

Prisoner Express



Summer 2005

Program of the Durland Alternatives
Library
Co-sponsored by the Cornell Public
Service Center
A Project of CRESP

Free to prisoners

Hi all,

It is with much pleasure that I start this next newsletter for Prisoner Express. I get so many letters from you, and this gives me a chance to respond. I know it probably seems rude to you at times that you write some very interesting letters, and then do not hear back. Time and money prevent me from answering most of your letters personally. The newsletter offers me a chance to write back to tell you all how I am doing.

A good number of you are receiving this newsletter for the first time. I welcome you to the Prisoner Express Program. Our mission has 2 aspects. First, we hope to step through the isolation and alienation of prison life to bring hope and foster a sense of community among those who participate. We do this by providing information, education and opportunities for creative self expression. Secondly, we seek to present you, the prisoner, as real people rather than statistics. By better understanding the prison experience, we hope to encourage more public discussion regarding the present day model for incarceration. The newsletter is an important part of the program. It gives me a chance to let you know what we are up to, and what progress we are making on the various programs we are offering or developing, as well as a chance to print some of the writings you share with us. We have a number of projects underway and a couple of new ones to offer. I will highlight the new project opportunities in **bold type**, so you'll be sure to see them.

Please give me feedback on which projects seem most relevant to your life, or suggestions for new projects. Please keep in mind that we have no regular funding source, and that projects that have high costs are difficult to implement. A number of you have asked if you can donate stamps to the program. The answer is YES. As always, I'm looking for funding, and am ever optimistic that someone with money will notice what is happening and be willing to help support this effort. Till then we'll just keep on going and growing as it evolves.

Before I tell about the new projects we are developing, let me bring you up to date on some of the ongoing projects

JOURNAL PROJECT

I list this project first as it certainly is the one that has most captured my attention. Originally I thought it would be cool if 10 or so of you kept a journal for a year. As of now, I believe there are more than 100 of you doing so. The writing you have been sending in is so many things. It is moving, emotional, educational, ironic, graphic and much more. I read every entry, and am blessed to have found a collaborator in this project. Stephanie showed up a few months ago. She works across the hall from the basement book storage room. She offered to help while we were setting up for our fundraising book sale last spring, and from there she has gotten involved in this journal project. We both read all the letters and

marvel at the quality of writing and the poignancy of the stories you have to tell. One thing I notice is that keeping a journal can get you to look at feelings. Some of you wonder if that is okay. It is more than okay-it is healing. From what I can gather prison life is such an assault on your senses that the easiest path is to go numb. You can block out the bad that way, but you also, by the nature of numbness, block off all other emotions. The Journal offers a safe way to explore your inner self. It makes sense to feel bad when you are in a bad situation and numbness is certainly an effective tool for survival. It's hard for me to tell any of you to let go of it as I don't have to deal with your everyday pain. I can say I'm very proud of those of you who are willing to look at the situation your in and let yourself express your very real emotions about it. It is what you do with your feelings that is the measure of who you are.

I'll get off the soapbox now, and continue by encouraging those of you who signed up for this project, but haven't started to get it in gear. To those of you who are participating, my hat is off to you.

Stephanie and other volunteers are typing up many of your entries and we still hope to get them posted on the internet. More on that later. We had hoped to scan your writings on to the computer, but for a variety of reasons that has not proved doable. **Many of you signed up for the second round of this journal project. Now is the time to start. Please date all your entries. Send us your submissions as you want.** Some people send in writings every few days. Others are weekly or monthly. Make it work for you. Know that everything you send in is read. Till now I've read everything, and Stephanie is doing the same. We sent out legal pads to those of you who are signed up for the program. Many of you have let me know you've received them. Some of you have had them rejected. I'm still baffled by the world of prison mailrooms. Sometimes it seems like they are looking to complicate an issue. I'm sure you all could write volumes about the games that go on in the mailroom. We plan to send out special mailing, including legal pads, to all who are participating in this project in the fall.

BOOK MAILINGS

We continue to mail out 100+ packages a month of books. [This month we put out more like 200 thanks to Erica, Ileana and Anya.] With so many of you requesting books, it can take awhile for your turn to come around. Please share the books we send you. The more books we can get circulating the better it is for all of us. When requesting books, please give us a variety of topics to choose from. That way we are most likely to make a match with your interests. If one or two topics are most important to you put a little star next to those and that will help us prioritize what to send you. All of the books we send are from donated books. We do the best we can. It sometimes is a matter of luck. We are always getting donated books and what we have available changes from day to day. I know how valuable a good book can be and hope some of the books we are mailing out are helpful to you. We have not figured a way to know if the books actually get to you. I know the post office has 30 packages of books that are undeliverable. I can't get them back unless I pay the postage cost again. I can't afford to pay for the books back so I never know who gets their books. That is why I need for all of you who don't live in Texas to tell me the rules of your prison when you request books, in particular California, New York, Pennsylvania, and Indiana prisoners. I'm not sure if you have limits and if you can receive hardcover books. My experience is that if the package deviates from the guidelines it won't get in. For example, if the limit is 4 books and we send 5, the mailroom does not remove 1 book, but instead disallows the whole package. Help us tighten up loss by letting us know the rules of your prison

ART CARD PROJECT

This project has taken an interesting turn. We still have not produced any cards to sell to raise money for the program. We have taken some of the artwork, though, and framed it and put it up for exhibition in a local book store. The work was done by a community artist group called the See Spot Collective. They went through your submissions and chose many for the show. The show will be up until Labor Day. There was a grand opening reception on June 10th. It really

looks good, and I've received a number of very positive comments about your work. It was also featured on a local television show. I'm excited to start creating the next show.

All of you artists take note. Please consider sending in work for the next art exhibit. I am looking for portraits of people in your life. They can be self portraits, other prisoners, prison staff or your friends and family. Please write something about yourself, who you are, and what is important for us to know about you, on a separate sheet of paper. That will be displayed next to your work. **I believe showing your art and especially portraits will help accomplish the goal of getting people on the outside to realize you are flesh and bones people and not some statistic.** I hope some of you are as excited about this as I am and want to participate. If you saw all the artwork hanging in the book store/gallery I think you too would be very inspired.

I haven't let go of creating the cards either. It's still on the drawing board. I need to find a graphic artist with good computer skills to volunteer and help me create some cards. For some of you it is obvious that prison time is giving you the chance to refine your art skills. Please keep sending in artwork. If it isn't a portrait send it too. The portrait theme is just an idea. If the work is of good quality it will make it into the next show. I hope we will get it together to send some better quality drawing paper out to those of you who have signed up for the card project. Our funds are limited, but I am trying to raise funds for another paper mailing. If you have not signed up for the card project and want to do so you can check the box on the form that is included in the newsletter.

HISTORY CLASS

Here is an area where we are still searching for help. Over 500 of you have signed up for the distance learning history project. So far I have not been able to find any group to partner with to offer this class. I may take to xeroxing readings from books and begin it myself, but I figure if I keep looking I can interest someone in the value of undertaking this project. The Alternatives Library is located on the Cornell University campus. We are not a Cornell Library even though we are on

the campus. Given my proximity to all these scholars and educators I still believe I can find someone interested in this project to partner with P.E. to provide this service.

ORIGAMI

This is another project taking way longer to create than I expected. I have a master at paper folding in the Texas prison system, Tim who has offered to help teach some basic designs. Erica, a Cornell student, who is working with Prisoner Express this summer will take some of his designs and plus her own knowledge of paper folding to create some instructional booklets that I will then send to those of you signed up for the program. After you get the first booklet, if you want another, you have to send us 1 completed paper folding from the previous instruction booklet. We will take your work and create a display for public showing.

COMIC BOOK PROJECT

I still have high hopes for this endeavor. I have found a book at the local public library called "The Big Book of Scandal". It is a huge collection of stories all done by different artists on scandals that occurred in this country. There are sections on film stars, politicians, businessman and corporate scandals, government scandals and others. Each story is a couple of pages long. I'm trying to get permission to copy some of the stories out and send them to you. I'm hoping we can put together a compilation of prison stories. They don't have to be scandals. There could be a collection of stories about cellmates you've met, or prison guards who have either helped or hurt you, a section on your first days in jail. There are all sorts of possibilities. For any of you ready to start please start sending your ideas. You can send in the dialogue if you don't draw. If you draw then send in some panels showing something of what you'd like to do. I will send out more on this to those who have signed up for the project. I see from the card art that many of you are talented comic artists, and hope we can figure a way to tap your skills and develop your potential as you have fun creating a riveting and eye opening comic.

WEB SITE

That brings me to the issue of the prisonerexpress.org web site. It is up and running, but, in my estimation not very well. Stephanie, who volunteers in the Journal project, has gotten her husband to look at the site with the idea of making it better. He does this for a living in a large Cornell Library. He's very busy but I believe he is going to work on the site this summer. Some of the items we want to have on the site are your writings. These include the profiles you have sent in, and your theme writings, and as many of your journals as we can get posted. The hope is that in putting your writings online we can help you generate more mail from the free world. If you have a profile of yourself you want posted, please send it in. If we haven't your gotten profile on line yet we will save it until we can.

PEN PALS

Many of you write, asking for pen pals. I'm always trying to match you up with people I meet or library patrons. For some of you this has worked well. Others of you are waiting for your first letters. I'll keep showing your profiles to interested people and when the website is working better perhaps more people will find out more about you on the Prisoner Express web site. In the previous newsletter I listed some pen pal organizations. Did any of you try them? Did they work for any of you?

POETRY

We have received a good amount of poetry submissions. Dave a volunteer in the program has been taken by your way with words. He is reading through all of the poetry sent to us. He has selected some to reprint in this issue. Dave has written the following words to those of you who want to participate in the poetry project.

Listening recently to a recording of Amira Baraka, better known in the '60s as Leroi Jones, reading to the backdrop of a live jazz duo, I was again struck by the natural connection between music and poetry. Baraka's voice moved in and out of the groove created by the interplay of bass sax and snare drum as he delivered a moving tone poem, "Wailin'" - in celebration of African American music and culture. At one point, Baraka broke into an imitation of a saxophone sound itself, further blurring the distinction

between voice and instrument. Had Baraka composed the poem to be performed to music, I wondered. The experience of reading it to myself off a page could have hardly yielded so much pleasure and meaning.

By emphasizing performance, poets like Baraka and the Beats restored the natural rhythms of speech to poetry and sought to join it with other forms of human expression. A poem, they reminded us, is a passionate blend of sound and sense, breathed out into the world by a human being with a particular way of viewing life and art.

Most living things create music of a kind as they move through the world and humans are doubly gifted in being able to make music by the shape of their own breathing as well as through the instruments they adapt for that purpose. Words on a page are not far removed from musical notes on a score. Punctuation and line breaks indicate places to pause or add emphasis; poetic techniques like assonance and alliteration enhance a poem when it is read aloud, often contributing to the sense of what is being described. In this way, poets use the toolkit of language in conjunction with the mechanics of the human voice to arrive at results that lend a musical quality to their work.

Not every poet can arrange a jazz trio as backup. That doesn't mean that we can't write poems to be read aloud and enjoyed more for combining sound and meaning to create a different kind of experience. Even if we don't anticipate having an audience, we can still add the freshness of speech, subtleties of dialect, the sound of the street to our work. In the same way, reading someone else's poetry aloud breathes new life and meaning in a work that, in contrast, looks frozen on a page. Reading poems aloud can also help us to appreciate that unique instrument which is our own voice, which is something we don't do in ordinary conversation, and discover what is unique about our poetic voice.

If you've never heard a recording of your own voice, you might have missed the experience of hearing your personal sound print - a pattern as distinct as a fingerprint. Every one of us has her/his own way of speaking even though we mimic the accents and inflections of our regions and cultures. Recognizing that unique quality and finding how to put it to good effect is one of the keys to gaining control of how we present ourselves to others.

I didn't have an opportunity to hear my voice played back on tape until I was well into my thirties. It was a life-changing experience. For the first time, I realized that my speech bore the lingering effects of a childhood impediment which had left me with a peculiar way of pronouncing "th's." Suddenly I was hearing myself the way other people heard me and I felt a little embarrassed. But, with a little effort, I could correct these tiny flaws in enunciation and get on to the more important work of putting what was actually a naturally resonant, melodious speaking voice to good use. From that point on, I became more and more conscious how I sounded in person or on the phone, recited more and more poetry aloud and even made some spoken word recordings as a hobby. Later, I experimented with putting poetry to music and began to unlock secrets in individual poems that had previously eluded me.

Reading your own poems aloud will not necessarily make you a better poet. But it will help you to become more conscious of how you are using or could be using rhyme, rhythm, punctuation to good effect. Weak verbs or adjectives sound, well, weak when spoken even though they may look fine on a page. Reading your work aloud – and this applies as much for prose as poetry - will help you to make revisions and refinements.

Finding our own voice, whether it's in the way we speak or the way we write, is an essential mission in life. That is the project of self-creation; we take control of the elements of our persona or of our art and shape them to our own purpose. Whenever we write or speak, we leave little clues for our readers and those who listen to us. Becoming our own audience allows us to become more fully conscious and aware of these signposts to a style and identity unique to ourselves.

Poetry News

Gary has asked me to take on the project of being Poetry Coordinator for Prison Express. I'm very excited about getting a chance to read more of your work; the poems in this edition of the newsletter were culled from material already submitted and represents only a small fraction of the great poetry that will eventually be featured on the website.

Two weeks ago, we taped a poetry reading during the opening of the Prisoner Express Summer Art Show at a local bookstore. Volunteers read a number of fine poems by Ken Lynch, Tommy Steele and others.

Hopefully, this recording will at some point be played on the local public access station. This is only the beginning!

This summer, Prisoner Express is sponsoring a competition for the best poem written by a member of the program. A couple of Ithaca bookstores have agreed to donate gift certificates for prizes - \$50 for first prize, \$25 second and \$10.00 for third. Details will have to be worked out on how the winners can use their gift certificates.

Program members who wish to enter the contest should submit no more than two short poems (preferably typed.) Please include your work in an envelope addressed -- Poetry Contest. I am asking several people who teach poetry and creative writing in a local prison program to help in the judging. The three best poems will be published in the Fall/Winter newsletter, featured on the website and also included in future publicity releases put out by Prisoner Express.

All poets are also encouraged to submit their work at any time to the Prisoner Express News Poetry Contest as well as other poetry forums.

I also hope to organize another poetry reading in the Fall to highlight the work of prison poets. Deadline for submissions is September 15.

Thanks, Dave

Dave has a lot of energy for this project. I want to encourage those of you who have something to say to share your poetry with him, and thru him to all of us.

POETRY JUNE 2005

A Little Boy

Sitting on a tiny stool
Alone, facing the corner,
Salty tears course his face,
Whispering to silent walls,
Seeking some reassurance
while finding none.
Screams in another room
Most definitely about him.
Footsteps in the hallway,
Their sounds amplified.
The lad cringes,

Fear overtakes his tears.
 The door creaks open.
 There he stands,
 angry, and intoxicated,
 Whip in hand.
 Pleading only makes it worse.
 Defiantly the boy stands,
 Leather lashes out.
 Pain suddenly erupts.
 The boy awakes on his bed,
 Was it a bad dream?
 He sheds the blanket,
 Bruises decorate his legs,
 Confirming the truth
 That life is hard,
 Especially in your youth.
 -Ivan Benson

Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow

Yesterday is almost forgotten
 while today is almost over
 and tomorrow clearly is almost
 here.

Yesterday I clearly had you today I'm almost
 over you
 while tomorrow I wont even
 care.

Now yesterday is forgotten today is now over
 And tomorrow is clearly here.
 -Ivan Benson

Stream of Life

Life is like riding down the river,
 Listening to Mark Twain, as the banjo plays on. As
 I see the swamp bird rise from the water's edge; as
 the mosquito bites my neck, I see the alligator
 watching through the moss like life waiting to take
 another bite out of time. I find myself following
 this stream searching for an end in the water's
 depth. Sinking until I'm gone and I find myself
 old and now life will continuously flow down this
 stream of life.

-Charles V. Anderson

TRANQUILITY

Being alone is the next best thing
 to being with her.
 Fleet skeletons of music
 dance on fallen leaves.
 Silver birches bathe in pools of
 afternoon sun.
 Amid the confusion of
 spring dispersals
 A misguided bird cracks the
 Shell of a crooked day.
 The music stops. Darkness
 Coats the ugly day,
 Sheds light on the only way
 to break the solitude...
 Lay down beside her again.
 -Theodore Leslie

EXQUISITE DISILLUSIONMENT

At last I grasp stark nothingness,
 Mythologizing somethingness.

At last my inquisition yields
 A Universe composed of fields

At last I comprehend with glee,
 Dense immateriality.

At last I've found it's all remained
 A Singularity, contained.

At last, I know an instant holds
 Eternity within its folds.

At last, laid bare, this Cosmos stands,
 A strange Illusion, vast and grand.
 At last, sublimely, I perceive,
 Reality is Make-believe.

-Zachariah Chiaia

The Writer

In the beginning were LETTERS
 the LETTERS begot WORDS
 WORDS begot SENTENCES

SENTENCES begot PARAGRAPHS
the PARAGRAPHS formed a STORY.
And I became a writer
words, now my wine, became
an opiate-like addiction fed
by the power of creation
as my pen gives birth to
characters and plots
worlds and universes that
my imagination fills with LIFE - -
the children of my soul...
And for awhile as I write
in a small way, I have become
GOD-LIKE,
Having come to know GOD better
by this gift of creation
WE share.

-Derrick Corley

REFLECTION

Movement

we go from here to there
on a string
attached to something
birds - - twisting around
trying to get away
in currents of air
we fly in circles
life-like, but dead
with artificial life
escape in not possible
with artificial life
life-like, but dead
we fly in circles
in currents of air
trying to get away
birds -- twisting around
attached to something
on a string
we go from here to there
Movement

-Derrick Corley

BUDDHIST PRAYER FOR PEACE

May all beings everywhere
plagued with suffering of body and mind

be freed from their form their illnesses.
May those frightened cease to be afraid,
and may those bound to be free.
May the powerless find power, and may
people think of befriending one another.
May those who find themselves in trackless,
fearful wilderness: the children, the aged,
the unprotected,
Be guarded by beneficial celestials.
And may they swiftly attain brotherhood.

-Willie Jenkins

GEESE

A gaggle of geese landed
within the prison walls today,
In the middle of the field
they huddled together
seemingly unconcerned
of fences and razor wire
guntowers and surveillance cameras
the men, standing around
watching them with hunger
hungering not for a meal
but to become a goose
to be able to spread their wings,
ride upon the wind...
And as I watched, I wondered
of the thoughts in a goose's head
whether it, too, hungered
wanting to become a man...
But as they took to the air
honking their joy to the wind
I knew then, that
whatever they thought
whatever secret desires they possessed,
none were to be man,
for only man has the need
the desire to be something
other than what he is.

-Derrick Corley

Little Fingerprints on the Glass

One day while wiping down the tables in the
visiting room

at the French Robertson Unit in Abilene, Texas, I noticed little fingerprints on the glass. Then I noticed a man's handprint on the other side of the glass overlapping the little fingerprints. And I hear the little fingerprints say...

"Daddy, will you hold my hand?
I sure do miss you, Daddy.
Please don't cry, Daddy.
I wish I could wipe away your tears.

"I read your poem in school the other day, Daddy. All the kids said, 'Oh he sure does have a good Dad.'
I just laughed with all the girls and boys.
I just didn't tell them you were in jail.
I was scared, but then I cried.
I'm sorry, Daddy.

"I went to the park yesterday and flew my kite, Daddy.
I watched all the little boys fly their kites with their daddy.
You would have been real proud of me, Daddy.
My kite went the highest, as high as the moon!
Well, I pretended it did.
I couldn't tie the tail on right.
I tried real hard Daddy, I really did.
"mom, why is Daddy crying? I wasn't bad, was I?
I promise to come see you next Sunday, Daddy.
And, Daddy, please hurry up and come home.
Mommy needs you too. You are my daddy and I love you thissssssssss much."

Then I wiped away the little fingerprints,
And I wiped away my tears.
Tried not to think of all the pain
I'll cause being away so many years.
You see, the man's handprint on the glass was mine.
I'm locked up in this cold and lonely prison
Doing my time.
And someday when I'm finally released at last
I'll never again have to wipe away
Little fingerprints on the glass.

-Tommy Ray Steele

From my heart

WHO'S THERE?

Sometimes,
I need someone to hold me and tell me that they care.
When the quiet gets too loud...
I often ask myself:
"Who's there?"
If only why—endless questions asked. I contemplate the past...
My yesterdays are my tomorrows.
Can you feel the pain within my laugh?
In answer to my question
There are some who would reply:
"They care, they're near, they're there."
But to myself
I never would tell a lie!

One time I had a mother and within the comfort of her arms
I found love, strength and security, but now...
All of that is gone.
I even had a father but never learned to call him Daddy
or learned the things a son should know.
I've often wondered...
Why they had me?
One time I had a lot of friends. Yes! Wisdom is the price
Of learning.
They've let me down so many times
That now I turn my back on so-called friendships.
Within my soul are endless paths
Yet the echoes still remain.
As I stare and stare at my reflection
In a pool of teardrop stains,
"Who cares? Who's near? Who's there?"
And I know why Hamlet asked, "To be or not to be?"

A very simple question.
Which is why I stand alone, facing whatever destiny.
No matter what my life may hold
"Who cares? Who's near?"
What more do I have left? No one to hold me,

I'm Oh so lonely!
I cry

With my last breath...
"Who's there?"

-DeAndre Williams

LOGO DESIGN CONTEST

This is for all of you artists who want to see a better looking newsletter. Lance a volunteer with the program {if you've received a book from us in the last year you owe Lance a thank you. He comes by once a week and takes all of the book packages to the post office} has been after me to spruce up the newsletter. Lance suggested a contest for a logo design for this newsletter. I believe the overarching point of this program and the newsletter is to build community, both among people in prison reading it and then for all of us both in and outside prison. If you have any ideas for a logo, especially one that represents "building community" please send it in. Not only will you have the pleasure of seeing your artwork on future newsletters, but there will be a prize of quality drawing paper for the winner.

BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

Henry Stark, author of the book "Sierra Story" has offered to send his book to interested readers. It is a first person account of a wilderness camping trip he took in Yosemite National Park. Woven through his account of the trip is a history of the park, as well as all of the unexpected happenings to him and his 2 friends that he experienced while on the trip. He wrestles with issues of friendship, fear, and physical challenges during his narrative. He has offered to write those of you who are interested in how to write non fiction based on your experiences. To join the program we ask that you make the following commitment. You read his book. Accompanying the book will be a short series of questions that ask you to relate your own experiences with friendships, fears, challenges, and personal growth. All who reply to the questions will get a copy of what everyone else writes on the subjects. Henry has also agreed to write to those of you who have questions for

him based on his book, or who want to discuss their own non-fiction writing project. This program will probably be limited to 40 folks so send us a letter if you are interested in participating. The book is hardcover so if you can't get hardcover books let us know. If necessary I can remove the cover. I hope some of you find this offer interesting.

THEME WRITINGS

Those of you who have been participating know how this works. For those who don't here's the deal. Every month I suggest a theme. If you submit writings on the theme than you get mailed a copy of what everyone else has written on the same topic. It's a great way to see how others think. By participating in the theme writing project, you can get updates from this program when we send you the copies of the writings. We try to post all of the theme writings on the website, so it is another way for you to express yourself to the free world and be heard. I enjoy reading what you all send in and have taken a selection of themes sent in on various topics and reprinted them here for you all to read. Remember this is not a complete set of the writings, but rather a sample of some of the thoughts expressed. Please if you submit a theme, be sure your name is on it. Sometimes your themes get separated from your separate letters and then I do not know who wrote it, and I can't send you a complete set of writings. You'll notice at least one of the themes I have reprinted is listed as author unknown. If you're the author, please let me know as I want to give you credit, and mail you the other themes. Please don't think you can't write well enough to submit an entry. You all have something to say, and this is a good chance to express yourself. No entry is too long or too short. Don't worry about spelling or grammar. It's your ideas and thoughts that we are interested in knowing. If you've sent in a theme and not gotten the collection for the month please let me know, and I will get the writings to you.

Here is a list of the upcoming theme topics.

TAKING A STAND DUE 7/15/05

CHILDHOOD DUE 8/15/05

THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT DUE 9/15/05

RITUALS due 10/15/05

WINNERS AND LOSERS DUE 11/15/05

EXPECTATIONS DUE 12/15/05
PRIDE DUE 1/15/05
PHYSIC ABILITIES OR EXPERIENCES DUE
2/15/05

What follows are themes on four previous topics. I hope you enjoy them as much as I did.

ON THE EDGE

I have always lived here no matter where I may have been
Always on the edge always looking in
Maybe with a different name but still the same ole town
Always on the edge I am to be found
Alone I stand and I watch the world go by
Always on the edge until the day I die
Even in a crowd standing there all-alone
Always on the edge wishing to go home
I know no other life than the one I've always had
Always on the edge whether or not I was good or bad
How this came to be no one ever said to me
Always on the edge questioning my sanity
Only two friends have ever been with me
Always in the edge with pain in misery
I guess when its time to go and I give my final wave
I'll always be on the edge even in my grave
I guess it's not so bad from where you may stand
I'm the one who's on the edge questioning who I am
I watch you mostly go along never paying heed
To those on the edge who may be in need
Have you ever wondered what it was like
To live on the edge each of every night
It's been interesting in a sad sort of way
Always on the edge each and every day
-Timothy Baker

Living life as an organizer, radical thinker an extremist, people may simply define my way of life as being "on the edge." The average viewer or administrative official reviews my prison files in disbelief much more than witnesses it. I'm often subjected to restrictions involving my property, so my opportunity to express my personal views is limited.

There have been many trials, much stress and a lot of pain on the path of resistance I walk. But know this, the best source of strength is from within you. Not a mythical God, family or dependency on mind-altering drugs or any source outside of self.

It is in self that all possibilities lay waiting to be tapped. At the end of the day we lay our head to rest. But it is before sleep sets in that one drives the mind and observes the result, eyes closed deep in thought. This is essential in knowing self. I meditate nightly on the situations of my past, the events in the now and the troubles I see off in the distance. I've come to expect trouble, problems and a calamity. This is all part of a balanced setting.

Through your writings, male and female, I'm able to view your minds at work and the conclusions you draw about life. This I value in the extreme, since social awareness is a foundational building block among the masses. I've been shown through these letters and essays that all our lives are not too much different and I can call a male or female a brother or a sister, not based on the flesh, but mentality alone. I see many of kind in these writings, some of the best of our kind standing together to excel at the edge and fly.
-H.J. Parrish

All my life I have been on the edge, or close to the edge. As a teen, in Nam, and now in prison, I was always on the edge about the clothes I wore to school. From my home cut hair, my big overalls, and brogans. In Nam; I was always on the edge because of the one in front of me or the one behind me, knowing that they were high every time you went out on patrol. Now in prison it's those around me, those with AIDS. Are they going to start a fight and splash me with their blood? Are the ones with Hepatitis C going to spit on me or use my cup when I sit it down? Are those with mental problems going to go off if I answer their question in a way that they can't understand? Are the ones without common sense going to bananas when I explain something to them? For example, please don't stand in the doorway people have to use it.

But now things are slowly changing. With help from my reading and meditation it is easier to cope with being on the edge. At my age, I am

almost over the edge. It no longer frightens me. I have heard some say, "Boy I sure wish I could start over". I don't. I am not happy with some of the results, but I made my choices and I have to live with them.

The next big event in my life is death. But death is not an isolated event but just another change in a never-ending cycle. Death is just a potent reminder to use life well.

So we shouldn't worry about being on the edge, over the edge, or at the edge, no matter what each of them means to each individual. We should think about what we have done to not only keep ourselves from being on the edge, over the edge, or at the edge, but what have we done to keep others from reaching the edge.

-Donald Dickson

Falling Off the Edge

Ad-Seg took another victim yesterday. He fell off the edge into deep water and now is in the hands of the psychiatric ward. With the drugs they'll give him he may never surface.

This writing is to assuage my guilt for not trying to save him. Am I my brother's keeper? No, but when you're in the same boat, floating down the same stinking river without a paddle, you feel a responsibility to help your shipmates. At least you do if you're human.

Some are more capable of living in these conditions than others. In this tiny cell you have to get to know yourself and my theory is that "Stump" found something at his core he couldn't get along with. In recent months he had alienated most of us and those who might have helped him had been moved to other wings. In the end, when left alone, he didn't have the resources to deal with his situation. Instead of doing time his time did him.

The first sign of his coming fall was when he stopped going to recreation. "Stump" is one of the physical types who is dependant on activity to stay sane. In recent weeks I heard him laughing with the spirits but I thought he might be listening to the radio or reading a good book. Now I think he was slipping away to a place no one could follow. He had become withdrawn, not talking to anyone.

When I heard him telling officers he was discharging yesterday there was no doubt he was going under and it was too late to save him. Having seen his court papers I knew discharging was out of the question. He is out of here, but it's debatable whether he is in a better place now. He is not the first to be broken by one of these seclusion cells. He will not be the last either. The most important question in my mind, and the minds of all of us, is "Who will be the next to fall off the edge?" There is a limit to what any of us can bear and no warning sign when the edge is growing near or ready to collapse. No one is so strong that he can't be broken. All it takes is a letter revealing a loved one's death, divorce papers, or one denied parole more than you can stand. When that moment comes the edge we all walk crumbles beneath your feet and you find yourself falling.

It's doubtful we'll ever know what one thing broke his mind. Maybe it was the accumulation of losses that we all suffer over time. It's not unusual to see the weight of time destroy the prisoner. That is what makes the long term housing of prisoners in these "Supermax" prisons so inhumane. There is no way to judge how much is too much. For each of us it's different. You have to wonder if the goal is to break the spirit. If that is their goal then this is torture by any standard.

Today I'm making myself a promise. Never again will I allow this system to break one of my fellow prisoners without a fight. Whether we like each other or not is irrelevant. We should dislike the system, our common enemy, more and unite to deny them the satisfaction of another broken mind. When I see signs of the next mans impending fall, even if we're not speaking, I'm going to throw him a lifeline. In the end all we have to depend on is ourselves and our fellow prisoners. If we fail each other we fail ourselves. For that reason we have to try to help each other. Not for the person we reach out to, but because helping another might be the only way we can save ourselves from the same fate.

-Daniel Harris

Yeah I've been there, and over the top too. Sixteen, seven hits of blue shield acid a nose full

of heroin and Led Zeppelin crashing out of the speakers of my best friend's puke green seventy-three Chevy pickup truck. Three hundred bucks in my pocket, a warm bottle of grape Mad Dog twenty twenty, roaring out of Dallas, Texas with my best friend hell bent for California. A few months later I was forty pounds lighter than when I split for the coast, Charlie my buddy was dead, and I traded the truck for a quarter pound of weed and stuck my thumb in the air with Delta, this smoky redhead Charlie and I picked up in Arizona. She was running from a pervert stepfather and drunken mother and I was just feeling grown and closed in when I split home with Charlie. Man, Charlie, now that was a good dude. We ran together from second grade to high school when we both split after a summer of roofing with his dad. The night he got killed I got cut pretty bad and so did Delta. We did some back, but it was too late for Charlie, and he went, bleeding his life out in my arms and on the hard streets of L.A.! So I called his mom and bought alcohol and peroxide and some bandages at the same Rexal drug store I made the call from. Went to the dealer's apartment in West L.A. got me and Delta patched up and did a bump out of me and Charlie's stash. Sold the truck and got the hell out of L.A. Delta and I saw Oregon, Nevada, and the bad side of life and each other before we wound up back in Dallas. Her with her belly swollen and ready to bust with my son, "or maybe Charlie's." Neither of us was sure and didn't care. Pride is a hard thing in a young man and an old one too. My dad and mom staring at Delta and me, me and my dad making hard eyes at each other. Him a tough old paratrooper and boxer, me a young fool scared and ready to fight the bull of the herd. A movement, what I thought was a swing and murder in my Dad's eyes. On the edge, yeah and over the top too, "both of us," crushing each other in the fierce hug of an old man who's been there and a young one just finding out. Yeah, on the edge, and when the tears came we were over the top and all the way down too.

-Michael Collier

I would like to write this on a serious and non-racial mind...but I can't! I'm seeking to offend no one but by chance if I do...who doesn't?

Yes, I'm of "Motherland" (African) ancestry and was born and raised in a true "hell" we call the ghetto! I'm sure you've seen glimpses of it on the news or in a wider spectrum the Hollywood movies. So with this being said and understood; by destiny I was born on the edge!!
'You think not?

Cool. But check my life card. At the age of four my father passed of a heart attack (some say he O.D ed). Losing her lover and confidant, my mother continued his reckless style of booze and drugs to the extreme. What's more deranged is that she tried to find my father in every man she courted. Not just in style and habit man but also in LOOKS!! This created a monster in me from a child to a grown up to look at life through unmerciful and gloomy eyes.

Then before I could learn to pee straight I found out that society/America had a problem with the pigment of my skin! Yeah (smile) the pigment of my skin. Not old enough to understand the politics and manipulation of the "skin game" I switched it around. Reverse racism. Was I wrong? Darken your skin for weeks and experience the "skin game" live and in color!

Now what's really strange is when I learned that my own race despised each other more than any non-black!! Light skin against dark skin, neighborhood against neighborhood, posse against posse, gang against gang, and poor against ALL who are doing better. And I, the short skinny villain, was deep in the middle of it (laugh).

Mr. Reader being black in this uncertain society keeps one on the edge. I ain't saying we are the only ones that are catching serious abhorrence (NO) but if it was really, really possible for any non-black to slip on our shoes and tip toe through our path... I put my life on it you would do your best to burn those shoes to a crisp (laugh)!!

It's just a part of life and a way of nature. Just as animals in the jungle have to stay on the edge to preserve their life from lions, leopards, hyenas, etc. the same applies to the human species.

So see it as you want because as long as I'm human, alive and aware I choose to stay on the edge. Live up!

-Porcha Sweeney

As I ponder this topic, “on the edge,” I have come to the realization that I have lived the majority of my life on the edge.

Beginning with the daredevil stunts of my childhood, that included numerous activities of intense danger to myself, on throughout my life, I have remained on the edge.

I am what has been coined an adrenaline junkie. I need periodic spouts of this fuel, if you will, to stay on track.

Sadly, not receiving this “fix” in a safe and productive manner, such a skydiving or rock scaling, I began to use narcotics and commit crimes as a makeshift way to fuel my addiction to this natural high.

After many years behind the walls of incarceration, I find myself still lacking the adrenaline I need, and subsequently still taking risks within the prison to subsidize my need for risk taking.

Are those like me, per say adrenaline junkies, born with this addiction? Or does it develop as a result of the environment around us?

Many questions, not enough answers. Life on the edge has taken a great toll on me mentally and physically, however, this life has also left other victims. My family has suffered a tremendous amount, and continues to do so.

I have begun an experiment. I have begun writing a fictional novel. And while the adrenaline fix isn't quite as satisfying as if I were hanging off a 60-foot bridge by my fingertips, living out experiences within my own mind does help.

As the words hit the paper, I sometimes cannot help but to smile at my creation. Like the puppeteer, my characters' lives are completely dependent upon me. To them, I am God. What kind of adrenaline rush is that?

-Michael Morgan

Racial Profiling

What is racial profiling? Is it just a way for our government to abuse their power or justified in legal action? Is it done only by our government? Or is it done each and every day by all of us without knowing it? Racial profiling is done each and every day by us in prison and we are encouraged to, for our race to stay stronger than

the other races. Why do we think and act this way in this day and age? Our laws use racial profiling as a means to get criminals they say. We use it to put down and talk bad about other races. It is hard to say exactly what is truly racial profiling other than it's just another form of hate, and none of us should lower ourselves to hate in this world.

-Roger Hartley

Dear Son:

First of all, this day does not come around but every four years, so try and understand what I am saying while it's available. Secondly, I am not calling you “son” because you shine; I am calling you “son” because you're mine. Therefore, in no way should this letter be construed as an apology, what has transpired has simply transpired...it's what we do with the information we have learned that really matters.

The day before yesterday you seemed to have a slight problem with me correcting you on the use of the word “cracker” in reference to that white guy. Its words and behaviors that were carried on from slavery days and really seem to irk me when it comes to the way we relate to one another (as my mother pointed out to me on a number of occasions). In this instance, when she heard me use that word she bade me not to, saying, “Well, when the overseer would have an encounter with an unruly slave, he would threaten him by saying, “I'm gonna go get that crack'a,” talking about that ole whip.

There is so much in our behaviors that we unconsciously do that derives from those days. Let me give you another example, pimping. In those days it was prestigious for one of the field hands to have one of the house females to have a crush on him. That way, he would be able to get the scraps off the mastas table, or she may even be able to steal him a warm blanket. That also reminds me of the time that my mother watched me approaching the house and pleaded with me not to walk the way I did. I walked with a dip, my arms swinging as I leaned to my right side. We would refer to that walk as “pimping.” She scolded me, saying that was the way that a slave would walk when he was given something the other slaves did not have.

Then I look at the hood and see that shape that it's in, brothers killing brothers. They're so easily manipulated by the powers that be; turning on each other, snitching and setting each other up for busts. Then there's these "home invasions." I know you've heard over and over again how we used to leave our doors open, or sleep out on the porch on hot summer nights. I don't see how we got away from all that, but I do know this for a fact. There was a great fear that was in the hearts of plantation owners that one day the slaves would wake up and rebel. So there was a guy names "Willie Lynch" who would, on the banks of the James River, address a multitude of plantation owners with instructions on making a slave and keeping him a slave for years to come. I am not going to go into detail because it would take away from my point. But in essence, he was pitting the lighter slaves against the darker, distinguishing house hands from field hands. It is an old trick called "divide and conquer." And just as Lynch had predicted, this plan had us enslaved even after 200 some years.

One of the biggest problems that he has left us with is the separation of families. When a man and a woman got together it was for the purpose of breeding only. Once there was some affection shown, or the couple was getting close, the other was sold to another plantation. The children were sold away with no remorse. Even after slavery, I recall in early 1960 when my mother was expecting a social worker from the welfare department to come make her routine visit. She would come and make sure that there was nothing of value in the house, no car, no television, and definitely no husband. I recall the worker coming unexpectedly and my dad having to run out the back door. It was like a game to us, but a serious one. The rules to the game were, don't open the door to white people and don't answer any questions, act dumber than you really are. To lose at this game was costly.

This same mentality was carried off into our schools. See son, there was a time that something as simple as learning to read was a death sentence, or the one trying to read was sold off to another plantation that was so, so far away that the chances of ever seeing family members again was a mere fantasy. Then it was the label of

being called "uppity" that hindered us from reading or trying to learn skills beyond the basics. At times when we used words with more than three syllables we were accused of "trying to sound white." It was made to seem as though it was cool not to know, having to rely on Mista' Charlie to instruct us on everything.

Look, I ain't writing in an attempt to make any excuses, nor, as I said, am trying to apologize to you, for me or any other perpetrator of these behaviors. I will leave you with the advice that an old storyteller told me when I was young. There was this old man who would walk up this little winding road, every day. And each day, without fail, two little boys would meet him along this road and try to trick him. One day the little boys found an injured bird on the roadside. The oldest boy picked up the bird saying, "Ah, I got this old man now!" His plan was to cup the poor bird in his hand. He would then ask the old man if the thing in his hand was dead or alive. Now if the old man said that it was alive, he was going to squish it in his hands, killing it. Now, if he said that it was dead, he would open his hand and show the old man that it was alive, freeing the bird.

Soon after finding the injured bird and agreeing to such a clever plan to finally trick this old man, they spotted him coming around a bend in the road. Once he approached the oldest boy asked, "Old man, I have something in my hand, tell me, is it dead or alive." The old man scratched his chin and examined the cupped hand and noticed the feathers between the little boy's fingers.

In an almost teary and trembling voice he said, "Son, what you have in your hands is a life. Now, what you choose to do with it is up to you."

-Author Unknown

Sure, most of us do it; we see a certain color or hear the way a person speaks English as a second language and automatically put them in a box. A nice safe box that says, okay if you're not my color, you're not my kind. By most of us I mean people of all colors. One thing I've learned in this life is that racism crosses all facets of the color and socio-economic spectrum. Some people hide it and some don't, but whether you do or not you usually think something is wrong with people

who don't feel the way you do. Most of us in prisons come from poor working class families. From trailer parks, ghettos, and rent house neighborhoods. You better believe we're all niggers in the eyes of the upper-class. Whatever else you are doesn't matter to them. I don't know whether I find it amusing or not to see men from similar backgrounds with more in common than they will ever admit doing their best to feel like a better person because they were born a certain color or talk a specific way. Really it's pretty disgusting, almost as loathsome as our President saying homosexuals deserve our respect but can we please make a Constitutional amendment to keep them from getting married. Between the George Bushes, Louis Farakhans, David Dukes, Michael Jacksons and other assorted fruits and nuts in our country and around the world it's a fight for reality and common sense. People play the race card too much, blacks do it, Mexicans do it, and whites do too. What kills me about the whites that scream for white power is that we have white power in this country and all through the West. You don't have to hate anyone to love your people and its history; in fact you can't truly have any love for yourself or anyone else if you have hate in your heart. There's nothing weak about having respect for the next man and it won't hinder your love for the principles of your people. I say this to all men, "Sons of God Brotherhood of Man."

-Michael Collier

A victim of racial profiling myself, I have seen Blacks who had accepted the racist view points of all Blacks who have braids and dreadlocks, as radical rebellious criminals. From my own understanding I know Blacks with long hair are profiled as outcasts, in mainstream America. I hear people tell Blacks to cut their hair for job interviews and attorneys tell Blacks to cut off their afros, braids, and dreadlocks for court, to look presentable to a Caucasian judge. I do not understand why a Black man with hair, is not presentable in the courtroom. If I'm not judged by appearance, my hair should not matter in what the criminal evidence presents. Jobs that do not accept my hair, I do not accept. These personal experiences are why I stopped cutting my afro,

braids, and dreadlocks. I know rumors have spread that Black people with long hair are a sign of rebellion. In my case, it is true. I wear my hair with honor of my African roots, as a sign of my own personal revolt to the administration of America. I will not comply with the Caucasian racist racial profiling views.

I also use my crown as a sign, to prove the racial profilers wrong, in any intellectual educational political and religious spiritual challenges. Often the other man and the brothermans have met and the other stated "But I was taught" but I would reply "I proved you wrong." Check yourself and others on how simple racial profiling affects the way I and others will get treated by an unconscious individual. I personally have gotten harassed for more than my hair. For my tattoos, I was considered a thug and one time being from New Orleans a drug dealer before I knew anything about drugs. I have been profiled for my slang talk but I'm a professional at selling cars and was a leading telemarketer, who sold a lot of items to rich Caucasian people. I was accused of being a drug dealer for having gold crowns in my mouth in Illinois, when where I'm from, gold teeth is very common. Professionally, I'm versatile, and due to this, I can relate to people universally not just from one level. I actually make it my business to learn about any culture around me. I have learned from Moorish Americans and other Muslims, Christians, African Hebrew Israelite Jews, witches or Wiccans, voodoo conjurers and others. I even have heard devil worshippers and racist groups tell their side of the story. All I've learned is people are afraid of what they do not understand.

Malcolm X once said to students in Mississippi, "You'll get freedom by letting your enemy know that you'll do anything to get your freedom; then you'll get it. It's the only way you'll get it. When you get that kind of attitude, they'll label you a crazy 'Negro,' or they'll call you a 'crazy nigger,' they don't say Negro. Or they'll call you an extremist or a subversive, or seditious or a Red or a radical. But when you stay radical long enough and get enough people to be like you, you'll get your freedom." This is what I'm planning on doing with N.W.T., an organization I put together. The name should speak for itself,

New Order-World Operational Leaders Forming International Nations – Teaching Our Radical Revolution Operational Rehabilitation Ideal Situations.

-No Wolf in X

Racial Profiling goes much deeper to me. I've seen and believe there's a lot of discomfort, and hatred in some cases with different cultured people. It's out there everywhere, among every class of people, in every country, even in our own households. There's some kind of racial profiling everywhere.

It's not only the traditional, if that's an appropriate way of putting it, black and white thing. It's the rich, and the poor. It's also judging people for what material things they have, that others don't; for disliking someone for any reason, we might judge, or classify them in a category. It's in every facet of life, every social group, and in every community.

To me, racial profiling is a major problem in the world. People get hurt and even die. It's a problem that seems like it will never end. It's like asking for peace in the world today. A never-ending story, or lost cause.

But, until then it's up to each of us to do our own part in stopping this problem. No matter how little we contribute, it will end if we all pull up our own weight.

-

-Douglas G. Berry Jr.

My skin color is Chocolate-Brown ... But all my life I have been called black ... Negro, Niggard or Nigger ... Keeping mind that all of this was way before 9/11. Picture an 11 or 12 year old kid being followed around a store by security, because I don't go straight to an item then to check out. So as a non-white kid I am not allowed the joy of being out and about taking in the sights and sounds. Not many kids travel direct when alone. That's the way it's been all my life, especially when I enter a place of business. It doesn't matter what I am about or where I come from or even how good a job I may have, I am always suspect on sight because of the color of my skin. I am on a car lot to buy a car, a Cadillac. The actual car I'm looking at is based priced at \$24,700. The first words out of the salesman's mouth are SON can

you really afford this car? I was 23 years old and he couldn't have been more than four or five years older than me. Why can't a young black man afford a NEW CAR??? After I finally got the car, I was stopped while driving home. In 1984, in Houston, Texas, there are some parts of the town that a young colored man in a nice car is automatically stopped and questioned. I am sure that a record review will show that in three years I was stopped at least once a month, mostly for seatbelt check or insurance. It's never been explained to me why these stops always required me and my car ALWAYS being searched. Myself, I honestly believe that we as people are all different. I am different from my mother even as I am from my own brother. What crime is there in this country that's not committed by every race? What is it that white people do or don't do that non-white people don't do or do???

-

Calvin J. Carter

Racial Profiling is portrayed to victimize the black and Hispanic races but it's much broader than that. A car full of young white men are just as likely to be stopped in a black neighborhood known as a drug laden area, as black or Hispanics in an affluent white neighborhood because they don't fit in with their surroundings. It is because they most likely have no reason other than criminal to be there. In most cases that's true, but also there are some innocents caught in the racial profiling dragnet and that reason alone enough for it to be illegal and a violation of civil rights by countless law enforcement agencies throughout the country. It has become more like "status" profiling in the recent years. If you're poor and don't belong in the area you've ventured based on "social status" then the law steps in to rid the area of social misfits, etc. The future groundwork is being laid, brace yourself.

-Marion K. Boatman

FAVORITE PLACE

No matter where I'm at, I make it a point to find something positive about that place. There's many times its hard and I really have to search to find something good, especially while being here,

in jail. It's so easy to only view the negative, while often the positive aspects are hidden.

My favorite place to go while I've been incarcerated is outside. If I can go outside for an hour a day, my mental attitude, as well as my physical health benefits. While walking along the recreation yard, I can look across the street and see a whole new world. There are houses of many designs, trees of different sizes, and cars either zooming down the road are parked in front of homes. Everything is just so colorful. I can see the people outside doing yard work, kids playing, and even a cow or two grazing in the field. Since there are a few businesses, I also watch employees going to and from work.

There's nothing like the smell of fresh air. Whether it's raining outside or a cloudless day, there's a unique smell for each change in weather. The air outside makes me dream of things to do and places I'd like to visit. There's so much energy that I can feel flowing through my body, as I inhale the outdoors.

After being confined, surrounded by so much steel and cement, just being outdoors gives me a feeling of freedom. I've so often taken for granted being able to step outside. Now, I've learned to appreciate just the simple act of walking out the door so much more. I can't imagine ever changing my opinion on what my favorite place now is. No matter where I will go in life, that there will be "outdoors" wherever I am. I'll always have problems to deal with, but I know there's nothing I can't work through when I feel the cool breeze blowing over me and the warmth of the sun on my skin. I can step outside and inhale fresh air, while I exhale all my stress and worries.

-Theresa Fowler

My favorite place is not necessarily a physical location, as much as it is a state of mind. The state of mind that I speak of cannot be located by an easy trail or path. So to reach it you have to travel through the forests of inner turmoil, of emotions growing like thick undergrowth of brambles. Inside, hidden by this demure profusion is a meadow of soft grass that is a resting place. A place that invites you to let worries and cares melt away, opens its arms to introspection. It leads to

the contemplation of the serene growth amidst all the seeming chaos of life. In that place is found the strength of peace with which to learn that life need not be a struggle. In that peace lies the key to finding the way through the forest of life, the path that guides you. That allows you see the forest, to study and learn from it, and it is free of the tangles. We all have this place inside of us, which we can find, if we are willing to make the effort of finding it. This is my favorite place....

-Kevin McGowin

Normally and usually, I would say my favorite place is on the lake or pond somewhere watching on that big old 10 pounder to hit the line; sitting down eating a couple of sandwiches, chips and knocking back a Welch's grape, listening to some Kenny G. on low, drawing the fish to me with his playing. But now, I have to, and must say, that my favorite place is deep within, where it's quiet and peaceful, where I can feel and not feel. Hear and not hear. See and not see. Be aware and alert but, at the same time, comfortable, relaxed, and worry free. When I say deep within, I mean in the interior of my being, where very few people know where I'm coming from and talking about. But when one finds that place that I'm talking about, they will see and know why this is my favorite place and why I call it that, and pick this one place over everything else.

-Tim Hampton

Service and Brotherhood of Man: My Favorite Place

It's beginning to turn cold and what passes for winter here in the great southwest will soon be settling in. A deep feeling of sadness always comes into my heart at this time of year. It's almost as if a part of me was closing down or leaving with the dying year. I often wonder if my soul is remembering some long forgotten pain or loss from another life. If that is the case, the weight of the experience it comes from must have marked me deeply, for my soul to carry the memory of pain and sadness across the great beyond of death, back into life. How many incarnation's have I felt this and how many are the lives we touch and grow from in this vast play we

call life. Each thing we leave behind, affecting the life of the next man, and our future lives as well. What is it, in our individual search into the seen and unseen that will stand with mankind across the limits of our imagination? Moving with us into the infinity beyond infinity of the all pervasive creative intelligence of the universe. What we term God, and in our smallness can never come close to understanding. What we call knowledge for the most part is a passing thing. What rests in our minds and bodies will fade from this world and return empty, hopefully brighter with each rebirth. What is it then, this eternal part of us that reflects the stored building block's of our character. It is our soul and by its light or darkness our character is formed and chosen to bring us the experience we need to grow and become more than what we have been. We each pick who we are and what we will become.

Our life grows to fit those choices and our karma moves to accommodate and necessitate the methods most conducive to learning as a result of environment. Every experience allows us an opportunity to acquire greater inner strength and peace that will serve as worthwhile companions on our journey to true soul growth. Individuality is itself a misunderstood element of our being. We are each individual's true, but not individual expressions of our self as so many of us believe. What we are in our individuality are expressions of the greater spark of life that moves through all living things.

When we, through our selfishness, shut ourselves off from each other, we close our heart and mind to the eternal flame of truth. What is truth? When Plato was asked this question he answered with mystic intuition that God is truth and light is his shadow. When we let things like pride in race, social standing, intelligence and education stand as a wedge between us we slowly begin to refuse our chance for higher existence through expanded consciousness. Or a future as thinking, free willing aware beings. Animal, plant and mineral have no choice in their day to day existence and service. They must be what they are. Man the individual has a choice. We can accept more responsibility as individuals to guide ourselves, our family, community, and nation along the higher road to further evolution. Or we

fall behind and avoid our responsibility and live for ourselves or in a selfish group identity and might make the right attitude. My favorite place, well that's simple. My favorite place is in service helping to make the brotherhood of man flourish, so that one day we may enter into that higher order of universal brotherhood. It starts with you, in your heart with love and an unselfish purpose. This is not about change but quiet improvement.

-Michael Collier

This is the place I want to be,
It feels so good it's like I'm free.
It soothes the pain of everyday,
There I can go and stay to play.
Sometimes there's one I wish to take,
I couldn't though, too much at stake.
You couldn't take what I have there,
But you could lose, it wouldn't be fair.
I guess that's why it's just for me,
A perfect place for this refuge.

My Mind

-

Joe Flores

I sit here and try to judge just how many favorite places I have, you see. I remember being small and my father taking me out to the lake and trusting me to run the boat while he fished. Truth be told, I believe, now he just didn't want me to out fish him! But every time I hit the lake it's my favorite place, mainly because there is nothing but good memories for me there.

But I lay here and think of my wife's arms, and our warm and safe home. It's my favorite place to be as well, I can't begin to tell you how safe one feels in your lover's arms. You might be running from the law or whatever and feel there is nowhere safe to go. Except to your wife who will not forsake you. Yes, in her arms is my favorite place.

But then there are my children. Just being with them anywhere is my favorite place to be so I guess if you sum it all up, it would come down to just this.

My favorite place is being around and with my family who loves me and I love them. They share the good and bad times with you and see you through it all. That's my favorite place.

-Cody Ferguson

When asked what his favorite place is, a man could decipher this question many ways. What is his favorite place on earth? What is his favorite place in time or where is his favorite place to be at a particular gathering, being the class clown or the life of the party?

Well, for me I can answer all of these with one particular memory. My favorite place is at the circus with my six year old daughter. No other place on earth is as joyful, fun, and sincere in their quest to make a person, big and small alike to smile. When I took my six year old daughter to the circus for the first time it was my first time as well. Upon our arrival and entrance into this magical wonderland I ceased being Daddy and became a child myself. Wow, you should have seen us, running around eating cotton candy and wearing the funky hats with the propellers on top. Then when we saw the elephant we both clutched each other out of fear because we were both equally scared yet thrilled by the experience at the same time. (Elephants are quite large and intimidating creatures when up close and personal!) This whole magical experience was absolutely magnificent. My daughter is and always will be my best friend. We were like peanut butter and jelly. This is my most precious memory of all time, and until they figure out how to take our memories, I will always be able to leave this place if only for a moment in time. This, the memory of the circus is my favorite place. My favorite place to be, my favorite place in time, and my favorite place next to my daughter as a child, a best friend and a father alike

-Jeffrey Jenks

As I was growing up I lived in foster care and C.P.S. custody. I lived with a very nice, loving, caring couple who already had two boys and two girls! The two boys, Jerry and Chris and I built a tree house way up in an oak tree! The tree house was at least 20 feet up in this tree! It took about three or four months to finish it because of money and time. But once it was complete, boy, it was nice! We had two rooms and an outside balcony all the way around the tree house! After we were going to our tree house every day for about six months, some people adopted Jerry and

Chris. So I was the only boy left living there and I didn't like hanging around two girls, so I talked my foster dad into allowing me to live in my tree house! After about two days of bugging him, he allowed me to move in! I had everything in my tree house I needed. This tree house was a place for me to go to get away from everybody and ease my mind of all the upset and angry feelings I had of my mom and dad abusing me before I was placed in a foster home. Up in my tree house I could watch everything, see the birds fly by and look out on the city! I'd go to my tree house whenever I was feeling sad or depressed and just being up there I'd feel no pain or sorrow. It was like the tree was my friend and more! It was always my favorite place. When the time came for me to be placed in a permanent home, I missed my tree house very much. I'm still in contact with those people, and they tell me the tree house is still there. I want to go see it upon my release.

-Jason Lane

When I think about my favorite place even today I get goose bumps. I would have to say the Pow-Wow is my favorite place. I dance and the power I feel through the drum and the songs of power and hope lift my spirit to another place, long ago when my forefathers danced and sang the same songs as I hear today. My body tingles when I hear the Eagle bone whistle, welcoming the spirits to join in the song and dancing. When I reach my favorite place, I can feel Mother Aki (earth) breathing. Her heart beat is mine, to be connected to all that is sacred around me. It's uplifting and powerful. That is my favorite place the Pow-Wow. The elders gather around the sacred fire telling the old stories. They share wisdom and give advice, accepting you for who you are never judging. Only at the Pow-Wow do I feel totally at ease and comfortable. I have a lot of favorite places, but the Pow-Wow is number one.

-James (Giwaydin) Bennett

Walden Mind (Life In My Wits)
With Apologies to Henry David Thoreau...

"I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life,

and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and no, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.” Those immortal words that changed my life were penned by Henry David Thoreau. His thoughts to me are the “true-blue coins from heaven’s own mint.”

Presently, I am not living in a 10’ x 15’ cabin at Walden Pond in the breathtakingly beautiful woods of Massachusetts. I live in a 7’ x 12’ cell in the Texas prison system. You might wonder what a hot Texas prison cell has to do with the crowning jewel of American Literature. Actually it has nothing to do with it until you add a contrite soul that seeks serenity and sanity.

Being in the woods never bothered me. I was raised in east Texas and exposed to hunting, fishing, camping, and hiking at a very early age. Indeed my paternal family was one that bonded best in the beautiful and bountiful outdoors. My happiest memories happened in front of a campfire with my dad and his dad.

For some, however, the dark forest is a truly scary place. Most of the tales of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Anderson include references to the dark woods of northern Europe. Back in the days when pagan superstitions governed daily life, the German word for forest still strikes fear into the hearts of the Hessian children. Imagine Rotkappchen (Red Riding Hood) without the dark forest. Indeed her survival and subsequent victory (with the aid of a woodcutter) would not have been as dramatic.

Reading a delightful article in a back issue (December 1999) of National Geographic, I first learned the full depth of meaning of the forest in European Folk Literature. Many modern psychologists say that the darkness of the forest is symbolic of our worst fears. It was not until I had read this article that I began to equate the forest to the darkness that dwelt in my mind.

The most dark and dreadful thing that I could imagine in my life was indeed my diseased mind. From early childhood, I have had demons that danced in the Bedlam of my morbid thoughts, trampled on my tortured soul, and cast stinging thorns upon my tormented flesh. At a young age, I found escape and solace in music and work. As long as I had my hands busy at a meaningful job and a harmonica or radio in my spare time, I kept

Beelzebub at bay. I was successfully able to duck and dodge my demons and therefore never confronted them in silence. The silence was very scary.

An age old lesson says that if you ignore a problem it will only get bigger. As a tailor, my favorite rendering of this lesson is from Poor Richard’s Almanac: “A stitch in time saves nine.” No matter your culture, background, or faith, this lesson looms large. It wasn’t until I was locked up in a silent concrete cell without music or meaningful words that I was finally forced to face my fears for the first time. I wasn’t scared of being locked up, but I was terrified of the Bedlam inside of my mind. For the first time in my heretofore short life I had to make a choice: Bravely confront my demons or continue to cower away. I chose to fight! I picked up a pen, which I know to be the single most powerful weapon, and resolved to valiantly fight. Indeed my pen is more powerful than any sword...or prison cell.

I started keeping a journal that I call “My Tabernacle.” In it, I record my thoughts and not the daily events of the temporal world. From the beginning, I firmly resolved to never be a part of the prison culture. Inspired by the late Professor Morrie Schwartz from Brandeis University, I decided to create my own culture. There is very little about prison in “My Tabernacle.” It is instead a place for my deepest desires, my unfulfilled longings, my sincerest silent prayers, and my daily battle with my demons. It is also a record of all I read and my thoughts thereon. Finally, I keep track of my poetic ideas, of what I write, and all I wish to one day write. Truly, “My Tabernacle” is my therapist, my best friend, and my greatest aid to living a life of sanity.

I finally had the privilege to purchase a radio after nearly a year in prison. During the year without music in my life, I did much soul-searching before I had the opportunity to make that purchase and plug it into the outlet. Previously, I listened to swing, country, and sometimes symphony. Recovering from depression, I didn’t need the depressing nature of country music invading my newfound peace. Besides, country music degrades women and glorifies alcoholism. I also didn’t need the blatant sexual imagery of swing that my more mature mind now found

offensive. I lastly didn't want modern popular music or hip-hop because they glorify drug culture and hatefulness respectively. My only remaining choice was the symphony music that I loved all of my life. As Mozart's friend and patron Baron Gottfried Van Swieten said, "(It) represents what is eternal in all of us." Indeed this symphony music edifies me and challenges me to reach higher unto the best part of my being.

Since I possess a natural talent for lyrics and ballads, I decided to develop that talent and use it as a means of positive self-expression. I also decided to expand my writing ability to include essays, short stories, and minor journalism. I even enrolled in college to further polish my ability. Finally, I turned to the timeless wisdom of classic literature and this is where I discovered Thoreau.

Often I have heard my African-American friends quote Martin Luther King, Jr. One day in sociology class, my curiosity got the better of me and I went to the library to find out more. It was there that I found out that he carried a copy of Civil Disobedience on his person. Not being able to find a copy of my own in the library, the librarian told me it was contained within a larger volume of Thoreau's writings. I checked it out and, since I had the book for a week, decided to read the entire volume. This was the crossroads of my life. The solitary moment in time that the culture I had created began to take a firm shape and an unwavering direction of travel.

"How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book." I date the turning point in my life from the moment I opened up this spectacular volume. I devoured Civil Disobedience in a matter of minutes! I went on to read the other short works and finally started Walden a few days later. I had surely arrived home.

I felt like I had found a long-lost friend. Every jot and title in Walden was something with which I could identify. Most of all, the chapters entitled, "Where I Lived An What I lived For," and, "Reading," have implanted themselves squarely in the center of my mind. The spiritual familiarity of those two chapters is bone-chilling. I have read both of these chapters so many times that I can quote from them. My own little culture was there-after complete. I now know the true

meaning of Thoreau's little two-year experiment in the deepest part of my heart.

Having read Walden many times since, it has inspired me, changed the direction of my life and writings, and helped me to emerge from the fearful fog of morbid depression. Because of Thoreau, I have started practicing transcendental meditation and ergo have found a modicum of peace and light in my ragged life. This small but growing light has dispersed the dark and driven the dark demons away. Forever! I have even started reading the literature of his contemporaries and those they subsequently inspired. There are many who carry on Thoreau's noble experience. Bo Lozoff is my favorite. I only hope I may one day join their ranks with my pen in hand for the betterment of mankind.

Recently, I read the newsletter from Durland Alternative Library at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. With friends, I was discussing the subjects for future themes that they ask their subscribers to compose. The first subject for 2005 is "My Favorite Place." It was then that someone asked me where my favorite place was. I leaned forward, with my left arm resting on the table, rhythmically tapped the anterior tip of my right temple with my right index-finger and matter-of-factly said, "Right here!!!"

After a few puzzled looks, I described the culture I had created within this dreary place that I find myself existing. Any place where I can have the opportunity to learn and improve myself, to read classic literature, write in and keep my journal, listen to symphony, possess plenty of blank paper and pens, and last but not least, have a copy of Henry David Thoreau's witty, wise, and wonderful words... "the choicest of relics." It's a place that I have affectionately dubbed Walden Mind.

I go to this place often because it is there that I can live deliberately. There to front only the essential facts of life and learn daily the lessons it has to teach. There to regain my sanity, find peace, seek forgiveness, and truly and thoroughly live. And when I come to die, I hope to discover that I have fully and richly lived out my life at my very favorite place... ... Walden Mind.

-Geoffrey W. Sutton

RELIGION

Religion has become a very interesting topic now days especially depending on your faith. I've even heard arguments of Jesus being black or white, which in turn of course leads to racial standards. Amazing I tell you.

For some reason people seem to forget what he (God) did for us, which was die for our sins. Now, I can't sit here and claim to be an upstanding Christian but I do know he paid for our sins so that we wouldn't have to. But of course we know it all; therefore eventually we'll make ourselves do just that.

Me myself, I've never seen the importance of which church or religion you belong to as long as you were true to what you say in your heart to God. Of course this is my opinion The Church says you must be a "member" of the congregation. Now correct me if I'm wrong here but the Church is a body, not a building, an organism, not an organization. So if I go to a church but am not a member on paper does that mean I don't belong? That's like saying I enjoy your company but your wife and kids must go.

Religion to me has been run over by far too many especially by those who "claim" to know "their" religion and all there is to know. You wanna start an argument? Start talking about the Bible and there you have it, even some turn to me and say, "ain't that right?!" Like I'm suppose to know the answer.

My personal opinion is people need to accept it for what it is and that's Gods family and not separated by different faiths or beliefs. It all boils down to loving God, so what does it matter if he (God) is black, white, or even purple for that matter?! He died for our sins so that we may have eternal life not to argue over whose faith are better.

-Charles Rodriguez

Religious Doctrines

Among the many metaphysical disciplines, religion is the oldest. Either its origins are fake or a brilliant man / woman, or gallery of secret masons devised its fundamentals. After the invention of religion, immediately it began to

branch off and develop into myriad variations. In view of this fact, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam were born from the same origins. Other religions grew in tandem to the original triad, or were already here in other geographic locations. When the rites and methods of worship become taboo, it becomes a cult. The term religion is derived from Latin, and circumscribes everything of God, man, faith, and the method of worship. As religion becomes less ancient, corruptions were interspersed. Thus, the true faith vanished into equivocations and abstract rituals. The truth of God and religion may be lost to the past. If we are able to accept some ancient truths, predicated on Biblical verse, then it is God whom instructs man on the procedures of early worship in the Old Testament. Therefore, if the Bible never came into existence, could other religions have been born? Every worshipper claims the right of having his / her religious faith ordained by God. Hither to, the world goes on and the controversies among religions undergo more changes to suit contemporary times? If people heard the tenants of the original faith, would they discard the comforts of their own religious traditions, for the less diluted? Will the world move towards a single, religious ideology? And if so, how would that be accomplished? Who will return to straighten out this controversy? Jesus, Buddha, or the Mahdi? If one of the religions is correct, it promises the utopia we long for. Despite the controversy, I still believe in God over science. I pray that archaeologists discover all Holy Grails of the Bible.

-Keith Reese

What is religion? From a simplified human point of view, I see religion actually presenting itself as a sacred engagement with that which is believed to be a spiritual reality. It's a worldwide phenomenon that has played a part in all human culture and so is a much broader, more complex category than a set of beliefs or practices found in any single religious tradition. Through the years I have experienced the institutionalized system of religious beliefs and worship, concentrated on the purpose and nature it has for my life. I've always considered religion as a creation of superhuman agency. I only understood it on a level of

individual life reflections, on an individual attempt to live in accordance with precepts of religious traditions, and my spiritual life. It's kind of hard to make a claim at what religion is to every human on earth, but it has an importance as an uplifting experience of a diverse realm of human belief. Actually, the word religion is derived from the Latin noun "Religio," which denotes both earnest observance of ritual obligations and an inward spirit of reverence. In modern usage, religion covers a wide spectrum of meanings that reflect the enormous variety of ways the term can be interpreted. At one extreme, many committed believers recognize only their own tradition as a religion, only understanding expressions such as worship and prayer to refer exclusively to the practices of their tradition. Although many believers stop short of claiming an exclusive status for their tradition, they may nevertheless use vague or idealizing terms in defining religion. Through my residence on earth and in the penal system, I have maintained a religious life and stayed connected with my higher spiritual power, but never could grasp the fact that it's actually a sacred reality. To me, religion now is more or less, a basic practice of spiritual powers. Of course, religion is not an object with a single, fixed meaning, or even a zone with clear boundaries. It is an aspect of human experience that may intersect, incorporate, or transcend other aspects of life. Really though, religion should be practiced freely on any level a human wants to grasp it on. It should be a free choice, for every human on earth.

-David Fomenko

To me, religion remains a complex thing. I see news reports outlining numerous acts of violence, all in the name of religion. I see those who self-proclaim that they are "Holy" or "Just" people, and then abuse their positions to obtain personal riches.

Religion to me is a sense of structure that we can apply to our lives. Most people believe that there is a Creator, a higher being, yet we fall subject to believing that we need to war over what to call this deity, or how we as individuals choose to pray to Him. Why must educated human beings fall under the pretense that a Creator would even need us to defend Him? This Creator made us,

made the world around us, and yes, made those who we war with. Does He really need us to defend Him? Is this what He would want to begin with?

I believe that no one religion is better than another. I believe that each religion falls short, in that religion is a way of life, not justification to pursue negative human characteristics, such as a Holy Jihad or religious persecution.

I find it inane that practitioners of a religion take it upon themselves to interpret the tenants of the religion. I find it unbelievable that overly zealous people justify the murder of human beings in the name of religion.

While I believe that religion in concept is a wonderful thing, I often feel that man's pursuit to practice religion is flawed. Every individual religion I have studied, shares a similar concept. This concept is that of love one another. How can we, as educated human beings, interpret this concept, and then manifest it into acts of violence that leave innocent men, women, and children dead in its wake? I think that we all need to stop interpreting religion, and return to the concept of loving one another. Failure to do so, will almost certainly spell disaster and chaos for humanity.

-Michael Morgan

My Religion of No Religion

For many religion gives emotional support that allows them to survive hardships which otherwise might overwhelm their resources. For this reason it's my way to see each person's religion as what is needed to get them through the day.

That said, I must admit being anti-religion. It seems to me the harm religion does outweigh any possible benefit. The common denominator of all religions is intolerance. They can never accept that another religion could possibly be just as relevant as their own choice. Where science had the audacity to diverge from the holy text its members are denigrated as evil. All our major religions follow tenets set down hundreds, if not thousands, of years before. When you question the validity of a holy writ so old it predates the written word and must have been passed down as an oral narrative you are seen as demonic, in service to Satan, to doubt God's word. Even then much of

the Christian bible comes from ancient scrolls, transcribed repeatedly and translated between languages, before being gathered into one anthology. God forbid that you might suggest that these disparate parts were edited so they would conform to one another. Any mention of such skepticism is brushed aside with assurance of divine providence.

Religious people are convoluted conversationalists. In questioning Christian scripture your best arguments are destroyed, at least in their blinded eyes, when they circle back to the pillar that supports every point of dispute; Divine Intervention. How do you have an intelligent discourse on relevant issues with people who believe in miracles? NOMA, Non-Overlapping Magesterium, as described by Stephen J. Gould in his recent book, "Rocks of Ages," seems the sensible solution. Put in a nutshell, he says, science should stay out of issues of faith because that is the preview of religion and religion should stay out of issues of science. The problem is separating the two. It should be simple. If it can be proven through scientific study, as with evolution and the age of Earth, religion should cede the ground to science. In the case of issues of faith, like the existence of God and miracles, which can't be proved or disproved, religion should be given free rein. The difficulties come in where religion insist on trying to force an acceptance of what they take on faith, that the Earth is only 10,000 years old and the entire human race are descendants of Adam and Eve, be taught as scientific theory. Thus, the fanatic is born.

With this said, my admission to being an agnostic shouldn't be much of a surprise. As an agnostic my belief is in a God that is beyond all human understanding. The God I envision is much more omnipotent than the Gods of religions. My God set forces in motion, the laws of physics created as the chemical brew of creation was stirred, billions of years ago; knowing life would arise, even sentient life, through the most powerful tool of creation, evolution. My God does not sit upon his laurels answering prayers and awaiting worship. The work of creation is never ending and continues today. There is no preference for any race, gender, sexual orientation or religion; my

God is an all encompassing one. The only reward my God offers is the reward of life. Whether short or long, life is sweet. God provides us a world that should be a utopian wonder where we might exist in splendor if we had not, through our greed and selfishness, turned it into hell. There was never a need for God to create punishment for the wicked; man is quite capable of punishing himself. Many live a life of hellish torment due to conditions that could be easily alleviated if not for avarice.

Religion wishes us all to believe they hold a monopoly on morals and ethics. It has been my experience that those most likely to commit immoral and unethical acts are those that believe they have only to pray for forgiveness and past atrocities will be forgiven, washed away in the blood of a man dead 2000 years. Unless those actions are thought to be ordered by God that they might be done in his name, no forgiveness is required. They never have to face up to their actions and take responsibility. Even the bible says you reap what you sow. More evil has been done in the name of religion than any other.

Before anyone decides to quote Jesus they should consider that he left no written record. All you have is inadmissible evidence, hearsay. Guess it wouldn't sound as authoritative to say, "Paul says that Jesus says..."

After years of trying to live up to the doctrines of religion I have found that the best religion for me is no religion at all. Since this change I have taken responsibility for my actions and tried to do as little harm as possible. There is no hope of divine intervention, or faith in forgiveness from on high, and it is up to me to face my failures, making reparations where I can, and forgive myself. My circumstances may seem dire, but I live a joyous life where each day I awake in hope of being a positive influence on the lives of others.

-Daniel H. Harris

Gee... This is a risky subject no? Kind of a trap to the ones who do not believe in religion. But I got my mental cap on and I'm ready for the ride. Are you ready though? Cool. Put on your religious armor because my friend you're going to need it after your eyes focus on my facts (yes-my facts)!

From the start, no, Porcha does not believe in any religion, God, or a superpower that lives up, up in the sky with human-rational though. Yes, I have studied the book called the bible, the Quran, Wicca, Buddha, Khrisna, Greek, Egyptians, Satanism, Witchcraft, Magic(k), and ancient belief. Putting all these faiths/beliefs together with the reality of life...my eyes were open. Though I can quote where all religions are derived from, I choose not to say for the ugly face of racism will show its cunning head. Trust me.

Being that humans have not (and will not) put together the entire puzzle of how we came to exist, the almighty sun, moon, stars, etc. the concept of religion came along to do its best to put the human mind at ease. But, life and this universe are one big major mystery. From my study and standpoint I do believe that the ancients' belief of how things came to be is closer than anyone will ever get (but one must know how to interpret their signs and symbols first!). Even back in times, religions were used to manipulate just as today. But, today it is completely out of hand.

To believe that a human being has walked on water (laugh), died for three days then arose back to life, feed thousands of people with three loaves of bread (come on), and will come back on a cloud to claim his stock is pure insanity. Insanity!

To say there is a God but can't explain where this God is at, how he (as they say) came to exist, to never have seen this God's face/body (why not), and to fear this "man" made myth is ludicrous. We all know humans fear the unknown right? But if there is a God (just to assume) how come little babies get murdered and raped? How come these sick men who say they are men of "God" molest little boys? How come billions, and I do mean billions, have died in the name of religion? How could this God have a chosen race/people? A one and only begotten son?

The Devil (laugh)?

Well didn't this God create all? Does It/He knows all things all things according to religious belief? If so then It/ He knew what It/He was creating beforehand which makes this God and Devil lore a pure mind game for God. Can you catch that? Ahhhh, I offended you right? No sympathy.

My friend it's all a mind game. And many have chosen to fall into the religious human trap. One race is better than another, one religion is better than another, one race is the chosen people, and one religion is the chosen religion! You do not see the tricks of men (the creators of God)?

Have you paid any attention to the American and Iraq War lately? Are you sure? Where does God and religion play in that? Ohhh, you never looked at it in that frame of mind. Do you think these religious God(s) are looking down from above watching like a kid as each missile of mass destruction passes from one side to the other?

Don't question God?

What?

The mind is a terrible thing not to use Mr./Mrs. reader. And in order for you to stay strong, as well as giving this game of life your best, you need to believe in a Superman myth (doesn't this God guy seem to fit the supreme Superman)... The joke's on you.

I see, I learn, and I question all!

Live up!

-Porcha Sweeney

Religion Speaks (About Religion)

Talk about religion and you will be forever typecast. You will be, like Lot's wife, turned into a pillar of stone to stand against erosion by the cardinal winds of Wisdom, Ethics, Sin, and Nothing, as well as the trade winds of F-9 hurricane force. Religion beats politics as a subject of contention, anytime. People will argue from high heaven to holy hell. (Hell must be holy since, after all, a divine angel runs the place and fire purifies. Right?) And it hardly matters what faith: Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Confucianism, Shintoism, Paganism, Atheism, and so on. And this includes their many denominations or sects. (Christianity has its' Protestants and Catholics. Protestants has their Baptist, Episcopalians, Methodists, and so on. Baptists, in turn, have their own subdivisions. Muslims has their Shiite, Sunni, Sufi, Bahai and so on and so on.) They all have their own God or gods that make up that one God, even if that God is ultimately proclaimed as Self. There are many

branching schisms, all with their own creeds, canons, mores, ethics, sunna, hadiths, rites, rituals, values, traditions, and histories, and so on.

Talk about religion and you will often engage in the microcosm of the macrocosm of religious versatility, a.k.a., differences. Often a circular debate forever ultimately bound to unassailable belief or faith, blind or otherwise, internal or external. Of a history of self-definition and beginnings that has been totally opposite to its self proclamations of Good, lofty goals often effected through base manifestations whether by words or edicts or swords or bullets. Every religious person claims the one true faith, all else being unholy and hellfire-bent. Their scripture is THE final Word. The only word. It's blasphemy, otherwise.

It's said that God cannot actually be "proven", nor can one ever truly disprove HIM/HER either. I'm told by doctors and scholars with page-long credentials that s/he exists, or IS, by It's non-existence, and that regardless, we can see his works through us variously pigmented hue-mans. That WE are to aspire to his greater good by prayer, words, and deeds in proper fashion. But, the fashions, or methodologies and propagation of religion have caused such bloodshed and death that even hell is double bunking. So, apparently, hell exists, then, and if so, there must be a heaven, therefore there must be a God. Yes? No?

Arguments, debates treaties, theses, tracts, dictionary, concordances, epistles, synods, councils, and many other writings and official decrees take positions to explain origins, behavior, and religious history. Sages, Saints, Bishops, Priests, Reverends, Monks Sufis, Haffis, Rabbis, Mullahs, Medicine Men, Prophets, Abbots, Ministers, a la scholars and enlightened academics, or our wisest men and even God in the flesh, himself, tell us what is good or evil, right or wrong, why and how, and when and where. The religion of The One is many and many believe in The One and the only one way.

Ask any believer and they will cite, quote, read, sing, praise, hum, meditate, shout refer, and brandish their infallible sources dating back some few thousand or so years verifying lofty ideals, spiritual expansion, gracious giving, strict

obedience, transmutations, pious mercy, fastidious regimens, starvation, self- (or fellow-) flagellation, castration, euthanasia, pyrotechnics, hydrotherapy, communions, excommunications, and a varied assortment of techniques to worship The One and how S/HE started all this from just one word: "Be".

So, here we are, all from one source of many philosophies simply about The One. Who's right? Who's wrong? Who knows the Absolute Truth? The I Ching? The Qu'ran? The Bahagda Vita? The Bible (a la Pentateuch, Septuagint, a la Koine, Palestinian, Vulgate, a la Masoretic Text, a la Guttenberg, Erasmus, Tyndale and Coverdale, a la Douay-Rheims, King James, English Revised, American Standard, Smith-Goodspeed, Gideon, a la revision to the x power). The Torah? The Pyramid Text and the Book of the Coming Forth by Day and by Night (a.k.a. Book of the Dead)? Or just plain nature? (Of course, The One had to be multi-lingual. And to think that the penalty was death to posses a bible in the Middle Ages! Makes one wonder about all the "revisions" to make the Word of God acceptable to the masses? Sigh... No way can I read all theses "Words" without becoming schizophrenic and suicidal.)

So one day I piled each of the books, scriptures, treaties, theses, tomes, scrolls, papyri, tablets, and so on. Into one big pyramid and followed their instructions: I atoned, prayed, fasted, and ate them; I stoned, ripped, stabbed, drowned and stretched, tortured, buried, and crucified them and fed them to lions. I cut their capital letters off and slit their binds to eviscerate their innards, and boiled, staked, quartered, and crushed them and so on and so on. Then I just burned them. Fire purifies, right? Well, all that was left was gray ash. And it rained. So it turned to mud.

Now, here I am months later at the same mound from which now a single, unsheltered flower grew out of. And that got me to thinking of when I carried our my duties faithfully as instructed by the books themselves: when I discombobulated and annihilated them all. I recalled that the scriptures burned easily enough, leaving only it's bindings to melt. Like a house fire leaves only its skeleton to finally collapse from lack of substance to hold it up; the roof collapsing

onto the attic, the attic onto the ceiling, the ceiling onto the floor which was the ceiling of the lower floor, and so on until they hit rock bottom and is compressed into its own foundation.

I recalled in that domino-like effect that their contents were basically the same. Certain central stories were in the prior telling or more ancient flood story, the father, son, and Virgin, the murdered savior, the life after death, proverbs and witty sayings, psalms, the, not just 10, but 142 commandments (although they all said “not” to do this or that), and so on and so on. I was amazed and confounded. I was like an archaeologist, digging up a city that had been built on top of an older city which had been built on top of an older one through the ages until I came upon a village. (You know how mankind likes to build “bigger” and “better” things than before.) Unfortunately, the village had built nothing and the first superimposed town had simply listened to “uncivilized” villagers who had been there for, like, forever that had been taught by their parents who had understood these things.

So I stood there and stared unseeing at that plant. It then dawned on me why a flower’s petals looked pretty but fell off or could be plucked bare without detriment and why the solitary pistil with its stigma and stamen could not.

To be continued, that is, if I can “talk” about...

Reality, Everything, Life, Ignorance, Good, Inspiration, Omniscience, and Nothing
-Victorious Belot

I want to open this newsletter up to more of you to share your thoughts and feelings regarding the Prisoner Express Program. The following piece is by Danny who has been supporting me in creating Prisoner Express from its inception. If others of you have thoughts you’d like to share, please send them in for our guest editorial spot.

Rebels of Courtesy

Members of Prisoner Express are a special breed. Our commonality is not one of race, or even opinion, but one of circumstance. We are a group made from diversity and we come together

as intellectuals to share our knowledge and talents. This willingness to share and allow each other the opportunity to express our views makes us unique in the prison environment. As such we bear a responsibility to belie the stereotypical attitudes and conduct of prisoners and begin to erase the stigma that comes of incarceration.

Each of us a rebel, due to our search for intellectual growth, who thinks outside the established box. It may seem that we are few in numbers, and we are, but if we create standards of conduct that apply common courtesy to our daily lives we can have an effect out of all proportions to our quantity. Let me suggest that each of us attempt to, where possible; follow these three simple guidelines for our proper conduct.

1. Limit the use of derogatory or abusive language and avoid negative conversations such as gossip, trash talking and cussing.
2. Show courtesy to everyone you come in contact with by being friendly, smiling and using courteous terminology like please, thank you, yes sir and no sir and the equivalent for the female gender.
3. Be obedient to the rules as much as possible.

There are other actions that can be taken, but if we start with these three the others will come naturally. In this small way we can begin to change our environment for the better and become rebels of courtesy. Always remember that kindness is contagious and try to infect someone daily.

If you are like me you will often fail and find yourself falling short of your goal. Failing is not failure in this. The only way to fail is to refuse to attempt to show your fellow members of humanity kindness. In the end, whether guards or prisoners, we are all human.

-Daniel H. Harris

As those of you who have gotten this newsletter awhile know it can change from issue to issue. Last issue was full of resource tips. In the listings I did not give the complete address for the

Sivananada Yoga Prison Project. A number of you asked I correct that oversight so here it is...

Sivananda Ashram Ranch
PO Box 195
Woodbourne, NY 12788

This issue focuses more on the writings you have submitted to the program. Please remember to give me feedback on what types of information is most helpful to you.

If any of you have any ideas for raising funds to continue our work, send me the ideas. **If you want to donate stamps it always helps.** This is a free service so if you can't that's okay. If any of you have connections on the outside who want to contact us give them our address or email address alt-lib@cornell.edu

I appreciate all of the letters addressed to me as Dr. Gary or Professor Gary, but truth be known I'm none of the above. I work in the library, and it turns out that, with the library sponsorship, I can organize and run this program. I'm glad to have the opportunity to help, and only hope this newsletter can help relieve some of the suffering.

I just heard that one of our participants Jimmy Haggard in Iowa Park, TX was stabbed in the neck. It is so sad. I cannot understand how we as people keep fighting one another, rather than cooperating. I understand that social forces have pitted haves against have-nots in this world, but, man, wouldn't it be a powerful force if those of us at the bottom of the socio-economic scale could cooperate and join forces. There is a powerful movement going on in Bolivia today where Indians are rallying together to stand up to the government, and they are making changes. Those in control stay there by pitting those without control against one another. It's time for those without to come together. Let it begin now with you and me. If anyone wants to write a note of strength or goodwill to Jimmy send it to me and I will forward it to him.

Let's keep each other safe.

Please try to stop the violence.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Till next time,

Gary

Alternatives Library
127 Anabel Taylor Hall

Ithaca, NY 14853

Final Thoughts

The last sheet of the newsletter is our ever present registration form. It lists the programs we want to continue to offer or are still trying to develop. **Most of you receiving the newsletter have already sent this in. For all of you reading the newsletter for the first time, or who have not sent it in, you must send back this form to continue to get more issues of the newsletter.** We have 1600 folks who have requested books, but only about 900 of you have sent back the form. This is the first issue of the newsletter that is being restricted to those who took the time to enroll. Costs are high and I want to be sure that this newsletter is sent to those of you who want it. I have scoured the mailing list and have included a few of you long term participants in the program who have still not sent in the registration form. You have been contributors in the past or you write great letters. I figure something happened, and I want to give you one more chance to continue participating. If you've already sent in the form you can pass it on to a friend. Just be sure to tell them to let us know they are enrolling for the first time. If you want to send in the form again because you want to change the programs you are signed up for, please do.

Remember to let us know the rules for sending books into the prisons you are in.

It's been a great year in the garden. I've been devouring beet greens and turnip greens and starting to fill my freezer with all sorts of vegetables and fruits. I just finished the garlic harvest. Every year I set aside 800 cloves to plant, and harvest them Aug. 1st.



Please check one choice and then print your name and sign in the spaces provided.

I give the Alternatives Library permission to post my personal profile, writings and artwork on the web using the following guidelines:

A. _____ Use my name on my personal profile, writings, and artwork,

B. _____ Use my name on my personal profile and artwork, but not on my other writings

C. _____ Use my name on my personal profile, but not on my artwork and other writings

D. _____ Do not use my name on my writings or artwork, but you may use any of my work and post it as anonymous

E. _____ Do not use my name or any of my writings in your program.

You must choose A or B or C, for your personal profile to be posted.

Even if you check A, B or C, you can still ask that a particular piece of writing be posted as anonymous or never posted at all. We will respect your wishes.

NAME: PLEASE PRINT _____

ADDRESS: _____

SIGNATURE _____

Your choices on this form will never effect your receipt of books or participation in the pen pal program.

PRISON REGUALTIONS: If you wish to receive books, you must let us know the requirements of the prison unless you are a prisoner in Texas since we already know the regulations there. **We need to know:**

1. What is the limit of books you can receive?
2. Can you receive hardcover books? Paperbacks? Used books—most of our books are used? (circle all that apply)
3. What documentation, if any, do we need to include with the books so that they are accepted?
4. Can you receive magazines mixed in with your box of books? If your institution will not allow us to send you books, please provide me with information for sending books directly to the library.

5. What kinds of library materials and services are available to you at your prison?
6. How often are you allowed access to library materials?

List the types of books you are interested in receiving and we'll do our best to fill your requests:

Please check the programs you wish to participate in. When necessary we will send more information about the program.

1. Please keep sending me the newsletter
2. I wish to receive books through Prisoner Express.
3. I'd like to take part in the card making project. Please send me some card stock paper, and I'll send Prisoner's Express some cards.
4. I'd like to take part in creating comic books. **Circle all that apply.** I can:

<input type="checkbox"/> write a story	<input type="checkbox"/> illustrate a story
<input type="checkbox"/> ink in the words of the story.	

Some of you can do all three, while others can do one of the tasks. I'll coordinate sending stories to illustrators and inkers. I can make copies and forward them to you. I am very excited about the possibilities of comic books, and hope some of you are as well. It is a great way to tell stories to people of all ages and backgrounds. Remember I'm looking for both adult stories and some suited for children.

5. _____ Please send me more information about origami [Japanese paper folding]
7. _____ I want to learn to juggle. Send me basic instructions. [Once you master the basic 3-ball method you can request additional instruction]
8. _____ Please send me more information on the Journal Project. [This involves a commitment to keep a journal about your life and experiences for 1 year, and sharing that journal with Prisoner Express for publication with other journals.
9. _____ I'm interested in studying world history, and would like Prisoner Express to develop the course work.

DURLAND ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY
127 Anabel Taylor Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853-100



The top picture is me {Gary} in our book packing room, slightly larger than one of your cells and no windows.

The bottom picture is of students and a teacher from the local high school who have helped at benefits, and packed books during the school year.