



Perspective

By JAMIE BUCKINGHAM

Beating System

Built into all of us is a desire to “beat the system” — a yearning to get something for nothing, or at least for less than the sticker price.

I recently subscribed to something called “The Travel-Advisor,” because the promotional fliers promised it would save me hundreds of dollars by showing me how to take advantage of those lower fares the airlines won’t tell me about.

It is this same desire which causes people to buy those “Do-it-yourself-divorce kits,” or “How-to-make-out-your-own-will kits,” rather than pay attorney’s fees.

Recently I was in a shopping mall and saw a long line of folks waiting their turn to drop a quarter into a machine which takes their blood pressure. One woman commented, “It sure is cheaper than going to the doctor.”

But there is a difference between honest frugality and stupid (or dishonest) short-cuts. I remember a friend of mine who commented on his childhood in Harlem. “Half the folks up there work for their

money,” he said. “The other half spend their time trying to figure out some way to get their money away from them.”

Last Wednesday I drove down to Belle Glade with a circuit judge from Titusville who likes to make an annual tour of the prisons around the state. His philosophy — and it’s a good one, even though very few judges seem to agree — is he needs to know what kind of conditions the men he sentences to prison are going to have to live in. We spent the day being escorted through the prison by Superintendent R. V. Turner who is a tough, crusty veteran of the penal system. I was impressed with Turner’s philosophy of life.

“These men are here,” he said, “because they were not able to grasp the basic qualities of civilization: good behaviour and hard work.”

That’s what Turner is trying to teach those 800 men behind the high fence in Belle Glade. There, however, they have to use force — and the incentive of punishment or

early release — to do it. But some place along the line all men have to learn to behave and to work for their living. Both principles, by the way, are laid out as foundational for the human race in the first chapters of Genesis — when God gave them to Adam and Eve in the Garden.

My Harlem friend calls the man who spends his time trying to take the other man’s money away from him, a “hustler.” Oddly, the “hustler,” like most of the men in prison, doesn’t have to spend his time trying to “beat the system.” Most are smart enough not only to use the system, but to design one which would benefit mankind. However, until he understands that good behaviour and hard work are essential qualities to live peacefully with all men, he will continue hustling on the street or serving time behind bars.

In the long run, a person may save money — and even save his life — by not trying to beat the system, but by realizing the system has a purpose, and working with it.