

# PRISONER EXPRESS NEWSLETTER

## SPRING 2009

**W**elcome to the Spring 09 edition of the **Prisoner Express News**. Prisoner Express seeks to provide prisoners with information, education and the opportunity for creative self-expression in a public forum. We achieve this goal by offering a variety of programs to incarcerated individuals across the United States.

Many of you have been apart of this program for quite awhile, while others of you are receiving this for the first time. I would like to introduce myself and share a little background information about this project and myself.

First my name is Gary and I am the Assistant Director of the Alternatives Library. I coordinate the Prisoner Express project and along with student and community volunteers help create the programming we offer. As many of you know our biggest constraint on our programs is the money to pay for the postage and photocopying. I am constantly juggling ideas and projects looking for funds to keep us going. If any of you have extra funds and feel this program is worth supporting please feel free to send in your money and stamps. I know most of you can't help out financially and that is fine too. I just figure I might as well ask you, as I ask the many of the folks I meet when I tell them about this project. What ever the financial situation I am committed to keeping this project going for as long as I can manage it. I just have to adjust what we offer based on what funds I have at any given time. Right now I am concerned about keeping enough funds available to be able to mail the programs offered in this newsletter to you. One way I will save a bit is to keep this newsletter shorter than it have been in the recent past.

As you know the country is in an economic crisis, and many sources of funding may be in jeopardy. I always keep enough funds set aside so I can send you all a letter letting you know if something catastrophic happens to this program. As long as you don't get a letter like that than you can take heart that we are still operating, though a bit slower than optimal, and that eventually you will hear from us.

As I continue to face the reality of the need for more funds to keep up with the growing demand for

our services I have to find new and creative ways to offer programs that are low cost yet provide you with meaningful opportunities. For many of you reading this newsletter for the first time, the historical perspective might not be necessary as probably most anything we can provide will be welcome. For those of you who have been regular members of PE and participating in our programs please read the newsletter carefully so if anything has changed you can understand what those changes are, and you then won't be disappointed when something that you are expecting does not come.

Prisoner Express started 8 years ago when I responded to Danny Harris's request for a package of books. His written appreciation for a package of books

I sent him, so touched me that it inspired me to

create this program, and I started to regularly send books to prisoners. At first that is all we did, but as the numbers of prisoners requesting books grew, and individuals had to wait longer and longer for their packages of books, we wanted to create other opportunities for providing services and maintaining the personal component of this program. Currently there are over 1000+ of you waiting on receiving your package of books. I have been reassessing how often I can send a package of books to individuals. For quite a while we set a limit of 6 months between packages for individuals. We keep track of when we send your last package and then when you request books we added 6 months to when you last got books.

That has recently been bumped up to 7 and now 8 months between shipments. Of course we'd like to send books more often, but it is a change we must make due to the cost of postage and increased demand. Throughout the newsletter I will be describing ways we are changing certain programs, so you can have reasonable expectations of what is going on. Please give me feedback on how to creatively improve what we are doing, and perhaps feedback on which programs in your opinion are not worth the expense.

One more thing to understand is that some programs cost us very little of our funds, while others drain us quickly. Our most expensive program is probably our math class, and our most cost effective is



**Kenneth Warwick**

the Journal program we coordinate. In the following pages I will review all of the ongoing and new programs we have to offer in this next 6-month cycle. At the end of the newsletter is a signup sheet that you can return so we can enroll you in the projects you are most interested in. If you don't want to rip up your newsletter you can just copy the registration sheet and send it in to us. **Whether you want to enroll in any program or not we need to hear from you in the next 6 months if you wish to continue to receive the Prisoner Express News.**

We now limit our program mailings to bulk mail service. This means we have to send each program in batches of 200. If in a few months from now you send in your registration form we will only be able to send out the programs that have not yet been mailed. What that means is that if the history mailing or book club mailing have already been sent, than most likely you will have to wait till the next program offerings to get involved. Some programs will only have 1 mailing and if you miss it, you will have to wait for the next newsletter cycle to join. Other programs have such high demand that after I mail the first 200 there may be a second mailing of 200 if the demand warrants another mailing. I tell you this so those of you who really do not want to miss out register on the early side. I plan on sending new programs listed in this newsletter starting in the middle of May, and to continue sending out programs thru the summer. It is too expensive to mail programs on an individual basis. I wish we could, but we run out of funds if we do.

I get so many letters from you, and many of you ask for a personal reply. I just cannot manage that, as the postage costs alone would bankrupt the program. Also the time involved in personal responses is more than I have to give. Mostly the best way I can communicate with you is thru our various programs, and the letters that I include with various mailings. I do read most all of your letters, and I do try to answer questions you pose in the newsletter thru the newsletter and other mailings. I do so appreciate all that you share with me in your letters, and I am sorry that I cannot reply individually.

A number of you have asked me to tell you more about my life. As of you now know I am the Assistant Director of the Durland Alternatives Library, a small library on the Cornell University Campus. Our library specializes in collecting alternative perspectives on current social issues, and we often collect books, DVDs and periodicals that are not part of the mainstream media. I am able to create the Prisoner Express program as part of my library responsibilities. I use many of the student workers at the library for help in much of the Prisoner Express work that is done.

We also rely on volunteers to do much of the work of this program. The library itself is short of funds and cannot give any money to support the PE programs, and I have to raise money through special events and donations.

While I grew up in and around NYC I have been living a rural life for the past 25 years. I cannot imagine going back to living in a city. As I get older I seem to be quite content to be at home, and can spend days without going anywhere without thinking I am missing anything. I am married and have 3 children. My eldest daughter is in college. She has gone to 2 colleges already and is planning on transferring again to finish 2 more years somewhere else. She lives on her own in an apartment in town. College is really expensive, and I am glad she is taking her studies seriously. I also have 2 children in elementary school. They are a handful, and parenting responsibility controls much of what I do in my life.

For fun I like to garden, hike in the woods, and hang with friends. I have fairly simple tastes, and there are not many things I wish to buy. Last week we had the first party at my house in a couple of years. We had it on the first day of spring. Mostly we played music, [lots of drums and other percussive instruments] danced and ate good food.

This year I hope to plant at least 6 fruit trees. I will begin starting garden seedlings this week and will be starting them all thru April. It is too cold here to put anything outside except for spinach seeds right now, but all that will change in a few weeks. I grow much of the vegetables we eat, and save them thru the year through freezing, drying and root cellaring. I hope to can as well this year. I wish I could share gardening with you all, as it is one of my favorite things to do. I mostly create many raised beds that are 3 to 4 feet wide and can stretch 50 feet long. I densely plant the beds with seeds or seedlings started in a greenhouse. I will let you know how my garden goes in the fall newsletter. Beginning in early June I will be eating out of my garden steadily thru next December. I don't understand why everyone does not have a garden. I see that Michele Obama is putting a garden in at the White House. Way to go!

I believe one of the reasons I am compelled to help you all is my own experience as an unwanted and deprived child. For much of my childhood I was locked in my room by an angry stepmother and an uncaring father. When I could smuggle a book into my room, the company it provided me was comforting as well as engaging. I read the same books over and over again as I had very little opportunity to receive books. They let me out of the room to go to school and I

managed to get books during the school year, but summer was long and difficult to endure.

I have found that much of my life has been about changing the energy they directed at me when I was so young. My mom died when I was 3 and by the time I was 5 or 6 everything had gone bad for me in my family. Believe it or not there was a rule that no one in my family was allowed to speak to me. Bizarre to think they would do that to a 6 year old, but that is how it was. I got out of the house when I was 14. Needless to say I was socially inept.

Here is how I have been channeling the horrific parenting I experienced these past 40 years. First no one ever touched or hugged me as a child. When I was in my early 30's I went to massage school in Florida and for the past 25 years I have supplemented my income giving massages to people who are stressed or in pain. I have very strong hands. The experience of massage school helped me overcome many issues I had regarding touch and intimacy. Until then the only time I was touched would be in relationship with a girlfriend, but massage school open up the whole world of intimacy for me, as well as providing me with a wide and rich variety of experiences. Touch is a powerful healing tool, and it is not used very much among people in modern America. We are too uptight about sexuality to realize that intimate touch does not mean sex.

Later I began working at the local food coop. I know I always had some food issues. My stepmother did not feed me often, and when she did she often deliberately gave me food I did not like, and forced me to eat it. When I worked at the coop my main job was ordering all the food items we sold. In early 1990's the building the coop was in burned completely to the ground. We opened in another storefront and I was in charge of buying the food. As many of our suppliers sympathized with our plight they were willing to give us special discounts to restock the new store. I went wild getting every possible discount and bought much product as I could fit in the store. Days before we opened I had all the shelves totally full and all the storage areas packed tight with food. As I walked through the store I had the realization that I never had to worry about being hungry again. I was overwhelmed by the amount of food I had surrounded myself with. In that moment I knew my real work at the coop was done and I resigned my position within 4 months of that realization.

The latest bit of reconciliation with my past has come with this PE program. As I said I know what it is like to be locked up and forgotten. For me it was between the ages of 5 and 14 and it made an indelible impression on me. I wish I could change the whole

prison system to make it more rehabilitation friendly, and less focused on punishment. I do not know how to do that, but I can at least help you with the books that so helped me when I was all alone. Since that experience of being so outside of family and society, I have been focused on the importance of a sense of belonging. It seems like alienation is a chronic problem for citizens of the United States. For all of our material possessions we seem to lack a sense of connection with our communities and for many of us even with our family. I believe not having a sense of connection leaves people feeling lost, and that feeling of being alone encourages people to focus on the accumulation of material goods and wealth as way of protecting themselves from life and loneliness. We would do so much better as a society if we focused on caring for each other rather than the accumulation of wealth. I do understand the fear most people have of not having enough and no one to help them.

Those of you who have asked me to tell you more about myself are probably thinking enough already, so I'll let my bio section end there. Many of you have written that you were abused as children, and often you blame that experience for your own acting out. I can certainly understand how this can happen, but I would like to ask you to consider ways to transform the ugliness you may have experienced in the past into something positive as you step into the future. We know how others have hurt us, and it is our task to stop it with us, and to see that those that we come upon in the future will be nurtured rather than abused. No one gains when we do not deal with the pain inside ourselves. Pushing it off onto others does not really help us with our own issues, but does cause pain and suffering to grow on this planet. I am not sure why we are all here, but it certainly doesn't seem like the purpose is to increase the suffering of others. Let us as members of Prisoner Express consider being beacons of hope, and transcending our own troubled pasts by offering support to those we meet. As prisoners you have an opportunity to transform yourself and if enough of you can do that it will have to have an effect on those around you. I live in the free world and have a life of relative ease, and I know it is



**Ron Stewart**

easy for me in the comfort of my home to write these words, but I do know that suffering isn't limited to within the prison walls. We are given this gift of life, and while it involves suffering for all of us, this is a temporary condition until we move on to whatever is next. Whatever happens we are all in this together and PE members can take some comfort in that we are sharing the experience with one another.

I do receive many letters from you, and while I always like to hear how you appreciate what the PE program does or the energy volunteers contribute, I especially enjoy when you write to let me know how another PE member's essay or poem touched you. Through your written words PE offers you the opportunity to share with your fellow prisoners as well as interested folks in the free world. Your words and thoughts do matter, and even if we have to operate on very little funding I am confident we can continue to help you spread your words and thoughts into the world.

One comment I often get is to tone down on my political rants. I have been asked to be more conservative. Also I have been advised that my blasting of Republicans might hurt my efforts at fundraising. I see the validity of those opinions, but do not want to hold my opinion. I care about this country and the people in it and do not appreciate how the policies of this country seem biased toward the rich and influential. President Obama has inherited a big mess. While I know it was not completely started by the Bush administration their sloppiness and ignoring of corporate malfeasance has caused catastrophic economic conditions for our nation and its' people. I can only pray the new administration has the interests of the people at heart, and the effectiveness to carry out reform. I do know all of this Wall Street reregulation was supported by both Democrats and Republicans over the years, and it is time for some type of election reform so all the candidates are not owned by the moneyed interests [banking, energy, insurance, and pharmaceutical corporations]. These corporations do their job when they make money, and seem to care little how their actions effect the health of the economy and the country.

Finally winter seems to have passed on and we are now in that short interval between winter and summer that in upstate NY is known as Mud Season. I guess better to have sufficient water than not have enough. After all the snow and ice has melted and before the brambles begin to grow is an excellent time to go hiking in the woods. I have been exploring the woods these past few weeks. I often go hiking with the dog exploring all the new logging trails that surround my land. My neighbor has just had a major section of

his property logged and I am trying to figure how I might move some of the immense tops that were left in the woods. There is enough wood to keep my house heated for years, but moving, cutting and splitting it seems like a huge challenge.

The Prisoner Express program has been fortunate to have some superior folks come thru our doors during the past years. Two of the best volunteers are leaving the program, and because they have accomplished so much in their time here, they leave large openings. I am a hopeful new volunteer and student workers can pick up some of the slack. Some folks have such big hearts and work carefully to provide the best of services to you all, and they will certainly be missed. First we say goodbye to Toby who is off across America looking for adventure. I believe his destination was Arizona, but I wouldn't be surprised if it was a circuitous route. Toby created the Poetry volumes we have distributed these past 2 years. Volume 4 is almost ready to put together and I await the appearance of new poetry coordinator. Toby also created the drawing packets that many hundreds of you received in the last year. Toby was good on the computer. He laid out the newsletter after I had finished assembling the text. As I write this next newsletter I am wondering who will format it for me. I will miss Toby and all the support he provided.

For anyone who has received a book package in the past few years, I also have to pass on the news that Steve has retired from our bookroom. He singlehandedly sent out 200 packages of books a month, and included a personal letter in each one. Talk about heart, Steve lived on very little money, and even though he didn't have enough for himself, when he had a little extra money he'd go to the used book store so he could make a great match for one of you. He took it as a great responsibility to meet your needs. He will be sorely missed, but I understand how hard he worked, and why he needs to take a break. He has been considering a move to California. Wherever he goes he will continue to be a force for justice and compassion. It was a great pleasure to work with both Steve and Toby and see how much people are willing to give of themselves in service to those who need some help.

Even as people leave, new folks also come. This semester I have 2 wonderful student interns volunteering at PE. Both students are at the forefront of our mission to get your words and thoughts out to the free world. Beth is coordinating the journal program, and Ashley is creating a performance piece that Ithaca College students will perform. The performance will raise money and awareness about Prisoner Express in this community, and also to help gather donated books. The performance will be using the poetry and journal

entries you have submitted. Each of the authors she has chosen will have an actor represent them and speak their words on stage. I will send anyone whose work is used a copy of the program created for the event as well as a report of what transpired. If all goes well we will post a video of the event on the PE website.

I will discuss more about all the projects further in the issue, and was more interested in telling you about a few of the people who help out and make PE happen. What I really need now is a committed volunteer who can help me with our web site. Through the web site I can post much of your poetry, art, and prose for anyone to see. Stephanie who for years has helped with the website just had a baby, and is not as available to help. As you can see people just keep coming and going and then often reappearing in the PE program. I am trying to be satisfied with life as it is and make the best of the transient situation. One drawback though is when I think I have sufficient help for a project PE offers, and then find I do not. This has happened a number of times this past year, and I realize that it effects the quality of the services we offer. I can imagine your frustration at the long delays in getting a response when you write regarding certain programs. I realize that I have to build a better foundation for this program to be effective. I am not sure how to do that, but I do know what I must not do which is offer programs I cannot support effectively. Recently a bunch of essays I sent out to be typed by a student volunteer disappeared and I do not know whose essays were lost. The key for me is in improving quality control. I apologize to those of you whose work has been lost by sloppiness. In my defense I rely on so many volunteers who pop in for a few hours of community service and then disappear. I cannot closely monitor what each person does. Most volunteers do exemplary work, but one person can lose documents or make incorrect computer entries that cause mail to be returned. This is an ongoing problem, and I share it with you so you don't think we are deliberately not publishing your work or dropping you from our programs. We are making this up as we go along, and are suffering from growing pains. Hopefully I will learn from and correct problems as they occur.

I hope we have some programs that generate sparks of interest in your minds and hearts. Please only sign up for that which you will do as it all costs money we don't yet have.

In solidarity,  
Gary

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## PE programs for Spring summer 2009

**B**OOK MAILING- this is the origin of our program. We collect donated books, take your requests and mail packages custom made to your requests. As you can imagine we have to substitute often, and it can be difficult to fill exacting requests. Give us a broad view of what you like to read. You can always ask for specific books, but please understand, how unusual it is for us to have an exact book in our donated collection. I can say that we do send superior quality books and even when we substitute we try to turn you on to something interesting. Currently you can get books every 8 months. I wish it could be more often. I know you all share your books as much as possible and donate extras to the library. Currently there is about a 6-month wait for books on letters we have received this past month. I know it's huge to wait that long, and if any of you have access to funds to help us with postage costs, it would be a great assistance to us all. Enjoy the books, keep sending in your requests and know that when we can we will send books to you.

**H**ISTORY PROJECT- We has gone thru a series of packets these past few years, and I believe we are making the packets more interesting. A student had a passion for creating a packet on World War 2, and I said sure. We will be offering it this next cycle. In the most recent past we looked at the Ancient Greeks, then the Rise of Rome, followed by another packet on the Barbarians who invaded Rome. Our last packet was on the rise of Islam. It was meant as a historical document and not a religious treatise. If we followed in the process we might jump into the Medieval Europe section of our series, but that will be down the line.

We also will be offering a lesson on West Africa. Sean a student who works at the library has indicated he will generate a lesson on the area. He just spent a number of months in Ghana, and will share his insights with you. His packet will cover history, culture, and what he thinks are the misperceptions folks here have about life in Africa.

In both of these lessons there will be a series of questions for you to answer. Send your answers back to us and we will choose the most interesting responses and compile a document to send all of you who respond. With all our projects only sign up for that which you really want. The packets cost to copy and send and when we waste funds, some other part of the program is delayed.

**P**OETRY PROJECT- Students are reading thru the poetry we continue to receive. They select the poetry that touches them and we are typing them up. Hopefully the ones that are not selected for publication in the Poetry Volume 4 can still be placed on the website down the line. The cost of the poetry volume to you is the submission of a poem. As many of you who received Vol 3 know I am automatically sending you Vol 4 if you have received Vol 3. We will be sending Vol 4 out this spring. Don't worry if your poems come in too late for Vol 4, as we will immediately begin collecting the next set of poems for Vol 5 which will come out in Fall 09. This is an ongoing project, and your poetry is always welcome.

**J**OURNAL PROJECT- Hi everyone! My name is Beth and I am the coordinator of the Journal Program here at Prisoner Express. The program currently has 50 participants who have agreed to keep journals for a year. Not only do the writers benefit through their self-reflection, but they're also performing community outreach: some of the journals are being put onto our website for the public to view. I think it is a really effective way of telling your side of the story in a more personal way than other types of media can, and it is clear that a multi-faceted difference is being made. I have really enjoyed keeping up with the participants' stories myself and watching their development and process of thought.

To those already enrolled in the program, please let me thank you from the bottom of my heart for the efforts you are making and challenge you have taken on. A year commitment such as the JP is not an easy one, and I admire your dedication very much and want to thank you for making each week, day and letter a unique experience.

If the program sounds interesting to you but you missed or passed on the opportunity earlier, I want to let you know you're still more than welcome to join mid-season. If you send the beginning of a journal or even just express interest in the project, I would be happy to send you information on getting started...joining the Journal Project can only help you! I would really recommend jumping on board and joining the ranks of some really interesting, intelligent and reflective people. If you want to join, please send letters addressed to Prisoner Express under the care of myself, Beth. Hope to hear from you!

**Note from Gary-** We have not yet got many of your entries posted on line, but we are getting many typed and organized. Once we have some help we will get them posted so your friends and family can read them. If friends or family can't find them on our website have them email me at [alt-lib@cornell.edu](mailto:alt-lib@cornell.edu) and

I can email the portion of your journal that is typed. The same is true for your monthly theme essays.

**A**RT PROJECT- As some of you know we have an art show each year. We had some great entries last year and awarded 1st, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3rd prizes of \$100, 75, and 50 respectively. We also give out 10 \$20 scholarships for promising work. We know it is just a little, but it's a gesture of respect for you and your work. A graduate student group at Cornell finances the show and we hang your pictures in a student area where 1000's of people move thru each month. Please consider sending in a piece of artwork for our next show. Last years winner was a paper-mache sculpture by Mike Ford, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize went to Jeff Harnden and 3<sup>rd</sup> prize was awarded to Juan Gabriel. To be included in the next art show the work must be mailed to us by mid Sept for it to be included in the judging. The judges will be graduate Art students at Cornell University. I hope will be able to supply at least the same prize money as last year. We will use any sales money gained to help fund the program.

Some of you are tremendous artists. If you are considering sending an entry of your art or craft, please know paper folding, leatherwork, and fabric art as well as drawing and painting are all appreciated and eligible for the show. I love seeing your artwork, and seeing how your creativity can transcend the environment you are currently experiencing. When folks view your art it breaks down their preconceptions of who or what a prisoner is, and it reveals the common humanity we all share. Please consider sending in some of your artwork.

**D**ICTIONARY SPECIAL- I ordered 300 dictionaries from a discount house on line. I got what I paid for, and have learned not to order a book like that unseen. Still I am in possession of 300 very basic paperback dictionaries. **If what you want is something college level and higher this dictionary is not for you.** If you want simple words and spelling help, then this dictionary might be of use to you. I will continue to search for a low cost, superior dictionary, but this is not that. So if you want this very basic book I will send it to the first 300 of you who return your registration form and check the box asking for it. This is a one-time offer so if it doesn't come to you then you'll have to figure you mailed your form in too late.

**B**OOK CLUB- This may be the prize of offerings this cycle. Cornell University has donated many copies of the book "**Lincoln at Gettysburg**". I have not read the book yet and will

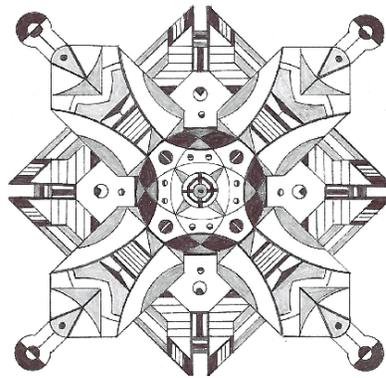
probably read it with the first group of you who sign up for this opportunity. I will mail it out every time 2 to 300 of you sign up until I have used all my copies. There will be questions that come with the book. If you send in your answers we will again compile the most interesting answers you send, and we will send them back out to all of you who responded to the questions. We will also include some of the answers Cornell students supplied to the questions as they read the book as a Community Read Project, the same way you are doing now. Reading this book is the entryway for some intellectual discussion and historical analysis. Prison seems to be dull and routine in many ways, which really delays brain development and can lead to a decay of the thinking process. This book and the questions you will consider can get that gray matter active again. Below is a short overview of the book:

The power of words has rarely been given a more compelling demonstration than in the Gettysburg Address. Lincoln was asked to memorialize the gruesome battle. Instead, he gave the whole nation "a new birth of freedom" in the space of a mere 272 words. His entire life and previous training, and his deep political experience went into this, his revolutionary masterpiece. By examining both the address and Lincoln in their historical moment and cultural frame, Wills breathes new life into words we thought we knew, and reveals much about a president so mythologized but often misunderstood. Wills shows how Lincoln came to change the world and to effect an intellectual revolution, how his words had to and did complete the work of the guns, and how Lincoln wove a spell that has not yet been broken.

**Dawn**

**By Roger B. Smith**

Dawn breaks as twilight fades.  
 Day comes forth, a crimson bolt across the sky  
 Hints of gold thrust forward as a magenta shadow  
 withers.  
 The golden hue is a respite from dread of night,  
 Where fears rule, and terror abides.  
 As light abounds and peace returns,  
 Time to stow the fears of night and start the day  
 anew.  
 A reprieve to all. All is well again,  
 Until...the angst of DUSK.



**Jonathan Chiu**

**CHESS PROJECT-** Ettie, our local chess master has agreed to create a newsletter with tips on how to improve your chess game as well as include reenactments of notable chess games from past masters. Please sign up if you would like to be included in the next mailing.

**A NATOMY PROJECT-** Speaking of Gray matter we have sent out the first installment on our ambitious anatomy project. My fear is that it is too difficult to understand without a teacher who can help explain complicated sections. This program has the potential to be very expensive to offer between copying and postage costs. My plan is not to offer anatomy for enrollment this cycle, but to focus on the 350 of you who are getting lesson 1. Let's see if we can work out how to do this in a sustainable way. If you

received the packet recently please take the time to write us and give us feedback, even if it is to tell us you didn't like it. Your feedback will help us figure how to best present this information in a useful way.

Like the math project once an individual gets going, you all work at your own pace, and it becomes hard to get 200 pieces of mail to send at once, that is identical, and then we loose bulk mail rate. The

cost of postage then goes from 36 cents a mailed lesson to \$1.79 or so for the same lesson. You can see the problem.

**MATH PROJECT-** Read the above description and you will understand the path of the math program. Earlier this year we sent out the placement test to about 300 of you. We have started this program a few times and each time we've been buried by the cost of sending the material especially at the individual rate. Those of you who scored above 80% on the placement test were sent lesson #2, and those who scored under 80% received our 63 lesson plan book covering what we think is the most basic high school math. Along with the 63-lesson plan there is a retest. If the student takes the retest and scores 80% he or she moves to level 2. Dani, our math professor, mover and shaker, and advisor in this portion of our program hopefully will develop lesson #3 as time goes on. We feel our best use of resources is to serve the 300 of you participating in this current round. If you want to sign up for the math program you will get that opportunity next fall. Hopefully by then we will have found funding to help mail these packets to you. We are recruiting students who will work as

tutors through the mail and hope in the future to match you up with short term tutoring using student volunteers. I am sorry to those of you who are ready to learn math and have to wait. If the funds come thru I will let you all know.

**YOGA PROJECT-** Now here's one where all you regular readers are chuckling wondering how long it will really take before I mail this out. I believe I will only be able to do this yoga packet 1 time due to cost and I want to do it right if it is going to happen. I know the person who can do exactly the right job in presenting it, and I know they want to do it, but their busy life has caused it to be delayed. I will keep looking for a replacement, or perhaps if we all visualize this exceptionally talented teacher as realizing the importance of her completing this for you it will happen. I just know that if you could ever embrace the tenets of yoga and then learn how to take that awareness off the yoga mat and into your daily life that your existence in prison could be a little easier to bear. If you have not yet signed up please do. There are about 800 of you know waiting for this packet. I want this packet to be worth the wait.

**PICTURE STORY PROJECT-** Please note the following photos placed next in the newsletter. Each one has a date next to it. Look at the photo and create a story from the image. Send us the story, long or short and we will again compile the stories sent for each picture and send out a complete compilation to all who write on a picture. We will probably include the writings for at least 2 pictures in each compilation, so a single essay can get you plenty of interesting stories to read. Let your imaginations wander and write.

Below are the new pictures to write about:



**Due 6/1/09**



**Due 7/1/09**



**Due 8/1/09**



**Due 9/1/09**



Due 10/1/09



Due 11/1/09



Due 12/1/09

I am reprinting one story submitted from our last newsletter's picture theme project, based on the picture of a solitary person. It is longer than most submissions, so please don't feel compelled to write a long story. I send it because it was so well written, and as a child of the 60's I found it easy to relate to the subject matter.



Glen Vivenzio

### **The Village at Cartegena**

I waited in the bright morning sun that is common for the central coast of Spain. The light reached the white plastered walls of an adobe building, in whose doorway I had sought refuge. Using a hand to shade my eyes, I looked to the east. The sun had just cleared the horizon of the Mediterranean Sea, the sky already a bright blue. In front of me was the hard-packed dirt road that we had traveled down to from the main highway. Across the road were low-roofed plastered buildings in different shades of pastel. Most connected to each other, but a few were free standing. The space between them led to some crude stairways cut into the hard, stony dirt that went down to the beach. The village was split-level, not so much from design, but because of the sloping coastal mountains. While waiting for the sound of an approaching car, I thought back to the beginnings of this long journey.

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It was a grey drizzly morning at the old airline terminal in Los Angeles. I was standing on the wet tarmac with my father. He was shaking his head as he opened his wallet, pulled a couple of twenties out, handing them over, then said, "Take care of yourself—I don't get it, but be careful." No hugs this morning—we were not the hugging type family. I had bought a one-way ticket for 150 bucks to Amsterdam on Icelandic Airlines. Icelandic was the cheapest one-way charter going in 1968. They flew to Luxembourg and Amsterdam. I had with me a rucksack filled with precious little—my guitar, and now, fifty bucks. It might seem strange these days, but in the late sixties, it was a common thing to go off on an adventure with little or no money and even less expectation of how you might get back.

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After spending the night on a deserted beach just below the highway south of Port Beau, I woke up shivering, quickly climbed up to the highway, catching a ride south with the sky just lightening in the east.

The ride was in a Siat of indeterminate age. In Spain, Spaniards manufacture Siats cheaply for the Fiat Company. They strongly resemble a large dumpster with tires and a curved top, hence the name change. The driver, Paco, who was about thirty, wore a white shirt open at the throat and a pair of grey slacks. He seemed like a more well to do Spaniard. He was especially proud of his cassette player, something I had not seen before. In America, we were still using the large, cumbersome, 4-track tape. The eight-track player, in the not-too-distant future, was just waiting in the wings. He treated me to a variety of Spanish pop music as we followed the winding coast highway south. Between his bad English, my lousy Spanish, and the cassette player blasting, I understood that he was only going as far as Cartegena, wherever that was. As long as it got me closer to my next stop, the youth hostel in Marbella, just south of Malaga, on the Costa del Sol.

Later we turned off the main highway, onto a poorly paved road. I had a hunch I should get out here, but the view of those wide empty beaches ahead bypassed my common sense. I let him continue on down, one steep switchback after another.

From above, the village appeared. It startled me—I saw such a unique place, separated from the rest of the world, lost in time.

Paco saw my reaction, smiled, and said, “Si...muy bonito.”

He went on to explain that Cartegena was located on the Gulf of Mazarrón—with its long, wide, beaches curving northward to Cabo de Palos, and ‘mucho pescado’ (good fishing).

He dropped me in the middle of town, drove off in a cloud of dust, and then turned up a steep road leading to a partially built structure that at first glance looked to be the beginnings of Cartegena’s first resort hotel. It was located at the top of a bluff overlooking the Mediterranean. But the longer I looked at it, the more it had the appearance of a project long abandoned for lack of money, or perhaps someone reconsidered—*Thank God*—the location and decided to cut his losses and bail out.

Directly in front of me was the hard-packed dirt road that went through town, crested a hill, and then disappeared into the dense, coastal chaparral that covered the mountains above the village.

Since then, no other cars had gone by. The building, in whose doorway I sat, either was closed or

out of business. In fact, the whole town was really quiet—like they say in the movies...*too* quiet. It was kind of spooky.

A local woman passed by me with a large terracotta urn up on her shoulder. She was dressed simply, but colorfully, in bright blues and reds. She walked a steady pace up to a well made of flat stones cemented together. She set the tall terracotta pot down on a low, three-foot high wall that surrounded the well, and in no rush, filled the urn slowly with a large coffee can. When the big jar was full, she hefted it back up on her shoulder, and started back down, grateful, I’m sure, that the trip back was downhill.

It was still early, but soon other women, from different directions, began to make trips up to the well, gossiping with each other as they filled their jars. I noticed some, too polite to point, were giggling and looking in my direction.

The first one passed by me on the way back, and glanced in my direction.

“Hola,” I offered with a smile—despite growing up in Southern California, my Spanish was still limited to the basics.

With eyes lowered, and a hint of a shy smile, she returned a quiet “Hola,” then continued down the road.

I spent most of the morning watching these women go back and forth to the well, filling their jars, and passing in front of me. It suddenly occurred to me—“Where are all the men?” The ground on the other side of the road dropped down to a wide beach. It was empty except for a couple of old fishing boats whose seaworthiness had long since passed. I could see recent dark gouges in the buff colored sand that ended at the water’s edge. I fantasized for a while that maybe Godzilla had come ashore in the night, devouring all the men, one by one, as they valiantly defended their tiny village.

By noon, only two cars had gone by, neither of which were inclined to give a young American with long hair a ride. My thoughts drifted back again to my first week in Europe.

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The big Icelandic Boeing 707, which had refueled briefly in Niagara Falls on a deserted, snow-covered runway, descended through the clouds over Amsterdam. When we were low enough, the clouds parted, and the city lay below—blanketed in deep snow. I shuddered, thinking—this was definitely not part of my plan.

Plan “A” was to camp out as much as possible. Obviously, I could scratch Plan “A” for now.

After a quick customs check, I left the airport on foot, walking carefully in the snow, slipping only

once, my backpack breaking the fall. Luckily, it was early, and not too many people were out, or my embarrassment level would have been much higher. Even though the sky had cleared to a painfully bright blue, my feet were still frozen.

I happened upon a big train station next to the red light district. Prostitution is legal in the Netherlands, and even at this early hour, a few were still set up in display windows—like it was a department store, and the young ladies were simply modeling the latest bedroom furniture from Sweden, at 6:00 am, in skimpy little outfits. It really cracked me up. Some of them were making goo-goo eyes as I passed—“Sorry ladies,” I smiled, thinking...not this trip.

In the station, I asked about passage to England—I mean, it doesn’t snow there...right? I can work for a while...at least ‘til the snow melts, and then continue on south

I was right, it does not snow there, but there’s this weak sunlight and a cold wind that cuts right through any amount of clothing you might be wearing.

I bought a ticket that included a short bus ride to The Hague, boarded the ferry to Harwich, on the eastern coast of England and from there took the train into London.

Unfortunately, customs at Harwich stamped my passport with a big square notice that took up a whole page, declaring: MAY REMAIN IN THE UNITED KINGDOM NO LONGER THAN 6 MONTHS FROM TODAY AND WHILE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM WILL NOT BE EMPLOYED, IN ANY JOB, PAID OR UNPAID FEBRUARY 10 1968. There went alternate Plan “B.”

I spent one horrid night at the London youth hostel run by a retired British Army major who ran the place like a boot camp. There was even this small speaker, built into the wall next to the bathtub, that he would yell orders out of every few minutes. However, I did meet one nice English girl and two American girls traveling east to Carnival in Cologne. They were as anxious to leave London as I was. We decided on taking the boat train from London to Dover, then across the channel to Calais, where we would go in halves on a cheap rental car, then drive on together as far as Paris.

We arrived in Paris late in the afternoon. And unlike me, these girls were smart enough to buy Euro-rail passes that allowed a person six months unlimited rail passage for one flat fee. They parted, wishing me luck, and boarded the train east.

I did make a pitiful attempt to hitchhike out of Paris in the middle of a snowstorm. Finally having enough of northern Europe, I realized I’d done nothing

more than put a big dent in my limited funds, and I was still freezing my ass off.

I decided to see how far I could get with my dwindling money roll. First, I had to find someone to translate into French my wish to go as far south as fifty dollars would take me. I found out two things—one...the average Parisian does not like Americans, and two...they are just outright rude! I was snubbed four times before I found a really nice German businessman who spoke not only his own language, but both English and French as well. With his help, I bought a ticket that would take me to the Franco-Spanish frontier at Port Beau, just south of Perpignan.

I boarded the train, stone broke, and as we got underway was quite pleased to see the frozen city of Paris receding in the distance.

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After a meager lunch of dense Spanish bread and margarine, I decided to walk up to the village well and refill me canteen, since everyone had disappeared for siesta. In Spain, between two and five o’clock, everything comes to a grinding halt during the hottest part of the day. From the well, I could see further down the beach, and I spotted a nice deserted cove, about a half mile away, that would be a good place to camp for the night.

Now that siesta was over, the women again began to make trips to the well. They were now used to my presence and smiled whenever they passed by. Some even gave a sympathetic, yet guilty kind of look, as if the lack of cars traveling through the village was somehow their fault.

In the late afternoon, I finally gathered up my rucksack and guitar and started down to the beach. I reached the cove I had seen earlier and started setting up my little army surplus tent. From here, I could see the main highway. *It was only two or three hundred yards away!* I guess the road into Cartagena was much longer than the road out of the village. I could kick myself for not exploring the terrain above the well earlier. I remember when my ride from Barcelona turned off the main highway and drove down to Cartagena; it was *not* walking distance back. I just assumed the main road was at least two or three miles away. Well, this was not the first time I’ve been diverted from my trip.

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I remember arriving at the Spanish border after a long, uneventful train ride from Paris. The further south we went, the older the trains got. Much to my relief, the snow began to thin out, finally disappearing completely, and the air was steadily warming up.

The last train we rode into Port Beau, at the Spanish border, was an antique and must have been from the turn of the century.

I got my passport stamped without any trouble, and was soon hiking out of town, down the sunny coast highway of northern Spain. The jade green Mediterranean was smashing up against the rocks on my left, and for the first time since landing in Europe, I had a big, wide, shit-eating grin on my face.

I hiked down the road awhile, just digging the warmth of the sun. I was not in any hurry at all, until a cool breeze came up, and the sky to the east began stacking up with dark clouds.

I stuck out my thumb, just as a light rain began to fall. Before it soaked my clothes, a new silver Mercedes pulled over. I ran to it, opened the back door, tossed my rucksack on the floor, and wedged my guitar in vertically between the seats.

The older one, on the passenger side, turned around and said, "Hurry, it's really starting to come down out there."

"Thanks for stopping."

"Do you have enough room?"

"Yeah, plenty...thanks for stopping."

"We're going to Barcelona."

"How much further is that?" I asked, just as the rain really started to pour down.

"It's just about an hour or so from here—where are you going?"

"Just south for now, eventually Gibraltar—I want to catch the boat across to North Africa and then hitchhike to Tangiers."

"Oh really, that does sound exciting," the older one said, "but be careful—*do not* turn your back on the street Arabs—the filthy little creatures will rob you blind when you're not looking—isn't that so Bartholomew?" and without waiting for an answer, turned back to me adding, "That's how we lost our camera last year."

"Okay, I will...thanks for the tip."

As we continued south, it started to rain harder, and I was grateful to be out of it.

The older of the two introduced himself as Ian—he was curious about the United States and what it was like to hitchhike around different countries. I think they picked me up more out of boredom than anything else. The driver, Bartholomew, kept quiet and concentrated on the road, only nodding to me briefly in the rearview mirror when introduced. Ian was one of those artsy types who just love to talk about the theater, the opera, or some current hot painter. It did not take long for me to figure that they were just a couple of gay blades off on a junket through southern Europe.

He also thought of himself as quite the gourmet and was especially keen on Spanish food.

He turned again and said, "If you're not in any hurry, Bartholomew and I are stopping for dinner in the city. You are more than welcome."

"That sounds great!" I had not eaten since leaving the train at the border, and even that was only a continental "breakfast"—that consists of a crescent roll, butter, and coffee. It might be breakfast for a Frenchman, but it left me hungry all morning.

"Perhaps you can favor us with some tales of the open road."

"Sure, I'm not in any hurry."

"Have you had paella yet?"

"No, but I've heard of it." I *had* seen it one quick scene of a Clint Eastwood movie, 'The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly,' I think.

"Then you are in for a treat, young man—I know a simply marvelous place on the Ramblas, in the Gothic district, the Café de l'Opera. It was *the* rendezvous for all the great Spanish artists."

As we drove on through grassy farmlands, I was lulled to sleep by the sound of the tires on the wet road.

Bright sun on my face woke me, and I sat up startled, slightly embarrassed from conking out on them. Apparently, the rain had gone as quickly as it had come.

Soon, the city of Barcelona spread out before us, the lights just beginning to sparkle in the twilight.

Ian directed the driver to park the car down near a dilapidated seafront, near a tall obelisk that stood in the center of a circular drive. As we climbed from the car, a strong smell of fresh caught fish assaulted our senses. It came from the fishing boats unloading across the way.

With Ian playing tour guide, we started walking up the Ramblas, a wide, tree-shaded center walkway, bounded by two narrow lanes in each direction for cars and motorbikes. At our feet were terracotta tiles of all sizes and shapes. Above us, tall row houses of soft colored pastels, their windows fronted with iron balconies. In some of them, Catalonians sat around small tables, drinking wine, watching the crowd below.

Ian gestured to our left. "Ah...here we are." He led us to a group of large, circular outdoor tables where a waiter in a short white jacket seated us immediately. Ian ordered a large carafe of vino rojo and the paella for the main course. He then filled our glasses and said, "Red wine helps build up your blood."

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After setting up camp, I gathered up some

rocks that lay scattered around and made a small circle for cooking. Then, I stacked some driftwood on top of a bunch of dried sea grass and lit it up.

Removing the guitar from its case, I sat on a larger rock, looking out to sea, and began to pick some desultory notes. I watched the coming sunset, streaked with brilliant oranges and blues, and wondered how nature knew to use the perfect complimentary colors when creating her most beautiful work.

A dozen or more black specks appeared as I gazed off to the horizon. I watched them for some time, waiting for the small fire to burn down enough for cooking. As the tiny specks got larger and larger and took on some shape, I realized it was the village men returning from the sea. Apparently, they had escaped the ravages of Godzilla.

The sound of water boiling brought my attention back to the task at hand. Returning the guitar to its case, I rummaged around in my rucksack for a small pan, a bag of white rice, and some saffron I'd picked up at the market in Tarragona. I decided to dig clams and attempt to make my own paella. Managing to find a good size handful of little periwinkles, I removed the boiling water from the fire, dumped in the rice, stirred in the clams, and covered it. While waiting for it to cook, I noticed a lot of activity down the beach. The fishermen, with the help of the village women, heaved to, and were dragging the large dory-type wooden boats up onto the beach, one next to the other in a line.

The roar of motorcycles came from down from the highway. I could see two Guardia Civil pull over, park their bikes, and climb down the embankment. They walked quickly through the sand, heading straight for me!

"Oh God...now what?" I said aloud, looking around, hoping that there must be some mistake—someone else around they wanted to talk to. The closer they came, the scarier they looked. These were Franco's elites, looking just like Nazi storm troopers with motorcycle helmets. They had on knee-high black Wellington boots and grey-green uniforms with a black leather strap across the front. They were also packing side arms. This was a serious pair of dudes, and they were open for business! All work down the beach stopped while the villagers watched what was happening.

When they got to my little camp, I could see they were pissed about hiking the 200 yards through the sand to talk to me.

Sticking his hand out toward me, the bigger of the two said impatiently, "¡Pasaporte!"

Frantically digging into my rucksack, I found it buried underneath a large, leaky can of soy sauce. I

quickly wiped it on the side of my Levi's, and, with a forced little smile, handed it over.

Even wearing gloves, he looked as if I was handing him a turd or something equally disgusting. He opened it, checking the stamps, turned to his partner, and said, "Estadounidense."

"Ah...Americano," his partner nodded.

He looked back to me, pointing at the ground, and said, "No camping aquí."

"Can I finish eating?—comida?" I asked, pantomiming an eating motion.

"¡No camping!" he said loudly, shoving me down to the sand—and to get his across, he kicked at the pot of paella, knocking it over, and dumping my dinner all over the sand.

"O-okay, o-okay, just be cool, I'm outta here."

He threw my passport on the ground next to me, stepped on it, and motioning to his partner, they walked away.

I felt anger and fear all at once. I collapsed the tent in record time, rolling the sleeping bag up inside of it, right along with the poles. I kicked some sand onto the coals, stuffed the upset pan, sand and all, into my rucksack, quickly tying the tent to the top, thinking—man, it's that cop mentality...the same no matter where you're at...they just gotta bust your ass.

Picking up my guitar and backpack, I humped it down the beach toward the boats. A large group of the fishermen were gathered between the boats. From a distance, they seemed to be having a heated discussion. They were gesturing with their arms and speaking loudly.

With my stomach growling, I started thinking back to the paella I had feasted on last night with Ian and his friend back in Barcelona. Gratefully, I turned at the sound of motorcycles driving off, and felt a new, deeper appreciation growing within me of how different life is in a fascist country.

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"Picasso, although born in Malaga, lived in this very neighborhood," Ian waxed on almost wistfully, gesturing around with his wineglass. "Dali and Joan Miró also found refuge here. At the turn of the century, Barcelona was home to a Spanish Renaissance."

Bartholomew and I sat enjoying the lesson and the wine. The waiter brought two more carafes, which we consumed while our host went on about how St. George was the patron saint of Barcelona and how important dragons were to the culture of the city. After a while, I sensed that Ian was getting impatient.

"It's no good if they make you wait too long," he said, craning his head toward the restaurant.

As if on cue, the waiter came out carrying a deep cast iron pan with hot mitts. He placed it in the center of the table and, saying something in Spanish, removed the lid. A cloud of steam rose up to reveal open steaming clams, pieces of chicken, artichoke halves, rounds of chorizo, brightly colored red and green bell peppers—all laid out on a bright yellow bed of saffron rice. The aroma was incredible—the long wait had only sharpened our appetites.

Ian ordered a carafe of a dry Moroccan white wine with the meal, and during the next twenty minutes we didn't discuss a whole lot, quite content making yummy sounds and sampling all the exotic flavors before us. During the meal, several street entertainers stopped and provided everything from jugglers to musicians. One was a fire breather, close enough to us that when he blew a huge cloud of fire straight up into the air, we could feel the heat. Ian said the man symbolized St. George, patron saint and noted dragon slayer.

After we finished eating, Ian led us further up The Ramblas. Pointing to a balcony we passed, he said, "That's where Picasso's studio was when he created, along with Matisse and Brach, the Cubist, abstract style of painting."

Ian suddenly turned his head and said, "Come on...there's something you must see."

Before I knew it, we were dashing through the backstreets of the Gothic Quarter, and, following him into an alley, we left the busy Ramblas behind. Suddenly, looking around, it felt as if we had stepped into another world.

The plaza in which we found ourselves was circular, formed by the curved fronts of old buildings. One was the front of a church, where two Spaniards stood pointing at something up on the wall.

As we approached, I could make out a spray of small depressions on one section of the front wall.

"The last bullet holes in Barcelona," Ian pronounced. "Once they were all over the place, but most have disappeared. These are all that remain of a desperate struggle for freedom."

"What struggle was that?" I asked.

"The Spanish Civil War," he said, then added rather wistfully, "Viva la Republic—may you someday return."

With a sudden fear in their eyes, the two Spaniards backed away from us, looking at Ian as if he were a madman, then turned and walked quickly away.

I watched them leave and said, "What's wrong with those guys?"

"I should be more careful—men have gone to prison, even been executed or simply disappeared for saying as much."

"What Republic?"

"The one crushed by the fascists; led by Generalissimo Francisco Franco, our host here in Spain. Along with the help of Adolph Hitler, he led his Falangists army of fascists against the undermanned, under-funded, and outgunned Loyalists in 1936. Even with the help of the communists' generals, and the weapons Moscow provided, by the spring of 1939, it was all over. Barcelona was the last city to fall."

"You make it sound like you were here."

"Oh...but I was dear boy, yes...I was."

"You don't look *that* old."

"Why thank you—it was another time then, before communist became a dirty word. I was not much older than you."

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I knew now why people like Ian, people from many countries had fought so courageously in a civil war not their own—to free the Spanish from the oppressive rule of dictators like Franco. Growing up in America, some of us don't get a chance—or simply become too jaded—to personally experience how precious, how easily lost, freedom can be.

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All eyes were on my as I walked toward the boats. They must have witnessed my treatment at the hands of the Guardia Civil.

These were small, dark Spaniards with rust-colored skin, wearing white shirts rolled up at the sleeves and dark work pants. Their arms, from pulling in nets all day, were muscled and scarred. A group of three stopped talking and one man came forward.

"Hola," I said tentatively, slowly setting down my guitar and pack.

He broke out with a big smile, saying, "Hola, hola," and shaking his head up and down.

I started grinning too, feeling some relief at last since the encounter with the Spanish 'Gestapo.' We all grinned at each other for a bit, then one man from the back of the crowd came forward, somewhat bashfully, with his hands behind his back, much like a suitor hiding a bunch of flowers. When his hands came out, he held a cold bottle of cerveza in one and some chorizo-type sausages in the other. I had seen these same kinds of sausage hanging up in most of the markets and bar-restaurants I'd been in.

I accepted the offer gratefully, then took a big bite of sausage, chewed quickly, and washed it down with the beer—pure ambrosia.

Exhaling, I said, "Gracias, muchos gracias—thank you all."

Soon there was beer and sausages all around. The main spokesperson, Miguel, made a reference to what had happened up the beach and said, "Guardia

Civil!”—then, taking a thumbnail, he scraped the back of his top teeth and spit on the sand. Even with my meager command of the Spanish language, I knew exactly what he meant.

Then, pointing at the sand between the boats he said, “¡ya lo campo aquí!” He made a tent with his hands, saying, “Sí...sí, ¡ya lo campo aquí!” I thanked him profusely, and as twilight darkened, our little party broke up.

Soon, I had my tent set up. I used a flashlight I kept in my rucksack to make a small light to read by. I was working my way through the Russians, and tonight it was Tolstoy.

After a couple of chapters, suddenly alert, I heard the approach of footsteps. ‘Not the Guardia Civil again,’ I thought to myself and then jumped when the flaps of the tent opened.

“Lo siento...por favor Señor.”

I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw it was Miguel.

Smiling, he said, “Esto es para ti, Señor,” and laid down some Spanish coins of the floor of the tent, then added, “¡Viaje con dios, Americano...adios amigo!”

“Gracias Señor, adios.” I smiled right back at him.

As soon as he left, the flap opened again and another fisherman poked his head in, smiled, and said, “Adios, Americano,” tossing some more coins on top of Miguel’s.

One by one, the villagers came to my tent—men, women, kids—they all smiled, wishing me luck, and left a few coins. The pile grew and grew; I kept saying, “Gracias, gracias,” after each one. It wasn’t long before there were tears in my eyes.

When no more came, I looked in my pack for something to hold such a fortune, finally settling on a clean sock. There were a lot of one-peseta coins that looked like pennies, a few duros—Spanish nickels, and even a larger silver one with cincuenta stamped on it, with an ugly profile of that pig dictator Franco.

Next morning I awoke to the sound of boats dragging through the sand. I dressed quickly and managed to help push the last two into the cool morning surf. I waved to my friends as they began to pull on the oars, rowing out toward a gorgeous pink and pale blue sunrise. Right then, I wanted to drop all of my life’s plans and let this village, this community, show me the way to contentment.

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Since that day, I have not met a people with such warmth, generosity, and good hearts. I still think about them to this day and truly hope that *progress* has not found them in their Shangri-La by the sea.

That last morning, after the men had gone to sea, a large group of women and children followed me back up from the beach to the road. We paraded down the main street of the village—I felt much as Lawrence of Arabia must have felt with his army of Arabs behind him.

The first lady of the well, whose name was Pilar, explained to me slowly, with hand gestures, that once a week the bus for Malaga stopped here in Cartegena.

So with my ten pounds of coin in hand, we walked to the bus stop. I tried to convey my feelings in broken Spanish, but it wasn’t necessary. I think it showed in my eyes. I had a feeling I was the first American that they had ever seen.

It wasn’t long before the peace and quiet was shattered by the sound of a large vehicle in the distance downshifting and grinding gears to slow its descent down the switchbacks above the village.

“¡La autobus!” said Pilar excitedly. We carefully dumped the coins out onto a large flat stone next to the road. I had seen this stone yesterday, but never guessed that it served as a bus stop. She helped me stack all the coins by size so we could easily count out the far to Malaga—two hundred miles south.

Pulling up besides us, smelling of burnt oil, the driver set the air brakes, and jumped down to open the baggage door on the side of the bus. He quickly took my guitar and pack, tossed them in, and slammed the door. Pilar spoke rapid Spanish to him to ascertain the fee. She paid him the correct amount of coins, giving me the rest. She gave me a quick hug that brought peals of laughter from the ladies gathered and some playful snickering by the kids.

I climbed aboard, and worked my way back through the crowded bus to wave a last goodbye to my new friends. The bus pulled away, and, waving back, they faded away in a big cloud of blue exhaust.

When the bus reached near the top of the mountains, I turned, resting my cheek against the window, but could no longer see the village. I tried carefully to memorize the lay of the land, so that someday I could return.

**T**HEME WRITING –This is one of my favorite Prisoner Express programs. Every month we suggest a topic, and we ask you the participants to write a story based on the theme topic or image presented, and to mail us that writing. It can be long or short. There is no right or wrong story, but just what you chose to share. So many of you write that prison is a place where one cannot display your true emotions regarding issues as there is the possibility that your feelings can be used against you at a later

date. Yet as living breathing people, feeling is something we all must do. Suppressing emotions leads to dis-ease. Writing these essays provide you with the opportunity to feel or remember some of the stories you have inside you. It is a chance to share them with the other writers in the program as well as the readers of the PE website. We post each month's theme topics on line. If you submit writing on a theme you will get a complete set of writings on that topic. We also select some of the theme writings to publish in our PE newsletter for all of you to enjoy. Remember if you like the writings that follow, you can get a complete copy of all the writings by sending in your own submission. You writers rock. Keep it up!

## Upcoming Theme Topics

**Narrow Escapes due 6/1/09**

**Borrowing due 7/1/09**

**Walking Home due 8/1/09**

**The Beach due 9/1/09**

**Privacy due 10/1/09**

**My Worst Job due 11/1/09**

**Apologies due 12/1/09**

The cost of operating this portion of our program is slight, especially compared to the rewards of reading your various writings. I hope more of you will consider joining this program. Below are a few selected theme essays for you all to consider. I wish I could share more of the writing with you, but then again consider this a small sampling an entryway into the world of theme writing. Your ticket for entry is simply a submission of your own.

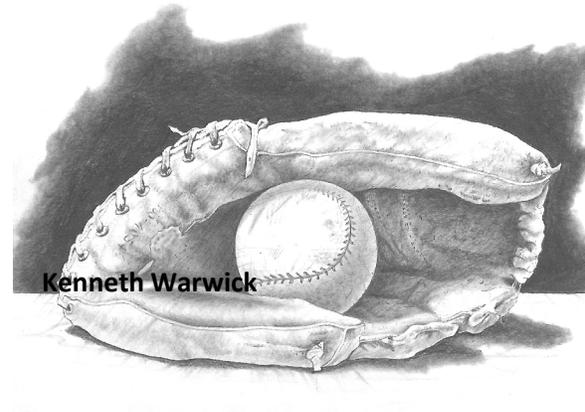
### Dinnertime

#### *Time for Dinner*

Any discussion of dinnertime first requires a closer look at what time dinner is.

For a poor, country hillbilly, like myself, dinner is always the noon meal. The evening meal being called supper. It wasn't easy for me to grasp this difference in language. Why would dinner be timed different for country and city folk? In the country we're up before the sun rises and our days begin at first light, if not earlier. By noon a day's work is done and we're ready for a heavy meal. We call that dinner.

In the city people sleep later and only take breakfast after the sun has been up for hours. They aren't hungry at noon and only seek a light repast they call lunch at midday.



Country folk do hard labor and need the influx of calories to restore their depleted energies. A salad won't get a working man through the day. In the evening a light supper is plenty to hold us until breakfast, which comes early.

City people take their heavy meal in the evening to fuel their bodies for the long night ahead when country folk are sleeping. Dinner seems to be the name of the heavy meal, no matter what time it is consumed. It's only an issue of scheduling.

*-Daniel H. Harris*

I don't know about you but for dinnertime isn't just some scrumptious meal to appease my hunger. As these lines begin to take shape, I turn the dial in my head to bring back those distance memories associated with dinnertime, I realize that, for me, meant a withdrawal of work.

Around the time I was like five years old ('69) when Mom doesn't like it when you go to far from home I recall that when she needed something from the neighborhood store she would send me. Usually around noon she would send me to the Jiffy-Mart to buy some sodas, one for her and me. My siblings were at school (dad in prison) so running the errand was the highlight of my day. In the time it took to go and come I felt that freedom from the influences of others telling you what's right or wrong. I could throw at dogs (and cats, too), run across the street without fear, look for treasures, and I was BOSS! Before long those days passed and I too began going to school. School was awwwwright but not all that. Even back then, and throughout my school years, I'd be sitting in class feeling bored as hell and just wishing the teacher would shut-up! Sometimes, yeah sometimes, when I was being a good studious boy and doing my class work in the back of my mind I was hoping for the bell to ring, announcing lunch so I could get away from school work.

How I got passed to middle school is still a mystery to me. A small part of me did like school but the rest of me didn't. In middle school it was nothing different and I longed for the bell to ring for lunch (and to go home). Soon I just quit going to school. Truancy is just one of those crimes that landed me in state school, Texas Youth Commission. State school was boring too! Although the teachers were more tyrannical so when the bell rang for lunch it was a relief to get away from these tyrants. Then I arrived in prison. In prison I wanted to be in school instead of working in the fields. However working in the fields sometimes is inevitable. It was good to be out of the building and working outside, supervised by wannabe a cowboy with guns at hip, but at free labor rates. I'm looking all around for an excuse to take a break or spot the rank lift his cowboy hat signal "hat time" i.e. dinnertime (sometimes the end of the work day. In retrospect, I wasn't the only one looking forwards to dinner because at hat time a murmur would pass around as somebody hurried-up and told his homie and others just uttered it for all to hear and know.

Even when I used to work in the free world (hell yeah I've worked!) I would still look forward to that midday meal that marked a break from work. It seems like if my life has always centered on dinnertime as a recess from work or school except for these last sixteen and a half that I've spent in ad seg (administrative segregation). There's no work or school (nor any congregate activity) in ad seg. I wish there was something to do. Sure I still look forward to dinnertime and any meal. Meals mark the day's routine. Breakfast starts the day, dinnertime brings us closer to that special Moment of the day, mail call and supper ends the day. But one of these days I am going to find myself no-longer-here in this piss-hole. And it's going to cross my mind, briefly, all the times somebody asked me what's the first thing I wanted when I get out. Sometimes I've asked others this very question to which 95% of the time sex is the common answer. But for me... well, I no longer have a place I can go to and call home. Mom's in a nursing home and my sibling don't write... so, I'll go find me a Mexican café and explain to the person that brings me a menu how I just served 20 years and am hungry for a home cooked meal and that all I want is a platter of chalupas, hot salsa, and their biggest glass of ice cold water with sliced lemons on the side so I can make a freshly squeezed lemonade.

PS: Chalupas are corn tortillas fried in grease until they're crisp with refried beans spread across the tortilla and diced lettuce and tomato and shredded cheese sprinkled on top.

*-Gary Jimenez*

Don't call me late for dinnertime, as friends and family gather round. It is time to rejuvenate from the vigors of the outside world, and a time to let our guards down and absorb the atmosphere of our kitchen's safe haven. Dinnertime is an opportunity to spend an hour and a half with what should be our most precious treasure (family). The food and drink is a sacrament to the collective soul of humanity. It is a bonding time over shared bread and salt fulfilling a basic yearning for interactive socialization. Mother is in the kitchen cooking a wholesome meal, and the smell of it all still make my mouth water all too real. I remember being a little boy again waiting for the dough to rise after Mom taught me about life and death through the symbolism of yeast as a catalyst of change, which shapes the world and life as a play upon center stage. I Hope one day to afford my family these dinnertime golden opportunities to bond and explore what it all means. Dinnertime can be a quiet contemplation of life's events, slowly melting an iced over heart after being heaven sent. We realize it's not only which fork, knife or spoon to use; we learn to use manners as a way to show respect to ourselves and others. Dinnertime is an opportunity to turn off the television and talk to those we love. What we ought to do most is listen to each others opinions. Simply paying attention and taking interest is a gift more precious than gold. It's one that can be shared between young and old. Dinnertime is also for a seduction of that special someone. Lit candles, incense, finger foods, and the intimacy of closeness and privacy, or perhaps a walk through a darkened park to a secluded spot, lit only by the moon, laying a picnic spread beneath an oak tree, triumphing in the reaction of heartfelt glee. Perhaps this is the one to make a home with soon.

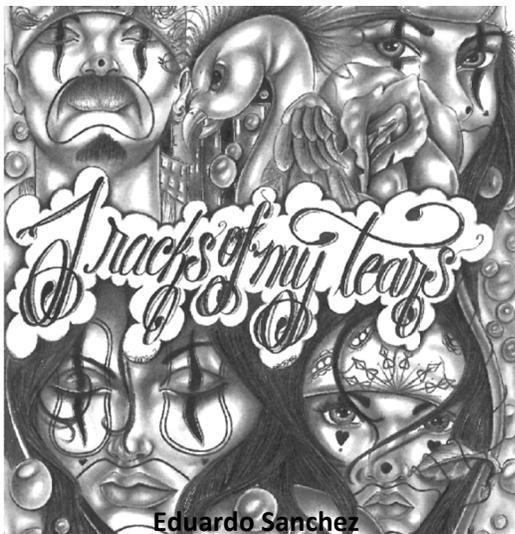
Dinnertime was easy to take for granted, all those years I prowled the streets plying my trade to appease my greed. Then came myself destruction. As I reaped all I had sown and found new lows dinnertime became intravenously administered at regular intervals all alone with no home. Dinnertime for the next four years left on this time is spent in a cramped room full of strangers. The dirty floors, walls trays, cup and spoons of this industrialized cafeteria are the norm, and constantly looking for the surprise left in your food is the wise thing to do. Even the rats aren't scared as they sit and stare at you! You must be on guard against the next crash dummy (in gray or white) trying to pull something funny.

There is another dinnertime choice "sleep late lose weight". Now I am feeling foolish as this is a slow hell of my choosing. The last riot was behind someone

cutting in line on “pizza” day. Someone please teach these “men” to play nicely. My greatest challenge now is to find a way to remain positive when dinner time is twenty minutes long and it takes at least fifteen to get through the line. Now the guards are screaming “time, pick em’ up leave and don’t even think about conversation while you eat!! I feel forced to live, cheat and sneak to get an extra tray cause what they feed me only keeps hunger at a short bay. Finally snapping, ready to fight about scraps, the lion escapes ending all chance for parole cause this guard wanted to see how far he could go. I offer dinnertime prayers for a better way to live after seeing for myself all that life has to give. What more can I say, except I will leave the negative behind.

*-Charles Marques*

Dinnertime at my house always seem too be exactly and precisely on time, and if you were ever late for dinner you had some explaining too do and some consequences to pay. As my mother would take her time to prepare a meal for the family, making sure everyone had enough too eat, seated at the table for dinner, heads bowed always in prayers and thanking god for another meal. As always, my father coming from work late, but in time for dinner, we ate as a house (together) and no one took one bite until each (mother/father), had their say. As usual as commonly done especially on (Sunday) don’t be late for (church), and for surely not for dinner. Just like breakfast is the start of another day (best meal of em’ all). (Dinnertime) was the meal that put you down at night. Some people, a lot of people, weren’t able too be provided meals by their family, perhaps a lot of people never had family (too call their own) to sit-down and have dinner with, I was one of the lucky-ones, being one of the eight kids. I still think back on all the times we shared together even though a lot of my family has passed-on, I will always remember all if not most of



Eduardo Sanchez

our time spent/shared together. Everyday, always meant doing (house-work), (clean-up), going too (school and church) and not missing a day. And like any other ritual, don’t be late for ‘Dinnertime’, cause you’re assuredly have some explaining too do, and consequences most definitely too face and not forgetting what happened if you did.

*-Elzie Hanson*

## Loyalty

### *Loyalty: A Long Road Back (To What I Was)*

Everyone is loyal to ideas, people, faiths or events, be they logical or illogical, moral or immoral, sensible, or nonsense, popular or unpopular, right or wrong. No one lives or exists in a complete state of detachment to the world. To be loyal is loyalty. Loyalty is the act of being consistently stubborn to ideologies, doctrines, people or events. Yet few people possess the ability to be a true loyalist. Loyalty is self-identifying, definitive to thought, nature and behavior. It is the allegiances we live by.

Much can be written about loyalties, and there exist a multitude of so-called causes to which one can align his or her loyalty. Recently, during a period of great reflection, the soul, searching, discovered a Divine Revelation of myself by The Greatest Power. In this, I regained insight to what was my finest season precursor to a loss of loyalty not just in myself but to My Country, My People and unfortunately My Honor. Life is a circle to which the wise will collect those most valuable things he has lost in passing. To become loyal is to regain honor and honor always adorns loyalty.

It has been years, decades, since I possessed the inner feelings of honor which signify loyalty. See, loyalty is not just thinking one supports the ideas or the people. Loyalty is an active state in which one physically represents their commitment to those ideas, people or causes.

In the past year, after some very lonely and trying times, I took a mental journey back to that day when I shifted my loyalties from this country. When a soldier abandons his loyalty, he surrenders his honor. Fortunately The Lord revealed to me that abandoning one's loyalty to a weak or deceptive institution is not necessarily dishonorable, it can be an honorable act. Much of this revelation has come from watching the casualty count rise in Iraq because honorable men and women have been misled into a battle that isn't about protecting the American way of life but rather to increase the wealth of our country's so-called leaders.

In recovering my perspective of loyalty I've rediscovered my America, my People, and our Way of

life without a government. America may not be the most beautiful place to everyone, but it is my Eden. Americans, “My People, “ may not accept me because I have failed in my social and moral standards in times past.

My loyalty herein lies not with the government which no longer represents the people, but rather with the people whose government has betrayed them. My loyalty rests with the “Stars and Stripes,” which represent the blood of human sacrifices whom believed in individual rights and democracy. My loyalty lies with the masses, be they ignorant to the policies, procedures and agenda of their government. My loyalty requires that I protect the American dream; the potential to succeed with their own God-given talents. Loyalty means I must stand to protect My Country and My People from domestic and foreign enemies, capitalists who choose to rape her of her resources. My loyalty is to God, the Father and Jesus my King for the preservation of honest faith in the assault of satanic governments and their laws. My loyalty lies in being a soldier so that My People can believe as they so desire.

Loyalty isn't a word one should throw about lightly. Loyalty has demands, sometimes popular sometimes not so popular. Loyalty isn't something you think you are. It is who you are. Loyalty defines our philosophic ideas and orchestrates our behavior. Loyalty fills our bosom with a larger than live heart.

*-Jackey R. Sollars*

### ***Loyalty Perverted***

The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. - Frederick Douglass

Have you ever seen a chicken rancher try to get his dog to un-taste blood? You know, to a chicken rancher, once his dogs taste blood, they are not just worthless to him, they are harmful. The dogs like the taste of blood so much that they start killing just for the fun of it. They get vicious. Then they have to be taught to un-taste blood.

More bad news is that no ranchers have ever developed a successful way to make his hounds un-taste blood. So far, the best way to keep dogs from turning vicious is to prevent that first taste of blood.

This same trouble occurs every time our politicians teach youth to kill and sends them to attack in “wars” against “enemies.” The people who feed us our TV, radio and print “news” wring their hands over our poor, highly-trained killers at every “war” since before post-traumatic stress disorder was invented to excuse their grisly deeds. They publicly whine, “pity our soldiers! they suffer stress and nightmares from

protecting our freedom, plus they have high rates of suicide!”

Yes, high rates of murder-suicide!

What our fine members of the gov/media alliance do not reveal is the familiar, repeating cycle goes like this. Gov't creates vicious killers and sends them to mass-murder. The survivors return from their mass-murder missions and tend to kill their wives, friends, associates or strangers. They learn that they are no longer “the best” or “special” or privileged to get away with murder. When they learn that punishment is inevitable,, they go on a rampage and/or commit suicide.

Our gov/media alliance cries real tears for these confused soldiers. Lawyers make up a courtroom “defense” for them. The public catches this over concern for their special welfare so they, too, can bask in the patriotism. Everyone loves the solider boys, but somehow not their jurors who have to evaluate from close-up their grisly deeds. These soldiers were given special license to mass-murder by politicians for a specific purpose, place and time. Somehow they got mixed up about the limits of their gov't-given privilege to torture and kill others. Now they must be punished. Boo-hoo!

Let's face facts, for once in our civic lives: killing is wrong. It says killing is wrong in virtually every book in print, especially the ones on ethics and religion. What part of “thou shalt not kill” do they find unclear? Being young and gullible is no excuse. It is an all volunteer army. This time, everyone had a choice. Every citizen had 18 solid years to figure out the correct answer to this question. Some of them chose wrong anyway. Vietnam proved that we could just say “no.” I told them 'no,' and they decided to put me at the far end of the line. Others went to Canada. Others made their emphatic point by rolling grenades into their commanding officer's tents. The vice curs who wanted us to kill for them eventually go the message, and their attack upon the citizens of Vietnam was finally called off. Despite the politicians and media hacks urging me to “be patriotic,” I will not overlook the murders or find sympathy for the killers even when they justifiably kill themselves. They made their choice and deserve their end.

My only regret is that the ones who gave them their taste of blood get to continue to manufacture more hoards of vicious, mindless killers. These are the varlets who need to be stopped. They didn't increase anyone's freedom, they diminished it, then left a mighty swath of destruction and death in return for their misbegotten antics. It would do us all good to let the gods eat these chickens!

*-James Bauhaus*

## ***Loyal Tea***

Ingredients:

1 pinch fidelity  
2 tsp. pure devotion  
1 oz. unadulterated faithfulness  
2 quarts steadfast allegiance

Cooking Instructions:

Seethe to just below boiling point. Then steep to constancy desired.

Serve: Hot or Cold. Always serve the first cup to yourself. If you can not drink it no one else wants it.

Note: Loyal Tea should not be shared with all and sundry. It is a precious commodity and more valuable if given grudgingly. Still, it must be given in order to receive. So given to those you love and trust, but never serve with Haste.

This is an old family recipe I stole from some Old Family

*-Michael Pace*

## ***“Loyalty”***

A mystery of sorts took place in the woods

Where the smallest of animals foraged for goods

There never was strife like this ever before

“What can we all do if there’s no food to store?”

The birds claimed that the sky had turned brown

And a beaver complained that his tress were chopped down

The squirrels had then noticed their nuts were all gone

And a duck complained of the scum in the pond,

An owl called a meeting before it’s too late

We’ll meet by the pond at a quarter of eight.

So later that night as they prayed hand in hand,

A tiny skunk asked “Could this be caused by a man?”

The animals paused and said “No, that can’t be,

The man’s an American like you and me.”

But the tiniest skunk with his tail bristled high

Said “I saw the man’s cabin smoke color the sky.”

The birds they all gasped at the words the skunk said

“If this smoking continues we’ll all soon be dead!”

The oldest of beavers signed heavily and stood

“Where there’s smoke, there is fire, and on fire is our wood.”

The squirrels all said “Yes, that explains both wood and sky.

But what of our nuts? For without them we die.”

The little skunk spoke with great tears in his eyes

“I saw the man grinding them up into pies.”

The ducks stood in shock at all they had heard.

“We cannot believe it – not one single word!”

“For in the man’s yard on a pole hoisted high  
is the flag of America combing the sky.”

“So tell me my friends is this what you see?

An American man with no loyalty?”

The wizened old owl claimed he never believed

That the day would arrive when the man he must leave,

For American pledges of liberties,

Require strong bondings of loyalties,

“With loyalty broken...as crushed as our hearts,  
tomorrow I’ll order this man to depart.”

“For in this vast forest where we live hand in hand  
we haven’t the room for a disloyal man.”

*-Dave Gordon*

“To thine own self be true.” Those words kept coming to mind when I thought about the topic of loyalty. In prison I think this is not the easiest thing to do. People expect you to be or act a certain way and this most often is not naturally how we would behave or think. Loyalty may bring up grandiose visions of doing for others. I tried to imagine some heroic scenarios involving things that have happened or I imagined that is how I would act but no matter how I tried, it did not ring true. The instances that struck out the most were the ones where I stuck to a principle or a belief despite the popular conception or opinion held by those around me especially those I hung around with or associated with. Hanging on to my integrity struck me as the most loyal thing I have done since coming to prison. They have this thing here in Texas they call institutional adjustment. Well horse pockey I don’t want to adjust to this life that is the most ignorant thing I think I have come across in my life. For me loyalty is to yourself first and your core values. Do not let yourself be changed as far as the values you hold dear. In doing this you will in effect be honest with those around you and in turn I don’t think you could show loyalty to others better than being honest with yourself and others.

*-Ferman Sims*

## ***Lifetime of Changes***

To consider loyalty requires us to examine not only what it is but also how its definition changes over a lifetime.

My earliest loyalties were to blood kin – my family. It was what I was taught. Those family ties came untied when I put a needle in my vein the first time. It took years to realize it and accept the loss of all I had ever held dear.

Without the anchor of family my loyalties shifted to the ladies that paper the walls of my

existence. Most were undeserving and gave back little in return.

The truth of loyalty has been taught to me by a special friend. She is there for me, "Until the wheels fall off," even when I fall short of every goal I set for myself and all our shared expectations. I feel the least deserving when she proves her loyalty. Nothing I've ever done could earn what she does for me. Nothing I could ever do would cause her to give up on me.

My early definition of loyalty required me to earn it. Later, I gave it freely where it wasn't appreciated. Today, I'm a recipient of loyalty that puts to shame every version I ever experienced. It is for me to live up to this special gift. And if I don't, it'll still be mine.

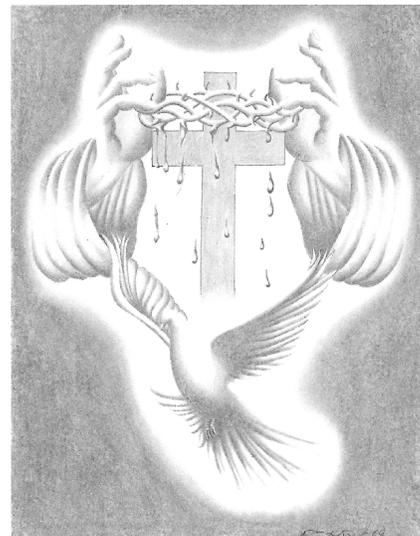
*-Daniel H. Harris*

There are so many things and people we are loyal to. Like so many times, it's always the wrong things and people. We are so caught up in "the mix" we don't ever realize it or don't care. Some are loyal to drugs, women, and the fast life. But are we being loyal to the people or ourselves? I guess it doesn't even matter. For myself, I've been loyal to so many things, right or wrong...I stood firm, not to be boastful or brag, I've done my share to stick to my oath. I'm from the street, no, not homeless. I made my living being ok breaking the law. I grew up the hard way, but didn't have to. I've been loyal to the streets, my customers, to my drug connections, etc. But I thought I was being loyal to my family, kids, my ex, when really I put them second. But most importantly, I forgot about the people who were loyal to me. The people who never told me no, and never closed their doors in my face. These faithful people are my sisters, my crime partner, and little bro I never had Krokodil...and of course I can't forget my loving Mom. While doing bad crimes (which I won't admit to in this article), hurting people and one time or another being in their presence in a stupor, which is disrespectful. For me, and probably the rest of us in prison, the only person who's stuck by my side is my mother. No matter the situation when the smokes clears, my Mom is right there. To see how I am, how I'm feeling. I've been there a lot this time down. My girlfriend left my two boys at my sisters house, and who went to get them, who went to court for a whole year to get full rights? Who gave them food, love, shelter, who did all this without asking? MOM. All this I mentioned has been during these past years and of course I can't mention everything. Anything you can think of positive...she's been doing it.

Now let me take you to my past. First of all, she birthed me. Through all that pain and probably

some cussing she loved me. I also remember the time I stole my first car with my best friend, which was my first time being in trouble with the law. We were joy riding and got pulled over. That was my first time being in trouble with the law. They had to call my house so she could come pick me up...3 in the morning she went and got me out. Even though she told me she would never get me out again, she did numerous times and signed me out. This other time I decided to stop stealing cars and jumped into the drug game selling cocaine in the early 90s, which at the time I was probably 14 years old.

I was doing fine, had my own money and bought my own clothes, until I was at a party and fell into temptation. I did my first line of coke and it was something new to me. Like they say..."The rest was history." Oh by the way...did I mention I was selling for a big time dope dealer? I know I was in big trouble and had to face up to what I did. So I went and let her know what had happened. All she asked was how much money I owed. At that time we were living in the projects and at those times it was called "terria de los Muertos," land of the dead. Because of the people they were finding dead. What did she do, she went and called the dope dealer and told him that I had his money and asked him not to give me any more drugs. She gave me the money like BAM!! Here you go. Go and take care of this and come home son. When I got back home dinner was ready and she gave me



**Albert Haechten**

a hug. Of course, the ass beating commenced right after that (smile) which got me straight, and I started school in the fall. Now back in school other kids were wearing new clothes and shoes, name brand, which my Mom couldn't afford. I saw a lot of kids smoked weed but were too scared to go to the house that sold it. Scared to be seen by someone who knew their parents. So I put 2 and 2 together and started selling my own weed, which went on for some time. I also decided to smoke a joint before school started behind the gym. Long story short I got busted...snatched on by another student. So I'm high and they had to call my Mom to come pick me up at school. So she had to get out of

work...that action right there got me expelled from school for the rest of the year. Man I can go on and on how my Mom has helped me along. Even this time she has been loyal to me, when she could of just washed her hands with me.

I got a 25-year sentence, and she still stands firm and has been raising my two wonderful sons for six years now. She does all she can do for me and the rest of the family. In hindsight I see my Mom has done so much for me. This is loyalty I can't get any where else. Now you might say she did that because I'm her son and she's my mother. Naw, naw...

I've seen many people in here whose Moms have cut them off completely: no letters, phone calls, nothing, not even when or if they make it out of this place. Any of us can be in that situation. No other woman would of done for me like my Mom. At the first sign of trouble...they are gone. Like most girlfriends with their guys in prison, they will eventually fall off and leave you stranded. You all know what I'm talking about. So think back...how many times have we reached out for someone and your Mom's hand was already on your shoulder, or wiping tears out of your eyes. Even if she might not be living, you better believe she is watching after you in heaven.

I am grateful and very humble that my mother has been loyal to me, loving me no matter what I've done or continue to do. As her son, she's always been my hero. And when this gets printed in Prisoner Express News for the world to read... "I say this: You've been the best. I want to thank you for your loyalty Ama. I know it wasn't an easy trying to raise me. But one thing is for sure...you never gave up on me. So it's my turn to return the loyalty Ama. I'm here and I want you to forgive me for the pain I've caused. If I ever hurt you with my stupid mistakes or choices in life, I am sorry. You know your baby boy loves you. Through all these years you've done everything you could for all of us. So I thank you. I forgot to mention my only brother who has always been the person I looked up to. I didn't forget you bro. Thank you for everything you've done for me, and Ruben and Nicholas. So to all my family, thank you for all the years of loyalty and love."

*-Ruben Benavides*

### Digging Deeper

#### *Part I: Before Level-3*

Two products of long-term incarceration are anger and hostility. There really is no way to avoid this accumulation in the core of your being as long as there are officers who think punishment is part of their job and supervisors who allow misconduct.

Every time a prisoner is denied a basic need or some right he knows he has coming, a speck of anger joins the growing mass housed deep inside. At some point, this becomes critical and begins to radiate hostility. All act shocked when they are suddenly forced to reap the harvest from this field of sorrows.

For years, I've gone out of my way to bury this accumulated anger beneath shielding walls of courtesy and lock it away in a storage vault of kindness. You'd think by now, it was secure.

You'd be wrong. It seems the deeper I bury my anger, the harder some officers work to uncover it. Maybe they just begin to feel safe when there is no recent history of violence. In recent months, lies have been told in retaliation for my grievance writing. Guards have made choices to deny me too often as they cursed and accosted me when I complained.

The walls are holding. Just barely. Visions of mayhem come often. And I can't say I'd be wrong to surrender to these fantasies. Their surprised expression would be worth the punishment. But no. They'll have to dig deeper if they wish to see my anger lain bare. I'll keep shoring up the walls with kindness and hope they'll give up and go dig somewhere else.

#### *Part II: After Level-3*

They brought me a move slip tonight. My level has been dropped due to a falsified disciplinary report. The anger that we all share, though I thought mine contained, has boiled to the surface. In an instant, I have decided it is time to teach an abject lesson in violence.

For those of you who are not Texas prisoners, the level system is called corrective by the administrators when, in reality, it is a cruel system of punitive measures that punish beyond the scope allowed in disciplinary court. A level-1 may buy what he pleases from the store and is allowed to have electronics, radio, typewriter, hot pot, etc. A level-3, my new level, is allowed nearly nothing. Not even books except for religious materials. If I am to suffer this indignity for what I did not do, then I intend to give them a reason and make them wish they had left me alone.

There I stood, back where I had fought so hard to escape from, prepared to use my body as a weapon. No amount of chain can prevent that and it's what I'm known for, though they don't know me here.

Once my property was sorted and packed, I placed a bag of coffee in one pocket of my shorts and pens and stamps and envelopes in the other. There is always the chance they won't even let you have what you can have when they first roll you and a bag of coffee isn't too much to ask for moving the easy way.

Much to my surprise, they didn't even strip-search me. I hesitated to react hostilely with my coffee on the line and they were being more than a little courteous to me. My level-3 property was separated from the rest, though I had been lenient in allowing myself cups and a book to read until I could get more. They thought I was crazy when I showed them this and they placed it all on a cart and when they got to my new cell, they gave me everything.

This, they didn't have to do. It was an unexpected kindness from men I had no reason to expect anything but cruelty from. They knew the rules and broke them for me. My anger had lain dormant, buried under a façade of courtesy and kindness. Circumstances had unearthed it and there was no way short of violence for me to rebury it. Yet they had returned it to the vault themselves.

They'll have to dig deeper next time to uncover my anger and the courtesy and kindness I show will have a foundation they helped me build. It's still there; I know now I'll never be beyond it, but if we work together, anything is possible--even living a life in prison without violence.

**-Daniel H. Harris**

Digging deeper means pushing yourself to new limits, to fall into your inner strengths. There are times in everyone's life when you feel you just can't do it. Mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically, you're drained. You've gone as far as you possibly know how. As you look forward, you see nothing but despair and more agony. You glance behind and start to realize how much you've gone through. That realization usually helps. It gives you the strength to face one more day...one more trial, one more problem. For me personally, I use prayer when I'm feeling like I can't do it anymore. When I can't take the loneliness, the hate, the bars, the fence, the knowledge I'll never be free...when the rest of my future looks as black as my past, I pray, and prayer helps. It enables me to face one more day in the Devil's Paradise, to find a light in the darkness. Prayer gives me the comfort and strength to keep digging inside. I believe that we're each given an endless supply of inner strength; it's just up to you to learn how to tap into it. To all those who have felt like I have, or are feeling it now, pray for strength and God will help you Dig Deep inside for it. Even if it's dark in your life now, remember there is always a light. Find it!!

**- Rene Joe De La Rosa**

As I excavate through the relics of my past the very first adventure of digging deep can be credited to

playing pirates I was sure buried treasures existed in our backyard. And I can still picture myself knee-deep in the crater or sifting through the dirt looking for trinkets. Occasionally, I'd hold a rock towards the sun, squint an eye, in hopes of discovering a sparkle of a diamond or gold nugget. Ancient bones and Comanche arrows or axes were never too far from my fancy and fleeting imagination. At school somebody mentioned that if you dig and dig and keep digging that you can tunnel your way to China. Needless to say that I plunged into the pit with renewed energy! I didn't dig up all of our backyard nor did I find any secret treasure or artifacts much less reach China. In retrospect, looking for treasures and trying to tunnel to China along with the childhood wonderment involved in that early age still cheers my heart today.

Many years have since passed and time now finds me imprisoned and segregated from the general prison population. Segregation in Texas offers no congregated activity nor educational in-cell programs or televisions and if they can think of a way to make our stay more gloomy they will. Inside this piss-hole we are left to make the best of our situation or be bitter and let the abyss pull us into its darkness. Reading is the official prison escape and at the same time it allows you to learn and think as well as ask your own questions about the puzzles of life and self. At times the soliloquy may be profound and our wonderment confusing. Digging deep is like pondering soliloquies and trying to discover that rare and elusive philosopher's stone. And sometimes no amount of digging will change what is though it can affect what we can be.

**-Gary Jimenez**

Sometimes we dig deeper to find the motivation to keep pushing on. Sometimes we dig deeper to find out who we are. I have been in groups among men who bravely bared their souls. While I have listened, I often felt emotions I didn't know were there geyser up from the deep.

Dealing with emotions is a messy thing. It complicates my picture of myself and forces me to admit that I am still on a quest to know who I am...

I still need to dig deeper.

**-Paul Pommells**

And I must say, the reason I have so much love for the essay program that I write these essays for is because you all are always coming up with some very great essay topics for us to write about. And this month's topic about digging deep is something I can really relate to, because I have been through a lot. And my life has been messed up for so many years. I have

been locked up in prison, and locked down in a one man cell for so many years, because I had no kind of direction for my life. At first I did not know what I had to do to change the way I was living, because I was only fighting against myself and the ones who loved me and wanted to see me do better. And while being locked down in a one man cell all by myself gave me so much time to think about so many things. Because for so long I had been searching outside of myself, for all the answers as how to be a better person and to live by the truth. And it took me years to make the decision that I was going to start digging deep and start struggling deep within myself so I could learn some real knowledge about myself and how to face reality for what it was and not for what I wanted it to be. And digging deep within has started helping me to gain some control over my life. And I read about the prophets who faced many hardships, but they never gave up hope because digging deep within themselves helped them to carry on with their struggle. And I must face my difficulties in the same spirit. And reading about men like Mahatma Gandhi and Badshah Khan who was a man to match his mountains, I feel the need to dig deep within myself and do some real soul searching.

**-Michael Jerome McKinney**

I'm no miner; I'm not in search of coal or gold. I'm in search of myself and who I really am. There is this one book I'm reading, title "The Daily Six," it inspired me to write to this theme topic. I tried to write on a few topics before but always felt it was never good. I have an upcoming release date Sept. 14, 08. I've been in prison since the age of 16 (tried as an adult), this is my 12<sup>th</sup> year in jail and I'm tired of it – it's kicking my ass!! Now that I'm like 80 days away, I no longer play the rec room to watch TV as I once used to, instead I'm reading self help books, writing and getting my vocab sufficient, playing my cubicle more often, not playing around with these guys that are subject to change like the price of gas, one day they're alright and the next day they want to knock your head off. So I avoid that by avoiding them and cut off all ties – "I clean my hands" – is what I tell them. I can't afford to give any more of my life to this place. I already lost my mom (2002 – R.I.P Ma). My family is much different now than we were growing up with each other. My real friends who

are a chosen few, know more about me than anyone in my family ever will.

As I have learned, this is my "gift of desperation." It took a dramatic change in my life to find my self identity, to find ways to be smarter, stronger, being able to speak well, have a vision and realize that "all that, is not elusive." I'm grateful for what I have been through, all the struggles, the fights, the experiences. I'm not dead and that's what matters most.

"Stop blaming your fears of tomorrow on your experiences of yesterday. Build a bridge and get over it!!" (quote from: Deborah Bruce).

I'm in my zone, I'm about to get out and show my doubters this is where it counts. Prison is my stepping stone. I'm not going back down stairs to the basement because there is no way out, the windows are too small!! (That is, the windows of opportunity) I'm going straight to the top. My boy tells me "you are the worst critic." And when my female friend calls me handsome it makes me feel good. The little things are what I'm digging for, little things like 4 minutes of quiet time, to gather my thoughts and elude the dwelling. It's been too long, freedom is moments away, the time is going by so fast and the anxiety is building. Little things like holding my friend's baby boy (2 ½ months) on the visit. I was holding the bottle for him to drink his apple juice while she went to the vendor. Che started choking and instinctively I put him on my shoulder, pater his back until he was fine. That MADE MY DAY, I knew what I was doing and I haven't held a baby since I was a child when my 1<sup>st</sup> younger sister was born.

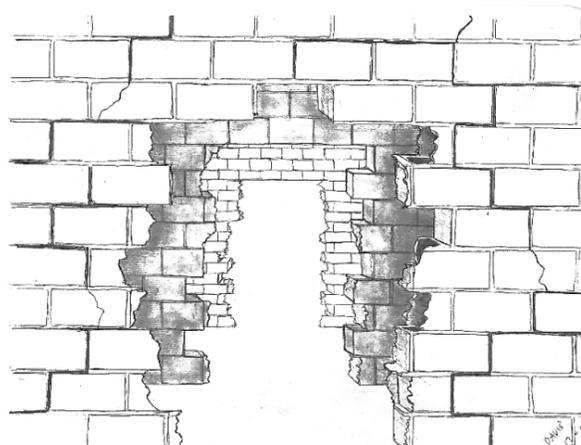
(She made me a big brother, I love you Jennifer)

This theme stuff is like writing a letter in a sense, I'm just letting it flow. I was re-reading the theme topics on strength and I got an idea of how to go about this one. In particular, rebuilding strength is one of my favorites. From the winter/spring 08 newsletter by Daniel Harris (Thanks man – it was food for thought)

I'm not done digging, I'm still in search of significance, purpose, and the way to live life correctly. It's deep and I'm going to get there and keep going when I do...

Until my life is complete.

**-Jason Rosa**



**William H. Davis**

## Fences

### *Guarded Spaces*

Fences. Walls. Barriers against escape. Defenses against intrusions. Prison is a world of intersecting enclosures. Some built by our captors. Most are our own creations.

Immediately on entering the gates of prison you face a barrage of psychic assaults from all sides and for many reasons. Some look to gain from your addition to the population while others are just looking for sadistic pleasures.

Guards lay siege to the barbicans of our identities as they attempt to strip away our personalities. All shaven, hair cut alike, wearing the same white clothes in the name of security when other states allow variety of dress and grooming with no more problems of violence or escape than Texas has.

Prisoners in search of profit invade our boundaries. Some seek refuge in friendship out of fear. Others are in search of lovers to quench their lusts. Many try to con loans they never intend to repay and seek to extort the weak.

We begin to build our fences to defend a bit of personal space as we are fending off attacks to our psyches.

Men make mask of their faces and never smile to keep their peers at bay. Some become known for initiating violence at any perceived disrespect. Many cower behind false smiles and laughter that rings dishonestly in the ears.

My walls are high, built with stones of courtesy, and seen as weak. I find them battered by hostile siege engines. They hold quite well.

Only when I lower my draw bridge and raise the portcullis do the besieging armies find ingress. This lowering of my defense is due to wanting to help others. Usually they bring no assault and are worth the risk. Only a few see kindness as a weakness. Those find their way blocked with the burning oil of my scorn.

The guilt sets in once my walls are again secure. It doesn't matter that I have no choice if I'm to keep my personal space secure. I wonder if I could have handled it better. It's hard to push away some person so needy as to cling to me. The weight of my own time is all I can bear.

In the end we are each our own protectors and set the limits of our boundaries. When another refuses to respect those limits the fault is theirs. Still, it's a hard world were fences are more important than fellowship.

*-Daniel Harris*

As he dropped into his bunk from exhaustion after the 12 hour day of hitting on the packed ground with his oversized hoe they called aggie, sleep came instantly. The 1<sup>st</sup> few weeks here had been hell. The guards had cussed and humiliated him from day one as they did all new boots. He had been beaten within an inch of death that first night. Three men whom he had never seen in his life were his attackers. He'd been forced to live with them in this dorm. They wanted his meager belongings; a t-shirt, a pair of tennis shoes, and a few dollars worth of food. When he wouldn't give it willingly the assault began. He ended up with his eyes swollen shut and bruises covered his body as he'd been hit and kicked relentlessly. At the infirmary the nurse shrugged her shoulders and gave him a Tylenol. "If you still hurt in the morning they will give you another Tylenol at pill window." The nurse sarcastically said sending him back to the same dorm. She had seen much worse behind this fenced in community and figured they all deserved what they got, except her son of course who was in prison 2 states away for a string of 12 burglaries. Her baby had been railroaded and shouldn't be in with all these monsters; the murderers, rapists, robbers, and drug dealers.

Ruiz was put in the hoe squad once his eyes partially opened. His hands bled the 1<sup>st</sup> day, then blistered and finally calloused after a week. After a month his entire being became calloused. The cold shower and cold slop he received for his 12 hours of labor froze his heart. There was no god of that he was sure. He had prayed every night for death to come but still he breathed, if not lived. He existed, and this only in his mind.

Each morning Ruiz woke at 2:30 am to walk in a stupefied daze to the chow hall where he ate his cold tasteless grits, cold pancakes and water. Walking down the bowling alley he stared at the 12ft razor wire fence and thought, 'how did I get here?' The guards wielding M-16 rifles stood in towers just outside the fence. They stared down menacingly and sometimes aimed their guns at him when he looked at them.

It was a three mile walk to the endless cotton field after breakfast. The hoe squad banged on the ground monotonously with their aggies for what seemed forever. Ruiz's forearms and back became like steel after a month of hitting on it. While he lifted the aggie up and down listening to the rhythmic cadence being sung to keep the row of men in time his mind would drift beyond the fence, beyond the 30yr sentence he faced.

Ruiz was 32 years old and just months prior to his conviction he'd been a prosperous family man. He had a beautiful wife of ten years and a 9 year old son and a 8 year old daughter. He had owned a chain of 6

Laundromat which were quite successful. He had been active in the community; coaching his son's soccer team, been a city councilman, taught Sunday school, was a mason and a volunteer fireman. That was all ancient history now. He was just a nameless number in this new world he now lived. There was also a fence separating him from everything he loved.

The criminal justice system in America is broken, though the majority would never know it and if they did they wouldn't admit it. The masses get their information as they sit and watch Law and Order or CSI in the comfort of their cozy homes and believe every judge, DA and detective are infallible, moral men and women who believe in truth and facts. Most people have never been in a court room or known anyone who has. They figure only criminals are charged and convicted of crimes, never entertaining the thought that the falsely accused could be charged, much less found guilty. They fail to realize that the saying, 'innocent until proven guilty' has been inverted to, 'guilty until proven innocent,' by a malicious arrogant minority running the judicial system. The accused has the proceedings leveraged against him with presumption of guilt already established. The prosecution has an endless supply of legal resources at his disposal, where a defendant has what he can afford and no more. The judges favor the prosecution and look down at the individual accused as a petty inconvenience stopping him from playing golf or going to the nearest bar. Peoples lives hanging in the balance of their decisions never enters the judges, DA's or detectives minds, when by arrogance they spew lie after lie and distorted truth to win their argument. To the modern day aristocrats winning and being right regardless of the truth is all that matters. Concern for the peasants and serfs (in their minds) is a petty matter. Disposing of another's life by forcing them into a life of slavery, which is what prison is, doesn't affect their judgment. The lowly criminal gets what he deserves. So does the falsely accused. Thomas Jefferson said, "It is better that nine guilty go free than for one innocent to be found guilty." Don't believe their propaganda of a kinder gentler nation. The founding fathers are rolling over in their graves right now.

Ruiz had never received as much as a traffic ticket until the police surrounded his house and kicked in his door with guns drawn and aimed at his wife and kids. The police had a warrant to search the house. They found a pound of marijuana hidden in a bedroom closet along with a stolen gun, TV and DVD player. When the police handcuffed Ruiz and his wife for the crime, Ruiz said, "She doesn't have anything to do with it. It's all mine." Ruiz could only think of his kids having to go to a home and had confessed so Sylvia

could remain free to care for them. In the instant he and Sylvia had been handcuffed he'd imagined a foster home where Angel and Felecita were abused and neglected. That wasn't happening even for a day. Ruiz knew there was a mistake and the truth would set him free in a day or two but Sylvia needed to stay at home with the kids and explain where daddy was going.

In the events that followed the inadvertent confession would haunt Ruiz for the rest of his life. Ruiz's brother Jose had been staying in the bedroom the stolen items and drugs were found. Ruiz had offered a place to stay after Jose lost his job. Little did he know Jose had a drug habit that cost his job and home. Jose would leave the house every day supposedly looking for work but was really out committing every crime imaginable to support his habit. He robbed, he stole, he dealt. When Ruiz was arrested Jose came forward immediately and turned himself in to the police. He confessed in detail to every crime he had committed, stating it was him only and his brother had nothing to do with it. As he expected they charged him, but to his confusion Ruiz was charged with more crimes including organized crime. The detectives figured they had nabbed 2 for the price of one. They had all the evidence they needed, plus 2 confessions. After being found guilty the judge told Ruiz he was letting him off lightly, then banged the gavel down saying, "I hereby sentence you to 30 years." In a real travesty of justice Jose's lawyer put everything on Ruiz and got Jose off with probation.

Ruiz woke feeling a suffocating pressure all around him. He thought he was being attacked again. He kicked his feet and flailed his arms fighting through what felt like thick paper mache. Tearing his hands, then his head free, light penetrated and he realized some pranksters had wrapped his bunk with rolls of toilet paper. He felt a weight lift from his chest as he wasn't being beaten down. Finally escaping from the paper cocoon he yawned and stretched his legs. Looking around the room there were paper cocoons surrounding every bunk. Suddenly back spasms forced him to the ground and he screamed out in agony. Guards appeared in the doorway shouting, "What the heck." They ran at Ruiz with batons. They started clubbing him with the heavy sticks and Ruiz couldn't figure out why. The pain of the 1<sup>st</sup> blow angered him and he felt supercharged with energy he hadn't felt since his ordeal began. He raised up to his feet and snatched one guard by the collar lifting him off the ground with one hand. He threw him into the wall then pushed another guard back into two more knocking all 3 down. Ruiz was like a man possessed. He stood tall as the guards pulverized him. He walked to the door calmly and ripped it from its hinges. He walked to the

yard and shrugged his shoulders. A matched pair of 6ft wings spread from his back. Ruiz knew not what happened but looking at the fence he knew it wouldn't hold him another minute. He flexed his lat muscles and the wings flapped. It was a strange experience but he kept flexing until the wings flapped madly. He ran towards the fence and jumped. Up, up and away. The feeling that flying gave him was exhilaration. He was above the fence and free. The guard tower was shooting at him but soon was out of range.

Now free from all fences Ruiz knew the place he wanted to go. It took him 3 days but finally he stood on one side of another fence. It was the white picket fence he'd put up last year in his front yard. Ruiz opened the gate and walked to the front door. He was just about to go inside when Felicita burst outside screaming "daddy, daddy, you came back." Ruiz squeezed his eyes shut as he felt tears sliding down his cheeks he put his arms around his little girl and held her tight. He heard a loud noise and opened his eyes. "Ruiz," someone shouted. "Ruiz, mail-call." The image was gone in an instant. A guard was standing over him with a letter. It was the news he had been dreading. Sylvia said what he knew she must.

As the years passed Ruiz would remember his dream in vivid detail as he looked at the fence. When he turned 62 and they called his name to go, but it wasn't on wings but a broken down back and tired feet he left walking from the gate. He knew no one anymore, not even himself. As the bus pulled away Ruiz looked longingly back at the fence thinking of all it had given and all it had taken away.

*-Michael Henderson*

When I think of fences I envision people setting up physical barriers as security in order to prohibit other people from crossing certain points. Sometimes fences serve as a safety measure to keep children, and pets safely out of the way of traffic and strangers. Whatever their desired purpose fences are needed to help keep people feeling safe, and secure.

However this feeling of security doesn't just mean the physical fence we may erect around our homes or property, it also incorporates psychological fences people use to protect their emotions. People probably erect psychological fences even more so than they do physical fences.

When you've been burned in love you tend to put a fence around your heart to prevent being burned again. When you've been let down, and disappointed time after time you tend to erect a fence around your hope, and expectations. When you've been crossed and your trust abused you put a fence around your loyalties. And when you meet a stranger for the first

time you erect a fence around all intimate details of yourself.

There is a common thread when using either a physical fence or a psychological fence. That is, fences are used as a precaution. In either situation I believe it would be prudent to remember that precaution can grow into fear.

Unchecked fear can grow into a habitual monster where we begin to erect fences in every area of our lives. Fear of the unknown is a major contributor to erecting fences. If we display a little more courage in our lives there will be less need of fences.

*-Kevin Betts*

When I think of fences, I think of barriers. There is a noticeable fence which locks us all in. It has an electric current running through it, so whenever an unwitting bird lands upon it, it dies. In my life I see other fences, such as the social barriers we create. These fences also carry the potential to hurt. They are charged with emotions and judgments and words. The damage they inflict is on the inside.

For most of my life I was scared to move away from the familiar and hop over social fences. I was afraid of feeling awkward. In 2000 someone who loved me, sent me a self-help book. It helped me identify the false beliefs that held my social fences together. I have been dismantling my social fences ever since.

*-Paul Pommels*

### Choosing Sides

I used to live a double life. One of them was type-A and law abiding. It excelled in school and made my parents proud. The other one was also a type-A personality, but it sought dominance in the street arena. When I felt frustrated it took over. When I felt disrespected I let it take over. It grew up as I sought acceptance among the tough guys that were popular in my neighborhood and the public high school.

My mom always said, "Paul, you can't serve two masters. You're going to honor one and betray the other."

I thought I was smart enough and cunning enough to juggle my double life, but there is no escaping the morality of the story. The day came when I realized I had to choose. The choice was between making my future decisions based upon my standing with my homeboys, or basing my future decisions upon the needs of my family.

I realized I could never afford to lose my family so I mustered up the inner strength to disappoint

my homeboys and choose the right side. To my amazement, the ones who really knew me were aware of my growth and they understood.

*-Paul Pommels*

One of the saddest events a person will ever have to face is the loss of a loved one. Sadder still is to love someone your entire life and then discover they never loved you. You may claim that everyone you've ever loved has loved you in return. But if you have ever said the pledge of allegiance and meant it from your heart, then I have some disturbing news for you. We all grew up thinking that the U.S. Constitution's "We the people" meant us. We saw in these three simple words America's pledge of allegiance to us as individuals. But when you look carefully at the men who wrote those original three words, you'll see that their "We the people" meant only those who were just like themselves. So to find out if you are one of them, you must answer "yes" to all of the following questions:

- Are you a pure white man?
- Do you own a large amount of land?
- Are you a wealthy business owner?

If you answered "no" to any of these questions, then their constitution does not apply to you. You can scoff at this all you want to – but the truth is that unless you answered "yes" to all three of those questions, their constitution does not even consider you to be a person.

I grew up loving this country. But when I understood that this country never loved me, it caused me to see that who I truly loved were the American people, not the government.

It has been the American people who have fought and died for what they believed "We the people" to mean. It was these same people who endured the abomination of slavery and starved to death in the great depression. All of this suffering was caused by that elitist group who stole our identity by calling themselves "We the people."

It has been this same elitist group that has turned pornography, tobacco, and alcohol, into billion dollar industries. While profiting on the addictive qualities of their products, they care nothing if they kill us. While controlling the government, the elites send billions of our tax dollars overseas to develop new markets for their goods, but deny our own children proper health care.

Among the many atrocities that these "We the people" inflict upon us, not one is worse than their method of keeping us divided. Racism is richly embraced by those who know that if we are consumed

with fighting each other, we will never bond together to oust them.

We presently have a presidential election underway that happens to have a candidate running who is promising "change." I pray that this man gets elected and that the change he brings will be a sweeping change of heart in the interpretation of who "We the people" truly are. By so doing, he can destroy racism forever simply by giving us our own dignity as equal citizens.

The bondage of division must end and those who profit on division should be charged with treason. Our country is ready to grow up – but without a unity of its citizens, this great country will die in its cradle.

*-Dave Gordon*

### Change of Heart

I have lived my life as if I had no future. I had always believed that I would die in my twenties, so I never made any plans or ever cared what was going on. I tried to keep myself self-motivated at all times. It was quite a miserable existence. My only motivation was to get high by any means necessary. My only thought upon waking was how was I going to get the drugs I needed for the day.

Whenever I was deep into my addictions I tried to stay away from my family and the people I loved. I couldn't stand to see myself through their eyes. Besides I couldn't take the chance to be near them for fear that I would hurt them by stealing from them or conning them out of some money to feed my addictions.

I lived my life in a vicious cycle. I would do my drugs (heroin was my drug of choice) so I could escape from reality, but once I was high I would hate myself for the things that I did in order to gain the drugs. You name it I did it. I shoplifted, burglarized, robbed people, conned people out of money, and even sold my body for what I needed.

It got to the point where I hated the person I had become. I blamed everyone but myself. I got arrested, did some time, then came out and did the same thing all over again. It got to the point where I didn't care about anything. All I knew was I was in such pain.

I attempted to kill myself once by taking a bunch of pills that my lovers grandmother had. I don't remember much but I was told I was groggy, cussing people out, then just slept on the couch for days straight. When I finally woke up I was so mad that I was still alive. I also awoke with a hunger to get well. I needed to have some heroin. My body was sweating and I was shaking. I went out on the sheets and sold

my body for \$50. I was able to get well. Once I was well, I had decided that I needed to kill myself. I once again took a bunch of his grandmother's pills. He now needed to get well as well, or he just wanted to do some more drugs to get into a deep mood. He asked me to come with him to hit a lick (do something to get money). We drove off and we went to a house and stole their TV and VCR as well as some other things. We went somewhere and sold what we had. We got \$100. At this time, I started feeling the effects of the pills. I asked him to take me to the hospital. He refused. I pulled out a razor and sliced my wrist open. He threw me out of the car and sped off to the connection's house.

I got to a pay phone and called his grandmother and asked her to send someone to get me and take me to the hospital. I had wrapped my shirt over my wrist to control the bleeding. Next thing I knew here he comes driving up to me. He was pissed that I called his grandmother and I was to try to kill myself again. He told me he was taking me to his grandmother's house again and I can sleep it off again. I begged him to just drop me off at the hospital. I wanted to get help. I couldn't live like this any longer. He wouldn't stop the car to let me out and not even at stop signs! I threw the door open and rolled out. He kept going. A neighbor saw me jump out of the car and called an ambulance. I was then taken to a mental ward where I stayed for 3 months.

It took me quite a while to heal myself. This happened over 20 years ago and since then I have been in prison. During this time I have come to appreciate life and cherish the time I have. As I enter my 45<sup>th</sup> year on this planet I have changed my way of thinking and what I feel is important in life. The most important thing in life is family and treating those around you respectfully. I will never take life granted again.

***-Ralph Patrick Fuller***

I pray that I can make amends to the people I hurt and the family of my victim. If it is possible I would like to be reconciled with the ones who could forgive me.

One day I was watching Oprah when the guests were victims of crime. I saw them each confront their hate. One lady explained how for years she felt burdened by hate for her brother's killer. This disturbed her because she is a spiritual and religious person who had been taught to forgive. She said holding on to the hate was disrupting her spiritual practice.

I wonder if the family I hurt feels a similar disruption in their spiritual life? I pray for them. If

they thought the worst of me, I would understand it, because all during the trial they heard the prosecutor make accusations and exaggerations. I did exercise poor judgment, but I am not the picture of the monster the prosecutor painted me to be.

Over the past eight years of my incarceration I have worked hard to redefine myself and prayed that others would be willing to have a change of heart concerning me. I do have a selfish motive for wanting to be forgiven but that is not my only motive. I have compassion and a conscience.

When I think of the crimes weighing down my soul, I don't want to be burdened with having hardened someone's heart permanently. I know what Hate does. Hate holds people captive. Hate removes the wonder and brilliance from Life. Hate puts us in a prison of our own making. Knowing all this, I would hate to contribute to someone else's captivity. But that's what I did. I hurt at least one family so deeply that they may hate me.

I am sorry. I pray that God's timely Grace liberates them through a change of heart.

***-Paul Pommells***

All the hardship, I have been through in life has made me somewhat bitter. All this hardship has hardened my heart too everything that's around me. But from the start I had a good heart. I guess it runs in the family. My mother and grandmother also had good hearts, but I came up in a very hard way. Even when my heart wanted me to love and not hate, I went against that. I grew up always being incarcerated. In youth homes and then to prison made my heart grow cold, bitter and hateful. Being separated from family and society and seeing so much injustice in prison had me at war with myself, and everything around me. I fought all the time. And thought the world was against me. It was hard for me to trust people. Even when it was in my heart to trust, it was hard for me to do so. But as the years go by, I am getting older and wiser. The more I have read about so many real things has caused me have a new outlook and a change of heart. I now want to help and have love for the one's who hate me. I now want to understand the ones who don't want to understand me. My heart has changed for the good.

***-Michael J. McKinney***

## FINAL NOTES

We are in transition here at PE. Many of our best community volunteers have moved on, and most of the students are crazy busy trying to finish up their schoolwork. The last day of classes is May 1. Many of the students I have been working with these past few years are getting ready to graduate. They have been instrumental in keeping this program going. Some of them have mailed items directly to you so you've seen their names in one of our program mailings and others have focused on maintaining the database and processing all your requests.

Without the input of students I would flounder in my efforts to provide you with programs. My computer skills are limited. I am amazed at what I have learned, and overwhelmed by how much I do not know how to do with computers. As my gray matter slowly hardens [maybe it is quickly] I notice how little aptitude I have for learning new things. Luckily I work with students who are almost always staying between 18 and 22 year old. It's quite fun to watch them thru those years and then they are off, into what ever is their next chapter of life. They have grown up on computers, and it is amazing to me their familiarity and skills with these remarkable machines. This spring Paul, Katherine, Sean, Max, Ellen, Earl, Beth, Ashley will all graduate and leave the confines of college. They are both excited and nervous. The current economic conditions speak to a hard time finding work. I grew up in a time where we could get by on very little money and still have a good life. After college I hitchhiked around the country for many years stopping for chunks of time in many places always easily able to find some low paying gig that would keep me clothed, fed and sheltered. That was in the 70's and I think it is not as easy to do these days. These students are coming of age in a whole other social climate. I am thankful for all they have contributed to this project, and want you all to know that many of them have done so enthusiastically as they really could see that the effort they put forth was well received by all of you. I believe most people want to help, do good work and feel that what they do is meaningful. Participating in PE has been meaningful to them, and I hope many of you have benefited by their contribution.

Please consider writing for one of our programs be it theme writing, poetry, journals. We care about the content of your thoughts and do not judge

you on your technical grammar skills. In fact if you are concerned about those skills let us now when you write and we will try to find some good grammar books to send you.

It is a pleasure working with you in these programs. Thank you for your patience in waiting for these mailings. I try to do what I say I will with these programs, and appreciate that keeping you waiting can add unneeded stress in your life. As funds are tight I do not want to keep sending this newsletter and other programs to those of you who are no longer receiving them. In order to ensure that you stay on our mailing list please be sure to write us sometime before the end of August 2009. I will be mailing this newsletter to anyone who has requested services from us since August of 2008.

So far I continue to have confidence in Pres. Obama. When he speaks he makes sense, which is a refreshing change from our president of the past 8 years. He was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth and it is my hope he continues to think of the people, while trying to correct the abuses of power that have come before him. I have never been so hopeful about a president in my lifetime but I understand there are pressures on him that I cannot not begin to fathom. Whether we like it or not we are all related, and it is in all of our interests to begin caring for and about one another.

Happy Spring. The peepers are back at the pond singing after dark and the birdsongs are also loud at dawn and dusk. I have survived another winter and look forward to the return of sunshine and warmth. Strength to all of you in the coming days. Keep me informed about what is going on with you, and don't forget to let us know which programs you'd like to join.

Prisoner Express  
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**REGISTRATION FORM**

Please note: If you received this newsletter you are on our mailing list for 2009; if you do not wish to participate in any of our other programs or update your 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 May. 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 1000 names on the list and we send out about 175 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.

**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 4th Edition *Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology*. **I understand that to receive the anthology I have to submit a poem to be considered for the anthology.**

**Art Contest/Exhibit** – Enclosed is my art work to be considered for the PE Fall Art exhibit to be held at Cornell University. All artwork received by Oct 1 will be eligible for the show

**History Project** – I’m interested in studying world history, please send me the next unit on **World War 2**

**History and Culture of West Africa** Please send me the packet on West Africa.

**Journal Project** – Please send me a journal program starter pack. [you can start immediately by sending your entries if you are ready. ]

**Dictionary mailing-** I understand that PE has 300 **very basic** dictionaries. Please send me one if there are any left when you receive my request.

**Picture and Theme Essay Project**-Mail in your submissions and receive the collection of everyone else’s writing on the same subject.

**Chess Club**-Yes I want to receive mailings on how to improve my chess game. The mailing will also attempt to answer some of your chess questions, so include those with you registration form

**2009/10 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. If you already signed up for this rest assured it will be mailed eventually.

**Book Club-** Current book selection is **“Lincoln at Gettysburg”** Sign up if you would like to read and join in on a discussion of this intriguing book.

**NAME:** (PLEASE PRINT)  
\_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS:**  
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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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# NEWSLETTER

## Prisoner Express

### Spring 2009

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, sponsor of Prisoner Express, is a project partner of the CRESP Center for Transformative Action. Additional Support comes from the Cornell Public Service Center.



Mark Copestakes