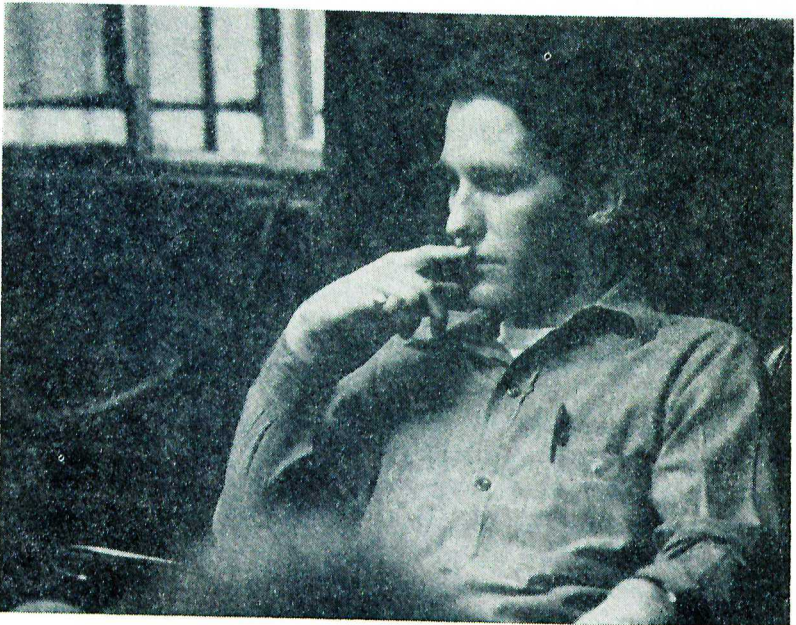


## LIFE BEHIND BARS\*

Tom Isenbarger

The slightly pink eyelids slowly raised and then dropped. His cheek muscles twitched. Once more the eyelids slowly opened and closed immediately. A bird sang in a tree outside the window. The scarce tracks of eyebrows were drawn down in a full squint, and the pinkish eyelids opened halfway. Simultaneously, the eyelids and scarcely visible eyebrows were raised. Two large, brown eyes slowly appeared as the lengthy eye-lashes were drawn apart. The chirping of the sparrow outside aroused him from the dullness of his heavy slumber. Through the bars he could see the shadow of the tree outlined by the window. He stretched and yawned as if to shake off the remaining drowsiness. He was awake.



His eyes surveyed the room while his arms jerked in a meaningless pattern. His legs kicked forcefully, first one, then the other, up and down on the bed. From his tiny, slightly blistered, red lips came saliva in the form of bubbles. The lips parted to expel a cough which made him wince and frown. Then he smiled and gave out a gurgle of laughter. His hands grasped the blanket as he gazed through the bars at the shadow of the tree. His head moved from side to side as if he were scratching it on the bed underneath. As the sound of someone's voice met his ears, which seemed too large for his head, his face brightened, and his two big, brown eyes glistened.

Through the bars he saw many shadows which he did not understand. Often, very large shadows would come and go; and at the same time, he heard voices. Being unable to speak the language, he could not understand what was said. Nor did he care, for it was a great hunger that appealed most to him. Since his appetite was larger than most, he had to be fed quite often in order to be satisfied. This job required that he leave the bars, and he enjoyed being out now and then. But, invariably, he returned to his reclining position behind the bars and continued his arm-waving and leg-kicking.

His hair stood up all over his head when it was washed, which resulted in some calling him "fuzzy-head." Like the fuzzy little shadows that closely surrounded him within the bars, he knew nothing of his or their "fuzzy" condition. Invalid in nature, he was constantly being picked up and tossed around, although he did not seem to mind. In fact, he was generally rather quiet and not outspoken, unless the matter was of extreme importance—such as eating.

I guess you could say that he was just a big baby, because that was exactly what he was, all 14 pounds of him. He slept and ate and moved and looked like other babies, but he was special because he was ours, Cindy's and mine, and we loved him.