

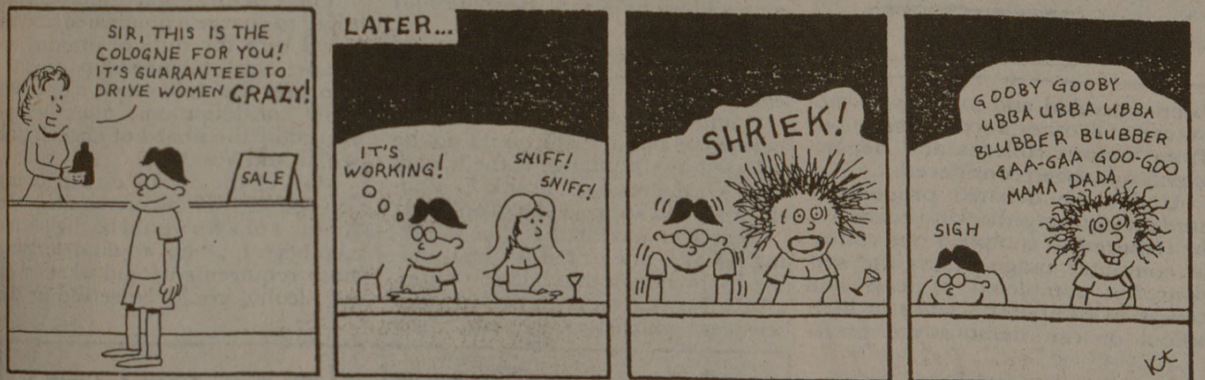
Warped

by Scott McCullar



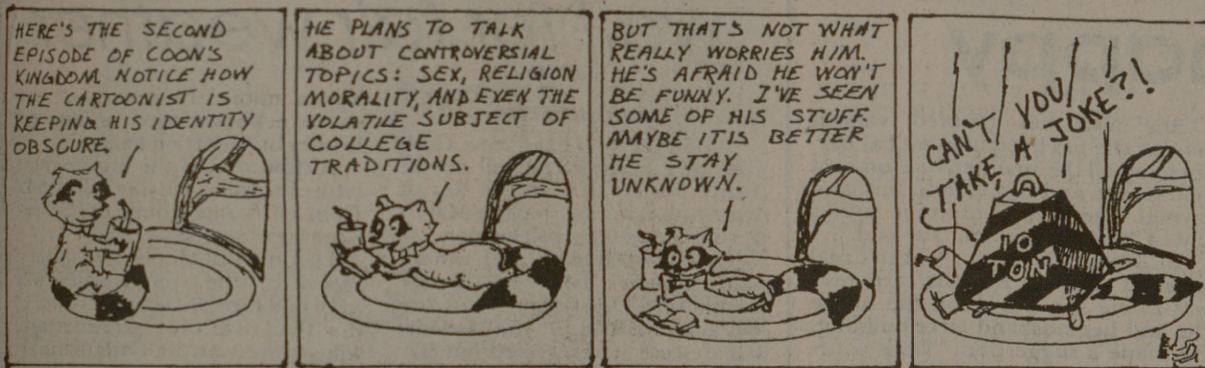
Waldo

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Coon's Kingdom

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TDC early releases stir controversy

**Associated Press**  
**HUNTSVILLE** — A program started last year allowing Texas prison inmates to be sent to halfway houses before they are eligible for parole has drawn a mixed review. Advocates favor the program because it is cheaper than housing convicts in prison and will help the Texas Department of Corrections stick to its court-mandated limit of about 40,000 inmates. But critics say the plan puts criminals back on the street and does not adequately punish them. The Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles launched the early release program last year, sending some inmates to halfway houses as early as six months before they became eligible for parole. Prison officials have proposed expanding the program to send some released convicts home, instead of to

halfway houses. But the Texas Board of Corrections declined during a meeting last week to take action on the proposal. State Rep. Dan Morales, D-San Antonio, says he is worried about the parole board's increasing role in controlling the inmate population. "It appears that the parole board is being used as an instrument to control the prison population," Morales said. "The parole process should only involve itself with the individual quality of the inmates and defining a fair term of confinement." But John Byrd, the prison board's executive director, said the inmates would be released anyway. "Early release is a misnomer," Byrd said. "The fact is that nearly everyone gets released early from prison and almost no one serves their full term." Parole board spokesman Mike

Roach said halfway houses for prisoners were first set up in Texas in 1977. About 4,200 convicts have passed through the state's 47 halfway houses, he said. "It allows for a period of transition for people who have been in prison a good while but have no place to go when they are released, no place with family or friends to help them get started," Roach said. Roach said one of three inmates who is designated as high-risk, or likely to return to prison, winds up back behind bars after parole, compared to one in five inmates for those who are first sent to halfway houses. The early release program has drawn criticism from residents who live near the halfway houses. Conroe residents last year launched a petition drive that ended Jan. 14 with the closing of a local halfway house. The protest started

when residents learned two tenants at the home were suspects in a pair of area murders. Harris County District Attorney John B. Holmes Jr. said the early release program puts the criminal right back where he started. "If people are sent back early to the same environment that they came from, why bother removing them in the first place?" Holmes said. Prison officials said a maximum of about 300 of 12,000 convicts who come up for review each year will be admitted to the home release program. Inmates must be serving a short sentence for a non-violent crime to be eligible. Roach said some released convicts may be required to wear electronic sensing bracelets that sound a remote alarm when they leave their homes.

Some residents of 'hunger counties' don't apply for aid

**Associated Press**  
**HEMPHILL** — According to Harvard University, Henry Hanks should be a hungry man in one of the hungriest counties in America. However, Hanks, 78, who had just finished a breakfast of cornbread made from corn in his garden, said if he's hungry, he's unaware of it. Researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health identified the East Texas county of Sabine as one of the nation's 150 "hunger counties" in the nation. The designation was used for counties where a third or less of the residents eligible for food stamps receive them.

Officials with the Department of Human Resources said Hanks and many other elderly people in the county probably are hungry, but either have too much pride or think the food stamp program is more trouble than it's worth due to the paperwork involved. Hanks, for example, is a retired mechanic who lives in a tin-roofed house. He is eligible for food stamps and said he used them for a while. "I got them for a while," Hanks said. "All I could get was \$17 worth a month." "I had to Xerox every check I got to show how much I made," he said. "You get to doing that, and it'll cost you \$17 pretty quick by the time

you go to Hemphill to get the stamps," Hanks said. "I finally told my wife, 'We'll eat what we can get or do without.'" Hanks said he survives on Social Security checks and what he gets from his garden. Mary Warren, supervisor of income assistance programs at the Texas Department of Human Resources office in Hemphill, said Hanks' case is typical. She adds that eligibility guidelines are strict, and that each applicant must fill out a long form. But she is frustrated by the refusal of many older people to sign up. Harvard University researchers estimate that at least 1,800 people —

almost a quarter of the population in the county — are eligible for food stamps but are not receiving them. Alden B. Howard of Bronson, who hauled pulpwood until an accident left him unable to work, said many loggers apply for food stamps when rains or building slumps drive them from the woods. Howard, who lives off \$330 disability insurance, draws \$17 in food stamps. "They ask you too many questions," he said. "They ask you how you buy toilet paper and where you buy razor blades."

No mistrial in Autumn Hills case

**Associated Press**  
**SAN ANTONIO** — A judge Monday denied a motion for a mistrial in a 4-month-old murder-by-neglect trial involving a nursing home and four of its present and former employees. State District Judge Don Morgan of Galveston denied the defense motion following more than two hours of closed-door deliberations with attorneys in the case. Lawyers Roy Minton and Tom Sartwell moved for the mistrial last Thursday after prosecutor Mike Guarino asked a defense witness if he had taken the 5th Amendment when he testified before a grand jury. The witness, Dr. Weldon Kolb, treated Elnora Breed for 27 years until she entered an Autumn Hills nursing home in Texas City. Autumn Hills Convalescent Centers Inc. and the individual defendants are charged with the 1978 death of Breed. The state claims Breed died of starvation and infection, both brought on by poor nursing care. The defense claims she died of cancer. When court adjourned for the noon recess, Minton said lawyers from both sides had held a hearing on the mistrial motion in the judge's chambers. He said attorney Ted Penson, who represents Kolb, testified during the hearing that the state had agreed to immunity for the doctor before the Galveston County grand jury in March 1985. The same grand jury four months earlier had returned indictments against the current defendants.

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