

# PRISONER EXPRESS NEWSLETTER

## SPRING 10

Welcome to the latest edition of the Prisoner Express News. The newsletter is designed to bring you a sample of the writing and art you all have created in our last cycle of programming. We also will present you with a variety of programs to choose from for our next mailing cycle. I will attempt to answer some of the many questions directed to Prisoner Express these past 6 months, as well as update you on the happenings here at the Durland Alternatives Library, which is the hub of Prisoner Express activity. Many of you have been receiving this newsletter for quite awhile, and of course, others of you are holding your first edition wondering what this is all about. PE was called into being close to 10 years ago from a single letter asking for help.

We focus on providing you with information, education, and opportunities for creative expression in a public forum. We offer a variety of educational and creative programs for you to join. As we are literally scraping the bottom of the funds barrel I ask that you only sign up for projects in which you will fully participate. With our funding limitations, every mistake we make or every extra-unused packet we mail means some other program is not completed, or someone down the line will not get a packet they are hoping to receive. Nothing like a money crisis to reveal once again how interconnected we all are.

This program is all about creating connection. We hope to connect you through your writing to other prisoners who participate in our programs. I know from your letters how valuable it can be to read about each other's thoughts and experiences. I understand that it is often difficult to share real feelings while locked up, and that if you do it can come back to haunt you. Yet I also know the universal pain of being stifled and thwarted.

Creative self-expression can be a pathway to balance and health. Much emotional distress comes from bottling up real thoughts and feelings. Often it is not your actual thoughts and feelings that are the problem, but rather the bottling up of them, that cause distress and imbalance. It is my hope that your writings, and our other programs helps you to realize you are not alone in dealing with the struggles of incarceration and life, and that indeed you can use this and any other experience to learn and grow. Often the experiences that cause us to reflect and change are not the ones we'd chose for ourselves, but once we are in a situation it is in our best interest to make it serve our personal growth.

We also are working to get your writings on to the internet. We have created a new system for posting your work online and it is making it much easier to stay

current with posting your themes, journals, and poetry for all the free world with a computer to read. If anyone visits our webpage at [www.prisonerexpress.org](http://www.prisonerexpress.org), there is a link on the lower right called "Newest Writings". It takes the reader to a page in google docs, where we post your writings. Let your friends and family know. It is quite amazing what we can do with technology, and how much information is at our fingertips.

At PE, our hope is to engage you and bring you into community with other prisoners and the free world folk who participate in our project. Having come from a broken home and abusive parenting, I have always valued the feeling of belonging. To me, a sense of belonging, is at the root of a healthy society. Whatever has happened to any of us in the past is memory. Memories can offer us a richness of experience, but there is no need for our stories about the past to control our present and future. We create the story of our life through our interpretation of what has happened to us. Sometimes the stories we tell act to limit who we are now and tomorrow. I propose we recognize the limitations we place upon ourselves and see all things as possible, at least in terms of our ability to create and celebrate our existence.

I know how foolish that can sound to some of you living in hard times and circumstances, but what other options do any of us have. There are always hard times and we can let them grind us to powder or we can stand firm and at least let the forces polish us to a bright sheen during this experience of life.

Well that is a lengthy introduction to this project, but I do like to share with you all, where I am coming from in this effort. My name is Gary and I am the Assistant Director of the Durland Alternatives Library. We are a small library on the Cornell University campus and we collect books, magazines CD's and DVD's related to alternative perspectives on current social issues. I guess the PE project is an attempt to offer an alternative perspective on the prison experience. The library faces hard financial times as well. Our budget is based on an endowment, and the payout has been diminishing every year for the past 3 or 4 years with no end in sight. Money is an issue here in the free worlds, and it seems like there have been all sorts of banking and Wall Street scandals these past few years that have really caused the economic picture to be bleak. It is a hard time to earn a living on the outside, though of course there is still plenty of money in someone's hands. I wonder how people in the future will view these times where mega wealth is celebrated, while millions go hungry. Those of you who read the "Grapes of Wrath," our last book

project can see that the more things change the more they stay the same.

On the bright and cheery side, it is gardening time once again. I have an endless list of chores to do to get my garden going. I have many flats of seedlings started in a small greenhouse. My large tiller is broken, [busted rod], and I am turning a lot of ground with a shovel. It is slower and harder, but it works. I have a small tiller I can press into service as well. So far I have planted spinach, lettuce, beets, onions and potatoes. I am fortunate to have found an activity that nourishes both my body and being.

I just had 4 days tramping around New York City with my 10-year-old daughter. We went to museums, Chinatown, Times Square a number of other places. She loved it and is ready to relocate to NYC. Given that we live in a sparsely populated section of upstate NY, you can imagine her astonishment at the intensity of the crowds on the street and the packed subway cars at rush hour. I imagine we will be going back soon as I want to share the experience with the rest of my family.

Lack of funds is dramatically affecting our ability to continue with our programs. I have not had the funds to send out both history programs from the last cycle; "Civil War" and "Latino Migration to the US". I recently learned, that the small grant we hoped to receive for postage and copying the history material was not funded. I have at least 300 packages of books requests waiting to be mailed as well. Student volunteers continue creating the book packages with the faith that the money will come. I have started writing a letter that I will send to famous wealthy people who have been to jail, asking for their help. If anyone can suggest names of folks who have funds and might be willing to contribute please let me know. I have begun talking with a professional fundraiser and he may help me find funds. He will get back to me in May. I planned to mail the newsletter out a while ago, but have had to wait until I had the money. I want to include you in this conversation because perhaps someone has an idea.

Some of the ideas suggested by PE participants are: to stop sending book packages and use funds for the educational programs. The rationale was that other places supply books, but there are not a lot of other educational and creative self-expression programs. It was also suggested that we charge you for the postage for the book packages. An average book package costs around \$3.50 to mail. This would work for those of you with some funds, and would allow us to use whatever money we could raise to help indigent individuals. I am not sure how a two-tiered program would work. It was also suggested we ask the female PE volunteers to have a car wash in wet t-shirts, but I do not think I am going to follow up on that one, even though my truck really needs to be cleaned.

I know I am dumping my money woes on all of you, but at least you now understand the long wait for books and other educational materials. In some way I hesitate to put-up my usual list of offering this cycle as I don't want to set you up for signing up for programs I can't deliver. Luckily we still have our writing and art projects and they do not cost as much to produce. I am saddened by this turn of events and I will continue to search for the money-needed to continue.

Modify and Adjust! I have learned through life that every situation needs evaluation and then it is up to me to modify and adjust my expectations or actions in order to be in harmony with what is. I am working at understanding how to continue this PE service given the present financial situation. Despite my plans of finding money, I choose to be conservative in the programs I offer this cycle, in hopes that I can follow through on delivering them. If I raise the necessary funds, I will always send the history projects from the previous cycle.

### **Projects for Spring/Summer 2010**

#### **Book Mailing**

We began PE by sending out a package of books to Danny Harris. Danny most eloquently let me know the power a good read had in his life, and his actions and my response illustrate the power you all have when you write and communicate. Now 10 years later we are sending anywhere from 150 to 200 packages of books out each month. We have volunteers collecting and packing books for you. Understand that there are a few thousand folks currently requesting books so any request will take a while to fill. Currently new book requests are assigned a November 2010 mailing date and that is as of April 30. This is a best-case scenario and assumes I will have the money to mail books as planned. If you have read up to this point, you already know about the financial difficulty we are facing.

Your responsibility is to let us know the types of books you would like to receive. The more options you give us the better your chances of getting what you want. We are usually short on language books, how to technology type books [carpentry, electric etc, and art books, so give us options. It is good to prioritize for us, the types of books you want. If we can't make a good match based on your request the volunteer packers will select a few interesting books for you.

#### **Journal project**

Rachel, a Cornell student, coordinates the journal project. She read the submissions you send in. She keeps your entries organized and helps find folks to type selected journals to post online. We usually send an "Ideas for Keeping a Journal Packet" when we have 200 new people signed up for the project. You can join this project immediately by submitting your thoughts about life, or you can wait until we send you the intro packet.

Keeping a journal is a great way to reflect on the events of your life and the mood of the day. It can help gain perspective on what is in front of or inside you. Send us your entries at your convenience.

### **Poetry Project**

We created this project in response to all the evocative poetry sent to PE by you, the members. We are working on PE Anthology V6. We receive many poems. A team of students reads the poetry and select ones to print in the PE Poetry Anthology. All of you who submit a poem for consideration receive a copy of the anthology. If your poem comes after we have begun production of V6 than it will automatically be

### **Jose Lauriano Di Lenola** **Slow Movements**

Slow movements of sound  
Agitate my ears with  
Vague whispers that  
Echo and accuse  
Me with  
Every rustle.

### **Jack W. McCollister Jr.** **Blink**

As the minutes creep into hours  
And the days go rolling by  
I begin to wonder what happened  
To all the years of my life...  
All the dreams I had,  
All the ambition to make them  
come true?  
In the blink of an eye  
Twenty years have gone by  
And I've only accomplished a few.

### **Jesus Felan** **Suicide**

Baby, just thinkin' bout the past  
We both have lived it very fast  
Relationships that didn't last  
We sure did have a freakin' blast  
With different lovers every night  
I held them close and very tight  
Pretending things would be alright  
But in the end we'd start to fight  
I'd make believe the love was real  
But that's not really how I feel  
I'm doing things against my will  
Day in day out the same old drill  
I couldn't live with all the strain  
'cause everything was so arcane  
Some people say I've gone insane  
I've killed for pleasure just like cain

Too many turns with crazy twists  
My soul is blackballed from the list  
I'm not like vapor, silent mist  
To all the world I don't exist  
I had a life when I was free  
I used to have a family  
Then I was happy as could be  
Now they're all gone and it's just  
me  
I found the only way to cope  
Was getting' drunk and smokin'  
dope  
So now my life is without hope  
Around my neck the hangman's rope  
I smoked so much forgot my name  
Monday thru Friday it's all the same  
Nothing is real it's just a game  
And I'm the only one to blame

### **Eric Bederson** **At the Riverside**

The flow, smooth as silk  
Over sandstone (at times)  
Coursing variety of turbulence,  
Cooling in shadowy pools of arching  
boughs.

Leafy fingers, gusting!  
Parting wide river rolls  
Under strokes of light. Dusted  
Rays glisten off rapid reflections  
Of summer, floating in seasonal  
Rituals as adventure seekers hunt  
Polliwogs and single-minded beasts  
Chase sticks and stones  
While safety-headed protectors  
Tote lotions to keep sunburns at bay  
When splashing stirs with laughing  
And sticks and stones are thrown  
Followed by plodding dives.

considered for V7. Sending in a poem is a great way to mail and see what your fellow poets are writing. We also use some of the art sent in to illustrate the booklet. If we use your art we will send you a copy of the anthology as well. We also post the poems from the anthology on our website. A few months ago we sent out Volume 5 of our anthology. I hope those of you who received it were pleased.

Below is a sampling of poems we have received in the past few months. I encourage all of you so inclined to share your poetic thoughts with us.

Then, eyes gleam diaphanous wings  
Of a butterfly in a wave of illusion  
Beneath the water as it dances  
In the glow above with a heart-beat  
Motion to its flight, dying  
At every pause in the wind.

When the laughter subsides  
And sticks cease to be thrown,  
When rapids refrain from cascading,  
When the heart-beat of the butterfly  
Is all but cocooned, when I see  
Beyond this memory, free from my  
Loneliness, when the sun's rays  
warm  
But do not burn my skin when my  
Aged eyes rest to a new spring in  
bloom,  
A riverside at play, a fountain of  
youth  
Beside an ageless citadel, where  
from  
My time has flown.

### **Don Collins** **Mind Perception**

With your mind, you perceive by  
choice,  
Take calling in the voice of trust...  
Others will balance in what you  
cannot know,  
For you remain alone until reality  
sets in...

Silence is to be blind in what you  
will not see,  
Come forward, heed to the voice of  
opportunity...

Stay clear of your ego, as it is a  
strength of weakness,

Keep open your mind and seek the path toward an open ear...

Patience is a cure, while stubbornness is a cop-out, Awareness is to be alert, where isolation brings seclusion,

We cannot read thoughts, nor foresee your next journey, What is certain, you are here, you made a choice of reason.

**Robert Deninno**  
**The Magic's Come Undone**

Wild eyed golden child  
Your placenta was the sun  
Misty eyed and jaded now  
The magic's come undone  
Your heart is broke  
Your soul is bruised

**History Project**

You are not alone in wondering what happened to the history packets you are waiting to receive. I was not able to mail units the "Civil War" and the "Hispanic Migration." I have all of the names of folks who signed up for the lessons in our database, and I have the lessons ready to mail. I do not have the funds to duplicate and mail the material. Each mailing would go to 300 to 400 of you. Each packet would cost more than \$500 for copying and postage. I will hold on to the material, and try to find a sponsor who can afford the cost of this endeavor. I will keep you updated. What I can do is post the lessons on our webpage. You can access the lessons if you have friends on the outside who can print off the lessons and mail them to you. Let's all hold the image of a history loving individual with deep pockets stepping in to fund this as an ongoing program. I will have an update on the history program in the next newsletter.

**Norse Mythology Study**

Laura a volunteer at PE has volunteered to create an information packet on the Norse Gods. I am offering this before I have secured any funds to mail it, but am hopeful we can do this. I am hoping to mail this packet at the end of the summer. Below is a description written by Laura.

**By: R. H. Miller**

*Norse mythology is something referenced every so often in modern media, but the details behind it aren't as*

You guard yourself  
From being used  
And try to keep yourself amused  
While the colors fade and run  
Wild eyed golden child  
The magic's come undone

**Robert L. Hambrick**  
**The Greatest Thief**

The greatest thief  
Steals light  
And changes it to shadow;  
Shadow, into darkness;  
Darkness, into oblivion...

Steals ambition  
And changes it to contentment;  
Contentment, into sorrow;  
Sorrow, into apathy...

Steals enjoyment  
And changes it to mediocracy;  
Mediocracy, into contempt;  
Contempt, into loathing...

Steals desire  
And changes it to loneliness;  
Loneliness, into desperation;  
Desperation, into despair...  
Steals love  
And changes it to abandon;  
Abandon, into recklessness;  
Recklessness, into fatality.  
The greatest thief of all  
Turns minutes to hours;  
Hours, into days;  
Days, into years;  
Steals all,  
And leaves only tears.

*well known as, say, Greek or Roman mythology. In this pamphlet, we will look into the Scandinavian lore. First, we'll start off with a brief introduction that defines what exactly Norse mythology is and some of its defining characteristics. We will then go into the world that surrounds the gods and goddesses -- all three worlds that are situated around the tree Yggdrasil -- as well as some of its major inhabitants, which range from the gods and goddesses to the creatures that live around the world tree. Finally, we will go into some of the legends, including the creation myth and the Ragnarok, as well as the hero myth of Sigurd.*



**Math Project**

We are in the middle of this year's math project and will not accept new enrollees until the Fall of 2010. We have developed 2 units so far, and Professor Dani is working on developing Unit 3. We have sent out the Unit 1 placement exam, and have been scored and returned. We are sending out Unit 2 to all who passed the placement exam as well as to all who requested a more advanced instructional packet. For all who did not score 80% or higher on the placement exam we are sending a 63 lesson packet as well as a unit 1 retest. If you have not received your instructional book yet, expect it in the mail shortly. If you are interested in advancing your math skills, look for the offering in the next newsletter.

**Drawing Instruction**

In our last cycle we sent out a 300 "How to Draw" packets developed by student intern Toby. It focused on

shading and perspective. Many of you request art and drawing instruction books. We get more requests for this material than donated books. Also, donated books can often have the unclothed human body which I know prevents the book from being delivered to you. Our response to this situation has been to create packets of instruction. Current Prisoner Express intern Ksana volunteered to create a "Drawing 2" pamphlet. She writes "*Anyone who can make a mark can make art- this instructional booklet will only teach you how to be a better artist. It features sections on how to think and see as an artist, the benefit of drawing to your life, explanations of the basics (including composition, proportion, negative space, shading, line, value, and perspective), exercises, and strategies for improving and developing your drawings, and an advanced lesson on portraits.*

### Art show

Every year volunteers at PE organize an art show from the art you send to us. It is an opportunity to publicize the program in a different way, and also demonstrates the humanity and talent of folks participating in this program. We sell any artwork we can, to raise funds to continue our educational mailings. Mostly, the show is for students at the university so prices are low. If you would like to donate art for the show, please send it to us by mid Sept 2010. In the past, we have offered prizes for the work, but I hesitate to state what they will be this year, as I don't want to offer funds I do not have. We will highlight the winners in the PE newsletter, and the show will be juried by graduate students in the Master of Fine Arts program here at Cornell. Some folks in Texas have reported that they are prohibited from sending artwork because we are not on their visitor list. I have clarified that with the mailroom and as long as the art you send is on standard 11 by 8 1/2 inch paper, you are allowed to share it with us. The art can be drawing, painting, sculpture, paper art, and any creative endeavor you can safely mail to us. It is always lots of fun when we have the art received during the year spread out on tables and framed on the walls of the gallery space. We hang the art in the graduate student lounge so in the course of the month it is on display, thousands of people pass through the room. Please consider sending in an item. I do not want to promise to return your work, as both postage and the time needed can be prohibitive, so if you need to have it returned, probably it is best not to send it. **If you send in art, please send a short statement about yourself, the materials you use, and the working conditions you face in creating art. We will post this by your work.**

### Book Club

Our last book club selection was "The Grapes of Wrath". We sent the book to over 1100 individuals. I thought it was an excellent read, as did many of you participating. Gabe, a student volunteer has created a compilation document of your answers and hopefully you have received it even before I have mailed this newsletter. If not expect it soon. In fall 2010 I am expecting to receive

hundreds of copies of the Sci-fi classic "*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*" by Philip K. Dick. This is the book being given to all new freshman at Cornell to read, and often I can get donated copies in the late fall. I read this book 40 years ago and wonder what I'll think of it when I read it again with all of you. We will not receive the book until next fall, and you will have the opportunity to sign up for it in the Fall 2010 newsletter

### Chess Club

Chess master Ettie has been creating a chess newsletter for chess players for the past couple of years. Her newsletter is full of tips on how to improve your game, including the moves from great chess games from past chess masters, some chess puzzles, and answers to some of your chess questions. **As I want to be sure all who are currently on the mailing list for the newsletter still want it, you must sign up if you wish to receive the next issue of the Chess Newsletter.** I am hoping we can mail it out later this summer. To sign up you can send in the registration form at the end of the newsletter or simply write and let us know you want to receive the chess mailing. If you do not sign up now you will not receive the next newsletter. Your registration will entitle you to chess mailings for 1 year until summer 2011.

### Prisoner Express Newsletter

We send the newsletter to everyone who requests it, but if we do not hear from you for 8 months, we delete you from the list. If you want receive the Fall 2010 newsletter be sure you have written us since March 2010. If you are not sure then drop us a note letting us know you want to stay on the mailing list

### Theme Writing

Every month I offer a different writing prompt, and I ask all of you, who are interested, to submit your thoughts on the theme. All the themes for a given month are typed, and everyone who submits an entry receives a copy of all the writings we receive on the theme topic. I enjoy reading your themes. Your writing offers a great way to communicate. Often what one person writes can resonate with many of the other readers. It can be really healing to realize others share your feelings, so you writers do a great service to this program and all its' participants with your submissions. Giving voice to your inner thoughts can be a great way to resolve issues and get clear with yourself. Participating in this writing project is a good opportunity to develop writing and communication skills. Many people read your work on the website, [www.prisonerexpress.org](http://www.prisonerexpress.org).

Below are upcoming topics and the deadline for submitting your writing. After that I will reprint a few essays from previous topics. There are many essays I would like to put into the newsletter, but can't as I have to keep it at 24 pages.

I have gotten to know many of you through your regular writings and I appreciate the insight into your life that your writing provides. Remember there is no wrong or

right way to respond to these writing prompts. All of your thoughts and efforts are welcome. Some of you do not have confidence in your writing ability and this program offers a chance to practice. I have seen a number of you improve as writers over the years, and I believe the participation in this project has helped you hone your writing skills.

**Remember send us an entry and you receive a complete packet on the theme with your writing, typed and included.**

#### Upcoming Topics

<b>Best Friends</b>	<b>due 6/1/10</b>
<b>On the Road</b>	<b>due 7/1/10</b>
<b>Teenage Years</b>	<b>due 8/1/10</b>
<b>Stars</b>	<b>due 9/1/10</b>
<b>Pretending</b>	<b>due 10/1/10</b>
<b>Basic Needs</b>	<b>due 11/1/10</b>
<b>Sympathy</b>	<b>due 12/1/10</b>
<b>Heroes</b>	<b>due 1/1/10</b>

#### WALKING HOME

By **Randall E. Gibson**

"This is SO boring!" I thought several times while sitting in English Lit class. Today I decided to do something exciting, "Ha! I know, I'll just skip this class. Heck, I might as well skip the rest of the classes too!" One slight problem though, I would have to walk all the way home! No big deal you might think. Well, home was over 15 miles away! So during lunch break, I made my escape, ha! I made it to Big Creek Bridge without being seen by anyone I knew, meaning neighbors that might snitch me out to my folks.

By: **Lionel Reyes**

I had several hours to kill, so I went down to the creek and started walking along the banks looking for some line and a hook. This creek is well known and quite popular for trout, salmon and steelhead fishing. I regularly collected a good supply of fishing equipment along its banks every time I fished there. It wasn't long before I found what I was looking for. After finding a nice tree limb to make a "pole" out of, I proceeded to tie a 10' length of line and a small hook to it. I turned over a few rocks in the creek and found some baby crawdads, excellent for bait. Walking down the creek to one of my favorite spots, I threw the line out into the current, and of course, before it made it to the end of the small pool, a nice fat cutthroat grabbed a hold of the other end. I proceeded to haul in two more to go with the first one. I went ahead and gutted them, and then made a nice little

fire. I found a nice "green" forked stick that I shaved the bark off of and cut to length. Then I sharpened the forks and stuck one of the trout onto it. Then I placed the stick at an angle over the fire, out of the flames to cook the fish while I went and looked for another forked stick.

The trout were excellent fare even without salt. After I finished eating, I figured I'd better start walking. I wanted to make it home at the same time the school bus showed up. I ended up walking the railroad tracks so I wouldn't be seen by my folks or neighbors who would of course offer me a ride, which would ruin my chance of getting away with it.

I ended up making it home without anyone the wiser. However I decided that I wouldn't do that again because it was just too much walking and having to keep an eye out for people that I knew.

By **Harvey Wendt**

Sometimes even such a mundane activity as walking home can be an unforgettable experience. I will never forget walking home with my brothers and sister one day when I was five years old: sixty-four years ago. The memory comes along extra strong every time I smell cornmeal or sacks of grain in a farm or feed store.

I cannot remember the name of the town, only that it was a very small town somewhere in Texas--with a feed store. I used to love the fragrance of it and still do.

My mom and dad had been separated for a couple of years. When they separated, my dad took my brothers and me, leaving my sister with my mom. He got a job as

a woodcutter on a small crew, and we lived in the woods. I never did figure out why the adults slept inside the little cabin while the kids who were there had to sleep in hammocks outside--unless it was just because the kids didn't know enough to be afraid. In 1945, woods in Texas were not nearly as tamed as they are today.

Anyway, mom somehow found out about a year later where he had taken us. She came with friends loaded for bear and took us back. We had been away from her long enough that we didn't recognize her when she came in the middle of the night.

It was after we had been with her and our sister for about a year, and being told repeatedly that he was never coming back, that we decided one day that we would walk to town for the adventure. It was a walk of three or four miles not a short hop for a three-year-old girl and three boys ranging from four to seven.



On the way back home, as we were walking past the feed store whose aroma I liked so much, we heard a loud whistle behind us and turned to look. There was a man about a block back walking behind us. When we looked back, he waved. We kept walking. In a few minutes, we heard the whistle again and turned. He was a little closer and waved again.

"I think he's after us," my older brother said.

I kept looking back and said, "That's daddy!"

My older brother looked back and said, "No it's not!"

We heard the man from the distance calling, "Wait for me."

"He is after us," my brother said, "Run!"

When the other three ran, I ran too, still convinced it was daddy we ran from. When we got home, mom had arrived from work and asked where we had been. We told her, and my brother said, "A man chased us!"

I said, "He didn't chase us. He just called. It was daddy."

Mom frowned and said, "Daddy doesn't know where we live." Then came a knock at the door.

That was when mom and dad got back together.

#### **By Perry Allen Austin**

Because my dad was in the army, we moved around quite a bit from one military base to another, from one town to another. So I had a lot of different homes through the course of my life. Still, I did my share of walking home.

As a small child in elementary and junior high, at various military bases and towns, I usually walked to and from school as it was close by. There were times though because of the distances that this wasn't possible, and I would have to take the bus. As I got older and into high school, the distances started not to matter. I would hitchhike to school and then walk home afterwards. I was a loner and kept to myself most of the time and hated the noise and crowded, closed in feeling of the school bus. I started hitchhiking regularly to school when I was in the 9th grade and living in Cicero, Indiana. I was very small for my age and being half-Japanese, living in a small all-white racist town was very hard. I was bullied terribly and treated as an outcast by mostly everyone. Because of this, I tried to avoid the other kids as much as possible. I'd get up early in the morning when people were just heading out to work, and hit the small two-lane highway to Arcadia, the next town down Highway 19 where the high school was located. It was about seven miles or more I reckon. I usually got a ride easily in the mornings going to school, but if I didn't, no matter. I enjoyed the quiet stillness of the mornings with just my own thoughts to keep me company. After school, I didn't even try to get a ride. I got home when I got there. Besides, there wasn't anyone

there that cared if I got home or not, nor what time I got there. My dad was in Vietnam then and my mom, well she just couldn't be bothered.

After my dad returned from Vietnam, we moved to Comanche Village, Fort Hood, Texas. This was to be my home for the next two years. For the first couple of weeks, I rode the bus to school and back until I learned its location, the main highways nearest it, and the side streets leading to and from the highway and the school. Then again I would get up early in the morning and hitchhike or walk to school and then walk home afterwards. I started running away from home a lot about then also, and sometimes would hitchhike back to Cicero, Indiana and stay with my aunt and uncle for a while before being sent home, hitchhiking and walking of course.

A lot has changed since then. Home for me has been a Texas prison unit for the last 30 years, the last 7 of them spent here on death row. I don't have a real home anymore. If I should ever get out there is no place I could go that I could call home. The Bible says I'll have a home in heaven once I die though, a home with God. I wonder if he'll let me walk there.

#### **WORST JOBS**

##### **By Ruben Benavides**

Man, I remember my worst job...even if it was for just one day, and based on a bet I was hell bent to win. The bet was simple- to take care of my son Ruben Jr. for one day, which I felt I could do. It was not a job per say, but I was just 15 or 16 years old, so it was a challenge for me.

The day was simple; my girlfriend left, and it was on. My son and I spending the day alone. He was still a baby, not even one year old. I mean, it was simple- he cried, and I would pick him up and carry him. I talked to him and he would stare at me and just smile. It gave me such pride to hold my son like that, father and son. We were alone to fend for ourselves and face life's troubles. Even if it was for one day, to me it seemed like a life time. That's when I was younger. Hell it was too easy. The milk he drank was made, I just had to warm it up. He already took his morning bath, so it was all good. The jars of baby food were set up for me. It was an easy bet. I would win and show my girl.

Before anything let me state this- my girl and I had gotten into an argument about how being a mother was easy. All she did was stay home. Big mistake on my part! Hey I was young and stupid! My girl was older than me, by a couple of years. I was young and made fast and easy money. I thought I was the one doing anything, as in a job. So that's how it started and the bet was made. Little did I know I was playing with a stacked deck! Yeah, she got down...which now I smile at.

So the morning was set and planned. I would clean the house, mop and sweep and put my son in the swing while he chased me with his eyes, just blabbing like little babies do. I cranked up the swing and off he was in the swing. It was time to take care of business. I was really in to it- I had the music on and I was cleaning the whole house. The last room was the bathroom. I moved my son to the little hallway so I could keep my eye on him. By the time I knew it, it was almost noon and my son was fussy. I picked him up and gave him a bottle to put him to sleep. To me, this was easy. Hey I even changed his wet diaper! I got this! My son soon fell asleep and I channel surfed for the better part of the day. Here was when the stacked deck came into play. I made myself a little lunch, ate and washed my dishes. My son woke up and I knew he had to be hungry, so I got the food jars my girl told me to feed him, which if I remember right were some vegetables and chicken. So there I go. I fed him and he ate the stuff up! He was a big baby and ate a jar and a half, with some of it on his clothes and face. But he ate. So I burp him and boy he belches like he ate a steak! Just like I knew he would, he fell asleep.

There he went, as I watched him snore. He was laying on top of me and we fell asleep like that. Then like in a boxing fight I woke up like I smelled the smelling salts used to wake up a knocked out boxer! Man oh man...it smelled like a skunk had died! Then I knew right there and then that I was set up. Soon after that started to wail and swing his arms as he cried.

Man I needed a plan. I knew I had a weak stomach and for sure I would just throw up when changing or trying to change my son's diaper. So I had a master plan. I got my boy and went to my room. I got two socks and a t-shirt. I proceeded to wrap a sock over my nose. Then I got the t-shirt and made me a ninja style mask, like I used to wear when I was younger. Then the other sock I used to cover my mouth again. Can you imagine how I looked! Like a masked idiot with socks tied around my face! Haha. In ("tow"?) I got newspapers laid on the table and baby powder all over the newspapers. I got all I needed, baby wipes, diaper, table, I was set.

I laid him down on the newspaper covered with baby powder and unbuttoned his jumper. Here he was all happy and looking at me like I was entertaining him. I unfastened the diaper and the stink was powerful! So I just closed it back up! Oh my god, his poop was green! The waves of the stench came like waves just crashing over me. I was gagging with this stuff on my face, and here was my son laughing like he was part of this Ruse! I started, so I had to change him. I opened the diaper and was gagging and my eyes were watery.

My god it was like a stink bomb was set off in his diaper! It took me some time, and like twenty baby wipes and four diapers, which I put on backwards! Yeah, I put it on so fast, no wonder I had trouble fastening the

straps to the back. Freshened up and not crying, I changed a stinky diaper! I won! I wrapped up everything and we both walked to the dumpster to take the stink out of the house.

For some it might not be a job, but at that age it seemed like a job. So thanks to those who change these dirty bombs kids set off in their diapers, much respect! That day I learned a lot and grew also. I didn't say anything to my girl. And when I smelled something stinky, I sure found dirty dishes to wash (haha). It was my worst job. But a job that I came to love. Now my son is fourteen years old, and lucky I don't have to change his diaper anymore (smile). At this point, I'd gladly ask for a job like this. Happy times and things to smile and laugh at, the good 'ol days.

**By: David Prater**

For me the arrival of my sixteenth birthday represented the first substantial step towards entering that revered fraternity of "adulthood". In the days of the Romans I would have been apprenticed out or I would have joined the legions and been shipped off to serve my time in the army. Times had certainly changed in two thousand years. At sixteen, no one in their right mind would have welcomed me into an apprenticeship, nor was I of age to serve in any of the armed forces. I was, however, armed with a freshly minted driver's license, my first serious girlfriend, and two months of free time before I was due to report for fall football practice. Life was good and only promised to get better.

Unfortunately, any ideas I had entertained for a laissez-faire summer were short lived. My father, who was a product of the Great Depression, had been harboring thoughts of his own concerning my emergence in the adult world. He had decided that it was time for me to have my first job and the approaching summer provided the perfect opportunity to stretch my "adult legs" as it were.

My father continued to speak for some time afterward, although I confess I was unable to hear much of what he said. There was some such nonsense about learning the valuable lesson of an honest day's labor and wages earned, but it was all lost on me. In my head, planes were falling from the sky and were crashing to the ground in fiery balls of thunder. Cars, with their tires screeching, were veering out of control and slamming into one another with horrific force. Plagues of biblical proportions were invading every crevice of my mind! If I had been armed, I would have fallen on my sword just to end the agony gripping me at that moment.

I made a half-hearted attempt to counter my father's sally, but he was old school, and was unwavering once his mind had been set on something. That I would be working this summer was not up for debate, I knew. The only thing that remained to be

settled was what sort of hellish labor would be required of me in the days and weeks ahead.

After finally gathering up my faculties, I set about learning what job prospects my father had in store for me. I was bolstered to learn that he had nothing tangible and would be open to suggestions from me. I informed him that I knew of several jobs that would not only offer employment, but would provide experience that would pay dividends in the real world. His ears perked up at that, seeing how excited I was to embrace his proposition. Little did he know that my sole motivation was to acquire a job that would demand little of me physically and mentally. I promised my father I would look into them and would meet with him later the next day. He accepted this and I was off on my quest for height loafing.

Near our home was a large public pool that opened every summer. Jobs for trained and experience lifeguards were to be had if you were quick. Of course I was not a trained lifeguard, experienced or otherwise, but I did know the people who owned the pool, and felt confident that I could cajole a job from them. If need be by bribe.

I called directly on Ray Giuliani, the owner of the pool. Known as Big Ray around the neighborhood, I told him I had come to inquire about one of the much coveted lifeguard positions. While chewing on a turkey leg, he was Big Ray after all; he informed me that the ever-chirpy Rachael Hanson had snapped up the last lifeguard position. Rachel Hanson! She was small in stature, and had large breasts that, while nice to look at, did not allow for proper swimming technique. "How is she going to life guard anyone?" I demanded to know.

Big Ray shrugged, and then reminded me that I couldn't swim a lick either. He apparently had not forgotten that I nearly drowned in three feet of water the previous summer.

"Fair enough, but is Rachel willing to mow your grass every week?" I countered smugly.

**By: Anselmo Ramirez**

In fact, she was willing, and had mowed the lawn that very morning he pointed out to me. I looked down at the freshly cut lawn and cursed Rachel Hanson.

"Sorry", he said and wished me better luck next summer. To hell with next summer. He'd be lucky if I didn't turn his pool yellow this summer. Bowed, but far from broken I left for my next stop.

Around the neighborhood, there were several venues where you could find work. There was the farmers market co-opted by the students from the nearby university's Agriculture program, which all of the 4-H nerds gravitated to. The dreadfully obvious were the fast food burger joints where you sacrificed your clear complexion, for a zitty landscape, in exchange for work frying up the next heart attack for some unsuspecting family, and then there was the snow cone stand. To some it was the Mecca of summer jobs. I knew better. True enough you worked inside an air-conditioned booth, and you were free to eat all the flavored ice you could manage without freezing your brain, but it was a snow cone stand for crying out loud! It was a crap job, I knew, but it still beat tossing burgers at the Sonic or DQ, and with that, I made my way to the 20 ft snow cone.

I'd be the first to admit that the snow cone stand was a marvel in modern engineering. Made of wood and fiberglass, the stand resembled a giant snow cone measuring 20 feet tall starting at the lighted neon blue snowball at the top to the white cup shaped bottom. I

once asked Ms. Penelope, the owner, what flavor the giant snow cone was, and she replied matter of factly, "money", and that, ladies and gentlemen, was Ms. Penelope.

A forty-something divorcee, Ms. Penelope owned a perpetual tan thanks to her second business, "Ms. Penelope's Fantastic Tans". As a result, she wore cut-off jeans year round no matter what the weather so she could show off her long, tanned legs. Most afternoons she could be found sitting under the awning of the stand, chain-smoking Marlboro lights while habitually patting her big bleached blond hair, which looked to me as if a shaken can of orange crush had exploded from the top of

her head. While she held court she would drink cans of Coors hidden inside 7-11 Big Gulp cups packed in ice from the snow cone stand. Whenever she would finish one she would sing, "Mama sure is thirsty today!" then



proceed to take a fresh can of Coors and stash it inside her dummy Big Gulp.

When I arrived at the snow cone stand, I found Ms. Penelope standing at one of the side windows counting money. A look of concentration was etched across her face as she slapped the dollar bills onto the counter with a quick and practiced hand. I paused just short of the window, not wanting to disturb her mid-count. I had a propitious plan mapped out in my mind and interrupting her while counting money was not where I wanted to begin. I waited until she had finished before stepping forward with my best smile.

I greeted her as cheerfully as I could, and asked if I could speak to her.

Ms. Penelope's first response was to blow a plumb of smoke into the air while reaching for her Big Gulp. After taking a drink she answered, "Certainly, sugar." She called everyone sugar, or baby. Of course if she was pissed she used something incredible profane.

I made quick work of explaining I was in search of a job for the summer, but before I had even finished, the snow cone mogul was shaking her head. She motioned over her shoulder to her three daughters who were busy comparing manicures. "I have those wallflowers and then ten others already lined up for the summer" Her tone made it clear my services would not be needed. "If you want I can tell Frank you're looking for work," she offered after seeing the pained expression her curt answer had caused. Frank was her ex-husband and he ran a machine shop across town. Heavy lifting inside a sweltering machine shop was apparently her idea of a do-over.

I nodded my head, thanking her for the great offer while in fact it was the worst suggestions my adolescent ears had ever heard. I left after promising to stop by and speak to Frank. Another lie on my part, as I had no intention of stopping by to speak to Frank. My only destination at that point was home, marching under the shroud of defeat to meet with my father. I was Napoleon at Waterloo, Antony at Actium...my attempts to find desirable employ had failed miserably.

That I loved my father was a known fact. He was keen and intelligent, and all of my friends regularly reminded me how great he was compared to their droll, and idiotic fathers, however no teenage ever wants to be at the complete mercy of his parents contrivances, no matter the degree of adoration that they feel. And as I made my way home, I was loath to admit the fact of my once promising summer vacation now rested in the hands of my father. As I turned down my street, I spotted Rene Villalobos' truck parked in front of our house. Rene was the family plumber, and had been for years. He was short, and squat with a handle bar mustache that belonged to poncho Villa. I always half

expected him to start shooting up the place while shouting "Viva le Mexico!" at the top of his lungs.

Instead of having target practice with all of my mother's knickknacks, I found Rene along with my father in the garage. The water heater had gone kaput and Rene was there installing a new one as my father looked on. I waited until my presence was noticed before taking the opportunity to mention my streak of bad luck with the job search. Rene turned at that point and asked what sort of job I was looking for. My father, proud sire that he was, went into the whole spiel about me working for the summer. Hearing it all again sank me further into a pit of depression. Then, just when I thought I had reached the murky bottom, Rene proved me wrong by plunging my head under that bleak surface when he mentioned that he needed a helper until his cousin, Jesus, could make a full recovery from his back surgery. Dad loved the idea. He said plumbing was real work that every man should know and learn. I could have put that theory to the test quickly enough by asking why Rene, a plumber was there, but I let it pass. In the span of a few minutes, my father and Rene had worked out the logistics details for not only my salary, and work hours, but also insurance coverage in case I fell into a septic tank. I stood by and watched the entire procession without uttering a single word. I wasn't so much shocked by the fact that I would be plumbing my summer vacation away, but by the ease and rapidity in which my father had auctioned me off. The humanity! Now that I had a job awaiting me the last two weeks of school, which had been dragging by at a snail's pace, was suddenly flying by at such a rate that I felt dizzy a good deal of the time. I had successfully campaigned for a week of freedom before I was to report to work with Rene, but even that time went by so fast that I cannot recall one single detail of those 7 days.

When black Monday arrived, I dressed in my oldest, most ragged pair of jeans, then stepped into the work boots my father had bought for me in anticipation of the new job. The t-shirt I wore had a picture of a man being walked to the hangman's gallows emblazoned across the front. An apt metaphor for what I was facing as far as I was concerned.

Our first two calls that morning were the typical case of someone needing their clogged pipes rotor cleaned. A task quickly managed by the evil looking metal snake that Rene fed down the drainpipe with my help. It wasn't until later that day that we received the tale-tall call that set the tone for the rest of the summer.

On the north side of Ft. Worth, sometimes called the "old side" by the locals, the majority of the houses dated back to the early 1930s. The homes, sturdily built, were constructed mainly of brick with crawl spaces beneath, the south's version of the built in basement common in the northern states. The homes, essentially,

were set upon columns or “stilts” that created the space beneath that allowed for a person to maneuver under the structure for any myriad of reasons, to repair faulty plumbing for instance. It was an ingenious idea unless you were the person called upon to slink beneath an old, creepy house where no natural light had been seen in nearly a century. To call this man made underworld an unpleasant place to find yourself would be a gross understatement. These crawl spaces were dark, damp environments teeming with spiders, scorpions, and every other multi-legged creature that would have even the bravest exterminator reaching for a raid grenade. Noxious gasses permeated the atmosphere and the reality of raw human sewage was a common affair, and since my rotten luck seemed to be holding, it came as no surprise that on my first day of work I would be needed to assist Rene in this hellish environment.

The call had come that a sewage drain beneath the “old side” house was clogged, and we were charged with unstopping the mess. As we prepared to tackle the job, Rene attempted to allay my fears by making light of his first foray into a crawl space. His lack of comedic relief was immediately evident as I found nothing humorous about being thrust face first into a giant spider web or fighting off millions of tiny wood ticks crawling all over my body. Still, if this was the cost of buying my way into the adult world, then I would collect my currency bravely, or at least pretend to do so bravely.

We began our task by removing the panel at the rear of the house to expose the entrance to the crawl space. Then, armed with a powerful Mag light Rene went in first in order to locate the clogged pipe in question. After doing so, he reappeared at the entrance to direct me on how to manage my way in. I'd be pulling the portable rotor roter, and I would need to take a circuitous route once inside to prevent my becoming wedged between the support columns inside. I listened intently and when I had received my instructions, I went to work.

My first impression once inside the crawl space was one of complete shock. The intense heat that immediately enveloped me was oppressive and debilitating. The afternoon temperature taped inside the closed off space created an oven like effect that made the simple act of taking a breath an epic struggle. That I was lugging a 120 lbs. rotor roter behind me only compounded my troubles.

**By:James Dykes**

Second was the smell, which contained a rancid combination of stale air and decaying flesh. Taking the path that Rene had set for me I encountered numerous skeletons of mice and what I hoped was a cat and not some large mutant breed of rat. This was not an environment that I wanted to linger in, and with that thought at the forefront of my brain, I made quick work moving towards the flood light that Rene had set in place some forty feet ahead of me.

I had closed half the distance between Rene and myself when the sound of a snake shaking its tail rattle halted me in my tracks. With my heart thundering inside my chest, I took the Mag light from my belt and aimed it directly in front of me where I immediately spotted a coiled rattlesnake not ten feet from me.

The panic that flooded through me then was palpable. I screamed for Rene while instinctively trying to turn and retreat the way I had come, but found that I had no room to make a u-turn. To my dismay, I was stopped between two columns and had no room to maneuver left or right. My only option was to back my way out with the 120 lbs. rotor roter nagging me every inch of the way.

In case Rene and the rest of the population had not heard me the first time, I shouted again. The alarm in my voice sent Rene hurrying in my direction. As he approached my near right, I detected his labored breathing. While he caught his breath, I quickly explained the situation and urged him to pull me free so that I could get the hell out of there. There was a short pause from him followed by a question of whether the snake was big or small. I was incredulous then. “Does it matter?” I shouted angrily, and threw in a few choice curses for good measure.

Rene reasoned quickly said that, no, it did not matter, then moved behind me to aid my exodus. He grabbed hold of my feet and began dragging me backwards. One of the new work boots came off in his hands, and I cursed myself for not lacing them up correctly. After some initial trouble, Rene was able to loosen the strap that held the rotor roter to my back, enabling me to slip out from beneath the burden that had been blocking my exit. Once outside I fell to my knees and took big, gulping breaths of fresh air. I was drenched in sweat and the light breeze that blew cooled my overheated body.

I turned at some point and



found Rene smiling at me. “What was so funny?” I demanded.

“This will make a great story someday,” he said, and began laughing hysterically. I just shook my head in response.

The exterminators were called to remove the snake and the following day we returned to unclog the drainpipe. And so it went, the rest of the summer, the worst job of my life.

## **PRIVACY**

### **By Ruben Benavides**

Privacy is something people crave when they want to spend some time alone. But here in Ad Seg, we get only one hour in the day room and 15 minutes in the shower. That shower is great and privacy at its best! But sometimes it is just overwhelming. Here we keep our hearts, feelings, and pain like a good poker hand close to our chests and eyeing everyone who is around. These feelings are best kept to oneself. People here seem to take kindness for a weakness and when you call it on them; they act like you’re from outer space. But I’ll say this now, to hell with privacy! I miss the times when you used to talk to your girlfriends on the phone and my sister trying to listen in. I’ll go back always and say, I’d even go this far, and say I’d share a room with my brother again! I even miss the times when I used to get my car keys and my live-in girlfriend would want to go along with me. I could go for some of that at this point. I even miss my son banging and crying because I closed the door to use the bathroom. I miss all that noise. I miss my nephews going through all my PlayStation 2 games and scratching them up. I miss all my change missing from my pockets when the Ice Cream truck came through the neighborhood. Hell, I miss my Mom going through my drawer of clothes trying to find the stash of weed I kept in my shoe at all times or how about when you brought a girlfriend over and your Mom calls her the name of a girl you had come over a couple of days before, ha! Yeah to the hell with privacy!

Well hmm... Maybe we do need some privacy. I feel for the people in the general population when using the bathroom and the guy one toilet over starts talking to you about the new items they got in the store. Or how the prices of food keep going up! Dude! I’m busy over here, ha ha, or when you get a bad letter from home. We for sure need some privacy there. We don’t want someone cracking jokes, saying, “Oh look who got his Dear John letter.” Lucky I don’t have a cellie to tell him to let the cell breathe some or air out. All of a sudden he wants to be a hermit. Many of you all had that nasty cellie. So I feel for you all. Hey, maybe Ad Seg is not all that bad. But don’t get any ideas! Go for that good intrusion’s of your privacy. Go home and enjoy those little things you miss. They are there waiting for you.

### **By Eric L. Foster**

When I was a young child, privacy was defined as my parents being locked in their bedroom. Who would want that? Of course back then parents were funny and somewhat weird.

When I was a little older, privacy was being able to speak on the telephone without being overheard.

Over the years privacy has been viewed and defined by me in different ways, under different circumstances, dependent upon ever-pleasant distractions in my life at the times I sought it.

Somewhere along the years, privacy no longer meant being alone. This actually came as a surprise because my personal view of privacy has always required my being alone.

I found that I enjoyed privacy and private moments more if I shared them with my wife. Entering another person into what I previously defined as privacy didn’t feel as intrusive as I had believed it would.

Then came being thrown into a hostile environment where the authorities make every effort to strip everyone of humanity, decency, companionship, morality, and privacy.

The experience is comparable to being placed on display in the zoo. Everything is designed to discourage basic human behavior and actively promote animalistic behavior. The sad fact is that most inmates succumb to this by completely enforcing the animalistic behavior and by doing so, enable the authorities to justify their very own existence and justify their creation.

Those of us that don’t succumb to the hordes of animals are few and far between. We hold onto our humanity and sanity with a death grip and don’t lose our identity and become like them... animals.

Now privacy is termed as being able to carry on intelligent conversations with other intelligent individuals in this jungle the authorities call prison.

In the quest of defining privacy, I have found it’s entirely subjective to the needs, views, and judgment of the individual seeking it.

To me, privacy has many faces. It is having some quiet time to reflect on my past and pray. Sometimes it’s just putting on my headphones to simply tune out the ever-present animals.

At other times, the most important times, its spending time with my wife, be it through letters, the phone, visits, or when we’re together. Obviously, privacy is an ever-evolving relative term that can only be accurately defined by the individual seeking it.

### **By Rene J. De La Rosa**

Privacy, something I long to have. Privacy is something I miss, it’s something I cherish. When free, privacy wasn’t something I considered important, wasn’t

a relevant part of my life. Privacy was something I took for granted. A lot of folks do.

I'm in prison, incarcerated for life and I realize now how wrong I was to take my privacy for granted. Nothing I do here is private. They take "privacy" away from us in the name of "safety". We are housed in cells that provide 24-hour surveillance of us. I won't lie, it's needed, but even so, not for all of us. Not all of us are going to slit our wrists or hang ourselves. Not every inmate has murdered or attacked another inmate. Our private place can only be a place established in our minds. Nothing is sacred, nothing is private in a state institution. Take for instance, in Texas, we go through six-month shakedowns. That's when officers go through all your property. All in the name of "safety". Every six months is the statewide shakedown, but officers are given the right to do it when they want. "Safety", you see? Having my privacy stripped from me is another penalty I pay to society. It's just not a written one. Sometime this week I go and have my life on a table for three or four officers to go through. I have to swallow my pride and anger as these officers dissect my little world. I have to endure watching them read the words of my loved ones letters. I have to stand there and watch the judgment shown in their eye. My ears have to listen to the comments and my eyes can shed no tears. I put myself in prison, I have no privacy. I forfeited the right that was paid in blood by soldiers who fought and died to first establish our country and the others who came after dying to uphold "Democracy" and "Freedom".

**By: Jeff Harnden**

My mind is the only private place I have left. There I lock in all my most cherished memories, ones I share with no one. No officer alive can make me lay those on a table. My mind is private, inviolate. Only God himself can access this place, and I believe he knows my mind and heart so he leaves me a little for myself. He respects my private place. Privacy, privacy, privacy. I don't have it anymore, though I crave it. Privacy. I lost it. All in the name of "Safety".

So I guess after this shakedown I'll do what I've been doing for nine years. I'll pack my property that was

dissected by strangers who see me as a non-entity. By those who don't care if I live or die, by officers. I'll repack and bring my stuff back to my cell, say a little prayer for strength, for patience, for forgiveness, for all the thoughts that ran through my mind as I watched my life thrown around on a table, and I'll re-set up my cell. I'll try to put my "house" together then workout. I have to sweat it out, the frustration, because I can't cry out. Only cry when I'm completely alone, when I'm by myself in my own private area. To let my tears run free, I personally need privacy. Is it any wonder I've shed no tears in nine years? Oh, one last closing thought. To all the soldiers who died and bled to grant me my freedom of privacy, from the bottom of my heart I'm sorry you died because I threw your sacrifice away.

## **APOLOGIES**

**By: Jackey R. Sollars**

If there has been one thing that I have learned, that has helped me personally overcome the negative in my life, it is the simple act of apologizing. One can face his demons over and over, but until he has turned to those he has hurt and apologized, he has not begun taking the necessary steps to conquer those demons. We like to believe we have complete control over ourselves and life's situations. However, we can't have complete control until our flaws are exposed. In the act of apologizing, we deliberately open ourselves to social judgment, condemnation and even rejection. We can't force others to forgive us, but the simple act of apologizing mentally and spiritually cleanses us of our evil deeds. To add, we can't expect others to apologize to us. Yet, if we develop a mindset of forgiving, we become

more mentally and spiritually advanced than ordinary society. People seldom have the courage to forgive or forget. People are lazy in that it is easier to condemn than forgive. Condemnation closes the avenues of reconstructive relationships. When I finally mustered the courage to take responsibility for the crimes I committed, I had to face three very tough tasks. First, that my sins were of my choice and will and to which I had to accept that path to face my demons head on. Second, I had to acknowledge my sins, and go to those I had wronged and apologize after taking responsibility. Three, I had to begin scrutinizing my every motive for



deviant behavior. One can apologize until he is blue in the face, but without action, an apology is just words without meaning. I can't change others or society. The act of forgiveness is beyond the majority of people. To learn the value of responsibility and to apologize for any and all wrongs, I have learned is the way I can be demon free.

**By: Michael McCoy**

I was born and raised by a strong southern family. My mother stayed at home and raised me and my three sisters. I was the youngest of four children, and my three sisters would say that I was spoiled as the baby and only son. (I don't see it)

At a very young age, I remember my father going away for long periods, months at a time. I understand now that he was in the merchant marines and he was off earning a living, doing whatever it is that merchant marines do. When he returned home after these voyages, he always had gifts from exotic places for all the children. Carved wooden animals from Africa, strange toys from India. Wonderful things to behold.

I loved these times when dad was home. We did things together. I remember he would build gas powered remote control airplanes, which I was fascinated with. I also remember mother and father fighting, and to me, it seemed like the world would end. He never raised a hand to my mother, but the yelling wouldn't stop. I remember we had to move out of our house on Little Farms Ave., and my mother was very unhappy about that. I don't recall how old I was, but I was very young then.

The next thing I recall strongly was the first time it snowed in New Orleans, and I was riding my pedal-Tractor in front of our new old house. Mom would always bring up how much nicer our old house was, and the fights would begin again. I always thought mom and dad were gonna split up but they never did! Dad was a mechanic after that, and I don't remember when he did it, but at some time in my youth, he opened up a mechanic shop. He always took care of our family, we weren't rich, but we ate well. We always had a camper, which we were always using to go places on three and 4-day trips. I look back now and realize just how fortunate I was as a child.

Father taught me a trade, which I still use to this day. (When I'm not in prison), but I hated him for it when I was a teenager. I knew I had better things to be doing than hanging out at his shop learning a trade and making money. No matter that I had go-carts, mini-bikes, motorcycles, and a car, as I grew older. I hated having to work at the shop. How easy it was to forget all the fishing trips he took us on, the camping trips, the hunting trips. How easy in a child's mind, a child who thought he was a man.

I started using drugs and drinking in my early teen years. Stealing too. None of this did I learn at home. I did this all myself. Before I was 21 I had been in jail 30 times for things from D.W.I's to robbery. I finally left New Orleans after a failed marriage. Ended up in prison, with a life sentence after running from the law for 10 years. I was wanted in five states when I was done.

Now my parents are dead, my three older sisters won't speak to me, and I've been in and out of prison 3 times. Going on 19 years now. I've found Jesus and left him behind at the prison gates; I've re-married and lost a perfectly good, wonderful woman. I have ruined my life.

It is a miracle that I have a wife who still loves me (we are separated, to be divorced) and a girl who still loves me after all my mistakes. I'm back in prison. I have never been convicted of any other crime since my robbery in 1991. (Parole can be a bitch, with all its rules). I'm not very good with rules. I'm looking for something better this time. I think Jesus found me again.

So, I have a lot to apologize for. I'm sorry for being such a dumb-ass-know-it-all kid to my parents. I'm sorry to everyone I have harmed in my life, keeping myself high. I'm sorry to the person I robbed, wherever you are. I've done all these years for the crime, but I truly apologize.

I apologize to myself for wasting all these years of my life. It is too precious to continue hurting myself any longer.

For all those things I had when I grew up, and never thanked my parents, I apologize. For the love of my sisters, who I threw away, I apologize. God, forgive me-I apologize.

I have many amends to make- this is a start.

**Fates' Message**

**By: Daniel H. Harris**

My apology to the Fates for being so obtuse. It took me forty years before I caught on. Many were the times they walked me to the very threshold of Death's dark domain and yet I could not understand.

It took a diagnosis of chronic illness in 2000 to bring about my epiphany. All are born to die. Life is funny, no one gets out alive.

This was not the most horrific discovery you might think. Nothing had changed except I was dying a bit faster than expected, but knowing gave me reason to change the way I lived. Envisioning the truth of my mortal existence changed my perspective. All anyone is guaranteed is the eternal now, that single beat of the heart in which each of us exist. All of our plans depend on millions, or even billions of those that plan ahead, of those tiny pieces of the living present.

What does it mean? It's a realization that each moment of life is precious because you are not guaranteed another as that one passes. There is no time

for recriminations over the past mistakes. No one can change the past, but by living the present differently you can move into a more productive future.

All of this took time to understand and I'm still only human. Maybe more human now than ever. Humans make mistakes. None are perfect. Negative emotions still get the best of me. I have a temper that can get out of hand. But each heartbeat moves me into a new future moment that can be without anger if I'm willing to let it fade into it's own past and be forgotten. Each past moment is beyond my control. Only that single moment of present is mine to live as I choose. A deep breath or a swallow of pride is preferable to stringing too many moments of anger together.

The Fates are persistent in the lessons they teach. I thank those Grand Ladies for bringing me my personal epiphany. If only I had not been so dense maybe it wouldn't have taken so long and there wouldn't be so many past moments to feel sorry for.

### James Bauhaus

My first apology goes to the guard who went so far out of her way to tell me to button up my shirt. I apologize for this even though the shirt they provided me was so old and raggedy that I had to buy a sewing kit from them and repair the buttonholes myself. They got over ten years of service out of that shirt, most of it before they pushed it off on me.

Now they have me trapped in a profit-sucking merchant-prison. These professional cost cutters have developed an even more miserly approach toward their targets that go far beyond neglect. Exploitation is king at Geocorp. Their victims don't get sewing kits or buttons or zippers. They provide canvas pajamas. We get a pullover with one pocket big enough only to hold our photo ID badge with our prison bar code. Now no cops ever need to worry about what is in our pocket or hands, saving cops from their nightmare scenarios is job one here. Fear of payback haunts them daily.

**By:Richard Garza**

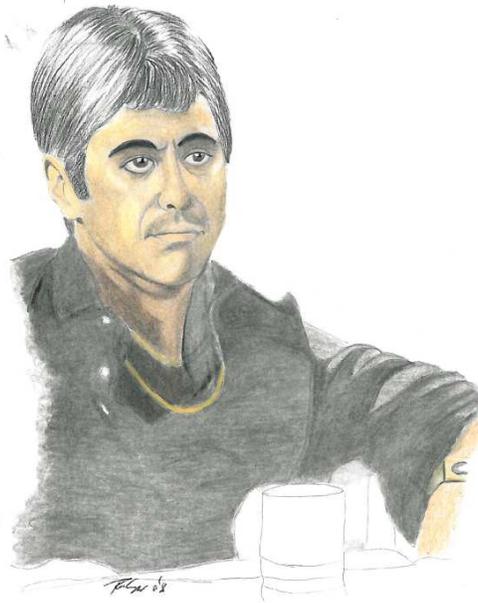
These canvas pajamas will not be replaced for four years, even though the elastic wears out after less than two. The merchants convincingly "forgot" to provide a whiz-hole, and this lack causes the elastic to wear out even faster. The design flaw increases sales, because even the poorest victim gets tired of being forced to hold

these clothes up with one hand while trying to accomplish the merchant's profits with the other. They get even more profits when we finally relent and buy more substandard, overpriced clothing from them. Don't tear up a sheet and tie it around your waist like a belt. These only enrages them and sets off their jealousy reflex. They see it, They stop everything and rob you of this dangerous "contraband". Don't try to tie up your buttons with a little "abner" suspender. Such audacity may cause the cops' heads to explode with rage. For this outrageous transgression, I sincerely apologize. Another thing I most abjectly regret is having the gall to bring my fan to this "air conditioned" prison. The A/ C is turned off, and, to move too quickly is to sweat buckets as if you were living in an unventilated attic. I hope that my transgression in this regard is mitigated by the guard's theft of my fan subsequent sale of it and hundreds of other captives' property so that these overworked, underpaid guards can enjoy a larger slush fund for their numerous parties, BBQ'S, events, and holidays.

For this I deeply and sorrow-fully apologize. Another of my apologies goes out for the prison administrators who are only charging us 300 to 6800 percent markups on canteen items. (A 15 cent soup for 50 cents :333% markup. 33 cents for less than half a gram of pepper is a 6800% markup. This is the same as an ordinary citizen being forced to buy a 100 dollar television for \$680,000.) I deeply and sincerely apologize for this and the Sherman Anti-Trust Act that prohibits monopolies, and the Clayton Act, which forbids price gouging, and the U.S. Constitution, which purports to provide due process and equal protection of the law, even for captives branded "criminal" by the state. I am so extremely sorry that we and our families are such poor targets for financial exploitation.

Please let me extend my most sincere apologies outside prison, too, to all those poor, incompetent and negligent cops, parole officers, social workers and sex-crime surveillance

teams who let that Cleveland sex maniac out without treatment so he could murder countless women and leave their corpses haphazardly strewn about his home for years until the stench of rotting flesh finally gave them away. Let all of us who are already captured and caged pay for his crimes through your determination to increase our sentences and suffering, despite the fact that



none of us had anything to do with his skulking deviancy.

Let us all apologize for our imbecilic politicians and bureaucrats who let daily hordes of foreign-born enigmas bring their primitive, often exploitive, cultures and religions over here become "Americans" by merely passing a simplistic "test" on, mostly, how to feign loyalty to a colorful banner. Let my apology for this be even more heartfelt when one of these persons is trained to be a mass-murderer by and for the U.S. politicians merely because they needed a translator/spy for their Arabic wars. Let me especially extend my apologies to the anonymous government employees whose brilliant idea to set this man to killing his fellow Arabs in Asscrackistan caused him to instead begin murdering the killers he was training with. My biggest and most sincere apology, however, goes out to President Obama, who, it seems, has somehow been too busy posturing about domestic health re-shuffle to check on and quash the hundreds of secret Bush-Cheney label programs that are still running on automatic pilot in the sadist-filled satrapies loosely connected to the CIA, NSA, MI, FBI, etc.. Particularly, I want to apologize for our foreign government buying operations, the most successful of which recently got our war-profiteers control of Colombia. The billions we never voted on that were marked as anti-drug "aid" bought us enough of Colombia's politicians for our politicians to serve as our secret cat's plan to provoke an attack on Colombia by Venezuela. This elementary tactic of using secret attacks to provoke full-scale counter attacks is a common politician-ploy that has marked the strategy for ruthless elites as varied as: Demosthenes (Athen's excuse for attacking Sicily), Machiavelli and Vlad the Impaler (Both against neighboring Turks), Saladin (Jerusalem), Hitler and Stalin (Poland), Wilson (The 1898 theft of many Spanish islands for U.S. Naval bases), Truman and Eisenhower (stealing fruit rubber and sugar plantations in Cuba, Guatemala, etc.), Reagan (Nicaragua, Grenada, El Salvador, Chile), and Thatcher (Falklands War), to name only a few. Now Hugo Chavez is about to fall into the trap set by Cheney, giving U.S.-run Colombia the perfect excuse to use our weapons and their peasants to patriotically stomp the hell out of Venezuela and annex all of their oil deposits, as has been planned since Reagan-Bush. For THIS travesty I apologize the MOST.

## **BEACH**

**Life's a Beach**

**By Daniel H. Harris**

My best memories of freedom are on beaches. Atlantic, Pacific or Gulf of Mexico; all salty shores

where I left tracks in the sand to be washed away by the next storm or tide. Like life.

Not much has been left behind that will stand against the tides of time. The best part of me, the son I never knew, died in a car wreck the day after his graduation. A good kid with a mom that was a better woman than I deserved to know.

Heartaches and disappointments are the debris I strewed carelessly along the tide line of my life. It shames me to think how many only remember me for my infamy. What is worse is that they do not know, nor do they care to, the man I've finally come to be.

That is the nature of lives and beaches. They change with the seasons. In this, the winter of my life, there is a bit more sunshine to share than expected at this season. Instead of a path strewn with litter in the sand, at times I leave a print in concrete to defend my peers and mark the way. I find I have time to clean up behind others a bit now when I move slower and don't make such a mess myself.

Sitting in a Texas Ad-Seg cell is the best thing that ever happened to me. It allowed me time for introspection where I admitted to my faults and tried, though not always successfully, to change, two unavoidable truths. First, before you can change your environment you must first make adjustments in yourself. Second, once you've adjusted yourself in a positive manner you often find your environment improved by your new perspective.

In the end, the one and only thing we are guaranteed control of and have responsibility for are our own actions. Make these positive and all else will follow.

## **Beach Bunny**

**By Dave Gordon**

It never fails. Every time the weather gets nice, Bunny wants to go to the beach. Bunny isn't her real name; it's a niece's way of pronouncing her Aunt Bonnie's name. Bonnie liked it, so now she's called Bunny by everyone.

There's a lot of peculiar things about Bunny, like she's never actually been to the beach- even though I've taken her numerous times. I guess I should explain this before I go on.

About 8 years ago, Bunny and several friends were celebrating the Fourth of July. While the fireworks were booming overhead, pull-tabs from too many beers were popping down below. The evening ended in a horrible car wreck with Bunny being paralyzed from her waist down.

With her partying days over, Bunny slipped off into a deep depression. It was there that one of my letters found her. She thought it would be fun writing to a prisoner. She introduced herself as a prisoner who was

locked inside an inescapable broken body. Her words made my prison seem rather trivial.

We traded letters that led us to a greater understanding of each other. She likes strawberry ice cream, soft rock music and spooky movies. I like root beer floats, quiet sunsets and starry nights. Bunny told me in one of her letters, that there was one thing she knew she would love more than anything, if only she had a way to experience it. She said, more than anything, she would love to go to the beach.

I couldn't believe that she had never been to a beach. When I told her I had visited the beaches of Atlantic City, New Jersey, Ft. Walton and Destin Beaches of Florida and Laguna Beach out West- she flipped. So now, every time the weather gets nice, I get a sweet letter from my wheel-chair bound Bunny asking me to take her out to the Beach through my letters. Bunny now knows what it's like to catch a wave at Laguna. She knows what the white sands of Destin Beach feel like as they squeeze up through her toes, and she knows how magical the atmosphere is on the boardwalk in Atlantic City.

I gave Bunny my beaches and Bunny gave me a whole new perspective on prisons. Freedom isn't a life without chains; it's the connection of the two hearts experiencing life together.

Love Ya Buns!

#### **By Harvey Wendt**

When I was a child, eight years old living in Galveston, Texas, only about six blocks from the seawall and the beach, I got my first kite. My mother suggested that I take it to the beach to try to fly it, so I would not have the worry of cars, trees or power lines.

Out on the beach, I launched the kite. It was my very first time to ever fly one, in what had to be the most perfect kite-flying breeze I have ever encountered. I didn't even have to run with it. Once I tied the string on, I held it over my head, let go, and steadily unrolled the ball of twine as the kite rose smoothly. I tied the second ball of twine and kept smoothly unwinding it until I came to the end; which I had tied to the stick I had brought with me.

For about two hours I flew the kite until lunchtime. Hating to bring it down, I instead tied it to a driftwood log and went home to lunch. When I returned, the kite was still flying itself peacefully.

I stripped down to my swimsuit and swam most of the afternoon on the almost deserted strip of water near the end of the seawall. When I went home to supper, I left the kite flying.

The next day, when I pulled it in just before lunchtime, I wound the twine onto the stick all the way without it ever touching the ground.

I have never again had as easy or peaceful a time flying a kite as I did that time on the beach.

#### **Coming Alive By Teddy C. Sandlin**

This is the most peaceful hour of the day, to me. The hour just before dawn. When the whole world waits silently for the arrival of the new day. Everything is quiet. It's as though everyone and everything is holding their breath.

The peaceful night air is a tangible thing that surrounds me as I sit on a wall of granite and stare into the darkness. The streetlight behind me casts an eerie glow, which ends at the edge of the wall where my legs hang. The sharp sweet smell of the salt water lingers in the night air. The soft swishing of the water, as it slowly eases onto the sand is so faint that I wonder if I really hear it.

The dark of night and the light of day start their eternal minuet for possession of the world. The darkness slowly starts to fade and I begin to see the iridescent glow of the foam on the water as it glides to a stop on the sand. The darkness retreats to the crevices along the wall and hides behind the rocks as the light slowly takes possession. I begin to see slight movements on the sand, but the night still holds enough of its grip that I'm not able to distinguish anything yet.

Nearby I hear the clicking of a stray dog's nails on the streets as he searches in the darkness. In the distance a car door closes and the sounds of indistinct voices drift to me on the night air. The calls of the seagulls and killdeer reach my ears, as each one greets the coming morning.

The night fades just enough, that the movement on the sand becomes clear. The small crabs are in a frantic rush, trying to regain the water, as the killdeers dart back and forth in their effort to catch them. The seagulls drift lazily on the morning air, over the gulf waters, in search of food. Every few minutes one will dive into the water and come up with a small fish. Then return to his easy glide through the air, on his continual search.

As I look toward the horizon, I watch as the water turns from dark brown to an emerald green. The water is as smooth as glass this morning. The sky turns from gray to blue as the sun peeks over the horizon casting a silver reflection across the gulf waters.

I lay back on the cool granite, close my eyes and wait for the new day. Slowly I begin to feel the warmth of the sun as it reaches the Earth. I block out all the sounds of the world and allow the sun to drive the dampness of the night from my body.

Opening my eyes again, the sun has breached the horizon and stands in all of its glory over the Earth. I look around to see that the bustle of life is in full bloom. The people have arrived for a day at the beach. Moms

and Dads with their children are everywhere. They've come to enjoy the great outdoors. They run and play across the sand, and in the water, as they feel the relief that nature gives them. I sit up, then stand and stretch. Take one more look around, and then climb on my bike for the short ride home. Tomorrow I'll be back to refresh my soul and watch the world come to life again.

### By Danny Sparks

Back in "Hippie" days, like as in the late '60s and early '70's in Santa Cruz, California. There were caves at the base of the cliffs that lined the backside of Castle Beach, which was just a couple of hundred yards south of the boardwalk that featured the oldest working wooden beamed roller coaster on the West Coast. Famous, all ready!

Castle Beach in the daytime is a beautiful typical USA public beach scene. Fat, skinny and in between, young, old and you know, chicks, broads and biddies. Females of every type, sunbathers, volley ball players, frizz bee-chucker, and chuckles. Chicks, dudes, dogs and seagulls. Sun, sand and surf. Catch a wave or a fish, get blistered, blasted, and flat ass flabbergasted. Fun in the sun until the everyday, spectacular, mind-blowing sunset. Wow, what a trip! Then the all nighters' circle up around jam boxes, guitars, blues harps and tambourines, weed, wine and whatever else.

Then the caves. These were different sizes, from 10 feet to 200 or 300 deep. You had to crawl in but after a short crawl, you could stand up in there. Some were huge inside and people partied, crashed and got laid back up in there. There were all kinds of put-ons performed, like hoodoo, voodoo, witchy, warlock. "What's your sign baby?" Your moon is in conjunction with my trouser trout, therefore we should make the beast with two backs so our karma can mesh with the cosmic kinship of you and me and we are one together.

Peace, love and happiness. Cool at that time. Then the Pig City bulldozed the caves full of sand and we all died or got old, bumner. -The end-

### Picture Writing

A picture is worth a thousand words. In that spirit we have created the picture story project. Every month we offer an opportunity to set your imagination free. We provide the picture, and you provide the story. **As with the theme essay, if you submit an entry you will receive a complete packet with all the other entries submitted for**

**an individual picture.** I reprint some of the essays in this newsletter to give you an idea of the writing done. I encourage you to let your imagination roam and share your thoughts. Your thoughts and ideas matter to us. Below are some essays from past pictures followed by the new pictures selected for this cycle. As with the theme essays I was unable to print as many submissions as I would like.. All of the stories are posted on the Prisoner Express website with a link under the heading of Newest Writings and Testimonials. Perhaps you can have a friend print out these for you, or better yet submit a story of your own, and get your own packet.

### The Fountain By Harvey Wendt

When Nathan was five, he used to love going to the park where there was a lighted fountain. At night in the summer, it was turned on, and the visiting kids were allowed and even encouraged to jump in and cool off in the water with jets shooting up from the bottom high into the air. Then, when he was eleven, his family moved from the small town to the city. He still loved lighted fountains, but in the city, they began to lose their magic.

Sometimes, but not often, the smallest kids were still allowed to wade in the water for a few minutes, if mama stayed right there. They had to stay away from the water jets and not pick up any of the coins people had tossed in; though they couldn't imagine why they were tossed in if not to be picked up. And no! Nathan must not go wading with them. He was much too old.

Finally, Nathan came to the big city--and the really big fountain. Oh, how he wished he were a child in Podunk again. At twenty, he still longed to wade in the pool and leap through the jets.

"It's just not fair!" he thought. When you're a kid, they teach you that fountains are for wading and having fun leaping through jets, but the older you get, the more of the fun they take out of life. It's no wonder people die when they get to be full-grown adults. The old folk's rules bore them to death!

Looking around, Nathan was surprised to discover that he seemed to be all alone. First, he wondered where everyone had gone to, but suddenly a gleam came into his eye, and a grin appeared on his face that no one had seen there since he was five.

Standing on the edge of the pool, he called out, "I'm too young to be bored to death!" Then he leapt.



**Rattlesnake Park**  
**By Cristobal Garcia**

“I swear, that woman! She is getting on my last nerve! Look at my hands! They’re shaking! Did you see what she did? She has the nerve to prance around like that. Her and her snotty friends. And, she takes all the credit! I hate her! She’s such a liar!”

(Mimicking in a high-pitch tone of voice.) “Oh, I’ve been cleaning and cooking all day.”

“Agh! She always takes all the credit! She sat on her skinny ass painting her dragon-lady nails and sipped that nasty scotch! She threatened me this morning! She said if I didn’t help her-meaning, if I didn’t do all the work-she would not let me go to Beth’s pool party! Since last week I’ve had Beth’s present-I got her a compact mirror and two lip-glosses-and my new bathing suit. She knows how important this party is to me! She is the cruelest mother in the world! I hope her hair falls out! Did you bring the lighter?”

Leslie vented to her cousin Christina. This is nothing new. It was the first thing that united them, the quarrels with their mothers.

Their houses are directly behind one another. They always meet in the alley. The girls walked down the dirt road alley turning left on Edison Street. They strolled past the Joker’s (biker) bar, Mr. Ed’s (cowboy) bar and Eva’s Cantina. After hopscotching on the sidewalk in front of the First Christian Church of St. Angela, they crossed an empty lot and entered the park.

Rattlesnake Park was built for the sole purpose of children. It is designed with four big slides and two baby ones. There are swings, monkey bars, seesaws, tumbling bars, marry-go-rounds, tetherballs, sand pits, obstacle walls, and an assortment of wall-less playhouses. Trees outlined the park, being sentries and makeshift hideouts for the adventurous. Leslie withdrew a cigarette from her purse, she smoked Winston 100’s. Christina lit up a Virginia slim cigarette and passed the lighter. Both girls exhaled smoked from their noses, sharing a moment of silence.

“Jeremy is here.”

“I see him. Leslie, please don’t call him over. I’m mad at him.”

“Christine turned her back to Jeremy’s direction. A tear ran down her face. Leslie leaned over and wrapped her arm around Christina’s shoulder.

“Jeremy’s an asshole.”

In unison they spoke the same words. Laughter spilled between them. Their giggles penetrating the sing-alongs, shouts and noise within the park. A few kids

stopped to glance at them only to lose attention back into their games. Christina angrily disclosed how Jeremy promised to be her boyfriend on the bus. She told the girls in P.E. class that they were going steady. Then Jeremy shows up at lunch holding hands with that fat cow Stacie.

“Christina, you know Nicolas likes you?”

“I thought he likes you?” “Yeah, we’re friends but that’s it. He told me he likes you. I planned on telling you and then I heard about you and Jeremy.”

“I hate Jeremy.”

“The cousins walked around the park, occasionally stopping at corners to smoke, waiting for it to get dark. As soon as the sun disappeared all the park lights glared to life.

Nicolas walked up to them with a bag in his hand. He offered and shared a bottle of orange Fanta soda pop and a stick of Slim Jim with them. As Nicolas and Christina talked, Leslie strolled a few steps ahead to give them privacy.

Leslie’s mother drove up to them at one of the corners. She rolled down the window. Leslie didn’t walk over; she stood in defiance with a cigarette in her hand. Leslie’s eyes pierced through the night. Her mother was going out again. They stared at each other. The car drove away. Leslie blew smoke at her.

**Lisa**  
**By Jackey R. Sollars**

Trouble comes in all shapes and sizes. Nowhere is this truer than it is in the desolate landscape of the Llano Estacado, its cursed oilfields and dust laden plowed fields. In this remote region along the north to south Texas/New Mexico state line, every child grows up quick. It is an environmental effect, a blessing yet a curse. Myself, I still have a hard time trying to figure out just exactly when I did physically grow up (note I said physically not mentally). What is said about me is true among many weeds of West Texas. By age ten to twelve, the boys were masters of snuff or chewing tobacco. At the same time, the Redneck-beauties-to-be were exercising their sophisticated independence; displayed with an occasional cigarette at one of the many teenage keg parties all of us experienced back when individuality was a God-given right at any age. I could put several names to the girl in this photo, smoking with modest sophistication. However, I’ll limit this essay to just one girl and probably that point in time when I realized there was a completely different and wonderful side to them.



Lisa stood near Mike's pickup, arms folded, cigarette pinched between fingers, talking to her best friend Beth. She always wore a nice summer dress, quite a contrast to the other girls who were poured into their denim jeans. Lisa had large crescent brown eyes that were full of inquiry, expectation and challenge.

Every dog was a puppy once. And puppies have been known to become overly affectionate. Lisa happened to be this dog's first taste of love and heartache. Being young, neither Lisa nor I ever crossed the actual lines of conversation. She didn't know how to talk to a fool. And me, being a lovesick fool could never get past the silent stutter. If you ever ask a grown man about some pivotal point, where the lines of sexuality took on meaning, chances are, there is a girl in a photo within the archives of his mind.

So there she stood smoking, sipping Coor's beer from a cup, talking and constantly looking around. At times, she would liven up to the beat of the music. Every ounce of her being seemed to come to life. Even the cascading wavy brown, waist-length hair shimmered with the brilliance of the starry sky and massive bon fire. There is that moment when the planets align, Gemini and Sagittarius. Lisa's eyes met mine, my eyes met hers, time ceased to exist. Then came that song to put pure emotion to a memory in the making.

The way you look at me. The way I look at you.

The way you're touching me. The way I'm touching you.

You're pulling all the right strings lady.

You're saying all the right things baby.

Now we've gone too far.

What man could escape the beauty of the heavens as Eddie Rabbit bound the thoughts to the heart? Few men could stand. And so, the photo revives a fond memory of one night upon the Llano Estacado.

### **The Fence** **By Paul Washburn**

It is a Sunday night and I am on the recreation yard to get away from all of the noise. Back on the cell block they are watching Sunday Night Football and it will be very loud there. I came out for the quiet and to look through the recreation yard fence; thinking of being on the other side of it. Next thing I know there is an old man standing next to me. I didn't even see him come up on me. He looked to be about in his late 80s early 90s. Without looking at me, he said... "Mind if I stand here with you youngster?" "Not at all

old timer, I could use the company." We stood there for a while not saying anything, just both looking through the fence then he asked... "How long have you been here youngster?" "22 long years pops." "So tell me youngster when do you expect to get out of here." "In about 2 more years if these people will ever let me go." "Well whatever you do youngster don't you ever give up hope of leaving this place." "It's hard sometimes Pops not to lose hope, sometime it seems like they will never let me out of this place." He just stood there not saying a word for a couple of minutes, and then he looked at me straight in the eyes and said... "Well let me tell you a story about someone who gave up hope of ever getting out of here. He came out here to this very Rec yard one night. He stood at this fence and looked out for about an hour, and then he just laid down and gave up. He had everything going for him; a wife and 3 kids that loved and cared about him. They would come and visit him and write him every week. All of his family was there for him and stood behind him 100%, but one night he laid down here, in this very Rec yard, and closed his eyes and gave up, and never opened them up again. No one knows what caused him to just give up like that, so listen to me youngster when I tell you to never give up hope of being on the other side of this fence, because you will. So what do you think of that?" I stood there for about 5 minutes thinking about the old man's story then I answered him... "Man Pop's, I really don't know what to think

about that. I guess that this place just broke him and he just couldn't take it anymore, but don't worry about me. Anytime that I start to think that I will never get on the other side of this fence, I will think about you and your story that you have told me. I'm going to be alright; so Pops when are you going to see the other side of this fence?" "Well youngster I never will. You see, this

is my home now and it will be for a long time." "Man I'm sorry to hear that Pops." "Oh, don't be son I am just fine and good. Well it looks like it is time to go in now, you take care of yourself youngster." "Hold on Pops. Before you go in, what's your name?" He just smiled at me and said... "Everyone calls me Pops 360. Have a good life youngster." As soon as I got back to the cellblock I told some of my friends about my little talk with Pops 360. Some of the guys started to laugh and called me crazy. One of the older guys pulled me to the side and said... "Man you could not have talked to Pops



360. You see, he died about 80 years ago. The crazy man went out to the Rec yard one night, and they said he just laid down and closed his eyes and just gave up and died out there. No one has been able to explain what happened to him, so take my advice and never tell anyone that you talked with Pops 360 because they will think you are crazy.” So I went to my cell that night and thought about Pops 360 and I vowed that night to never give up hope no matter how hard it gets, I will one day be on the other side of that fence.

**Boundaries**

**By Jaime Sandoval**

“Do not shackle me with your Boundaries.  
 Do not rope-tie me with your insecurities.  
 Do not blind me with your Point of Views.  
 Do not deafen me with your excuse of how I choose.  
 This Path has no Boundaries.  
 This Path leaves no room for insecurities.  
 This Path carries more Possibilities than Point of Views.  
 This Path is what I choose.”

**Newest Images for your stories**  
 Please use these picture cues to spark some creative writing. The PE program rests on the shoulders and pens of our writers.

Due 12/01/10



Due 7/01/10



Due 8/01/10



Due 9/01 10



Due 11/01/10



Due 10/01/10



10

## Final Notes

It has been quite an adjustment to find myself without funds. It is happening at two fronts at once. Here at work at the Alternatives Library our budget has been cut and we are trying very hard to spend no money. I am also struggling at home to keep up with bills, and payment for my children's education. I am looking for a second job. I do not have many obvious marketable skills, and the idea of working for \$8.00 an hour seems like folly due to the high cost of living. For those of you who have been out of main stream society, money has taken on a different value. Some things are very inexpensive[ read made by poverty wage labor in other 3<sup>rd</sup> world countries ex. Clothing, poor quality food products, most everything in wall mart, while other basic necessities are prohibitively expensive, ex. plumber, electrician, doctor, lawyer, college education, taxes.

What was available as middle class jobs is disappearing and being replaced by low wage service sector jobs, and that scenario is expanding. All this free trade is hurting the American worker and disrupting traditional societies where new classes of urban factory working poor are created. Fair trade not free trade is the answer. In fair trade workers are paid fairly for their work, and workers are not considered disposable. Trying to compete based solely on price will be a steady race to the bottom, and only the rich investors profit.

I am sorry that we were unable to follow through on the **memoir project** we offered last cycle. Many of the writings were put on our website, but David, the student coordinating the project ran into scheduling conflicts, and was unable to complete the project.

This cycle does not have the varied programming you have come to expect, and it is my hope that in by autumn I will have figured out ways to raise funds for programming. If you have friends or family that you think would support the PE program let me know and I'll send them a fundraising letter. For \$20 a year we can supply an individual with all our programming including 2 book packages. It seems like a great investment to me, but with 3000 members, you can see it is not an easy task to attain. We will continue to mail out book requests as long as we can. I am open to any suggestions on people to contact or fundraising methods.

As many of you know, I am unable to answer individual requests. I know you want to be sure I have received your art, poem or essay, but I do not have the money or time to acknowledge each letter. Most of my mailings are done at bulk mail rate. It is the only way to stretch our resources. It means I have to send mail out in batches of 200. I usually do not send out individual lessons by request. The price difference between first class mail on one of our educational packets and bulk rate is steep. Bulk rates could cost \$.18 compared to\$

1.27 at first class. I tell you this so you understand that if you miss the mailing due to your late response to the offering, you will probably have to wait until that program is offered again.

If you are reading this for the first time and have missed the deadline for the programs, send us a note and we will put you on the list to receive the next newsletter, which will give you another chance to get involved. Usually I can publish these newsletters 2X per year.

Please be sure to keep us current on your address, and be sure to write your name and number on all submissions. Poor handwriting can be difficult to read, and the typist volunteers shy away from what they cannot decipher. We do not have a lot of penpal opportunities right now, and the best way to get mail is to participate in one of our writing programs, that we then put on our website. I know that many of you want to have more contact with the free world and want more responses and feedback on your essays. Perhaps we can eventually meet that need, but for now we will continue to focus on keeping the programs going.

Some of you miss the mailings we send. It is a puzzle. Did we write your address correctly, did the mail disappear in transit, is it lost in the mailroom? I cannot say and have a feeling any number of reasons could explain missing mail. Please write if you feel you are not getting programs you expect. The feedback helps us tighten up our operation.

I imagine there is great loneliness in the lives of prisoners. We have many volunteers coming in to help get you resources to enrich your lives. While they can't do as much as they would like, I hope you can take some comfort in knowing that we all care about you, and want the best for you. Please accept our mailings as gestures of concern and as hope for an improving future.

My focus is to be present and centered in the moment, and here I am asking you to look toward an improving future. While it may seem like a contradiction, I hold out that each new moment is the future, and I invite you to step into this upcoming moment knowing you as a member of the Prisoner Express project are participating in an effort to humanize the image of incarcerated people to folks in the free world. Your participation is making a difference, in the lives of others, and we will explore and expand together, what it means to be a member of Prisoner Express. I hope to hear from you, and welcome suggestions on how we can improve our programming.

Let your light shine,

Gary

PRISONER EXPRESS

DURLAND ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY

127 Anabel Taylor Hall

Ithaca, NY 14853-1001

**REGISTRATION FORM**

**Please note: If you received this newsletter, you are on our mailing list for 2010; 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 this cycles packets are sent—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 150 a month. If you don't want to cut up your newsletter, you may copy the sections of the registration form regarding the programs you want to join on a separate piece of paper**

**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 in which you wish to participate. 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? \_\_\_\_\_

A. What type of book can you receive? Check one:

soft cover  hardcover  both are accepted

**Poetry Project** – Please send me the next Edition of *Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology*. I understand that to receive the anthology I have to submit a poem for consideration in the anthology.

**Norse Mythology** – I am interested in studying about the gods of Northern Europe. Send me this packet.

**Journal Project** – I will keep a Journal for 2010/2011, and share my entries with PE. Please send me a Journal Starter packet

**History Project- We have the names of those registered for the “Civil War” and the “Hispanic Migration to the US”, and will mail it when we can find the funds for printing and postage**

**New signups for Math Studies will be available next cycle.**

**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

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

**Drawing Instruction 2**- This packet is newly designed by PE intern Ksana and is different than the previous packet we sent.

**NAME: (PLEASE PRINT)**

**ADDRESS and ID #**

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 appreciated. Your donations help keep Prisoner Express running,

PRISONER EXPRESS  
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# NEWSLETTER

## Prisoner Express Spring 2010

Prisoner Express promotes rehabilitation by providing information, education and opportunities for creative self-expression to incarcerated individuals throughout the United States.

Subscriptions are free to prisoners. All others please contact Prisoner Express for rates. All proceeds are used to fund programming.

**The Durland Alternatives Library, which funds Prisoner Express, is a project partner of the Center for Transformative Action.**

**Additional Support comes from the Cornell Public Service Center and [Cornell University Office of Minority Educational Affairs](#)**



By Kelly Fredrickson



By: James Dykes