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#### KIDS BEHIND BARS



Brandon Wallager, Jason's younger brother, was charged with murder, but charges were dropped.

# **PRISONS**

Young inmates often learn more about crime Passing the time CONTINUED FROM A1 >

first time in prison.

off on bizarre thoughts."

a Millionaire."

small one-man cell, his "house,"

— four steps from the gray paint-

He complains his prison psychi-

atrist, Dr. Joseph Chung, refuses

to medicate him. Prison records

show Wallager has been diag-

nosed with a "severe psychologi-

**⊆** The only thing

taught here is to become a

better criminal. 99

CHRISTOPHER

PELTIER

convicted murderer

He and the psychiatrist talk for

two to five minutes in a small

room in the prison's health cen-

ter, he said. "He says to read the

County prosecutor, said he won-

ders whether any level of counseling would help Wallager, who had

Pamela Withrow said confiden-

tiality laws won't allow her to

comment on Wallager's psychiat-

ric treatment, if any, at the prison.

tal health team - a psychologist,

psychiatrist and a psychiatric so-

Chung is part of a prison men-

health programs as a child.

VanOosterum, the Mason

ery two months.

Bible and pray."

len library book.

The new law, enacted in January 1997, also allows prosecutors to try kids of any age as adults in Family Court, where a judge can choose between an adult punishment and juvenile rehabilitation, or a combination of the two.

Under the old law, Wallager would have gone to a juvenile program, possibly the state-run W.J. Maxey Training School in Whitmore Lake. Maxey would have been forced to release him when he turned 21.

Instead, Wallager pleaded guilty as an adult to seconddegree murder in Mason County Circuit Court and was sentenced in June 1998 to 20 to 50 years in prison. His first parole date is in 2013. He'll be 31.

And he said he's getting little stand for his TV and radio. In a five-month investigation own calendars to "pass the time," into the treatment of juveniles in state prisons, The Press found

that youths like Wallager get little

counseling behind bars: " "You need to protect the public now," said Oakland County Pro- Regis Philbin's "Who Wants to be bate Judge Eugene Moore. "But the ultimate question is not just short-term protection. Are we going to change them so when they're released the public is going to be protected from further

Moore got national attention in tional defiant disorder. January when he sentenced 13year-old Nathaniel Abraham to a juvenile program instead of prison for killing a man when he

was 11. "When you're talking about kids, you should at least try the juvenile system first," Moore

Elizabeth Arnovits; executive director of the Michigan Council on Crime and Delinquency, said the new laws are shortsighted. "The prison system is there to safely detain and house people who are sent to them," she said. "They don't give a damn about correcting. They will do some things and offer opportunities, but

that is not their primary mission." But state Sen. William VanRegenmorter, R-Jenison, said Wallager's case shows why the state needed to change the law to lock up younger kids. VanRegenmorter worked with Gov. John Engler's office to draft the legislation. Juvenile judges asked for the options, he said.

"If there's a fundamental principle, a single one, it is this: There are a few juveniles who are so incredibly dangerous that we need to give the criminal justice system the authority to keep the rest of us safe," VanRegenmorter said. Mason County Prosecutor Cris VanOosterum said prison is the

only place for Wallager. "In Jason's case, the decision left to me as a prosecuting attorney was not where Jason could get the most treatment," said Van-Oosterum, who prosecuted the case. "The real concern was the safety of the people, the commu-

nity as a whole." A relative of Carl Wallager said she feels no sorrow for Jason. "That's where he belongs," said the Mason County woman, who asked not to be named. "But if he has a chance to get out, he better have counseling, or he'll be doing it again."

State Corrections Director Bill Martin, whose department oper- signed to Wallager's prison, but ficient evidence. ates the state's 41 prisons, said they work only with inmates prethey give prisoners a chance to paring to leave on parole. better themselves.

"We're not a place in which you with bachelor's degrees in social throw people in the cell, throw work are assigned about 100 inaway the key and come back in mates each. 10 years and get him out," he said. "If an individual comes to us volunteer for a group-counseling and wants to be rehabilitated, we have the tools to do it, and we Thinking Productively," where

ers think of them. Wallager said he's not involved in any group

At the privately run Michigan Youth Correctional Facility in Baldwin, where the state sends most juveniles sentenced as adults, there are fewer programs. Four counselors with bachelor's degrees in social work meet with the prison's 330 inmates, but there are no substance-abuse programs or anger-management classes.

A psychologist and psychiatrist from Mason-Lake County Community Mental Health are on call for at least 10 hours a week. Seven teachers provide GED classes and one vocational program, teaching kids how to be janitors. The prison hopes soon to

provide computer classes. Youth prison Warden Dave Trippett said Wackenhut Corrections Corp. of Florida, which runs the prison under a contract with the state, plans to hire two social workers soon and provide angermanagement classes.

Young prisoners at other state prisons also complain about a

ack of help. "It don't teach you nothing," said Christopher Peltier, one of three teens convicted in 1996 of killing clerk Rodney Corp at the Beer Kooler party store in Grand

"The only thing taught here is to become a better criminal," he said from the state's Alger Maximum Facility in the Upper Peninsula. "The older guys will teach you stuff you didn't know. If a guy doesn't know how to steal a car, he'll teach you.'

These are lessons Peltier will never be able to use. He's in prison for life without parole. Willie Clemons, who was 16 when he shot and killed 20-yearold Jason Stanfield in the parking lot of Fulton Heights Foods in Wallager is thin with short 1995, said he's learned how to protect himself.

straight brown hair combed for-"I've learned a lot of things, like ward. He weighed 226 pounds when he killed his father but now if somebody puts a candy bar on a weighs 150. He shaved for the bed, and I come back to the cell, I'm not going to mess with that candy bar," said Clemons, who's In the interview, he fidgeted constantly. His legs shook. He serving a life sentence at the Ionia Maximum Facility. "I know in the grabbed his left wrist with his right hand and repeatedly slapped past those candy bars have cost guys their lives." the back of his left hand onto his

'A lot of bad things'

"I can't sit still. My mind runs Wallager has always been a He spends 20 hours a day in his handful. He was taking psychotropic drugs to help control severe emotional problems as a he said. He paces most of the time young boy, said his mother, Sheila Virgis. "He was in and out chipped bars at the front of the cell to the sink at the back. The of institutions," she said.

Wallager said he was diagsink is between the toilet and bed. nosed as oppositional defiant, hy-He also has a wall locker and a peractive and bipolar when he Between pacing, he makes his was in kindergarten and living with his parents in Coral Springs, marking significant events, like Fla.

when his mother and brother "I wasn't really the goodygoody kind of kid. Me and my visit, or when his favorite TV programs air — "Third Rock from the brother did a lot of bad things. Spray-painted the neighbor's Sun," professional wrestling and house," he said.

When his parents divorced in 1991, his father demanded custody of Jason and his younger brother, Brandon. Their mother

Their father suffered a heart attack in January 1996, and Jason cal problem" identified as opposithought he would die. Wishful Wallager said he meets with a thinking, he said. He and his prison counselor every two weeks brother moved in with their and with the psychiatrist once evmother in Florida, but they returned to their father two weeks later, he said. Jason said he hated his father.

> brother with boards, mops and once with a cable wire. Allegations of abuse also were raised in court hearings after Jason was charged with murder.

who, he claimed, hit him and his

But the relative who asked not to be named said she never saw the father abuse Jason. "It was the other way around," she said. "I kept on telling Carl that boy was going to kill him. I didn't think it was going to be that way. I thought he was going to give him

a heart attack." The victim's third wife, Stephanie Wallager, has said Jason had pulled a butcher knife on her when he was 10 and had talked about killing his father. Then, on July 13, 1997, Jason

spent years in and out of mentaland his father argued. A deputy testified that Jason re-"Jason may be a very wellsponded with an obscenity when behaved individual in a structured his father told him to go to bed. "You don't talk to me like that in setting," such as prison, he said. In three years, guards have cited my house," the father answered him for just three major misconas he punched Jason in the face. ducts, twice for disobeying orders Jason picked up a knife from the floor and stabbed his father in and once for possession of a stothe chest. He then stabbed him 18 Michigan Reformatory Warden more times.

The boys first called their mother in Florida to say their father was dead. Jason was covered with blood when he and his brother ran across the street to call 911 at a pay phone. "I stabbed my dad, I stabbed him once in the chest. I think he's

cial worker. But they are spread dead," Jason yelled as a deputy among Ionia's five prisons, which house more than 5,000 prisoners. pulled up. Some seriously mentally ill pa-The deputy found Carl Walltients meet with a psychologist or ager covered with bedding on a psychiatrist as often as once a bedroom floor, with wounds also on his hands and arm as if he'd week, Withrow said. "If you're

tried to defend himself. mentally ill on the streets, once a Brandon, then 13, at first was week is the best you're going to charged with open murder, but do," Withrow said. the charge was dropped for insuf-Three psychologists are as-

'I'm growing up in prison' Seventeen prison counselors

(2000, May 4). Grand Rapids Press, p. 5. Available from NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current: https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=image/v2%3A1231FD919F0C27A4%40EANX-NB-16EFD911359B0D23%402451669-16EF9A2E01307ACE%404

Jason Wallager's appellate attorney, Debra Gutierrez, of the state Appellate Defender's Office. refused to let him discuss details Withrow said Wallager could of the homicide in an interview. She's appealing the automatic program known as "Strategies for waiver law that allowed prosecutors to send him to adult court.

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to do it, and we do.

BILL MARTIN Department of Corrections director

worst when he got to the Michigan Reformatory. "At the time, I was the youngest one in here. That's pretty much how I survived in here. Other inmates said they had kids my age, and they felt sorry for me."

He said he's been approached by homosexual inmates, but it was subtle, almost like a teen-age boy asking a girl for a date. They offer to help or to buy him something at the prison store. He knows an inmate who's 50 or 60

and calls himself Linda. "I've seen a lot of things happen in here. I've seen people get beat up, seen people get stabbed: I see people get stabbed over someone taking their stamps.

Gang fights. His biggest fear is getting stabbed, just like his father. "I'm growing up in prison," he said. "People think that when I get out, I'll be better. There's no rehabilitation here. Congress is sending little children to prison, and they expect them to come out:

He said he will come out "bitter, very very bitter."

You can contact Ken Kolker at? The Press at 222-5629 or by e-mail at kkolker@gr-press.com

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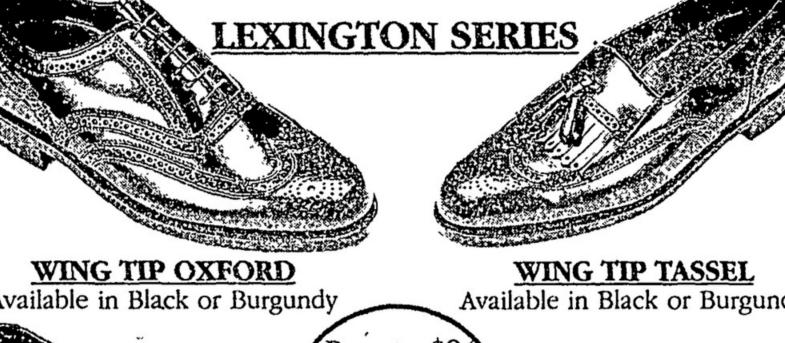
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prisoners learn what other prison-

Wallager said he expected the

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