

One spring morning in 1946, my grandmother came to my room and awakened me, saying "Ed, there's somebody downstairs who wants to see you."

I dressed and went downstairs. To my surprise, there sat a detective.

"Hello, Ed. How are you?"

"Fine, sir." I replied not knowing what to expect.

"What time did you get in last night?"

"Oh, about seven," I lied.

"Ed, I'm damned tired of your telling me lies. I know you didn't get in until three-thirty this morning because I was sitting out there watching when you came in, and you were drunk. Now we don't have any alternative, Ed, but to take you to the detention home. Your grandmother can't control you, and you are only making her life miserable. So maybe if we put you in the detention home for a while, it will teach you a lesson. Maybe when you get out, you'll decide to do the right thing."

His manner of speaking let me know I had no choice. I was taken over to the detention home.

A man came to see me, and introduced himself as Mr. Robinson. He was a Catholic Service League worker.

"Hello, Ed. How are you?"

"Fine. How are you?"

"How would you like to go to a place in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, where you could learn a trade and get a good education?"

"You mean a reform school?"

"No, Ed, this is not a reform school. This is a boys' school, where they specialize in teaching trades, so when you get out, you'll really have a lot on the ball. You'll not be locked up there—you'll have a regular little house you'll be living in—and you won't have anybody pushing you around or looking down your neck.

"It's a privilege to go there. If you decide you don't want to stay, you can come back to Akron. We think, should you go, you might just straighten out a bit. You're not being taken there for punishment, because you haven't done anything to be punished for. What do you say?"

"Yes, it sounds interesting, sir. I think I'd like to go. Fact is, I'd like to go anyplace."

He'd made it sound so good, I was convinced he was trying to help me.

"Fine, then we'll leave for the school next week. In the meantime, you can leave this detention home, and go home and spend a few days with your grandmother. How's that?"

"Oh, that's fine, sir. I really appreciate that," I said sincerely.

For the first time, I was excited about my future. Given this opportunity, I knew I'd straighten out. I was so happy I wasn't being sent to a reform school.

"I won't have anyone telling me what I have to do," I thought to myself. "Maybe I'll be able to show them how

good I am at baseball and football.”

My grandmother seemed relieved. The nights dragged by, for I couldn't sleep in my excited anticipation of going to the Philadelphia Protectory, a school located right across the river from Valley Forge.

I had been told by Mr. Robison that at the school I could come and go as I wished, without constant surveillance. But when I came face up against this formidable institution, I immediately had my doubts. When we pulled up in front of the school's main entrance, on that day in January, 1948, I saw looming in front of me two big, black steel doors. Inside the gates stood the large red brick administration building. This place didn't look like the boys' school I was expecting.

We went inside. The interior of the school had a cold, harsh feeling about it. After Mr. Robison signed the necessary papers for my admittance, I was led downstairs to a shower. My clothes were taken; and in their place, I was issued a pair of khaki pants and a khaki shirt. Then, I was led to the barber shop for a butch haircut. Although the rules about hair length were fairly relaxed in the protectory, each newcomer was required to get a close crewcut the first time around.

My initiation had begun, and my suspicions were rapidly growing. My family, and the probation officer, had painted a pretty picture of a rather loathsome place. The school where I was to be free had turned out to be a reform school. My resentment knew no bounds.

In short order, I began to withdraw into a protective shell. Many a time I'd find myself crying lonesomely; of course, I'd hide my tears for fear of being ridiculed by the other boys. But I learned how to deal with their taunts. I fought back as cruelly and as meanly as I could. I was not above using a baseball bat, or an iron peg from the horse-shoe pit, to even the score against even the biggest and the toughest. Everyone there soon got to know it was dangerous to fool around with me.

An average of ten runaways per year was not really too many for such a school. If you didn't work outside the walls during the day, it was difficult to escape. When a runaway was captured and returned, his hair was shaved off and he was made to sit in the middle of the yard, for 30 days. In the protectory, this particular location in the yard was known as "the line." No hats were allowed on the line, so in summer, sunburns were frequent. Escapees weren't

permitted to participate in sports, or in any other activities. In winter, a runaway was allowed to wear a hat and a coat, but he still had to serve his time on the line, sitting still in the frigid blasts.

Deals between school personnel and inmates were commonplace. Most commonly, guards bribed the boys to make the guards' beds and clean the guards' rooms. In return for these services, the guards would give a boy a pack or two of cigarettes, although tobacco was banned in this institution.

There was much homosexuality. It didn't stop with the boys, but included the staff. It wasn't unusual for a guard to approach a boy, and invite him to his room. After an hour or two, the boy would come out with his carton of cigarettes. Only my reputation as a fighter saved me from being a victim. I was rarely approached; but on those occasions when a guard attempted to browbeat me, I'd protect myself in my own particular way, and the guard backed off. In time, I a guard attempted to browbeat me, I'd protect myself in my own particular way, and the guard backed off. In time, I was left alone.

After I'd been at the protectory about a year, I was delighted to learn I was to go to work on a dairy farm. Finally, I would get my chance to escape. I would work outside the walls during the day, and only return to the institution each night to sleep.

One morning, while on my way to milk the cows, I dashed around the back of the barn, and headed for the woods. I remained there for about 15 minutes. Then, coming out of the woods, I ran onto some railroad tracks, and just sat there, anxiously waiting for a train to come by. As luck would have it, I hopped the freight train that would pass through Akron.