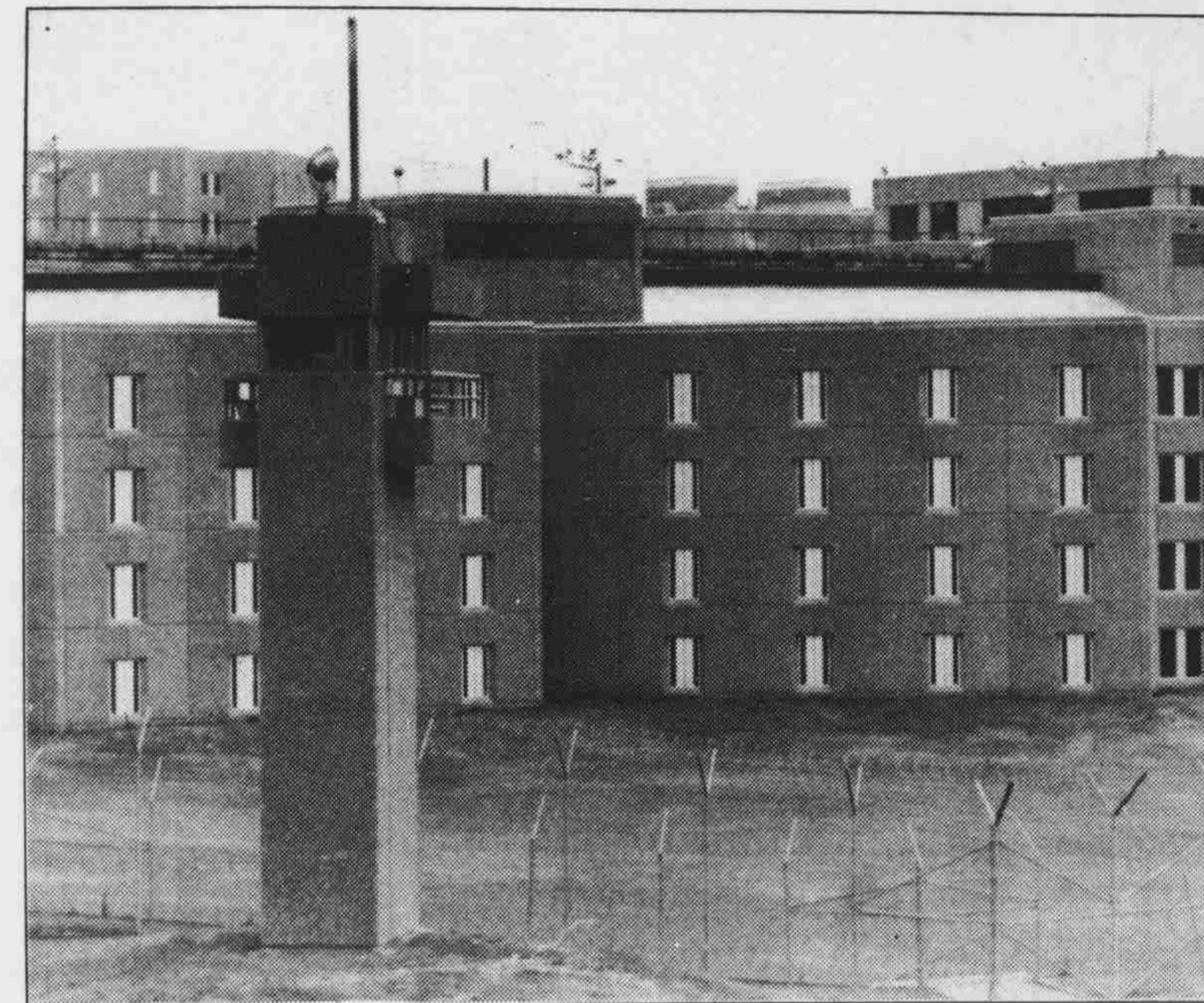
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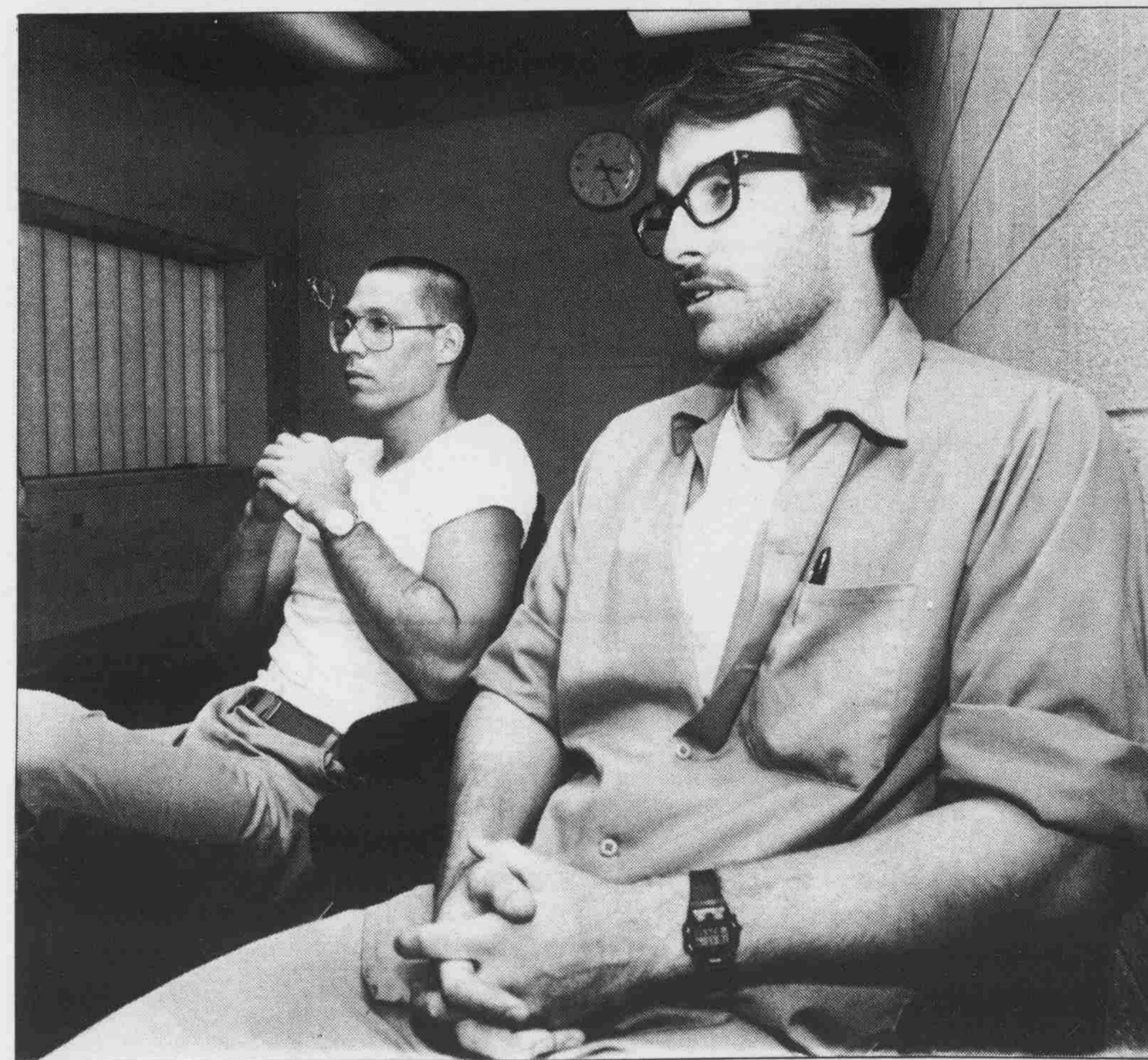


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North Carolina Central Prison in Raleigh



Joganch (left) and Duke in a second-floor conference room at Central Prison

Photos by
Charlotte Cannon

difficult to get, he said. "Nothing's allowed, but that doesn't mean it isn't here." Some inmates make their alcohol, using ingredients from the kitchen and other places in the prison.

Joganch said he continued his drug addiction for a while in prison. "For many years, my life revolved around my next high. I just kept right on."

Joganch said he started getting into trouble around age 12 and was kicked out of high school during his sophomore year for selling drugs.

He said he had no desire to study, but now wishes he had. "Like they say, hindsight is 20/20. I firmly believe, now, that education is necessary."

When he first entered prison in 1976, Joganch said he had a low opinion of human nature. "I thought then that man was like in (English philosopher Thomas) Hobbes' state of nature - brutish."

But after a few years, he said, his view changed. "I just felt there was hope. I got a visit from my brother. It was the first time I had seen anyone in my family in seven years."

He said he then stopped caring about the material goods from civilian life that were no longer available to him.

"I learned those things don't make the world go around. Prison has changed my perspective on life. I've seen the brutish side of humanity, but I've seen the other side, too. . . . It gives me hope for humanity."

For now, the only way out for Joganch and Duke is to stay involved. Through a UNC-sponsored program, they have been taking accounting, business law and philosophy courses. Joganch also jogs and works as the clerk for the prison's Alcoholics Anonymous program. Duke has found what he calls a scapegoat for his frustration in progressive relaxation, a meditation technique that the prison psychiatry department teaches.

"I think, if you were able to talk to the people who are making it, they would all have some sort of scapegoat," he said.

Neither of the men said they blame society for their frustration with prison. "I like to take all the blame myself," Duke said. "It's a good escape - to blame others - and you can't do that."

Joganch, who was raised as a Catholic and still claims to be religious (though not Catholic), does not blame God, either. "I believe God exists, offering support and strength. . . . I just don't conceive of God in a manner in which he punishes people."

Duke does not claim a religion. "I'll tell you what I tell everybody else - watch my actions. Because I can tell you anything, but if you watch my actions, you'll know."