

# PRISONER EXPRESS NEWSLETTER

## WINTER/SPRING 2008

**I**T IS WITH great pleasure that I begin compiling the Winter/Spring 2008 Prisoner Express newsletter. As coordinator of the Prisoner Express Project I receive so much mail from all of you and can barely find the time to keep up with it all, much less respond to you individually. The newsletter becomes my way of catching you up with the happenings in my life, update you on the programs we are currently offering as well as a forum to reflect back some of the writing and artwork you have shared with us over the past 6 or so months. We cannot yet afford to put out the newsletter more than two times a year, so for a number of you that have newly requested our services this is the first response you have received. Others of you probably sent in requests earlier in the year and were rewarded with our short holiday note and wondered why, when you had requested books, you instead received the newsletter from a group of folks you don't yet know. Still others of you have been with the program for years and understand some of the ins and outs of our operation. Because so many of you are new to the program I use the newsletter as a way of passing on all new information as well as catching up new participants into what we are about. Not to dash anyone's expectations, but we are a small organization sponsored by the Durland Alternatives Library on the Cornell University Campus. I work as assistant director of the library, and along with community volunteers and students try to provide you all with opportunities for creative self expression and educational material. We also try to make some of your work available to the general public through art shows, poetry readings as well as posting some of your writings on our website, [www.prisonerexpress.org](http://www.prisonerexpress.org). The funds needed for our services grow as more of you participate. I am always trying to modify what we are doing so we can provide high quality programs at very low prices. I am trying to create partnerships with other organizations to help ease the workload we have taken on.

Most of us we are scrambling so hard just to survive the daily grind that we have taken an out of sight out of mind approach to the prison system. People are not much interested in issues of justice or how people behind bars are experiencing life. There is so much uncertainty in most of our lives that it seems it is all we can do to take care of our own business. While in the short term it is effective, in the long run as a society we become fractured and lots of folks, not just

prisoners, fall through the cracks.

Let us hope that your participation in the programs we offer is one small step towards demonstrating a different way for people to relate, and that as folks rethink their assumptions about prisoners they realize we are all part of the same family: a family that is constantly evolving and experiencing the gift of life. One aim of our program is to help those on the outside to remember the humanity of those locked up in prisons

It is winter in upstate New York, and that means cold and snow. I returned from 2 weeks of Florida heat to an upstate NY snowstorm. My wife and I drove 23 hours straight to get from our house to South Florida. During our time there we spent 4 days in a state park on the Loxahatchee River, biking, birding and boating. We spent 4 more days with friends swimming in a community pool and soaking in their hot tub under the stars. We finished the trip with 5 days at the beach. Except for the no see ums which bit me close to death once the sun went down it was all good. Then once again we drove 23 hours in the car and back to the snowstorms and freezing temperatures. It was great to get away and get out of the routine of everyday life. I imagine all of you would love that opportunity.

Now I'm back to wearing multiple layers, constantly hauling wood for the stove, and beginning to plan to spring and summer vegetable plantings. I get great pleasure growing plants and have a large garden spot to play in. I have seed catalogs and am just beginning to select the ones I want. I also save lots of seeds from last years plants. It is a great feeling to be self reliant in providing seed stock for future years. I would be thrilled to see prisoners able to keep small gardens while doing their time. I believe it would bring joy and wholesome food into your life. I know a lot about seed sprouting to grow great fresh sprouts. I used to have a business growing sprouts in the Seattle area. Most of the sprouts need no sunlight and only need water to grow. They would be great to grow in your cell. All you need is a container with a lid with holes. In seven days a pound of seeds became 7 pounds of sprouts. If any of you can receive seeds and want instructions on how to sprout seeds into delicious greens let me know, and I will send instructions for indoor gardening.

I am very concerned about issues of censorship in Prisoner Express. While the discussion hasn't been very active over the past year, I want to bring to your attention the state of things. At first I wanted to print whatever essays and thoughts you sent. I was willing to print essays that I didn't agree with as I figured the more opinions read the better we could all make decisions. Though some of the essays may have been offensive to me, I believe free speech is an important right. While I still believe that, I now see that it is too easy for our newsletters and other works to be prohibited to you because of some of the content we publish. Even when I am trying to be careful I have included content that is not acceptable. It is my highest goal that all of you receive the mailings and I will censor however I must if it means we can continue to communicate. What is especially hard is that different prisons seem to have different positions on what is acceptable. It is further complicated by the fact that I do not know who has not received the mailings we have sent. So my goal is to not water down the content but to be vigilant in keeping this newsletter acceptable to those who read it

prior to you receiving it. Any hints you can give me on what to avoid mentioning so that the publication and all other mailings can be delivered is valuable in future program planning.

I know our programming can sometimes move at a snails pace. I am sorry for that, and hope the wait is worth it. I am always refining what we are doing to make it work smoother at the least possible cost. Sometimes it takes awhile to find the best way to offer certain programs. As many of you know most of our mailing must be done by non profit bulk mail. It saves a ton on postage costs, but it means we have to mail identical information to 200 people each time we use the service. When you sign up for a program, you may have to wait until the 200 number is reached. Sometimes that happens quickly, and other times you might just miss a mailing and have a long wait. Also please note many of our mailings are time sensitive. If you are reading an old newsletter and see something about say a Roman History project, it doesn't mean it is available currently. We usually always have at least one history selection available for each newsletter, so you can write and ask for what ever is current. The same thing applies our book club selection and other programs. Other programs are ongoing and you can sign up and just wait for the 200<sup>th</sup> sign up to get the info you request. That would include the Math and Journal projects for example. I will try to explain it in more detail as you read the different program selections.

We are also slow because there currently are many of you requesting services and few of us creating and running these programs. I will try to be less ambitious with my offerings this time around, but as I write this I can think of a bunch of new programs I want offer. On that note there are a couple of projects that did not get going very far since the last newsletter. In particular I refer to the Dungeons and Dragons initiative. We just couldn't find enough volunteers here to take it on. We also had an erotic writing project. We have collected a number of your writings but have not gotten around to mailing out the compilation document. We have been warned it would be censored. Still I have not given up on the idea completely and am inviting any of you who would like to submit an erotic short story to join this project. Just like with the theme essay project that you will read about later, if you submit a story you will get a copy of what the other participants submitted. Hopefully there will be more to report in the future.

When you send in a request for books or any other information to the Prisoner Express project, we automatically enroll you to receive our newsletter. Every year or so we will ask you again to write and let us know you still want to be on our mailing list. Each newsletter will describe the programs we are currently offering. Please only sign up for programs you are really interested in pursuing. It is very easy to check off every box, but we are all in this together and every unused packet we mail depletes our finite resources. I have asked a few program volunteers to write regarding their projects. ***When you see italicized words it is not my words but the work of PE volunteers, theme writers or something copied from another source. The other writing is mine and I welcome any feedback you care to share about the PE project.***

**Stay strong,  
Gary**

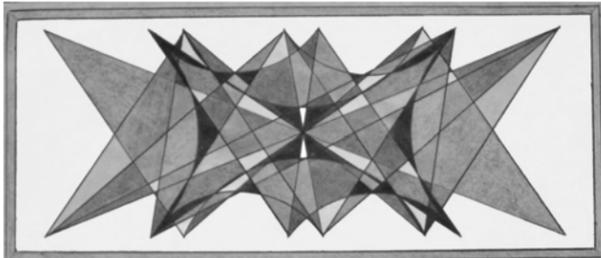


Jeremy Towner

**Book Program** - We currently send out about 150 to 175 packages of books out a month to individuals like you. Just write and tell us what kinds of books you'd most like to read. We have a tomb like room in the basement of the building the library is housed where we can store donated books. Steve and other volunteers go down in there seeking reading treasures for you. A typical package will be 4 to 6 books. Please give us as many chances to match you to your interests as possible. We do a very good job using the donated books we rustle up but we are always short of dictionaries, westerns, sci fi and select other topics depending on our recent donations. Sending us a request for a single author or asking for only good legal research books is unlikely to get you what you want, so always give us numerous secondary interests if possible. I know from your letters that the books we send get read by many and I am glad for that. I think of each book as a seed that can be planted many times. Speaking of good books, when I was on vacation I read two novellas by Tolstoy, *The Cossacks* and *Happily Ever After*. I thought they were both profound, and can now appreciate why he has been so celebrated these past hundred plus years. I kept thinking that his writing was so mature, though I don't know what that means. I guess cause I saw the truth of his realizations in my own life.

I would be so pleased if I could get a book of his into our bi annual book club reading. [More on that later]. If you want books please let us know any restrictions that exist in your prison regarding your ability to receive them. I am learning that we cannot send books into Oregon, but we can still send out history, math and creative writing there. Let us know whether it must be hard or soft cover and the number of books allowed per package.. If you are in Texas, we already know! Books have a way of opening the mind to whole new vistas. if there is anything I especially appreciate about the human animal it is our ability to communicate in such an abstract way. It is impressive that Tolstoy who died in Russia I am guessing 150 years ago could share his thoughts on life, death and marriage with me and I would find it all tremendously relevant. I say this to encourage the writer inside you to document some of your own insights. I have asked Steve who coordinates the bookroom and who creates 90% of the packages we mail to share his thoughts with you:

*Hi all, I was asked if I would give a book room report for the newsletter. I first wanted to say thank you for the encouraging words passed our way in the last newsletter regarding the book program. But it needs to be said that the bookroom, like all the Prisoner Express programs, involve a lot of different peoples hard work. Gary for one does a ton of work for the book program, reading and filing all the letters, printing the labels, keeping the room stocked with all the supplies we go through like tape and paper bags; and most importantly always finding book donation connections to keep an endless flow of good books to keep sending out to everyone. This last task is crucial, as with large quantities of letters, and a desire to try to have each package be a happy experience upon opening, it takes a lot of books for that to occur. Truth be told, Gary is quite an amazing juggler at keeping all the different responsibilities and commitments to all the different PE programs afloat. It's inspiring to behold. Makes me wonder why the universe doesn't one day bless Prisoner Express and Alternatives Library with a large funding boon in the form of a million or so*



*dollars. We can dream right. In the meantime, we get by pretty darn well, and I am happy to be a part of a grassroots program that does such meaningful work, and connects with so many kind people like yourself. It is a privilege. Nothing would make us happier than if you picked one or two books than if you picked one or two books you really enjoyed reading and shared them with a friend. And I hope you have a nice day today.*

*Best Wishes, Steve*

I just now read Steve's letter while I am assembling the newsletter, and in his modest way he gives me credit while he does a tremendous amount of work creating the book packages as well as writing a personal note with each package he sends. As the number of requests continues to grow, it means that much more time between packages sent to individuals. I hope you can find a way to share the resources we provide. Steve and I both get great pleasure opening up a box of donated books and seeing books that we know you would like contained in the donation. If you have requested books and after many months you've heard nothing please write and let me know. As the program grows it challenges my not very developed organizational skills, and mistakes do happen.

**Poetry Project** - *Firstly, I want to reassure you that the Poetry Anthology is on its way. It may even be in the mail by the time this is printed and mailed—the only thing holding us up right now is typing the immense stack of great poems we have! Anthology poetry starts on pg 4. Other than that, I have two new things I'm wicked stoked about to tell you.*

*The first is a new website for posting poems (and soon, art or even essays). If you want to tell your friends and families about it, the URL is <http://prisonerexpress.deviantart.com>. At this moment, 54 poems are on the site, and that number will only grow as more poems for the anthology are typed. People can leave comments about poems on this site, which I will print out and mail to the authors periodically. But the great thing about this is that I can post the author's address right next to each piece, so people can write to you after seeing your poems/artwork. Hopefully, this will be a way to jump-start the pen pal program. So if you want your address online, be sure to mark that in the permission section of the registration form and send it in.*

*I want to invite those poets who have sent their work in to Prisoner Express before, and any of you who are interested in trying your hands at poetry, to a brand-spanking-new poetry project I'm starting up. It's a tutoring program, and it'll work pretty much like most PE programs: get packet, send in response, get compilation, etc. Specifically, I'll send out periodic packets explaining the building blocks of poetry (rhyme, rhythm, stuff like that), elements of classic and contemporary poetry, and common themes and literary techniques. Basically, what I want to do is provide y'all with as much variety and information about poetry as possible, so that each of you can decide exactly what kind of poetry you want to write and (hopefully) I can help you do that excellently.*

*At the back of each packet, there will be several suggestions about poems to write (variety is the key here), and you'll have to write and send in a certain number of them. Then, volunteers here will type them up, and we'll send all of those out along with a packet on editing poetry (the best way to learn to edit your own work is by editing others'). The assignment in that packet will be to edit some and send them back in. The edited poems will be sent from here to the original authoress or author. What I hope to get out of that part is to make this less a long distance class, and more a communal learning process—you'll all be reading each other's work throughout, and helping everyone else get better at writing at the same time they're helping you.*

*This should be pretty high volume; I'm leaving at the end of the summer, so I want everyone who participates to make a commitment to be very timely about the assignments, and early if at all possible. I don't know what will happen to this when I leave (I'll be traveling the country for a year, so I doubt I could do it across the distance), someone else might pick up the slack, or it could end... who knows. And because of the intense workload on my part, I gotta limit this to 15 people. I really wish I could open this to whoever wanted to be in it, but I'm only one dude with only so much time. A quick side note: I'm going to fund the printing and mailing and so forth by holding poetry readings in hometown, of the poems people in the program are writing.*

*If you're interested in joining this program, please send in one poem you have NOT sent in before, a few paragraphs or a page on why you'd like to join, and if you're getting out before September (just yes or no, but I don't want people leaving the group halfway through). Please, even if you don't think you're a good poet, please send this in. I don't want the "best" poets in this program, I want poets who can get much better, who have a lot of spirit and emotion in their words, and I want poets who really really want to be involved.*

*I realize I've been rambling for a while about this, so I just want to tell everyone reading this that I really enjoy reading all your writings—not just the poetry, but journals and letters and essays and even history packet answers. The things you all say affect and impress me a lot, and I deeply appreciate the opportunity I've been given to work with you. And now as always, please send in your poems for the next poetry anthology (and maybe some ideas for a more creative title than "Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology, Volume 3"); I can't wait to get it out and read!*

*With solidarity and in struggle,  
Toby*

Toby has been working with PE for the past year and has been invaluable not just in furthering the poetry component of the program, but he is responsible for the improved look of the newsletter and the history projects. He also helps maintain our data base, reads your letters and respond to your requests. As many of the interns who pass through our doors, Toby will be off on various adventures once the summer time arrives. His plans include going to the Republican Party Convention and protesting their elitist, classist, down with the people policies. It is refreshing to know him and see how committed he is to social change.

**Journal Project** - We have created a starter packet on how and why you might want to keep a journal of your thoughts, experiences, and memories. If you sign up for this project we will send you this starter packet. We ask you to mail your journals to us, and we create a file of your writing. We search for volunteers to type your journals up and then we place certain of them on our website. Usually we put as many as we can on line. We recommend that you write at least 1x per week, but you can write as much or as little as serves you. You can send us your entries as it serves you. Some people send a few every week, while others save it all up and mail it in every month. You can do it any way that serves you best. Keeping a journal can be a good way of exploring your life, and learning more about yourself. It also helps refine your thoughts. For those of us on the outside your writing illuminates the humanity of the people in prison, promotes understanding, and can act as a motivator for us to improve the present model of incarceration. Right now we are behind in getting the newest entries on line, but we will eventually get this done.

**A**rt Project/Show - Many of you are aware that we held our second annual art show last fall. We offered prizes for the first time. First Prize was \$100, Second Prize \$75 and Third Prize was \$50. We also gave out 12 honorable mention art scholarships of \$20. It was very hard to decide who to award these prizes too as we had many excellent submissions. A team of 3 graduate students in art at Cornell University made the decisions on which artwork was selected. They were so moved by the work and your skill that these struggling art students picked 2 extra winners for honorable mention and contributed the money for the extra \$20 scholarships. It is a testimony to the moving power of your creative self expression. As hard as life experience can be, it often can serve to polish the soul of the person living the life. Art is a great way for all of us to express our creativity. I find often, any act I do that I am involved in, is usually satisfying whether it be something big or small. The main factor is that it is important to me. Art is something you can do that is important, and we offer a way for you to share it with the world.

Hannah coordinates our art program, and below are some words she has to share with you:

Dear Artists,

*Thank you for your continuing support of this project. I wish I had the stamps to write to each of you and tell you how exciting it is to receive your innovative, creative, and fascinating artwork. It is a pleasure to open each envelope. Both the level of artistry and the complex thoughts conveyed in the artwork make me excited to share your efforts with as many people as possible.*

*The opening was a great success. We had a wonderful turn out, and Prisoner Express had an informational booth. Pieces were shown on stands to supplement those that hung for the entire show framed on the walls. I've include some images of the show in this news letter to give you a taste of the work at the show.*

*We received so many entries that the judging room was completely filled. We covered six tables with your work and had to set up the rest of your work in chairs. It was great to see the work of so many people and to watch the show grow from last year's surprisingly large number of entries to nearly three times as many. Some of you sent multiple entries and it was great to see the variety and depth of your talent.*

*This past year's art show was a wonderful success. With the substantial traffic through the show area as well as the turn out on the night of the opening, we believe that as many as several thousand students, employees, and administrative and faculty members at Cornell University had an opportunity to see your work. The fund raising aspect of the show as well as the donations from the graduate student association should allow us to continue this project next Fall, with your help.*

*Please consider sending in your artwork for our next show this Fall. If you have entered before, we thank you for your involvement and contribution to the Prisoner Express Art Program. If you've never participated before, we hope you'll consider joining us. We plan to offer prizes again in the coming year to the winners of the show as judged by people with Cornell's Art Department. More to come!*

Hanna

As you can see Hannah is already planning for next years art show. In the past I have tried to send out art paper to many of you, but more often than not it is rejected by the mailrooms. You can work in whatever medium you like, and submit as many works for consideration as you like. I know the judges last year looked at each persons work as a group and

sometimes the variety of pieces earned the person the prize they won.

Many of you ask for books on how to draw. We have a limited supply pass through our book room and they are mailed out shortly after they arrive. **I will ask a volunteer to create a how to draw packet. I will try to include instructions for shading, perspective, and other relevant techniques. If you would like to receive this packet sign up for it, and when we have our first 200 requests we will mail it out.**

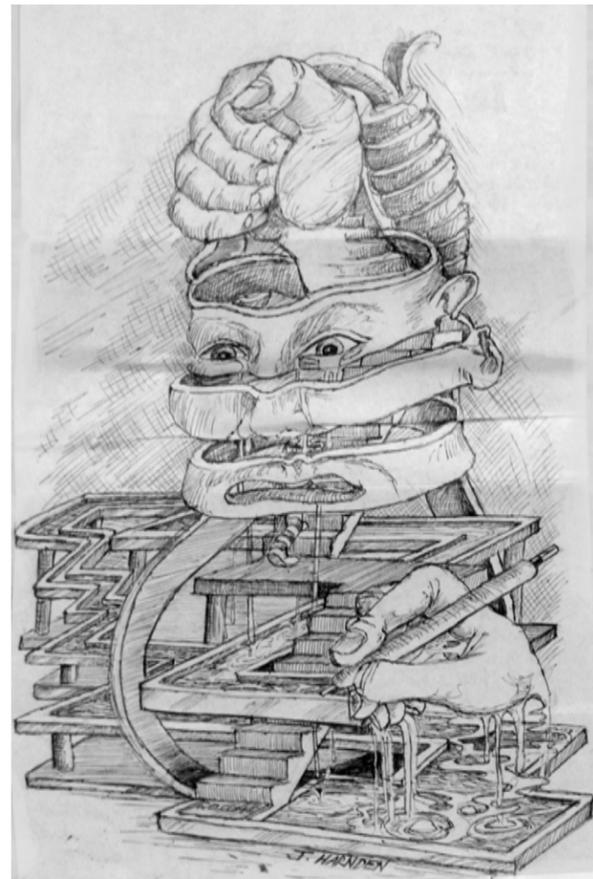
Many of the pieces that were sent in were in color and they will not reproduce well in our newsletter. We have selected a few that we believe will reproduce well to include in the publication. Unfortunately, once again my ability to keep track of all the artists for each piece has not been anything to be proud of. If I print your piece in this newsletter and it does not have your name, let me know and I will reprint the image in the next newsletter with your name. The bonus for you is your picture is printed twice. Also if the wrong name is on a picture let me know as some I labeled using my memory, which is always a shaky proposition.



**First Prize in our show went to Richard Garza.**  
(see also page 10)



**Second Prize went to Kerry Roland.**  
(see page 14)



**Third Prize went to Jeff Harnden.**  
(see page 7)

How the judges decided was beyond me as there were so many excellent submissions. Scholarships were also given, and the prize winners were sent money orders or we ordered books or magazines they wanted if the money could not be put on their account. **Art Scholarship winners include Ross Bonilla** (see page 13), **Randle Lyle, Jeremy Towner** (page 1), **Robert Turpin** (page 4), **John Anthony Saenz** (page 6), **Samuel Harris** (page 13), **Lamarr Little, Robert Vasquez** (page 9), **Martin Bibbs, Harold Laird, Arturo Gaitan, Armando Aleman, Glen Vivenzo and Raylon Attebury.** Congratulations to all of you who submitted art and especially to those of you who were recognized by the judges as having talent or showing promise. Our contest was not necessarily about who was best, but rather as a forum to encourage and reward artist participation. I hope many of you will consider sending us artwork for our future shows.

**M**ath Project - This is an ongoing effort. We are developing a series of tests and lessons to measure your math ability. The first course we teach will help you develop all the skills you would need to pass the test high school seniors must pass to graduate in NY State. Our second course covers more difficult material, but lessons are being developed to help you learn. We are working in partnership with the Math Learning Center at Ithaca College. If you would like to get started learning math please sign up. If you signed up in the past and passed unit 1 and then were blown away by the difficult unit 2 test, we are revising it and the follow up lessons, so please write and let us know if you'd like to continue.

This program has had a few fits and starts since its inception, but now that the Math Learning Center is on board I am hoping we can be timely and helpful. Don't worry if you need a lot of help to gain math skills. We are setting up the program to be adaptable to all levels of skill. There are 3 of you who have done wonderfully on the difficult math 2. For folks who can test out of the material we have developed to date we have an assortment of mathematics text books we can send you. If you are interested in becoming part of this program please sign up for our placement packet. There seems to be a groundswell of interest at the Math Learning Center to help teach you all math. I am excited about the possibilities that may develop with this program.

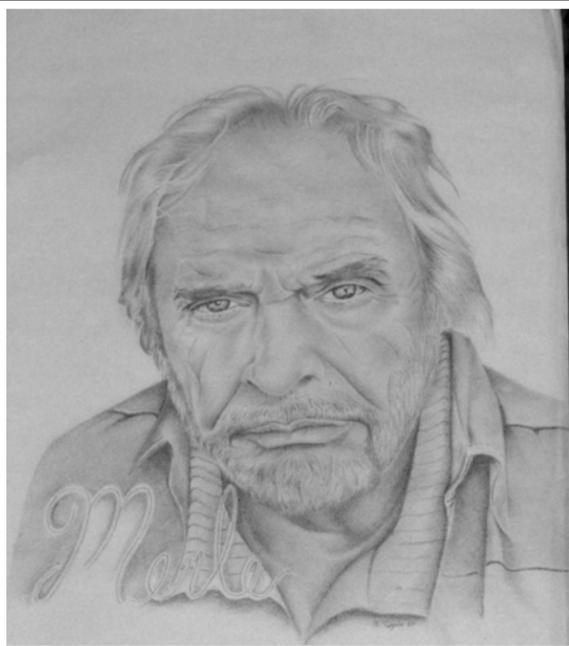
**H**istory Project - This project is geared to all of you who want to know a little more about human history. Our written history records but a short time of mans existence on the planet. For those of you who read the last mailing on African Civilization, there was some very good information on some of the theories about how stone age men lived and evolved. As I live I see constant revisions to how humans write and describe pre history. I believe there are elements of truth in historical assertions, but because I was not there I'm never sure of the accuracy or slant of the writer. Our lessons have been created mostly by our esteemed volunteer Dave who searches the internet on various historical subjects. Our last 2 history mailings were the aforementioned African Civilization Pre 1500 and another was a course on the Roman Empire. Participants in both courses read the material and then sent in their responses to the packet and questions we asked. From these responses we will create a compilation document of what we think are the most interesting answers and mail that pack to all of you who have sent in answers. We will do this again with our next mailings. We will be offering a packet on the **Barbarian Invasions** that led to and followed the demise of the Roman Empire. If you would like to read about these marauding groups please sign up for this packet.

**B**ook Club - Many of you signed up for our last book club selection, **Lost and Found**, written by local author **Gemma Macera**. It was a non fiction selection dealing with her personal struggle and cure of Alzheimer's disease. We are working on creating a compilation packet of your responses. Thank you all for your thoughtful responses. I am passing your letters on to Gemma.

Good News! We have found another book to send out for the book club, is titled **The Pickup** by **Nadine Gordimer**. Below is a review I found on line that tells a bit about the book (I have not yet read the book and will do so with all of you when I mail it out). I can get up to 700 copies of this book so sign up and join the club. The book will come with some thought provoking questions and we will create a compilation packet of your most interesting insights. Nadine Gordimer has won the Nobel Prize for Literature so you know the book will be interesting. The book and the money to mail it comes from the Cornell Office of Undergraduate Education and is required reading for the freshman class that entered the university in Fall 2007.

*"Through the use of a highly creative writing style, almost 'expressionistic' in character, Gordimer describes a wonderful illustration of a human transformation. The protagonist is a girl from the privileged White South African Bourgeois, who was virtually surrounded by privilege and opportunity. At least that is how it seems to an immigrant from a poor Islamic country in Europe. And, yet, unlikely as it would seem, she falls in love with this immigrant who is working as a garage mechanic. Having been raised in a more enlightened age in Modern South Africa, it does not seem inappropriate to either her or her bohemian friends at the Café/Restaurant that she frequents for her to do so.*

*"He has hopes that his involvement with her will help him stay in the country, which is trying to expel him, but he did not initially intend to fall in love. His vision is one of success that looks so sweet from outside the capitalist economies of the world, but can be so elusive once one enters within. Her vision seems yet to be developed. She has a job, which could be done in most parts of the world. She is an educated girl. And yet, she finds herself, through her own choice transported to the world of the desert; a world without computers and supermarkets. True, there is some electricity and there are cell phones and TV's, but*

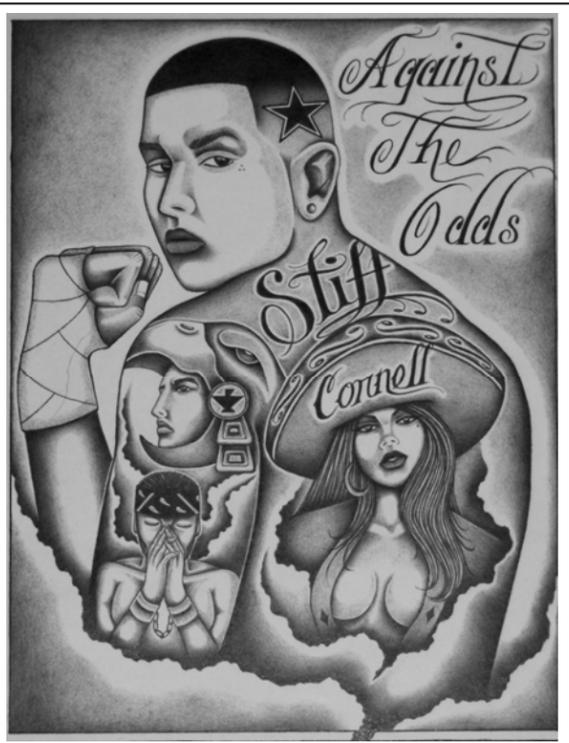


Merle Haggard  
by Robert Turpin

*not too much else in the way of modern day amenities, including a lack of running water. But there is always what becomes a strange allure of the desert around her.*

*"With technique that is nothing short of brilliant, Gordimer renders a tale of rejection of values from all sides. The man is rejecting the values of his homeland, and the woman is doing likewise, but neither knows truly what they seek at the end of their journey. The interplay of cross-cultural interaction is deeply conveyed within the text. Many of the deepest thought processes are left for the reader to understand by inference. And the solutions to problems in the journey are particularly uniquely resolved. The book is truly a modern day piece of literature."*

**Y**oga Project - Yoga is a great way to both work out the body and the mind especially in a limited physical space. It can be used to increase strength, flexibility and mindfulness. In our last issue of PE News we contained a thorough introduction to Yoga written by a local yoga teacher. We offered to create a larger more thorough packet for those of you who are interested. That packet is still in the works and hopefully will be completed this spring. It will include the instructions shared in the previous newsletter as well as more information on yoga poses and breathing techniques. If you have already signed up for the packet, we have recorded your name in the database and will send you the packet when it is completed. If you have not signed up for it, but want to know more about yoga practices here is a chance to combine physicality with spirituality while exploring your limits and your limitlessness. Please let us know if you'd like to receive this mailing when it is complete. I just went thru a short yoga workout the other day and it immediately let me see and work through some of the tension in my muscles and mind..



## POETRY COLUMN

### Anyway

*Note from PE: We don't know who wrote this poem because it was separated from its envelope before anyone here wrote the name on it. Please, write your name on every page of poetry or piece of artwork you send in—it takes time, but at least we'll always know who wrote what. And if you wrote this poem, please write to Toby. Thank you.*

People are unreasonable, illogical and self centered.

Love them anyway...

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway...

If you are successful, you win false friends and true enemies.

Succeed anyway...

The good you do will be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway...

Honest-and-frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest-n-frank anyway...

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

Build anyway...

People need help but may attack you if you help them.

Help people anyway...

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you've got anyway...

### Each One Teach One by Brandon Jamal Dixon Sr.

The more you learn,  
The wiser you become.

The wiser you become,  
The more you have experienced.

The more you have experienced,  
The more you have to share.

The more you have to share,  
The more opportunities you have to enlighten others.

The more opportunities you have to enlighten others,  
The fewer mistakes they tend to make.

The fewer mistakes they tend to make,  
The more options they will have.

The more options they will have,  
The more they are taught.

The more they are taught,  
The more they learn.

### Post Modern Poet's Blues by Eric Michael Street

I want to write a poem of love but,  
Damn, it's all been done to death, hey,  
Death can be my chosen topic...  
No, no, it has been passed along the way, so  
Sorry, what about a poem of Sorrow, or  
Would I need to borrow phrases used in  
Days of yore? Yesterday has been abused;  
Today is gone & tomorrow isn't here, oh  
Dear, maybe sex can be my affair, of  
Course, who has failed to use that one?  
Anger, joy, Nature, all undone, law  
Or chaos, loneliness, I despair the way  
All the things have been expressed  
And pressed into clichéd interpretation  
I guess I'm stuck with blank pages.  
Hey! It can be a new abstract poetry...

## POETRY COLUMN

### It's Tough To Be Transgendered by Synthia China Blast

It's tough to be a transgendered woman in prison. No one really knows what the pressure is like.  
I awake every morning and, stare in a mirror, longing to feel beautiful, yearning not to be viewed disgraceful.  
My friends seem to like me. If I follow up with their dares.  
If I am not willing to sexually satisfy them, they act like they really don't care.  
I walk around in a daze. In a prison complex that is made to keep us in a maze. No one really likes me. But everyone seems to want to wife me.  
I thought about taking drugs. I even attempted self-castration.  
I feel as if I am fading, into a light that keeps me waiting.  
I am a transgender. My life is spent around men. If one of them wants to date me, they don't ask they just try and rape me.  
I fear the being taken, to a place that I fear if I awaken.  
I fear being taken, to a place that is forsaken. I look at this prison cell. I think of my prison hell.  
Sometimes I really get so low that I want to end it all. It's tough being a transsexual. Life has never been fair. I wish I was a woman so I wouldn't feel such despair.

### Buddhist Prayer for Peace by Willie Jenkins

May all beings everywhere  
plagued with suffering of body and mind  
quickly be freed from their illnesses.  
May those frightened cease to be afraid,  
and may those bound be free.  
May the powerless find power, and may  
people think of befriending on 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.

### Crown Princess by Dana Y'ungblood

You're a Crown Princess...  
Little girl with Angel eyes born through incest  
A secret not known to many, as quiet as kept  
Your mother was raped by her Uncle Jimmy  
while she slept  
No one ever listened to her cries for help  
Abandonment is all that your mother ever felt  
Too young to know about her body's hastily  
maturity  
Uncle Jimmy staked out waiting to rob her  
virtually  
A thief he is--Ultimately!!!  
Admiring your mother from a distance,  
As if his devilish smile has no resistance  
Proud cause your mother keeps quiet and no  
one'll listen  
The puzzles scattered everywhere now, and a  
few pieces are missin'  
Time was in overdrive, inside her stomach a  
baby was pumpin' like a piston.  
It's obvious now, 13 years old and 6 months  
pregnant  
Now everyone's feeling guilty, and your mom  
grows repugnant  
Uncle Jimmy's on the run, and your grandma  
constantly repent;  
So your grandma goes and press charges to the  
fullest extent  
The family picture has such a lovely frame,  
Though the picture itself appears to be so  
strange  
That's why it's often rearranged,  
Because your beautiful existence is the source  
of family pain.

**T**heme Writings - Every month we suggest an essay topic. If you write something for the monthly topic then we send you a packet with all the other writings on the same subject. It is a great way to get mail as well as to read what others are thinking about on the same subject. It is my personal favorite part of the program. Each essay you send is unique and some of them are quite profound. I began this newsletter a few years ago as a way to share some of the essays with all of you. If you participate you get to read all the essays written on the subject, but as members at least you can read a selection of essays from the following topics in this edition of the PE News. It is too costly to send all of the essays to each of you; the only way to see them all is to send in a submission of your own.

### Sources Of Strength

*When I was a small child, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. I tried to find all the pieces and put them together, but it was not possible, so I kept only the largest piece. And by scratching it on a stone I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find. I kept the little mirror and as I went about my growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game but a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I came to understand that I am the source of light, but light—truth, understanding, and knowledge will only shine in the dark places I reflect it. I am a fragment of a mirror whose design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what I have I can reflect light into the dark places of this world into the black places in the hearts of people, and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is the "sources of strength" I have.*

—Shawn Montgomery

### **Rebuilding Strength**

*External sources of strength are life support systems necessary to survival when the weight of world weariness becomes too much of a burden to bear. In the end, only internal strength is permanent and any external support not aimed at enabling a person to tap into personal reserves of strength is only a crutch. Dependence on individuals or institutions that do not wish to see you capable of independence are never healthy. One of my greatest sources of*

*strength came from taking actions that allowed me emotional healing. I took responsibility for my circumstances and contacted the people I had hurt (where possible) and told them I was wrong and sorry for the things I had done. No more excuses. No more playing the blame game. Then I started over on a clean slate and put the guilt behind me. You can't change the past, only the future, and that only by examining past choices and learning from your mistakes.*

*Family can be a source of strength, for me it became a millstone of recriminations around my neck. The best thing that ever happened to me, though it was tragic at the time, was when I parted ways with my family and stopped pretending we cared about each other. No longer did I face their memories of my past faults and failures to taint any hope of success in my life. It allowed me to start over without facing their negative expectations. It's never too late and you're never too old.*

*Religion, too, had become a weight I could no longer bear to carry. Letting go of dogmatic doctrine restored me to my natural spiritual nature and gave me hope. What others consider a source of strength perpetuated in me a weakness and destroyed my life until I could stand alone and search for strength within myself.*

*Alone I found friends that became my chosen family. They lift me up when I'm weak and weary, providing me with what I cannot provide for myself. With them I am free to be who I am. They are a catalyst to draw out of internal strength and support when they have need. Our friendships become a circle of sharing without demands, dependency or conformity required.*

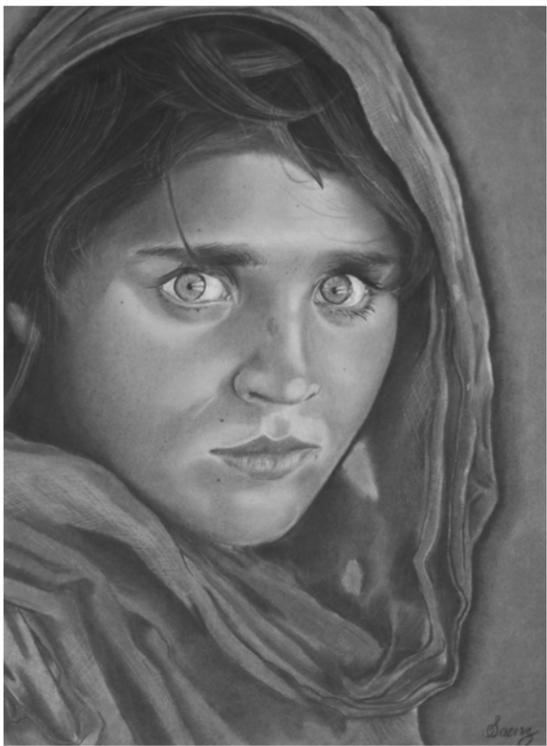
*Examine what you consider sources of strength and see which ones are crutches and which enhance your personal resources of internal strength. There's nothing wrong with leaning on a crutch, as long as you know it's a crutch, until you are strong enough to stand alone, but at some point you have to give up the crutches or become a cripple. It takes time to rebuild your strength, yet it's the only goal worth the effort. All else is a cop out and most of us have done that for too long already.*

—Daniel Harris

*I got my source of strength from a variety of things. From the quietest part of a day/night to where I'm able to think and reminisce about the good things and fun things I used to do when I was out. To look at pictures of my nieces and nephews while reading their letters or writing to them. To go back and sometimes read old letters from my ex or ex's sister. Even though this one might sound funny, but playing chess. How you may ask? I get strength from that because I'm able to see that I haven't lost my mind, especially*



Glen Vivenzi



Afghan Girl  
by John Anthony Saenz

since I'm in Seg. By being able to think or predict a move, I'm far from being crazy and I can function. Not taking any of those psych meds going around. Sometimes, I compare myself to those people and I see, I'm better off than most. I receive encouragement from my pen-pals and when I pray at night. Whether it's asking God to forgive me of my sins or thanking Him for seeing another day and letting my body work properly. When I hear people are going on home, or have gone home recently, it lets me know that my time is coming. And when that person, whoever he is that's supposed to go home before me goes, I know I'm next. But lately, I've been getting my source of strength from this special card that my ex's sister had shot to me when everything was going bad for me. I mean, my family stopped writing and my ex was trippin' and playing games. And she felt what I was telling her. And this is what she shot me by Suzanne Kleins: "It's not easy to be where you are right now, full of questions and doubts. In fact, it's really hard. But maybe it's supposed to be. Maybe life perches us on these thresholds of not knowing which way to go to make us realize that there are no easy answers, to make us turn inward and hear that voice inside ourselves. I know that you have a strength and wisdom inside you that you may not be aware of right now. I have faith that you will know what to do, perhaps sooner than you think, because I believe in you with all my heart..."

When I had read that, it felt like I wasn't lost anymore and that everybody didn't abandon me. And a couple of weeks later, I did what I had to do. That poem gives so much inner strength to want to make a person strive for more and jump the hurdles that's in front of them.

—Tim Hampton

One thing I have learned being locked up is that no matter how strong you are, it is not enough by itself, and yet you can't really depend on anyone else either. I know it sounds weak but it is a harsh reality. No matter how much weight you can lift, how well you fight, how smart, how stubborn, or how much of a hard-core killer you think you are, none of those things will keep hope alive for you. You learn the hard way (often after you lose everyone and everything you care about) that all hommies don't really care if you ain't right there. Sure they got you if you're around them or if they need an extra gun to put in some work, but when you are locked down for life (or death as the case may be) you don't really rate more than a passing comment in a casual conversation. Girlfriends have a tendency to want a man right there and when he's not well "that fool never did nothing for me no way!" and they move on to the next guy with money, reputation, good looks, etc, while you...well you're dead or as good as. Family (now I can't speak for others only my

own) they talk a real good game for the most part. Mom tries to hold the kid down for the most part, but has her own problems and a mountain of stress because of me. One aunt tries as well, all the others profess love and "support" only to the mom or aunt and don't really have anything to do with you at all. Now whether this is because they feel it'll be easier to just cut ties and try to move on or whether they just could care less I can't say, but the fact of the matter is for all intents and purposes you are already dead. Now bear with me this is not meant to be a "boo-hoo woe is me" sob story, my back is ram-rod straight right now! My posture is very erect! (laughing)

So what do you have left...no inner strength, no support system...God maybe? I spent 4 years on Death Row (2000-2004) and I really looked at "God" seriously. What did I find? Accountability. I found a source of strength. But not how you might think: self-discipline and self-control. Self is the key to both terms here. You would expect someone to seek out a supreme being to wave His (or Her) hand and make it all better! Now while many subscribe to this type of fairy tale scenario, watching 8 or 9 of them get executed in a row will pretty much burn off the bullshit vision glasses. So I felt I had to take a more proactive approach, I studied and learned the various rituals of worship and the meanings of the rituals. Over time I become aware of the ritual's purpose: discipline, which leads to control of self. I supplemented this with meditation, stretching, a deeper course of study, moving meditations, etc. After I had a true appreciation of the various rituals, I found the importance of a "living faith" in the sense of how I make choices, how I act. I've found that all of those seemingly pointless rituals are ways to train and discipline yourself to transform how you live, to turn faith into action. Do not mistake me, I am not a religious fanatic, I have no desire to convert anybody, or say your way is wrong as opposed to mine. I merely state my own journey. I try to study God from as many angles as I can to gain a better understanding. I have found that in order to truly be strong in a situation like mine, I need an inexhaustible source of strength. Everyone and everything else failed me...even myself. Hopefully someone will gain from reading these words.

—Francisco Tirado

I am sure that many will be writing about the source of strength that can be found in family and religion. While these are fine and encouraging, what about those that do not have family, and prefer to keep their religious beliefs secret? This article is for those people. I fall into the latter category, and while I don't broadcast my religious beliefs, I don't exactly hold them secret. Sitting in this eight by twelve box day in and day out, without even a window to see the outside world, my personal source of strength comes from within, and is generated through my creativity and ability to adapt. Yes, it is much easier when you have someone you can talk to



## POETRY COLUMN

### Freedom Made Me Prison Raised Me... by Theresa Battles

Freedom presented me the opportunity to learn but I didn't take advantage  
**Prison** raised me to think, speak, learn, and not be afraid to reach

Freedom made me self-destruct and shun the pain I felt inside  
**Prison** raised me to realize through it all I was given the strength to survive

Freedom snatched my innocence, swallowed up by the streets  
**Prison** raised me to re-evaluate and reclaim my life than to live life on life's term

Freedom brought about peer pressure that I surrendered to costing me everything  
**Prison** raised me to not be pressured but to embrace all lessons and then have the ability to make my own choices

Freedom sometimes make you take life for granted and ignoring all the goodness that it brings  
**Prison** raised me to squeeze appreciation tightly asking for one more change to be free.

### Texas Home by James Meier

Six tight strings on an old guitar  
Homemade likker in a Mason jar  
Soft summer nights on a front porch swing  
Hummin' 'n strummin' 'n tryin' to sing

Hits from old Hank and sometimes Ray  
Tunes from the legends I learned to play  
Lost in memory of bygone days  
Just me 'n my six string, take me away

From all this modern day musical crap  
Senseless noise 'n neighborhood rap  
Deliver me Lord from all that noise  
And take me back to them good old boys

Pickin' 'n grinnin' 'n sippin' along  
Lost in that jar 'n all them songs  
Just lovin' life 'n that old farm  
The woman inside with Texas charm

Lovin' that bundle down the hall  
Safely wrapped in grandma's shawl  
Livin' my life 'n following fate  
Makin' my way in the Lone Star State

Don't get no better 'n it can't be beat  
This old swing 'n that unpaved street  
Star filled nights 'n propped up feet  
But I gotta go now...

It's time ta eat.

### The Gods Decide by Chief J. Ramos

The winds blow, the seasons change  
But I am to remain in chains  
Until the Gods decide my destiny  
I live, think, dream and hate  
But they decide my final fate  
If they decide I am to be free  
Then in time that's what I'll be  
But if they decide I must remain  
The slowly but surely I'm to go insane  
It will be something that pierces my heart  
But I will remain here til death do us part...

## POETRY COLUMN

### Signs of the Times – Breaking the Holds of Bondage by Talib

Oh say does that star spangled banner yet wave, over lands of the free, and the home of the brave—

How can this be the land of the free, or the home of the brave, a country that was built on the backbone of a slave— and now united we stand on top of his grave—

The ultimate task is not to dwell in the past, or be deceived into thinking you're free at last, with an expression on your face like a tribal mask—you must look to the signs, as an original design, that provides the initiative to free your mind, only if you wake up in time—wake up brother, It's no time to sleep, you're not lost sheep—but a sleeping giant with promises to keep, how long will you allow your ancestors to weep—you must look deep inside, find the remnants of African pride, understand why your forefathers died, to regain the strength to stay alive, for only the strong can survive—

Evidently, the Creator has made it clear, you must hold fast to faith and in your heart be sincere; for a day is coming that most men will fear, except such as prepare as it every draws near—so wake up the sleeping giant, for the world has defined, we are living in the day of the signs of the time—

Free at last, free at last, are these inspirational words enough to escape the bondage of our past—

The death, the hardship, the tribulation, can these words overcome such devastation—

Can we look beyond the norm, and expose the true purpose of social reform—could it be a new set of chains, that causes a similar pain—using methods of pacification, to suppress the shame of a nation, a way for the country to flip the script, using a reversal of the racial tip—

Like a newspaper retraction, with pacifying promises of affirmative action—have we become so insane, that we no longer recognize game, there is a reason for the hype in the population, forbidden sex, the use of drugs for recreation; is it necessary to draw a blueprint or a map, it's a structure, just like a drug trap—

Built on promises to achieve success, but too often the outcome is pain and duress—don't you see, they're not bleeding the block, but bleeding the nation, while you hold onto hopes of future compensation—

Put two and two together, don't play the part of a fool, free at last is an analogy, like forty-acres and a mule—

### The Rebel by Chester Jones

What a vivid imagination,  
Thoughts of freedom on this plantation.

Constant darkness my soul does dwell,  
Only through death, shall I be released from Hell.

Four-score, before a war was fought,  
Lying Ab Lincoln's proclamation forgot.

40 acres and a mule, 'twas not for we,  
How long in Amerikkka, for us this poverty.

Black women, our sisters, our back  
bone broke,  
“We Shall Overcome”—at least that's our hope.

Freedom, sweet freedom, released  
from this plantation,  
Where forth art thou freedom, in my  
imagination?

understands you and knows you like only your family can. Not everyone has that though. A person has to be able to find their own source of strength from within to truly be able to become the person they should be. Anything else is codependent behavior, and while there is nothing wrong with being slightly codependent (we all want to rely on others for something!), when it becomes your defining characteristic it becomes a problem.

Through creativity (to make things perfectly clear to all readers, I speak of personal creativity, not the religious belief system) I am able to expand my mind and challenge myself, which is a source of strength. There is nothing like accomplishment to make you feel better and stronger. It can be the simplest task: writing a good letter, finishing a drawing you've been working on, or even writing a poem.

Accomplishment is not measured by how much you have done, it is measured by getting something done. It is easy to sit around in this cell, doing nothing but reading fiction books, playing games or just talking to your neighbor. These things could be productive, if a person would take what they've learned and apply it to a productive project, but often, this isn't the case.

We are our own worst critics, and if you think “I can't do this” you're right, you can't! You are already defeated before you start, because you defeated yourself. Becomes creative, we all have the potential. If you facility has a unit library you can get access to (like most units here in Texas) there is a “non-fiction” section, full of self-help books. Take the time to read some of these, rather than the best-seller from Robert Jordan (although Robert Jordan is excellent!) The ability to adapt is of paramount importance in here. Rules change, we age, people come and go and things change! Changing is not always a bad thing either, there is usually a reason for it. The ability to adapt is a source of strength because it enables you to broaden your perception of the world, and the more you know, the better off you are. There is no such thing as useless knowledge. True enough, you might know things you will never find a use for, but that ‘useless’ knowledge can be applied generally and is a source of strength itself. Those who are ‘stuck in their ways’ have a much harder time of it than those that can adapt. When I say ‘adapt,’ I don't mean conform, there is an important difference between the two. When you adapt, you adjust; when you conform you are complying (especially with rules and the like). There is enough brainwashing in today's society without me contributing to it though, so I will leave it at that. Yes, it is possible to adapt while complying, one goes hand in hand with the other, but most of us in here have problems with authority, so complying is a sore topic. Learn to adapt, you will be better served in doing so. Adapting doesn't change who you are, it simply changes the way you look at something and interact with it. Make the effort, it will make you stronger.

Find your inner strength; you'll be better for it. Becoming a better human being should be at the top of everyone's list, especially considering the circumstances we are all in. If we become stronger, we can overcome our baser urges that have led us down this path we have chosen too walk. Your source of strength could be one book away, one letter away, one conversation away. It is up to you to put in the effort to find it and recognize it. No one knows you better than you know yourself on all levels, only you know what will benefit yourself the best. It is just a matter of looking within: to your source of strength.

—Joseph L. Fritz

When I saw the theme I figured I had a few sources of strength I could write about. However, the more I thought on it, the more I realized I have many. Most I wasn't even aware of.

So I sat and made a list, a long one. By doing this it's renewed my appreciation in



Jeff Harnden

many of these areas, and have brought on a new appreciation.

God is first on my list. Anyone who is spiritually grounded knows this: belief, faith and hope all increase strength. Especially at times when it's needed most. It's what's called inner strength.

Love is another source. At some of the lowest points in my life, love has pulled me through.

And its love that ties me to these sources:

My family and their unconditional love have always given me strength. My friends. Real friends, not the watered-down version of catch-on's that come a dime a dozen. Especially one very special one that's stood in my corner during this time in prison. From her, I've learned more in a few years than in all my years alive combined. Why? Because like family, she's been there in my times of weakness.

Have you ever had a rough day and there you are, sitting on your couch and your dog comes up to you with a goofy dog smile and no matter what, it lifts you some?

Or the same with a child? Those are all sources.

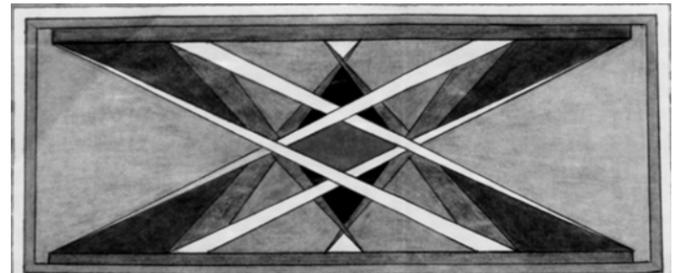
A lot of those I took for granted. I hope when I do get out I see these things the way I do now. Sitting in a tiny Ad. Seg. cell has opened my eyes to things like this. Those sources I've already listed are basically outside sources, now let me list some that aren't:

I've come to believe in the inner strength I have, and know I can always tap into that reserve when I need to. We each possess these strengths. Things like self-control, self-awareness, self-esteem, motivation, determination and confidence. The mindset of not realizing you have access to these inner strengths is what causes things like mental illness (some types), breakdowns, depression and tons of insecurities.

Inner strength is believing in yourself—having true faith and confidence in your unlimited capabilities and using them as tools to stand on your own two feet...self-reliance. Powerful inner strength?

Then there's those sources I can't explain. Like the recharged feelings I get after spending time outside on a sunny day. Maybe it's just all the senses being stimulated.

I've saved this one for last. Sobriety...you kind of have to have been an addict to understand



this, but sobriety is strength. And it's 'sober' that I see and become more aware of all these other sources of strength. I sure didn't pay much attention otherwise.

—Robert Moser

### Fresh Air

As prisoners, we all long for a breath of fresh air. I live on a minimum custody unit that has several separated buildings, so I can't complain of the cramped, dank surroundings of older prison units. So my view won't be a longing for the fresh air of Mother Nature.

Instead, let's talk about fresh air of the mind. That's the time when, say, we are reading a new point of view and we suddenly understand it in a single breeze. That's fresh air.

A philosopher once said something to the effects of "Man is two parts animal and one part angel." As animals, we have the tendency to get stuck in habitualized ruts. As angels, we have the ability to break those ruts and try something new. We have the ability to open the windows of our mind and let in fresh air.

—John Wilson

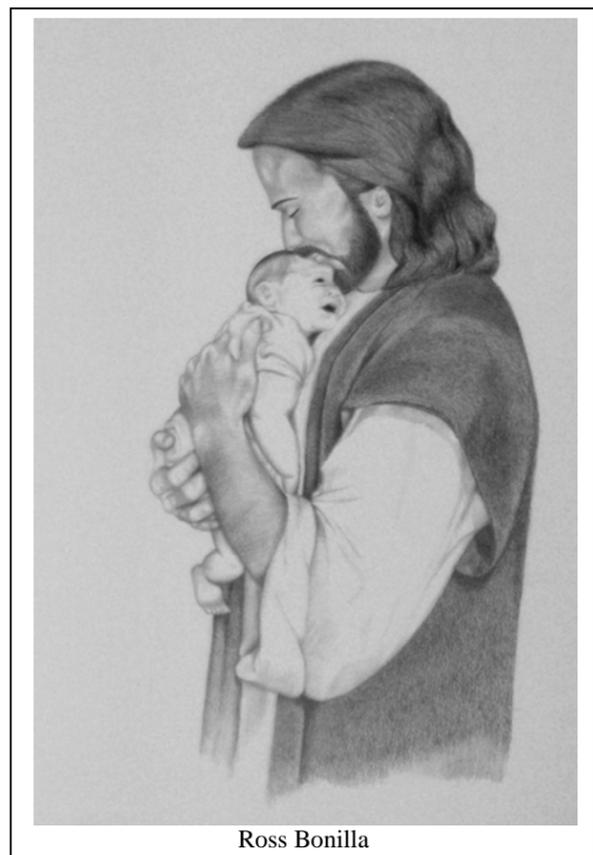
Okay, picture it. For two years you've been able to move only four steps in one direction, two and a half steps in another. For two years your only view of the outside in your cell is a four foot long, four inch wide window at the top of your cell. Everything you do is restricted and the only place you go without handcuffs is 'memory lane.' Your air is stale, your conversation is dead, your thoughts sometimes become distorted, your patience tested. Your environment is contained in every sense of the word.

That's two years in Ad. Seg. Now picture this, for six years you've been in one place. You try to remember the feel of your last trip in any vehicle. You long to be a passenger. You long to go somewhere, anywhere by physically. You're tired of the mental safari trips.

You pray while you sit in your cell for two years, on the same unit for six years "please let me out I've learned my lesson." Just one more, "fresh air."

Then it happened. Your prayer answered. "Pack up your chain!" Your heart starts racing, your limbs shaking. You try to play it down as no big deal, but it's in your voice as clear as a symbol crash in church. Sit, breath, breath?? You realize within the next week you will be free. Walking without handcuffs, see the sky. Breathe fresh air!! You realize you've been given another chance. You don't want to ever come back, to Ad. Seg. that is.

"Fresh air." Let me tell you about "fresh air." It's sweet and tastes like honey. It's a warm summer sun after a cool shower. "Fresh air"



Ross Bonilla

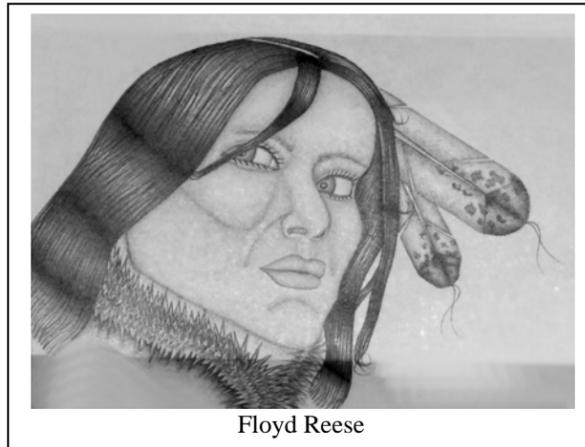
after Ad. Seg? It's like watching your baby smile at you for the first time. It's like seeing again. "Fresh air" after Ad. Seg? It's frightening. It's like playing Russian Roulette. A game of chance. It's like walking on a tightrope without a safety line over an endless gorge. Your misstep will send you to the bottom again. "Fresh air" after Ad. Seg? It's a narcotic at first; you indulge in the feeling knowing soon it will eventually wear off.

This is how I'm feeling now because I've been given my first does of "fresh air." I took my first ride in six years. I saw trees and horses. A McDonalds and even a liquor store. I felt the road underneath me. Man it was great!! But "fresh air" after Ad. Seg. also has me melancholy. I saw and lived in the life in the world of the "confined." The so-called "menaces to prison." I've heard their stories, and seen it through their eyes. For a lot of those cats their first taste of "fresh air" will be their last breath in Ad. Seg, because they can never leave. I left behind some good friends in Ag. Seg., knowing this.

"Fresh air" after Ad. Seg. makes me realize I'm blessed with another chance. "Fresh air" after Ad. Seg, for a person with 2 life sentences? Believe it or not it tastes like "freedom!!!" This is my view on Fresh Air.

—Rene De la Rosa

Well for the month of September the theme essay topic is about fresh air. And September is the month I was born and this September that's coming up I will be 37 years old and it will be just like fresh air, to see that I am still living and

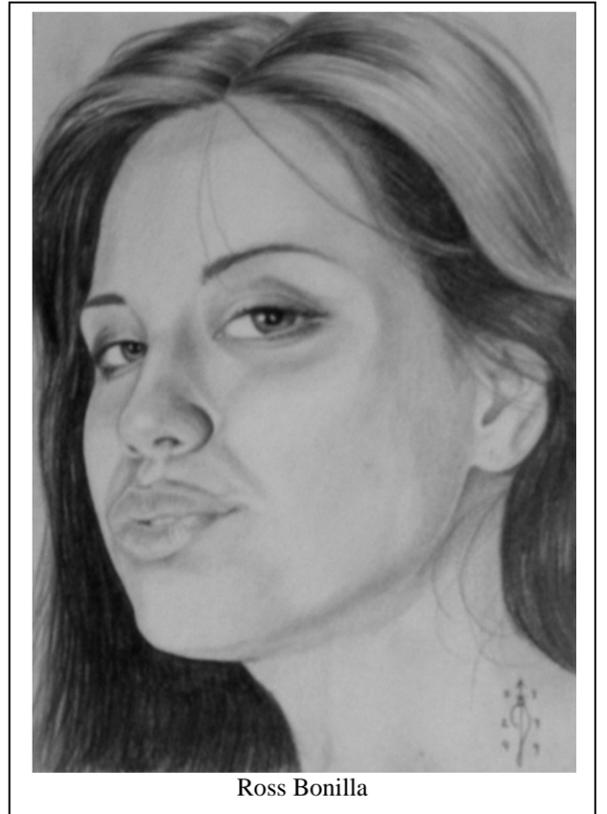


Floyd Reese

breathing through all I have been through. And every chance I get to wake up and see another day is a great moment of fresh air. Just to know I have survived through all I have survived through is a great moment of fresh air. And when I was young and growing up, just about everybody in my hood said I was not going to live to see my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. But September 19, 2007 I will be turning 37 years old and that would be another great moment of fresh air. Cause I have lived to see 18 years and two times and the air doesn't get any fresher than that. And every moment of fresh air I am able to get really helps me along the way. Cause the life I have lived has not had very much air and the place I have been held in bondage for so many years in this one man cell, in a close management control unit, and every time I am able to be in contact with anything that gives me just a moment of fresh air, makes me appreciate every little bit of fresh air I am able to get when I am able to spend any kind of time with the ones I care for.

—Michael Jerome McKinney

Five AM. The guard on the block can be heard this early autumn morning calling out: "Rec. Check!" asking all the prisoners if they are going outside. It's Saturday morning, September first, 2007, and inside this Wynne Unit the temperatures can reach over 100 degrees on these hot 90 plus degree days, and the humidity does not help either. The old red brick this building is made of holds the heat like an oven all night, at 5am the building is just cooling off and preparing for another scorching day...the cycle continues. With that in mind it is time to get up



Ross Bonilla

and answer the man, "Yes sir bossman," and get ready to be escorted, cuffed hands behind our back and walk outside to the yards to get some fresh air.

But, first things first! A quick bird-bath to wash off the overnight stickiness from the humidity and sweat. Cold water feels good in the morning to freshen up, before rec. time at 6 am. At last, the bird-bath over, then a scrubbing of the teeth with good old Colgate, freshens the mouth.

Standing at my cell door ready to go rec. outside. A small price to pay early morning. A piece of mint stick will help keep the mouth feeling fresh, at least until it dissolves. But at least if a female guard escorts me, I will have the confidence to say "Good morning" without fear of scorching her face with a dragon blast...as some guys like to do, just to see the facial reaction of the boss ladies...of course, some guards do not have a lick-o-sense-o-humor!!! And act robotic, badass touch, wanna-be cops, totally forgetting they are security guards, not DPS Police! Anyway, the walk down the four flights of stairs to the ground level gets the old heart pumping...and by the time I reach an open yard/cage where we in the prison administrative segregation go to rec for 2 hours, five days a week—I am breathing in deeply, gulping of the morning fresh air outside. I back up to the yard/cage door and my handcuffs are removed by my escort. I am alone. I look at the flat, smashed-up basketball in the corner of the yards, it has white splashes. I know it's some pigeon droppings...those pigeons have good aim...smile...believe me, I know. So, I look up, make sure I know where those pigeons are parked, so that I do not walk under them and get bombed.

I take deep breaths of that fresh air, feels good. And I walk all around the 10 by 20 foot yard/cage enclosed in cyclone fencing, with concertina wire all around the top.

I take a look at the pull-ups bar, it looks like it has frosting on top, or pigeon paint...I will not be doing any workout today, I will just walk around the yard, or look out towards the distant woods. The morning feels kool, and the air is blowing gently from an easterly direction. I face the wind...enjoy the fresh crisp morning air. The breeze feels great! This morning reminds me of a morning in Saginaw, Michigan. The fresh air transports me to my childhood, when I would walk into the woods, and I would stand facing the wind, and it reminded me of when the northern winds from Canada signaled the approaching winter...The fleeting memory is disrupted by the yard boss..."PUT Your T-Shirt on, Inmate!" ...And so, I do. But the spell is broken. The sun looks like an angry red ball of fire as it starts to peek over the distant woods on the horizon. I stand there and watch it move slowly up above



R. Jones

the tree line, as it continues to rise. Clouds seem to recognize its anger and move out of its way. Those strong rays of the sun start to streak and impale everything in their path...and the cool morning starts to heat up.

All the other yard/cages are full of prisoners. Each one in their own separate yard/cage. All seem to be enjoying the morning fresh air, the cool breeze. The start of a new day for all up us locked up...for me today marks the 10,525<sup>th</sup> day like this. There is no comparison to a deep breath of fresh air in the early AM hours of the morning here in the Texas prison system. Can't get it at any other time during the day at this time of year!

This early in the morning makes me think of the pagans and the wiccans...how close to nature they must feel. Being out here looking at the sun come up, cool light breeze made me think how close to nature I once was, and how far removed I am from everything...yet my eyes and my mind's eye transported me with a breath of fresh air. Way out there, and way back into the past, and in that instant I could see into the future, and look forward to some day enjoying some fresh air outside the yard/cage...then, I will think of this place and all those left behind.

As I contemplated all this, the escort boss was back; "Time to go Grandpa, back to your cage"...I removed my t-shirt, handed all my clothing to the guard for search and inspection, then once I had my shoes back on, I backed up to the yard door and got cuffed behind my back once again. And up the four flights of stairs I went.

By the time I reached the fourth floor...I was already huffing and puffing, but happily walked back to my cell where I will remain for the next 22 hours.

That breath of fresh air was worth all that trouble. I heard the news; "A cold front is moving down south from Canada..." I think I felt that fresh air out there in the rec yard this morning, and it felt very good.

Once a week we have an outside rec day...so I will look forward to our next outside rec day, next Saturday.

—Jesse M. Govea

You know, I'm willing to bet most people don't even give a seconds thought to the air they breathe while they go about their daily business. Unless of course something 'unusual' happens to catch a hold of their olfactory senses, say the odor of a skunk?

But I think there's one group of people who are usually all too aware of the air they breathe. Prisoners who live in an enclosed environment. I live in such an environment. Texas Death Row.

On death row we don't have windows in our cells that we can open to a whiff of that fresh air. We have what they call an "air-cooling" system. An air-conditioner? Whatever it is, it sure works good at cooling the air in here during the winter

months! Not so efficient during the summer though. When it is working, the air in the cell sometimes has a metallic or burned wire smell. That's preferable to what's outside the cell door though!

I keep my fan pointed towards to door of my cell so that usually keeps the more obnoxious smells out. But once I step outside my cell, whether going to rec, shower or visit, the various odors assault the senses like a stampede of cattle. The main smell to assault your nostrils is the musty, sweaty smell of too many unwashed bodies enclosed in too small of a space without proper air circulation. Then you have the rusty mildew smell from the showers, the rotten sour smell from spilled food on the runs. Sometimes you'll catch a strong smell of feces or urine. On the disciplinary pods you have all of that and the smell of gas and pepper spray thrown in for good measure. These smells are a constant and your senses soon acclimate themselves so that soon, even you don't notice it. Until you leave to go to a visit.

Visitation is in another building and to get there you have to go outside. The first thing you notice when you step out the door is the air. It smells clean. Fresh! You smell the grass, the flowers, the very air itself! You take a deep breath and hold it in. Then you breathe in some more as you slowly make your way to the visiting room, trying to prolong your exposure to something most people take for granted and



never think about. But you know that this is something special and precious.

Two hours later (four, if it's a special visit), your visit is over and you make that return trip back to the building housing death row. Again you take your time, enjoying the pleasure of breathing clean, fresh air. Then you step into the building and the smells hit you like West Texas thunderstorm, violently assaulting your senses. The smell of human misery and despair. You crinkle your nose and grit your teeth and shuffle your way back to the pit you call home.

A sweet, rotten, sour smell is emanating from the small kitchen off the main hallway. Gee, I hope that isn't our dinner!

—Perry Allen Austin

### Bullies

When I was 3, my older sister was my bully

When I was 7, a guy named Charlie took her place.

At 9, a boy named Rod out did Charlie, Then at 13, Terry filled the position as bully.

At 18, it was an army drill sergeant

At 22, my bully was a demanding wife

At 25, several bill collectors took turns bullying me.

At 27, my perfectionist boss enjoyed the job.

At 30, my bully became a crushed disc in my back

At 36, a judge in a Dallas courthouse. 9

At 41, a random of assortment of sadistic guards.

And today?

My bully is someone who is worse than all of the ones who came before him. It's like he learned all of their sadistic tricks and now attacks me in every way.

This horrible new bully sees me everyday, I see his hatred for me burning in his eyes every time I look into a mirror.

Yes, today my bully is myself.

—Dave Gordon

Naturally when most people think about bullies they conjure up a mental picture of their school days when fifth grade 6'0 200 lb Billy beat the snot of fifth grade 4'7 80 lb Bobby for no reason other than the sheer joy of dominating the other person. "News Flash," Being a bully is not indigenous to the schoolyard.

As Adults we tend to portray the feeling (outwardly at least) that we are diametrically against bullies. Yet some of us are using subterfuge to conceal how we treat our wives and children. It's a perplexing thing why we chose to subjugate a loved one, friend or even a stranger to our pernicious behavior, as things are more complex as adults than doing them for the sheer joy of it as children do.

Being a bully is not just about how you treat a person physically, it's also about how you treat people mentally and emotionally as well. The world is full of perfidious people including jealous husbands and insecure wives who bully each other and their children. Most people are so caught up in their bad attitudes they don't even realize they are being bullies. Take a good look at yourself today. **If you use a bad attitude to get what you want chances are you're a bully or well on your way to becoming one**, because let's face it being a bully is 90% attitude and 10% action.

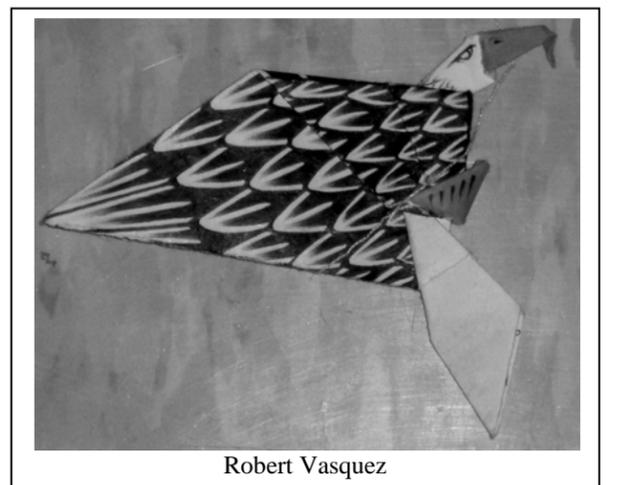
—Kevin Betts

**[Editors Note:** I thought the highlighted line was essence of truth and hoped you'd all reread it at least once and realize how much we are all affected by bad attitude—even our own. ]

Throughout my entire existence in this life of 25 ½ years, my experience has taught me that life does not forgive weakness. The trails and tribulations that we suffer to are unforgiving. And it was that first experience of life's cruelty that I learned that that is the way of survival. And it seems selfish in another's perspective. But you have to consider your environment and evaluate your situation in which case for us prisoners, we thrive on each other's misery. The weaker we can make another then the stronger we grow. I have been guilty of this selfish inconsiderate crime. I've bullied a weakling with out a reason to justify my actions.

It is addicting when we let this environment engulf us into its chaos cause we all are struggling o be above the rest in order to preserve our own manhood, pride, and dignity. And there's that vicarious element that pulls us into that cruel dimension that addicts us.

I try to pull myself away from that cruel part of me even when someone has transgressed that line of disrespect. What it takes is for us to see



Robert Vasquez



R. Jones

ourselves in another. We all envy each other because we're all so alike. But once we see our actions being portrayed by another that's when we become disgusted with ourselves.

The hope is that we, in prison, can treat each other with kindness but that optimism is always blinded by our own psychological insets. But how can we love our enemies? It's fair to leave the weak alone, but what about out enemies? If we too "love" our enemies then that makes us vulnerable to them, does it not? If humans ceased wholly from preying upon each other, could they continue to exist?

What should be understood is that we cannot prey on the weak for there is no glory in that. The strong outnumber the weak so why not find the glory in toppling an enemy stronger than you? Give kindness to those who deserve it instead of love wasted on ingrates.

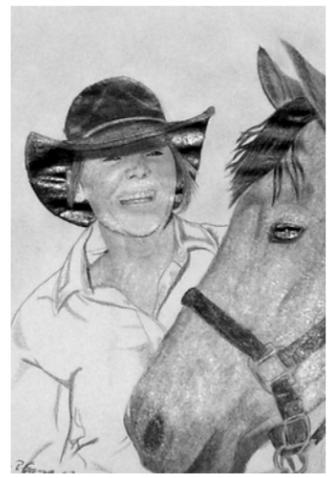
— Johnathan Hooper

As a child growing up in the alien world of Child Protective Services (CPS), I have encountered my share of bullies. Actually, I've encountered your share too. There are many reasons why bullies bully and I could probably go into the psychology



behind that, but for now I'd rather just share an experience I had where I was the bully's prey and the bully. My first time in TYC (a juvenile prison environment-Texas Youth Commission) and my first day on my dorm, I met a tall black dude named David, who just thought he was the shit. The way I met him was I walked into my room to put my jacket up and I caught him in the

act of rummaging through my locker. He attempted to intimidate me with his size (I was a skinny 16 year old white kid then) and when I didn't back down he resorted to violence. Needless to say, I didn't come out of that alteration unscathed, and while neither did he, I was in worse shape than he was. For the next 3 weeks this was an everyday thing, he'd try to strong-arm my stuff and we'd fight. He'd steal my stuff while I was gone and when I saw it missing we'd fight. Out of 24 people on my dorm, only 2 people stood up to him, me and another young wood out of Austin named Josh Anderson. One day I decided I'd had enough of his shit, so when he next stuck his hand in my locker I grabbed then nearest thing (an electric pencil sharpener) and swinging it by the cord I slammed it into the side of his head. He was out, down for the count. I know that when he regained consciousness there would be more trouble, so I hog tied him with some bathrobe ties and dragged him to the middle of the day room where I left him. No one helped him, when he came back to, he got the staff's attention and was untied. We had a few more flights, but they petered out. However, he continued to intimidate the others, and they continued to be intimidated. I got with Josh, and we decided to band together and get some of the other kids involved in our little group. Hispanics and whites, about 8 of us altogether, as one entity, began to stand up to David. Being as he was so big we ganged up on him occasionally, and more and more often David began to leave kids alone. Well, we got caught up in a blood frenzy and we became much worse bullies than David ever was. He quit wanting to fight, began to stay to himself and rarely gave us problems. Still we kept at it, kept beating up on him, kept stealing his stuff (or more accurately our stuff back) and we got even crueller than he'd ever been. We began to force him to do pushups, made him talk his Ebonics, made him eat live crickets and drink fresh urine. It got to where David offered no resistance at all, and I realized that we had broke his will, his spirit. He was docile- no anger, no aggression. One day I was "supervising" David clean the shower stalls when I realized with a jolt that all I had been doing was no better than what he had been doing. I was a bully. My group was a bully. As a compassionate human being able to put myself in others shoes I felt exactly what David must have felt and I was ashamed that it was because of me, my little movement, that he had become the sorry sight that he was. I felt sorry for him, and while I still tell myself today that he deserved that, it is still cause for self-reflection. I washed my hands of David right then, and began to encourage others to leave him alone now too. I made him realize why he had been treated this way and examined his feelings on the issue. It doesn't pay to be a bully and it doesn't feel nice to be bullied. That was 10 years ago and in prison the bullies are of a different caliber, where



Richard Garza

stolen property is the least of our worries. The bullies here are after your minds, your will, and your body. Many end up lying in a pool of blood in the communal shower, having been stabbed 50 times with a 10 inch long piece of sharpened angle iron or expanded metal. This is prison, and no one can understand it quite the way we can, those of us who live it on a daily basis. It's a dog eat dog world and as the saying goes "only the strong survive." So all you bullies keep in mind, no matter where you're at in life, there is always going to be someone much bigger, meaner, and badder than you.

— Rick Pearson

### Gratitude

There is no one thing to be thankful for...there are many things for men to be grateful for in this world. Each man may perceive things on a different level, in a more pleasing way...just as some people are more agreeable with some than with others.

No one can dispute the expression of gratefulness after taking a deep, lungful of fresh air...ahhh...feels good just to mention and imagine it...smile. The elements that hold our world together that give us such air of pleasure, and therefore sustain us with food that grows up out of the ground, we must be grateful for these things. You know it is almost Halloween, and pumpkin pies come to mind, fires, and celebrations...

The sunshine that provides the warmth and energy and lights our path, to see and to grow, the rain that provides drinking water for man, and minerals from the earth and for food we eat, not just for us, but animals and all plant life too... we must appreciate all of these things.

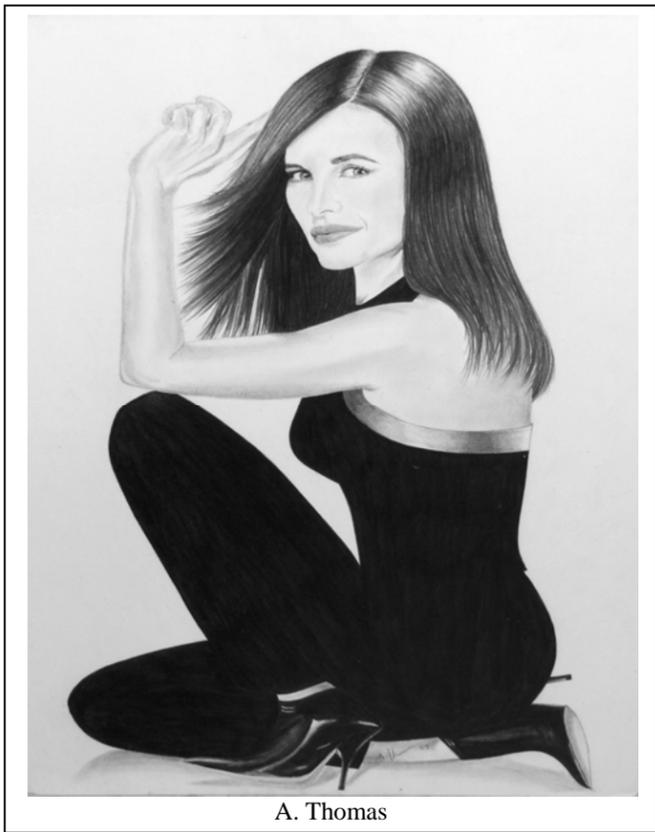
One day, someone far superior to us made a plan...they created this system we presently live and die in. Some may call him God, and others something else, the system is the garden, there is no doubt that the plan included man into the mix. And the good and the bad had to live in perfect balance.

The ten percent of our brain that we use allowed us to wander off course and create our own artificial system, man became ungrateful for the bigger system, and started to ignore it, as some men do now. Total disregard for the natural eco-system is foolish, for this nature can teach man a lesson.

And the past history indicates traces of great flood, and cities buried by volcanic lava that nature brought upon us. Nature can come back to bite us on the ass for being so ungrateful. We all must show a collective gratitude for this beautiful system we live in. Learn to appreciate the sun, the air, the rain, the thunder, the snow, the cold, the green grass, and the trees and all the other vegetation that helps clean the air so we can all breathe clean and fresh.

Of course there are people that touched our lives that we must be grateful for as well. Thank them for the things they do, or have done for us in the past. Each one of us has something we can turn to, to express gratitude.

In my personal life there is a long list of people, but I will only list a few names here, starting with my mother and father. They brought



A. Thomas

me up and offered me good examples and gave me direction. But the rebellious teen that I was, I went away. But now I am older and I appreciate all they did for me. I also have my first wife Isabela, who had me a son and a daughter, and took them from me because I would not change. Now they are all grown up and between the two of them I have eleven grandkids. Also, my second wife who took over and Anna, who gave me a monster son, a big fellow, she stayed strong and waited for me for the first thirteen years of my sentence.

I can not go past that part of my life without thinking of the twelve members of the jury that chose to give me a life sentence instead of death by lethal injection during the punishment phase of my trial. And so next year is 2008 and it will be thirty years since...and during that time I have met many people.

I have always been a social type of person. I am grateful for the late great honorable congressman Henry B. Gonzalez...I recall getting off the police van in front of the court house, all chained up. Police were holding shotguns all over the entrance, and Henry B. came up to me and the cops moved aside, everyone knew him. He shook my hand and asked me what court I was going to. I told him the 186<sup>th</sup> James Barlow. He smiled and said he would be there, he knew the judge. Sure enough, during the trial I heard him mumbling all over and the judge called for a recess. I looked around and all eyes were looking toward Henry B. Gonzalez. I never forgot that, and I know he passed on, but I am thankful for his time and presence at my trial.

The Archbishop Patrick Flores is another old man that also sent a letter and signed a petition on my behalf, to try and help get me out, asking the parole board for compassion...many people signed that petition, I can thank them all. I didn't even know some of the people who signed it, but I will always remember that, and I am grateful for that, and I thank them all. I will not forget that.

There was an attorney that even took my case during a motion for time cut, the late Earl S. Post. He claimed that God had directed him to help me...how can I not be grateful to someone like that. There are so many people that I do not mention here, but there are a few others that I recall...like for example Mr. Benito Alonzo. We did time together on several units, and he never changed. He showed me that to serve a long term sentence you must remain true and balanced in mind, body, and spirit. And one must have good sense, or the seven senses. Besides the first five everyone is familiar with, we must have an additional two more; common sense, and horse sense (a sense of humor). I learned that from him.

He too is serving a life sentence, his from 1974, mine from 1978, and I had the good fortune to meet one of his friends, Mr. Ruben Vela, who has done more time than either of us. Ruvencio is

a skilled writer...and I like to write, so he encouraged me to continue writing. He showed me some of his stories, and some that were published, his and another friend and bro Joe Saldivar, another long term convict. These men could really write some great stories! I am thankful for their encouragement and grateful that they took the time to share some of their writings with me, and encouraged me to continue writing. I am still not good enough, but I continue to try and express myself.

Expressing gratitude is not easily done...especially for one who knows so many people not only in prison, but out there in the free world too. And I know that some names would be deserving of mention here...but space and time is limited for me at the moment. This theme was due October 1<sup>st</sup> and here it is the 11<sup>th</sup>...

But those mentioned I believe have had an impact on what I am doing now...attempting to be a theme writer for the Prisoner Express Program.

Thank you Gary, for providing the avenue and thanks to all who volunteer to keep this program going strong, for all the volunteers and donors that help pay for all this, thank you all.

With sincere gratitude, your theme writer,  
Jesse M. Govea

This October the theme essay topic is about gratitude, which is a very good word, it means the quality of being thankful. My life has not been all that nice, but there are so many things that I am very thankful for, more things than I can ever count. And when I eat food in a way of mindfulness training, I show gratitude of how thankful I am to eat each bite of my food. I am thankful for all the preparation that it took to grow the food I eat every day. I am very thankful for all the preparation it took to clean and cook the food I eat each day. I am very thankful and show my gratitude for the preparation it took to have each one of my meals passed out and served to me. I am very thankful for the source of protein my food provides to my body. I am very thankful that each morning I wake up to see another beautiful day that God has created. I am very thankful for the breath I take from moment to moment. I am very thankful for the eyesight that lets me see each day. I am very thankful for God's whole entire creation, the sun, the stars, the moon, the earth and every thing that comes along with it.

—Michael Jerome McKinney

To start this off, I'm thankful for being alive first and foremost, even though I don't have everything I need. I would like to show some gratitude to Prisoner Express for all its help, for keeping me sane and my mind occupied with positive things. The knowledge that you share with me, from the books to the thoughts you all have for me and everybody else that's enrolled in the program have done me well. I'm thankful that I don't need any psych meds or any other medication to function. I'm thankful that I'm healthy. I'm thankful that I still have my T-lady

out there and only one person has passed in these nine years. Even though I don't want to be here, I'm thankful for the shelter, food, and clothing that I have because there are people out there who are in worse shape than I am. I'm thankful to be around and know that there are people who aren't too judgmental about people locked up, and not scared to communicate with us. Once again, P.E., I'm grateful to accept the small things that I get. I'm grateful that I live by, "Don't expect nothing from nobody, because you won't get hurt when they don't come through." I'm grateful that I learned that lesson, especially in here. I'm just grateful for everything, the good and the bad, because you can't accept one without the other. I'm just grateful.

—Tim Hampton

One of the greatest gifts I have ever received was something that I had tried my hardest to avoid. This gift was a 45 year prison sentence. It wasn't until after I had received this gift, and enjoyed it for awhile, that I had suddenly realized what an earnest debt of gratitude I owed to the state of Texas.

Prison provided me with so many things that I was working my butt off for, but for free. I always wanted to live out in the country in a big house. Security was also very important to me. Now I live way out in the country in a giant house that not only has a tall fence surrounding it, it also has a couple hundred armed guards to keep all of those unworthies out.

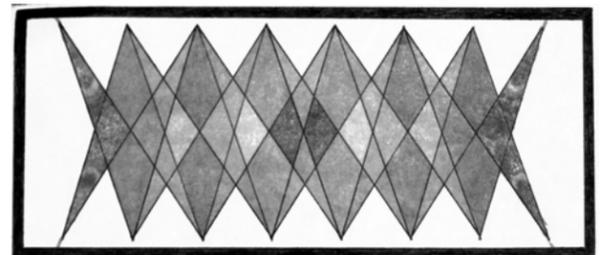
On top of these deluxe accommodations, we have a laundry service and a wonderful dining hall. My mail is brought to me while I lay in my bed and none of this costs me a single penny. In fact, I no longer have to pay for anything! Including taxes!

But naturally, someone has to pay for all this. Someone has to be paying my light, water, and gas bills. Oh, how I would love to give them a giant hug!

I figured out how much my incarceration costs. I included my free medical bills and all of the free legal costs of my conviction and my nine year appeal. Wow! Was I surprised to see that some wonderful folks called taxpayers were willing to pay nearly 4 million dollars...all for little ole me!

THANK YOU!

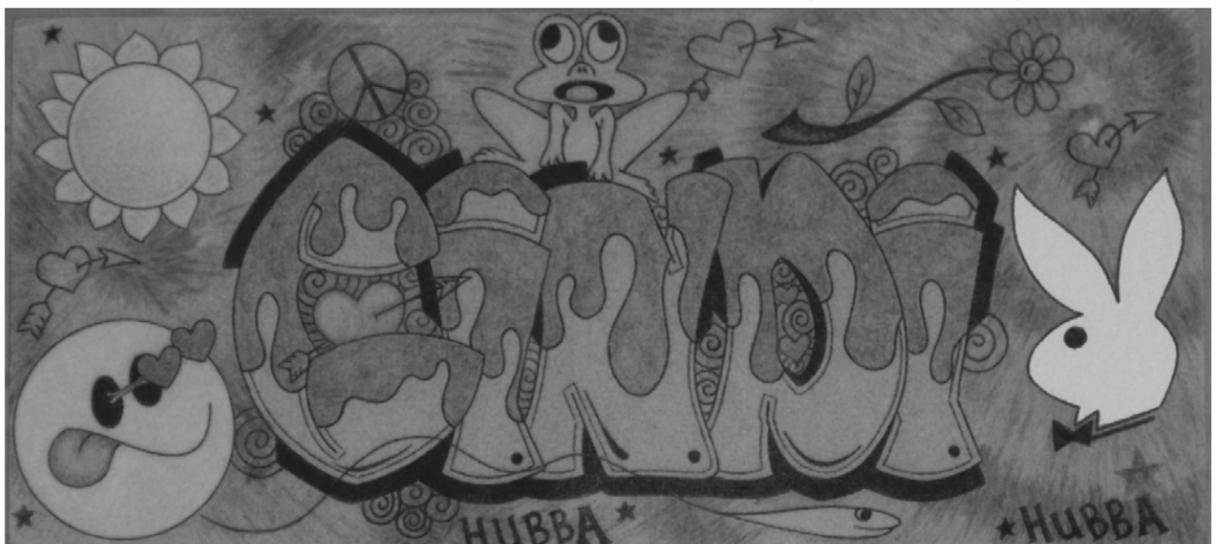
—Dave Gordon



### Gratitude is an Attitude

Gratitude is being thankful or showing thanks. Is this an attitude? Is an attitude not an emotional state of mind or thinking? Is gratitude not something we show, or should show when a deep emotion is touched? Gratitude, does it even exist or is it just a myth? Some say yes, some say no, I say it depends on your attitude toward life.

For years I flipped society the finger, with good reason of course. I had the feeling everyone was against me. Nothing I ever did was





Joseph Holquin

THERE'S A MAN I KNOW WHO LOVES US ALL.  
A MAN OF GRACE AND MERCY WHO STANDS SO  
WE KNOW HE LOVES, WE KNOW HE'S KIND.  
A GREAT BIG HEART AND A STEEL TROP MIND  
GIVES HOPE AND FAITH FOR LIFE! AN AUR  
OF GOLD THAT'S SHINES SO BRIGHT I THIN  
YOU KNOW WHO THE MAN MIGHT BE IT'S  
JESUS CHRIST OUR SAVIOR. OUR KING

good enough. No one ever showed me gratitude. Since the age of eleven, I've had those matching bracelets on my wrists more times than I care to count. I'm now twenty two years old, in and out of trouble and I've never given it a second thought.

See, where I'm from, the pen is not the place to be caught slipping, because while you're dwelling on your should've's, could've's, or would've's, someone is dwelling on your kicks or commissary. So I haven't had too much time to think of how ungrateful of a person I have been. That all changed when I got locked up in Pennsylvania, the prisons here are more resorts than penitentiaries. Lots of people try to act bad ass but I know bad ass and this isn't it. On top of being at this resort I've been blessed to be confined to a solitary suite, complete with room service and all. It's been this way for seventeen months off and on. I go to pop and come right back. But I rather like it here.

Being isolated has given me time to think of all the people who I should be sending Christmas cards to. For starters, the witnesses on my case, the DA who prosecuted me, and the state that holds me captive. Why should I thank them? Simple, they saved my life as well as some of my foes. During my isolated time I've been alone with me, myself, and I. Let me tell you, it's not easy dealing with myself and I, but for the most part they're good folks. The conversations and feed back they give is mostly why I keep them around. Had it not been for the aforementioned people, I would've never been able to know myself this well. All my life I've been fighting the system and look what the system has done in my favor. Remember that 90's pop song, isn't it kind of ironic?

Secondly, I got to give it up to society, because without you I wouldn't have any hardships to say I'm thankful I made it through. I tipped my finger at you before, now I'm tipping my hat! Last, but never least, my mama! I can remember when she was on my enemy list, in the top 5. Now she's on my best friend list, in the top 2. All the times I thought she was against me, thought she didn't care, she was really caring more than anyone else. So many preventive measures were taken to ensure my success, but I thought they were holding me back from my greatness and look, I didn't even know my potential until now. How did I pay her back, the same way we all have, by indulging in a life of crime. But thanks to the Commonwealth of PA... I have changed my attitude and I plan to show her gratitude when I get out. So, I guess gratitude is a matter of Attitude. But there's a flipside to it. Sometimes you will never get a

come out now." The snake refused, saying "It's nice and warm in here I think I'll stay". Outraged, the farmer begged and pleaded to no avail until he happened upon a heron. The farmer bent and whispered to the heron about his plight and asked if he would help, the heron agreed. He told the farmer to squat and force the snake's head out. As the farmer complied, the snake peeped his head out to see what was going on, and the heron snatched it out of the farmer. Overjoyed, the farmer told the heron, "thank you, how can I ever repay you?" The heron said, "Don't mention it." Fearing that the snake had bitten and poisoned him, he asked the heron if he knew a cure. The Heron replied, "To cure a snake bite, you must eat ten white fowls." The farmer said, "Well, you're a white fowl, why don't we start with you?" The farmer grabbed the heron and put him into a bag. When he got home he ordered his wife to cook the bird while he told her of his adventure. When he was done, the wife asked, "After all this bird has done for you, you want me to cook it. He saved your life, I will not cook it. I'm setting it free." Before the farmer could object she had cut the bird loose, but before he left, the bird scratched the woman's eyes out then flew away. Moral: When you see a river flowing uphill, you'll know a kind act has been repayed. Aesops fables.

Now what does that say about gratitude? Is it a myth or does it exist. For me, it does, because of my attitude. Why? Because gratitude is an attitude!

—Marcel Winston

### Clouds of Mischance

From the perspective of others, there is no reason for gratitude in my life. What others perceive as insurmountable catastrophe has become the catalyst for intellectual, spiritual, and emotional growth. My gratitude is for my hardships. Without them my ignorance would remain and my life would still be stagnant.

Having a ten count offense for attempted capital murder of police officers makes parole unlikely. This is my sixteenth year of a thirty five year sentence, and my history of staff assaults doesn't improve my chances for parole, neither does having detainers in two other states. That mean's I'll be sixty six when Texas has no choice but to let me go. And that's only if I don't get more time before then. That's always a possibility in Texas.

It's been years since I last heard from any member of my family. Not one friend remains from my life before prison, not even my common-law wife. She was also my fall partner and would still be in prison if not for me. That's life. 12

grateful smile. I have a story to show just that, and then...I will leave you to your thoughts.

### The Farmer, the Snake, and the Heron:

One day, a farmer was walking down the road. He bumped into a snake that was being chased by other farmers.

"Hide me please, I beg you," the snake said to the farmer. The farmer agreed and let the snake climb into his stomach. The other farmers passed by and kept searching elsewhere. When they were out of sight, the farmer said, "Oh snake, it's safe, you can

There are also health issues to consider. Many of you have learned of my plight through my writing. It's a fact, I have HIV. It's rampant in Texas prison and sex isn't the only way to catch it. How it's caught is the most irrelevant part of catching it. More people than you'd ever believe are currently infected and many don't want to be tested, or have been and are in denial of the results. Considering I've been on medication since January of 2001, over six years, it's doubtful I'll live to finish this sentence.

Some have more time than I do. Others have less. Any sentence can become a death sentence. None of us knows what tomorrow might hold. HIV made parole irrelevant and it no longer concerns me. Let others worry about what they cannot change. In accepting the inevitability of my situation I've found peace. Life is no longer so hard to accept on its own terms. Day by day I live it, each day a blessing if it allows me the opportunity to reach out and improve my fellow prisoners' lives. Not everyone can be helped. Many are not ready to progress beyond their negative emotions and hatred. Until then, my goal is to provide books to help them survive and move forward while filling the idle hours imposed by prison.

Loss of my family and friends made me reevaluate my life and realize that if they could be lost, they were not worth having anyway. Now, my friends are my family. I honor them because they fulfill my life and lift me up. Quite an improvement over what I had before.

HIV forced me to face my immorality. No one lives forever. Each person is born dying and most never realize it until it's too late. Due to HIV I stopped squandering my life one day at a time, and began to live it. Rather than wait for a future in freedom I searched out life in the here and now. My existence became worthwhile when my days became precious to me.

Admitting my HIV, and chancing the adversity that admission might bring, is part of the next step in my growth. Who is better capable of helping others understand this condition? Who else can so well warn prisoners of the possible consequences of sex and violence? I've placed an HIV survival guide for prisoners with Act up Austin to be distributed by Inside Books Project in Austin. I've moved on to new goals, using my life and troubles to help others, so that living has meaning.

These are the things I'm grateful for. It may be hard for some to understand how such disastrous events can squeeze gratitude from my heart. Few lives are without crises, even more so for prisoners. Yes, there are dark clouds, rumbling thunderheads full of lightning. In each cloud of mischance there is flashing silver to be grasped, but only if you have the courage to face the storm, and be grateful for the chance.

—Daniel Harris

Editor's Note: Here is an unsigned essay, and I





feel sorry that I cannot give the author due credit, by placing his name in the publication. Even more sad is without a name I could not send out the complete compilation package to him. Please take the time to put your name on your essays so we do not end up in the position of being able to acknowledge your good work. If the author reads this and would like the full compilation package please write and let me know.

Gary

*Gratitude, according to the editors of Webster's dictionary is, "the state of being grateful: thankfulness". To be totally honest, I have not possessed much gratitude in my life, in spite of the fact that my life has not been all that harsh or difficult. My parents stayed married despite many obstacles and dilemmas, and my sister, brothers and I were always provided for. We may not have always had designer clothes or shoes, but we were never ragged, and we never missed a meal...and there was always a roof over our head. There were times when my Dad worked two or three jobs as well as my Mom working the mornings and afternoons, so that she could be with us kids when we came home from school. The younger kids had to go to day care, and more than half the money she earned went to that expense, meaning that she essentially worked for less than 3.00 an hour.*

*I was not grateful for the hard work and sacrifice of my parents; in my self-absorbed state I only saw what I did not have, and what other kids did have. Considering that I took advanced classes that had a large percentage of students who came from wealthy families, the disparity between me and them, not to mention the cracks and jibes that I received from some dedicated souls. What I could not see through this ridicule and the resulting resentment that grew within me, was that their attitudes-as well as mine-were shallow, lacking real substance. Such enlightenment and transcendent thinking was not within the realm of my psyche. So instead of gratitude for what I did have, my heart was steeped in resentment for what I did not possess.*

*The examples of my ingratitude could go on and on, but it would only be more of the same. For most of my life, I have never been content with what I have possessed. Being stripped of all my possessions, as well as most of my pride and all my honor, I have come to understand what gratitude is, or at least should be.*

*While possessions should not be the basis of gratitude, one should be grateful for what he or she does have in life, even in prison. With all the conflict and abject poverty in the world, most of us should not sit around throwing pity parties amongst ourselves. Contentment must be found in what we do have, for if contentment is based upon the objects and possessions in life, a superficial nature can manifest around a hollow soul, or if not soul, whatever name you choose to*

*attribute to the essence that makes you who you are. If your self worth is based upon "things", you may one day find that you can quite easily be reduced to less than nothing.*

*I have heard many a selfish fool within these walls curse and disparage their mother, their girl, their family, and their friends when they do not receive a letter, or worse, if money isn't sent to their books. I just shake my head at all of it, because if I received half of what these cats have in the way of mail, funds, and visits, I would consider myself the most fortunate man behind bars. I feel fairly sure of myself when I say that most of us on this side of the fence did not do much to help those who were within our circles. An overwhelming majority of us were perfect shits, taking more than we gave. Gratitude for the love and concern of those closest to us should be first and foremost, especially for those of us in danger. Despite the lies that we have adopted as truths, most of us did not do much, if anything at all to earn the compassion of those in the free. From an extremely pragmatic point of view, what benefit are we to them?*

*As twisted and insane as it may seem, I have actually come to see my imprisonment with an odd sense of gratitude. Before my imprisonment, I was concerned with little else but what I could get out of life, the pleasures that I could experience. Hooking up with some chick, getting blasted on booze or weed, cruising on my bike, these were pretty much all I had for goals. Even then I could not be grateful for those things when I had them. While I'm no 10 to a girl(or even 9 or 8, maybe a 7 if she likes to laugh), I was never satisfied with any woman for long. Eventually her sweet voice became noise, and the charms I thought they possessed became tawdry and tarnished. Instead of straddling a Honda or Yamaha, I wanted a Harley. Rather than Soco or Skunk, I wanted Johnny Red.*

*Although I still look back with fondness on most of these things(women, weed, and wheels, though I'll pass on the stupor and loss of control the booze brought on) I realize that my character and nature, who I truly was, was as undeveloped as an aborted fetus. With this incarceration I have spent much time in introspection, identifying all my faults and inadequacies, even the ones I'd rather not recognize. They are quite a motley collection. I feel that I must use this time to rid myself of these aberrations, much as a dog roots out the fleas from his body, incessantly, without end, because much like those fleas, bad habits and twisted thoughts often find their way back to us, oftentimes without resistance.*

*So I am grateful for what I should rationally despise. By establishing an ethos with myself based upon honor and integrity, any depravity or degradation that can be visited upon me can be overcome. Pride and honor cannot be taken away from you if they are true, not merely facades or loosely held ideals lacking in construction. Through discipline and perseverance, much of what we decry as unjust or unbearable can be trivialized and made inconsequential. By viewing your imprisonment in such a manner, the seeming control of those who would oppress you can be wrested away, making their power less potent and in some cases, impotent. Attainment of this control comes through a true understanding of self, and is based on the proper foundation. Contentment without stipulations can be yours. With this, gratitude can be felt for every aspect of your life, regardless of where you may reside or who others deem you to be. Gratitude, in its purest sense, cannot be affected by*

*anything, as it is a state of mind, and while many cannot be truly grateful for who they are, one can always be grateful for the opportunity to improve and purify oneself.*

—Unknown

#### Upcoming Theme topics

*Lost and Found* - due April 1  
*Dinnertime* - due May 1  
*Loyalty* - due June 1  
*Digging Deeper* - due July 1  
*The Night Sky* - due August 1  
*Rivals* - due September 1  
*Telling the Truth* - due October 1  
*Change of Heart* - due November 1

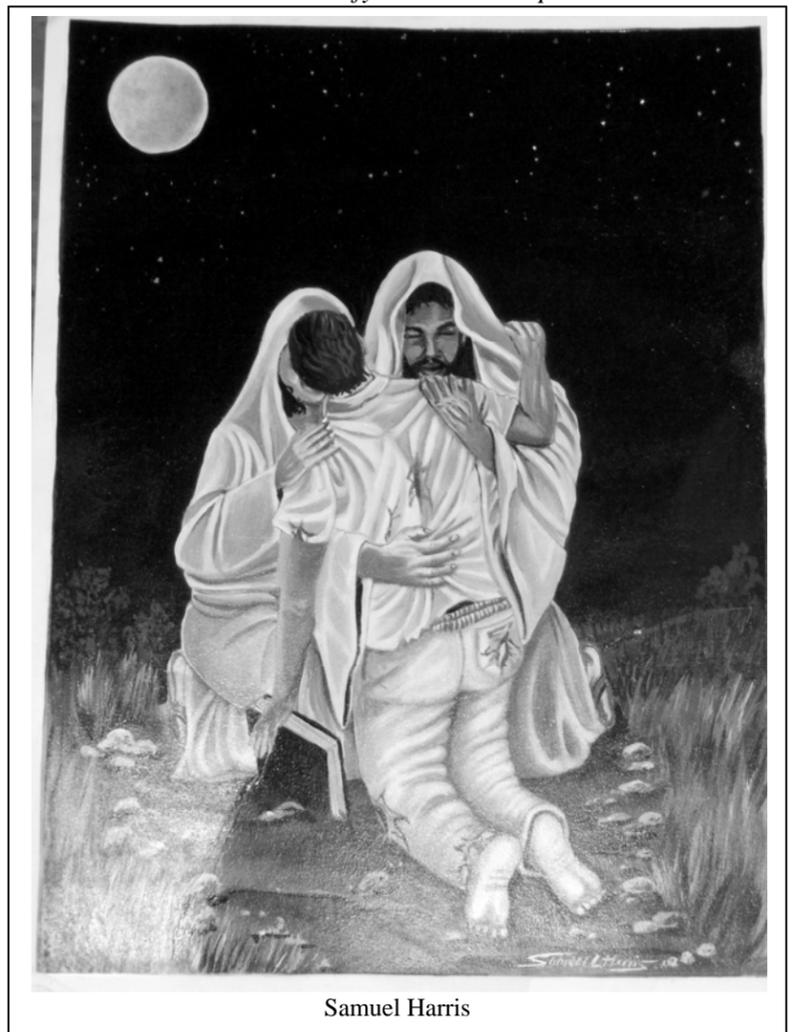
**F**inal Thoughts - Those of you who received our Dec 07 holiday mailing read about a Smiling Program proposed by Ankush, a new Prisoner Express volunteer. Ankush as well as many of us at PE who read your letters have struggled sometimes to read certain writers' handwriting. Ankush has a solution, and below is his idea.

Dear Friends,

*Greetings! I hope you are all in good health and high spirits today. Also I hope that you are smiling 5 times a day. At this point I must thank and acknowledge Hayden L. Hughes for his honest smiling sheet and a very inspiring participation in this program. It is easy to smile and laugh when things are going well for us, but much more challenging when our situations are trying. It is very heartwarming to know and hear from such people who possess the inner strength to take this challenge. If you haven't started your smiling charts, now is always a good time to start.*

*Today, let us look at yet another aspect of what I call the art of communication which is taught to us at a very early age - handwriting. Even though learning to write legibly and beautifully is a part of kindergarten instruction, we all know that its importance is even more among we "grown ups". Although typewriters, computers and printers have taken over a lot of handwriting work, all of us do not have access to these facilities. Moreover, handwriting is much more than words we write. It is a direct expression of our inner self, something which printers and typewriters cannot do.*

*In this art of communication, first and foremost is clarity or what we call legibility. A more elaborate definition of this would be to be able to identify characters/alphabets which make*



Samuel Harris

up words. Hence, the very first step we all take in learning to write is to practice writing alphabets. If we feel that we want to refine our handwriting we need to go back to this first step and practice each alphabet slowly. In fact, writing each character is like making an artwork. When I was in 9th grade (High School), I realized that I could not carry on with the handwriting I had. I restarted this process of practicing each alphabet and hence writing more clearly. I practiced it for about 1-2 months during summer vacations. It helped me immensely and I then moved on to writing words.

As we start writing words, the next step is to write words in a sequence (a sentence) and checking if we can maintain same level of clarity along that sequence. Often we start writing a sentence/paragraph with great attention, but then the flow of idea steals away that awareness. Therefore, the second practice is to write words clearly in an extended paragraph. I must admit that I am still practicing it. It is often hard to keep track of your writing while we get carried by the immense stream of thoughts hurrying to get a spot on the sheet of paper in front of you. Yet, whenever I am successful in maintaining a good flow of handwriting and arranging my ideas well on the sheet of paper, this process of writing in itself becomes a great joy. Apart from writing, reading a letter written in a beautiful handwriting is also a great joy.

If any of you worry about your handwriting or are just looking for a new productive practice, consider working on your handwriting. I was considering including handwriting worksheet here for alphabets, but I feel it is not really necessary. As one of my friend describes, one should make one's own ritual for each character. Just like you could make character "b" by drawing a vertical line from top to bottom and then make a curve clockwise, or by continuing with the vertical line into a curve anti-clockwise. Primarily what it needs is your awareness and a little bit of practice. You will be amazed by the wonders. However, if any of you still find it hard and would like to have an alphabet worksheet, we could try to arrange and send some to you. I wish you well and a joyful writing.

Regards,  
Ankush

While we often set deadlines for receiving your assignments for projects like the theme writing, history and book club assignments, please do not hesitate to send in your writing even if it is later than our deadline. We can often be behind in our work and can incorporate many of the late submissions into our schedule. I know that many times your mail can be held up, making it difficult for you to meet the deadline we set. It is easy to get busy on another project or have personal issues that take you away from your PE assignment. Come back to it when you can and don't let the due date cause you to stop.

Taking on this role creating and coordinating Prisoner Express was nothing that I was looking



Kerry Rolland

for in my life. It all began by answering one letter one of you wrote years ago asking for books. That letter and the letters that followed led to me making the Prisoner Express Project a big part of my daily life. I write this to let you know that your words do matter. The letter, essay or poem you write today can influence the thoughts and actions of others. Though you are locked up, through your writing and art you do not have to be completely out of the game of envisioning and creating society and culture. If one letter can get me started on this project, imagine the possibilities of what your individual and collective writing can create.

I certainly see how over the years those of you who regularly write get so much better at it. As with most tasks the more you practice the more you improve. I guess creative writing is like any other muscle: use it if you want to develop it. I hope more of you find a way to begin sharing your thoughts. I really do enjoy reading your letters, both the ones praising us for the good work we are doing, as well as the one's that supply feedback that can help us improve. Thank you to the many of you who care enough to point out our shortcomings and suggest ways to improve. It helps me to understand you all when I get good creative feedback that let's me know which projects are helpful, and which you could care less about. We try to have a variety of offerings so there is something for everyone. Please let us know what you would like to see in the pages of our newsletter. I am organizationally challenged at times and sometimes the volume of mail we receive and keeping track of all the projects is huge. The program is blessed with some great volunteers, but most of them come and go as time goes by. Many are students who have finished their studies, or community members who move on or find a job that takes up what free time they used to have. We are a small organization that has to raise all the money we spend on the PE projects. Any of you who are in a position to help us please do. You can send stamps or checks to us to help offset the costs of postage and printing. No one draws a salary from the money we raise and all of the funding we receive goes back into providing programs to you.

I keep so busy with all the projects Prisoner Express continues to spin out, that I want to be sure I don't miss the forest by seeing all the trees. My aim is to create a variety of programs that creatively engage you, while also offering you a sense of belonging to an organization that cares

about your well being, and wants to hear what you have to say. I think of you all, the members of Prisoner Express, as the owners of this organization and I am your employee. Your job is to let me know what you want, within the confines of the PE mission which is, "to promote rehabilitation by providing information, education, and opportunities for creative self expression to incarcerated individuals throughout the United States.

We hope to enclose the latest issue of Positive News in this mailing. Since we began

sending it to you all, the folks at Positive News have heard from many of you, and it is my understanding that this issue of their newsletter has a story regarding some of your responses to them. I have not seen the paper yet, but am excited to be including it with this edition of PE News.

We update our registration process for receiving the newsletter every 18 months or so. People move around in the prison system, and we want to be sure that we are mailing the newsletter to folks who are able to receive them. **If you have a red dot on your signup sheet it means you must reregister with the program to stay on the newsletter mailing list. You just have to either send in the registration form or send us a note to keep you on the mailing list when you next ask for books.** We will put out a newsletter in the summer of '08 and you must have your registration updated to receive it. Currently there are about 2500 active members and we all appreciate the opportunity to be involved in your life.

Be Well,  
Gary

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14



Rickey Moulder

## REGISTRATION FORM

Please note: If you have received this newsletter you are on our mailing list for 2008, and if you do not wish to participate in any of our specific programs or update your program registration you do not need to return the registration form. This form should be returned in a timely manner to make sure we receive it before the packets are sent—I hope to begin mailings by the end of April. Note on the form when there are deadlines for registration. You are always free to request books and they are sent on a first come first serve basis. Currently there are about 500 names on the list and we send out about 150 a month. **If you don't want to cut up your newsletter, you may copy the registration form on a separate piece of paper, but make sure you include all information required for the programs.**

**Personal Profile** - Please check one choice and then print your name and sign in the spaces provided. 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.

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 artwork, and my other writings
- B.  Use my name on my artwork, but not on my other writings
- C.  Do not use my name on my writings or artwork, but you may use any of my work and post it as anonymous
- D.  Do not use my name or any of my writings in your program.
- E.  Post my address with my writings/art on [prisonerexpress.deviantart.com](http://prisonerexpress.deviantart.com).

**Programs** – Please check the box of each program you wish to participate in. Carefully read the requirements of each program before signing up.

**Book Mailings** – I wish to receive books. Enclose a separate sheet detailing the types of books wanted.

How many books can you receive in a mailing? \_\_\_\_\_

What type of book can you receive? Check one:  
 soft cover  hardcover  both are accepted  
 **Poetry Project** – Please send me the 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition *Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology*. **I understand that to receive the anthology I have to submit a poem to be considered for the anthology.** We hope to mail this out in a more timely fashion than the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, so please send your poetry for consideration in quickly.

**Art Contest/Exhibit** – Please send me additional information about the fall 08 art show as it becomes available and/or please consider my art for entry into the fall 2008. **Prisoner Express Art Show/Contest.** I understand the artwork will be used for a fundraiser to generate income for the Prisoner Express Distance Education Program. Everyone sending in artwork will be enrolled in the scholarship contest and receive updates on the art show.

**History Project** – I'm interested in studying world history, please send me the next unit featuring **Barbarian Invasions following the Roman Empire.**

**Math Project** – Please enroll me and send the pre algebra course placement exam. If you have already received the placement exam please do not sign up again.

**Journal Project** – Please send me more information. 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. Next bulk mailing for interested participants will be in the late spring.

**Book Club** – New book discussion group. Please send me a copy of *The Pick Up* and the discussion questions. Limited to first 700 responses.

**2008/9 Prisoner Express Newsletter** I wish to enroll for another year as a member of the Prisoner Express Program.

**Yoga Instruction Packet** Please send me this valuable life skills packet so that I may increase both my awareness and flexibility.

**Drawing Instruction** - Please send me a pamphlet that will demonstrate a variety of drawing techniques and motivate the artist within us all.

NAME: (PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS:

This is a new address.

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

Donations are needed and welcomed. Any help you or your family can give, even something as small as a stamp, is greatly appreciated. Your donations help keep Prisoner Express running,

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Ithaca, NY 14853-1001

**Drawing Tips** – *This section is only a taste of what you might find in the "Drawing Instruction Packet." Enjoy!*

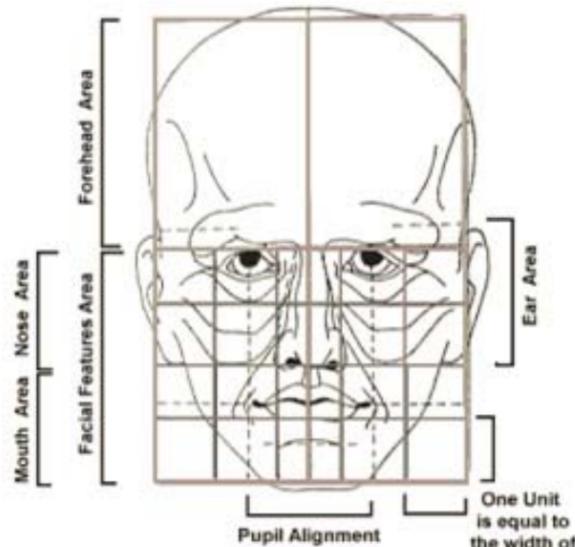
**Facial Proportions** - Art becomes much easier when you have a framework to work from. Often, when people become frustrated with their drawings (especially drawings of the human face), it's because they don't have a place to start tackling a very difficult project. Knowing how the "average" face is laid out can help with this a lot.

The eyes are halfway between the top of the head and the chin.

The bottom of the nose is halfway between the eyes and the chin.

The mouth is halfway between the nose and the chin.

The corners of the mouth line up with the centers of the eyes.



The top of the ears line up above the eyes, on the eyebrows.

The bottom of the ears line up with the bottom of the nose.

Of course, these proportions are not a hard-and-fast rule, and some people's faces don't fit them exactly. Also keep in mind that depending on the perspective (the angle you're seeing the face from), you may need to adjust where you place the lines.

**Common Mistakes** - While self-teaching is a great way to learn ANY art form (and has always been my favorite way to learn), and can lead to amazing new techniques, sometimes we don't realize simple ways to improve our drawings. Here are a few common drawing mistakes, and ways to correct them.

**Twisted Features** - Because we are used to looking at a person straight-on, we naturally try to make their features look level when we draw them. If their head is on an angle, this results in strange distortions in the picture. Sketch guidelines first to ensure that the features are on the same angle as the rest of the face.

**Pet Drawings from Human Eye Level** - When you take a photograph standing up, you are

looking down at your pet. They have to look up, and you end up with their head seeming much bigger than their body, and a rather odd expression on their face. Have someone distract them so they aren't staring down the lens, and squat down so the camera is at their head level, and you'll get a much better reference photo.

**Being Afraid of Black** - Often when shading, the shadows don't go past dark gray. If your value range is restricted to in some cases half what it ought to be, you are limiting the modelling and depth in your drawing. Put a piece of black paper at the corner of your drawing, and don't be afraid to go dark. Really dark.

**Outlining in Value Drawings** - When value drawing, you are creating an illusion with areas of tonal value. When you use a hard drawn line to define an edge, you disrupt this illusion. Let edges be defined by two different areas of tonal value meeting.

**Drawing on the Wrong Paper** - If your drawing is pale, it might be the paper. Some cheap papers have sheen on the surface that is too smooth to grab the particles off the pencil. A thick notepad has too much 'give' under the pencil to allow you to apply enough pressure. Try a basic photocopy/office paper, or place a piece of card under a couple of sheets to give a firmer surface. If you are trying to do even shading, some sketch papers can be too coarse, giving an uneven texture.

**Scribbled Foliage** - Don't use circular scribbles to draw foliage. Use more convex shaped scumbling - like crescent shapes and scribbly calligraphic marks - to draw the shadows in and around clusters of foliage, and your trees will look much more realistic.

**Wiry, Pencil-Line Hair and Grass** - If you draw every hair or blade of grass as a pencil line, you'll end up with a horrible, wiry, unnatural mess. Use feathery pencil-strokes to draw the shadows or dark foliage behind areas of grass and hair.



**NEWSLETTER**  
**Prisoner Express**  
**Winter 2008**

Prisoner Express promotes rehabilitation by providing information, education and opportunities for creative self expression to incarcerated individuals throughout the United States. Subscriptions are free to prisoners. All others please contact Prisoner Express for rates. All proceeds are used to fund programming.

The Durland Alternatives Library, which finds Prisoner Express, is a project partner of the CRESP Center for Transformative Action. Additional Support comes from the Cornell Public Service Center.

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