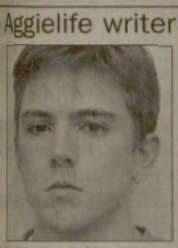


Summer job offers first-hand look into life in the "big house"



John LeBas
 Junior journalism major

I spent the summer in jail. Well, I wasn't exactly incarcerated. While the rest of my friends were pushing carts or flipping burgers, I got the unique opportunity to work at a Harris County detention facility in downtown Houston.

My job was simple: for all intents and purposes, I was a painter. I painted cells, bathrooms, kitchens — you'd be surprised at how fast a paint job will be annihilated in the joint. However, I took from the jail much more than an in-depth knowledge of the intricacies of paint application.

I showed up for my first day of work not quite knowing what to expect. Jails seemed foreign to me, as I, like most people, had never been inside one. I sure as hell didn't expect to be in close contact with the inmates — but right off the bat, there were orange suits all around me. Most inmates, to my surprise, are periodically allowed out of the cells to work, take GED classes, or go to the infirmary. I decided not to let this bother me.

The first day on the job

On my first day, I was painting with an inmate worker. I spoke with him while we worked, and he seemed nice — for an inmate. I listened to his "story;" he and his family had been robbed at gunpoint, and he was later arrested on a "hit and run" charge after he crashed into a house while trying to drive over the thieves in his car. I almost felt sorry for him, and I began to wonder how many more inmates would be able to evoke my sympathy.

Not too many, as it turned out. Perhaps it was their constant degrading remarks on my small size and youthful appearance (I concluded that they were ugly and jealous). Perhaps it was the disregard for responsibility so prevalent among the inmates (almost every one I talked to had been in "the wrong place at the wrong time"). Perhaps it was just the fact that most of these guys were crooks and locked up for a good reason. Whatever it was, I came to seriously dislike the inmates.

My distaste for the inmates was borne as much of necessity as choice, I suppose. Watch your back, I had been told, especially in the "lock down" cells, where the "bad boys" — trouble makers, murderers, rapists — are housed. These guys don't give a damn about much of anything and may have assaulted me without provocation or contemplation in the hopes of delaying departure to prison.

Fear in the workplace

I've been asked if this created a scary situation for me. I never felt absolute fear, just a sort of uneasiness. Imagine having to constantly look over your shoulder while working. Quite frankly, it sucks. You can't relax for eight hours, you can't trust anyone that comes near you, and you are always looking for a way out of possible danger. It sometimes felt as though I was working in a small, hostile foreign country.

When not looking over my shoulder, I was trying to figure out how most inmates can even maintain mental stability — jail is not a walk in the park. It is absolutely no fun. Most inmates do get to watch television, read the paper and make phone calls, but the apprehension and tedium must be hellish.

I especially realized this when I would come across a kid in jail. I saw many teenagers who should have been enjoying the summer but instead were sitting in the jailhouse. I wondered how many had, at such a young age, embarked on a lifetime of crime and jail sentences. Unfortunately, these kids often seemed to have to prove to that they were tough guys. They loved to fight and get in each other's faces, and they were the least remorseful inmates.

Of course, it would be unfair to say that all the inmates were bad people. Some did recognize their mistakes and seemed committed to obeying the law upon their release from jail. Nevertheless, they were criminals serving well-deserved time.

I quickly learned at my summer job that jail is a place I never wish to be — again. The world behind the bars is one I can never understand or appreciate, especially after being there.

Freudian Slip gained six new members this summer.



The Joy of Laughter

They have been laughed at by Texas A&M students for more than three years.

They are Freudian Slip, A&M's improvisation group, who, with each performance, is growing more popular and well-known.

Eric Pargac, director of Freudian Slip and a senior journalism major, said the turnout to the group's first performance before a midnight yell practice three years ago was incredible.

"We performed at Rumours, and people were falling out of the doors it was so packed," he said. "It went well."

Since its first performance, Pargac said, the improv company has undergone several changes, including the group's name.

"We first called ourselves 'A&M's Evening at the Improv,'" Pargac said. "After one semester, we changed it. We thought about a lot of names, even 'Manifest Destiny' or 'Big Toe' before finally deciding on 'Freudian Slip.'"

The improv team puts in many hours of practice, which often has the team members cracking themselves up.

Dale Alexander, a member of Freudian Slip and a junior business major, said sounds of laughter are frequently heard during practice. "Sometimes we will be laughing so hard, we'll have kidney failure," Alexander said.

But the nine hours of practice the members put in each week are not all fun and games.

Pargac said he remembers a time when rehearsal got a little serious. "The other day, we were doing practice and everybody kept cutting everyone off before any good dialogue happened," he said. "It was the first time I really got mad in practice. They all looked terrified like they weren't ever going to get back on stage."

"I had to explain to them every once in a while, I have to get mad. They were OK after that."

Freudian Slip is starting the semester in search of new faces to join its comedy troupe.

Auditions are being held tomorrow night in Rumours, which is located near the MSC Post Office, from 7 p.m. to midnight.

Pargac said two traits are imperative for students wondering if they have the "right stuff" to become a successful Freudian Slip member.

"What it takes is natural acting ability and intelligence," he said. "If you have these two characteristics, you can be taught (the rest). People who are funny in everyday life can't always do improv."

Many Freudian Slip performances make it seem like members have practiced material before the show, but the material is never performed twice.

"We follow the basic skeleton outline of a style, but the character plot line is always different," Alexander said. "In improv, you never do the same thing twice. During practice, we might find something funny, but it's cheating the audience if we do it again."

Grimm said practice helps the group think on the same wavelength. "We have a lot of rehearsals to do scenes and so we can get operating on a group mind," Grimm said. "Then (during shows) an idea flows through the group and catches on, like everybody naming each other names from *The Brady Bunch* show, but there are no pre-conceived ideas and notions."

Group togetherness is imperative to the success of Freudian Slip, which is an area the group worked on this summer.

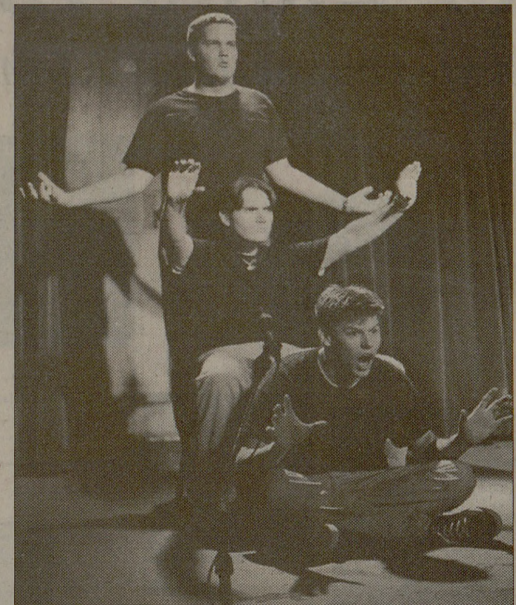
"At our first rehearsal, everyone was still trying to get to know each other," Alexander said. "But now we're like the *Brady Bunch* — knit together. Our group mind is cohesive. It's like we have this psychic bond or something."

"It's uncanny when you say something, (when performing) and

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Freudian Slip performs various improv skits during performances.



Story by *Tauma Wiggins*

Photos by *Tim Moog*

ATMentors provide guidance for students in need

By **BRENT TROYAN**
 THE BATTALION

There are no waiting rooms, no sign-in sheets and no medical records associated with the ATMentors. But the organization of Texas A&M faculty, staff and administrators continues to provide students with guidance.

For more than 17 years, the members of ATMentors have listened to students and helped them work out problems without official records.

Dr. Betty Milburn, ATMentors coordinator, said students can consult members of the program

on a variety of subjects. "Anything — making career or major decisions, family problems, problems with a professor, loneliness, adjustment — you name it," she said.

The 385 mentors provide counseling in their areas of expertise, but make themselves available to students who need to talk to someone, regardless of the issue. A student does not have to belong to the mentors' college to visit them.

The number of meetings and their times are at the discretion of the student and mentor. Milburn said students often find solutions to their problems with just one

conference. For more serious situations, mentors can refer students to more qualified professionals.

Milburn said the conversations are confidential, and

This is the first story in a series about support services available on campus for students. The series will run through the week and highlight a different support service each day.

record of the meetings are kept. She said mentors believe the lack of paperwork removes "the stigma of 'counseling,'" and makes them more approachable to students.

Dr. William Bassichis, an associate professor of physics and a member of the ATMentors Executive Committee, said the

elimination of paperwork was integral in the origin of the mentoring program.

Bassichis said ATMentors began in 1979, when a group of faculty headed by Dr. Rod O'Connor worried that the University's growth, and conse-

quent growth in bureaucracy, would prevent students from finding the one-on-one support they needed.

"We were just there to help," Said Bassichis, who has been a mentor since the group's beginning.

At the time, ATMentors was not officially connected to the University. The group began through, and is still funded largely by, donations from Texas A&M Mothers Clubs. A small endowment helps to cover expenses.

Mentors have always been volunteers. Almost all work out of their regular offices, which bear

signs with the ATMentors logo. Peggy Philpot, Class of '91, once enlisted the aid of mentors when she was a student.

"They were just there to talk to, to help," said Philpot. "They served as a resource to me."

Now a program adviser in the Memorial Student Center, Philpot volunteered to return the favor by mentoring students.

Though ATMentors has seen a renewed interest in the past few years, fewer than 1,800 students have sought help from mentors, a number "way too low,"

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