

Prisoner Express Newsletter

Fall 2010

I want to wish you glad tidings this holiday season. I know life can be rough, but I keep myself balanced by remembering I'd rather be alive than not, and as hard as I think things are, there are many people dealing with way more than I am who manage to do it with grace and style. While I know being incarcerated, especially at the holiday time can really set your mind to wandering dark paths, I want to encourage the spirit of gratefulness, for being alive, for experiencing life, for the opportunity of personal growth, and for the possibility of better times ahead. I know it is easier said than done, but life can be a great struggle for all of us inside and out, and it is good to remember the miracle of our existence, and how amazing creation really is. I want you to know that all of us at Prisoner Express are thinking of you this holiday season, and wanting the best for each of you.

With great pleasure I begin the Fall PE News. Prisoner Express provides information, education and opportunities for creative self-expression to incarcerated men and women. Our intent is to provide you with meaningful and worthwhile activities, and also to let you know that your words, thoughts and actions matter. While your bodies are locked away your minds are still free. We take pleasure in sharing your words to the free world through our publications and posting select work on our website, www.prisonerexpress.org.

This issue of PE is dedicated to a great volunteer and supporter of the program who passed away last August. Many of you who have been with the program for a while have received books and letters from Steve. He spent many long hours in our small, dark cramped, dusty bookroom creating packages especially designed for each requestor. Steve was a most unusual man. He had strong personal understanding of suffering, but rather than make him bitter he spent much of his life trying to relieve the suffering of others. When he joined me in the early days of Prisoner Express, part of his motivation was to help me from being overwhelmed by the onslaught of letters requesting services. Once he stated packing books he gave so much of himself to each package. If it was not a good match for you he would not send it until it was. He was on a low fixed income, yet he would go to the used bookstores in town and buy the books he thought would make your package complete. He had been doing this awhile before I found out he did not have enough to eat at the end of the month, due to spending his money on all of you. Even when I told him it was not necessary he continued this practice. I originally met him when he came to the Alternatives Library as a patron. He was always checking out books about the

Eastern spiritual masters, who would leave their body and the earth plane behind. Steve in many ways is responsible for this program surviving to this date. He was a major fundraiser for PE, and had friends who would donate funds after he shared his enthusiasm for mailing books to all of you. When our book room was overflowing he found someone to donate storage space. He understood the value of a good book, and he understood the value of all of your lives. When I learned he left his body I was not surprised. I miss him, and wish him well, and am glad he no longer has to deal with the enormous struggles that were in his path.



May Steve continue to watch over us all with his love and compassion!

I am so glad to have the resources to put out yet another newsletter. I am committed to continuing this venture, and want to thank all of you who have sent in stamps and money to help keep this project viable. Your contributions not only help defray the cost of postage, and serve to inspire me to keep the programs coming.

We recently completed mailing the last cycle of programming. This fall we mailed out Poetry Anthology #6, a Drawing instruction packet, a unit on Norse Mythology and a Chess Club newsletter. We are a bit behind in mailing out the theme essay compilations, but should be caught up soon. If you were expecting some of this programming and it did not arrive let me know. I can't promise we will mail it all again, but it helps me know where systems are not connecting, and I can update your contact information in our database.

Depending on so many volunteers to keep track of all phases of our project sometimes leads to mistyped addresses, or lost essays, and other random acts of chaos. I have always been a big picture person, and the daily organization of maintaining an orderly processing of all the mail and requests that come past me is my biggest challenge. I am up for this challenge, but as I grow in



maintaining orderly procedure, mistakes continue to happen. If ever you do not hear from us for 6 months, write let us know you are still interested. This way if for some reason we lose touch with you, it can be reestablished.

This next cycle we have a variety of interesting programs to offer. From the time you read this newsletter and send in your requests, it could be a number of months before you receive the desired programs. First I wait for at least 200 affirmatives for any program before I begin the mailing process. Bulk mail rates save a lot of money, so this waiting is a necessity. Also I depend on volunteers to create much of the programming. While some folks are way ahead of the curve, often well-intentioned students fall way off schedule for creating lessons as their own school work piles up. There is a lot of pressure on college students, and it is impressive that many find time to volunteer to help with this project.

For all new members of PE, I am Gary, and I coordinate the PE program. I am Co-director of the Alternatives Library, a reading room/library on the Cornell University Campus. The library is a great resource for alternative progressive perspectives on current social issues. I enjoy spending a good portion of my time helping folks find good books, periodicals, DVD's and CD's. The library sponsorship allows us the privilege of reaching in to the prisons and providing you with books and other educational endeavors.

The PE program has existed for 10 years, all due to 1 letter sent by Danny Harris asking for books. His eloquent writing inspired me to create this project. I encourage all of you to realize the power of your words, and to know that even though you are locked away you can still influence the world for the better.

I usually spend a few words updating you all on my life, which revolves around my family responsibilities, gardening, home chores and my short political rants about corporate, political and environmental landscape in which we find ourselves in the early part of the 21st century. The garden is always the easiest place to start. Harvest time has stretched out for the past many months. I was plagued by a groundhog I could not trap for many months, but now he/she seems to have moved on. You can imagine the frustration of seeing the tops of plants randomly eaten down. In particular this critter destroyed much Kale, cabbage and beans. I had a great year making pickles [nothing but water, salt garlic, pepper and dill. I still have a few 5-gallon buckets of them in the basement. I had a good

year growing potatoes, garlic and onions and they should last me well into the winter and perhaps thru spring. My freezer is slowly filling with greens. I get great pleasure growing food, and it also saves a good amount of money. I am already getting the garden ready for next year, and this year I have a small greenhouse and have it full of greens I can harvest for salad deep into this winter.

Family life continues to keep me hopping. My wife and I both work, and our schedules work out so one of us can be with the children. It means we don't see each other as much, but that seems to be the trend these days when both partners are employed. My daughter just started middle school, and seems to like the increased activity. She is in the school play, playing soccer, and reading non-stop. My eldest daughter has moved to Baltimore and is going to school. Last I heard she did not feel college classes were

holding her interest, and it all felt like a grind with no purpose except to get her a degree. She wants her education to matter, but has not found a way to create that scenario. I hope she finds a way to make it meaningful to her, or she will probably stop going to school. I figure she will find her path as she strolls through life. My son at 8 is just going through a growth spurt, and is starting to look like a big kid. He has a million questions, and wants to know how things work. He'd rather climb a tree than most anything else, except maybe play computer



games.

Another election cycle has just passed. While I have not been overwhelmed by the progress the Democrats have made while controlling the Congress and presidency these past 2 years, I am even more hesitant to consider the Republican alternatives. It seems like the Republicans use morality to hide hatred, prejudice, and a tilt towards ignoring the downtrodden while favoring the privileged in our country. They tried to block any progressive legislation the Democrats suggested. They like to claim that it is the deficit they are concerned about, but that is a lie as they racked up huge negative budget numbers while they and Bush were in power. The difference is Bush tried to hide his overspending by not including all the cost for Iraq and Afghanistan wars in his budget and Obama includes the expenses up front. I know people are hurting and the economy is bad, but for me it is obvious the financial crash started way before Obama, and that the way was led by Republican during the Bush administration. It was so deep and steep that we are still struggling. How people could put their faith in Republicans is beyond me. They are against

big government and do everything they can while in power to wreck government just to prove the point that government is ineffective. I can see why they do it, as a deregulated economy can lead to a small percentage of people and corporations making extreme profits, [ex. banks, insurance, pharmaceuticals, oil and energy companies] who mainly bankroll the Republican party. How does the average American see it in their interest to support that group? I know many of you hold Republican ideologies and so I invite you to explain to me why folks

vote for a political party that works against their best interests. Clearly I must be missing something here.

All right there you've got my political rant, family news and garden talk delivered and I can go back to the PE news. So many of you write and share your views with me, and I am unable to respond personally to all of you due to the time and expense involved. I share my personal material not as an official part of the PE project, but just so you know me a bit better, and my way to keeping our correspondence real.

PE Projects for Fall/Winter Cycle

Book Mailing

Perhaps our most popular project, this is your opportunity to request a package of the types of books you want to read. As many of you know we are way behind in mailing out books and often it is 8-month wait from when we get the request to when your package is created. I don't know any way around this while trying to maintain an orderly process for mailing books. If we can raise funds to send out 150 packages a month I am thrilled but with more than 1200 people waiting for books you can see how long the wait will be. To compound this problem, I can never be sure many of you haven't been moved or paroled in that 8-month interval which means the books are mailed and never received. We have lots of books and volunteers to pack them. It is the postage money that slows us down. When you just list a title or a single author it can be hard for volunteers to create a good match, so along with the specific titles, give us subjects you care about. You can give a list and that way we can go down the list until we find a match. For example we might not send a first choice, say a Spanish-English dictionary, or a second choice art book, but we might have some Science fiction or other lesser desired but still acceptable choice. Our donations are always changing. Right now I have good selection of high school biology books and criminal law books, but who knows what it will be in 3 months or more. Help us out by giving us options.

Poetry Project

We just mailed Anthology #6 out to all who submitted poetry for consideration. We could only choose a sampling of the poetry. Students who are very appreciative of reading your entries coordinate the project. We have already started a file and all the newest poetry has been entered into it for anthology #7. Not all the poems received will be included in the anthology, but by sending in a poem you are guaranteed to have a copy of the final anthology mailed to you. The anthology will also be on our website and we will include your contact information as well. Let me know if any of you here from someone who has read your poetry online. While people often write prison themed poetry, you are encouraged to express all and any emotions. While our environment certainly dictates much of how we evolve in the world, we all have an interior life that is rich and not necessarily controlled by outside happenings. Here's a sample of some recently received poetry selected by volunteers in the poetry project for the newsletter. We hope to publish Vol #7 in late spring 2011, and gratefully accept your submissions through March. After that we will place new submissions into a folder for Vol #8

No One Asked by Robert L. Hambrick

I am tired of crying damnit!

But if the tears should cease...only rage will remain.

The anger...was not born within me, it was given.

I crave the wandering time-kill of sleep,

For my nightmares...are in wakefulness:

the indignity of the cold steal cage -(em dash)

the cruel mockery of abused authority

the ruthless, grinding destruction of the will

humanity taken,

stomped and torn...

methodical soul-kill.

Living relentlessly in the frozen framed past,

for there is no future offered;

only a blind scented march toward oblivion.

Wasting mind games challenge rambling sanity,

(I feel the slippage.)

Memories...separated from reality;

rebuilding again and again...and again

indigo speculations of "what might have been."

Yet fantasy can never paint over pained regret.

Escape and rest come only



thru tear-faded dreams.

No, I am not simply a quitter;

there is nothing left for me to quit,

Nothing left not to quit.

I have nothing...Nothing at all,

but this burdensome breath,

this useless heartbeat,

this...none-life

Nobody asked why.

They just mindless ruled, "No more chances."

(self-righteous condemnation)

Mystic powers of circumstance

could have explained reasons,

(REASONS...Not excuses!)

But...no one asked.

No,no...don't think about letting me out now!

Oooh Nooo! It's too late.

Too many stained years have crashed by,

killing desire...robbing need.

This dog has been beaten too much.

Some...can now recognize

the dull red-glazed shadow in my eye.

They fear me...

they should.

I NEED TO BE LEFT ALONE!

But i am not evil...

just spent

Punishment...extended beyond justice,

simply destroys.

I know I am no longer human.

"The Bird in my Window" by Eric Clayton Moore

A bird landed on my windowsill.

I stared at him and he stared at me

I was here against my will.

While he was completely free.

He landed here to take a rest,

From flying on weary wings.

My window was his makeshift nest,

Though I know not how much comfort it brings.

He listened to my tired voice,

As I read him this very rhyme.

To stay there was his choice.

We had nothing but time.

And I know it will not be long,

Before he flies away.

I'll listen to him sing his song,

For as long as he may stay.

And when he decides to fly once more,

With him my heart will go.

Together our souls will soar,

But how high I'll never know.

"Shadows" by Douglas Harris

Bonds of blood, deals are made,

Lost souls in Battle;

Angels weep, Demons sing,

Walk they in the Shadows.

Satan's breath a cold heart makes
Another freed from the Gallows;
Only price for this ill-fated kiss,
Dark life in lonely Shadows.
Eyes of pain, body of scars,
Death a friend not counted as Foe;
Love a memory warmth a dream,
Cold continuous in silent Shadows.
Mistakes realized, forgiveness unfound,
Fighting for life, as doomed Blood flows;
A knock at the door, answered by Fate,
welcome.....Eternal Shadows

Locked Away by Michael Atterbury

Release the seals, release calamity
Open Pandora's box and set us free
Break open locks, break open binding scrolls
Unchain the gates, relinquish our captive souls
Here we are
Hiding behind this lid waiting for you to come and
 Insert the key
We've waited too long within this box
Waiting for our time to finally come
We're so close from breathing air though so far away
Trapped inside this space void of oxygen
Here we are
Hoping the end will begin
The end of our bounded captivity

So release the seals, release calamity
Open Pandora's box and set us free
Break open the locks, break open the binding scrolls
Unchain the gates, relinquish our captive souls

Buried by Benito Contreras

Am I a ling forgotten memory
Carelessly discarded ages ago
Sitting somewhere on the dusty
Shelf of your mind?
Gathering cobwebs as time leaches by
And I am left here
Starving
Stranded
Solitary
Waiting to be remembered
Waiting to be rediscovered like
The pyramids of Egypt
Somewhere beyond the sand
Housing ancient kings
And treasures beyond belief
When will some curious soul
Decide to lift the dust
That encumbers me?

Or am I just a myth

Of things unseen

Mocked by scoffers when

It's said to be real?

Heaped in the scorn of doubting fools

I am left buried beneath

Tons of unforgiving earth

Suffocated by the lonely dark

Waiting to be unearthed

Waiting to be confirmed as fact

Like fabled Troy where Achilles fell

And they wept their heroes death

When will some courageous soul

Decide to move the dirt

That entombs and

Set me free

PE Book Club

This cycle we are offering the science fiction book “**Do Androids Dream of Electric sheep**“, by Philip K Dick. The program will be coordinated by PE volunteer Naomi. Below is Naomi’s invitation to you all to join this cycle’s common reading and discussion project.

Greetings!

My name is Naomi and I am a volunteer with the Prisoner Express program. We at P.E. truly enjoy corresponding with you all. And so, Gary and I have been trying to think of a new way to unite our worlds. We wanted to create a new project, something fun but challenging. A program that would stimulate the mind, encourages critical thinking, and places our thoughts outside of society’s box. We wanted this program to open the channels of communication between prisoners and volunteers, forcing these two communities to engage in constructive, understanding dialogue.

*The result: **Prisoners Exploring Humanity**. The Prisoners Exploring Humanity program seeks to stimulate and cultivate critical thinking among the prison community by exploring what it means to be human. Every summer, Cornell has its freshmen read a book. However, this practice is more than just an assignment. The goal is to learn something of the new world freshman are about to step into. This year, “Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep”, was chosen. Science fiction may not be the most favored genre; however, the story succeeds in making its reader think about humanity. It makes the reader question not only their place in humanity, but also the place of technology and nature in humanity. Are we afraid of technology and its growing capacities? Does our fear give technology more power? Is the environment important to us? If it is, why do we destroy it? And most importantly, are we afraid of each other?*

And so I would like to invite you to participate in this new program. The first 1000 prisoners, who respond

affirmatively, will be included in the program and sent a free copy of the book as well as some discussion questions. We will then ask you all to send in your answers and from these answers we will compile a newsletter with select answers.

We hope that the Prisoners Exploring Humanity starts a discussion. We hope that it will inspire you all and volunteers, alike, to look past the roles society has seemingly assigned us. We hope that Prisoners Exploring Humanity will move us to never ignore our fellow brothers and sisters-impooverished, imprisoned, in need- and to never ignore. Be Blessed! Naomi

Math Project

This is a repeat of the math program we offered last year, and will contain the same study materials. We will begin this study sequence sending out our Math placement exam. It is the math you would need to know to get a GED or High school diploma in NY. If you pass with an 80 % or more we send out Math 2 lesson packet, which is a series of puzzles that require logic and factoring to solve. If you score under 80% on the initial placement exam, we will send you a booklet explaining the math you need to know to pass the test as well as a retest of the material.

Dani, a professor at Ithaca College helps coordinate this project and we hope to get a number of Ithaca College students who will serve as tutors to those of you who are struggling to learn math. In our last cycle of math we were not able to help those who need extra help after they did not pass the math retest. Hopefully the tutors can go back and help folks from the last cycle as well. We only offer the math 1x per year so if you re interested now is the time to join. Our projects depend on the low cost of bulk mail to keep them affordable so we can only offer them in this manner. As we progress in this project and we cannot use bulk mail rates the cost becomes prohibitive. We are still looking for funding to make this math project a reality for 2011. Sign up if you are interested, but please understand the funding issue still has to be figured out



History Project

Back on the table is a study unit on the **Civil War**. We tried offering this last year but lack of funds, and a student not finishing the lesson kept it from happening. We have another student volunteering to do this, and I am confident we can complete the unit this cycle. As in the past we will include critical thinking questions for you to answer and student volunteers will compile the best answers into a document we will share with all who send in answers. The Civil War was itself a monumental time in American history, and the events leading up to the war are steeped in the foundation of our nation. While it seems like ancient history to some, 150 years is not very long ago, and the ripples of that war still are with us today. Please sign up if you enjoy knowing more about American history. Please know that due to photocopying and postage costs this will only be a broad look at the conflict, as a detailed examination would be too much to copy and mail.

Journal Project

Below is an invitation from our two Journal program coordinators.

Rachel M. and Margaret here, just wanting to let everyone know about the Journal Project offered through Prisoner Express! We two coordinate the program. Our main purpose for the Journal Project is to provide an opportunity for all participants to receive rehabilitation through writing and self-reflection. We strive to create an atmosphere for participants to learn to find ways of expressing their feelings and thoughts and, in the process, discover more about their creativity, humanity, and self.

Another goal of the program is to foster a link between the prison and the "outside world." The publication of selected journals on our website provides a forum for the public to read and reflect upon your writings. Our hope is that the world will develop a greater understanding of prison life and your writings will influence the conversation about prisons, prisoners and our criminal justice system. Although we may not be able to respond individually to every participant, please know as coordinators of this project we take the commitment to reading every written word very seriously. Your thoughts and reflections stay with those who read them, and they help to shape the way our society view those who are incarcerated. We only ask that you take this endeavor as seriously as we do, be as honest and open in your reflections as possible, so we can all work together to create a world of rehabilitation and second chances.



Jeff Harnden

When 200 inmates sign up to join this phase of the Journal Project, we will send out an Introductory Packet describing how we run the program and what we expect from participants. The Introductory Packet will include writing tips and additional information regarding selection of journals to be published online. We have 125 folks signed up from our last cycle who are still waiting to receive their intro packet. We have been waiting in hopes that this cycle a bunch more of you will sign up and we will have the 200 folks needed for a bulk mailing. Please do not hesitate in signing up for this project as I hope to send out this packet so new journal writers can get started by Jan 2011. If the introductory packet does not arrive before the New Year and you want to get started, please start sending your thoughts and reflections to us. We look forward to hearing from you!

*Best,
Rachel M. and Margaret*

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. 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. Ettie is graduating this spring. If anyone

wants to write and wish her well please send letters with her name on envelope, and I will forward them to her.

Spring Art Show-

We are still collecting art work for our spring show. It will be on the Cornell Campus and selected work will hang for 1 month in a very busy building on campus. We will also have a grand opening where all the submitted work will be on display. We will try to sell any art we can, to raise money for postage for mailing books. We will have an art contest and scholarships will be awarded. First prize is \$100. Second prize is \$75. Third Prize is \$50, and there will be 10, \$20 honorable mentions. We will put money on your account if you win an art scholarship. Please send in your art work by Feb 15th if you would like it included in the show. If you have already sent in work, we are planning to use all at we have received this year.

I know many folks in TX have said they cannot mail art unless we are on their visitor list. What I found out is you can mail anything on 11 by 8 paper, so please consider sending what you can. I believe students and the general public seeing your art work truly plays to the idea that a picture is worth a thousand words. Your work conveys the humanity of all behind bars, and it can awaken the desire to help or at least consider the issue of incarceration in folks on the outside. I hope many of you will participate

Below are 2 Bonus opportunities offered to you. Both of the organizations contacted me, as they were looking to get the word out on what they are up to, and how they hope to serve you.

First up is the **Phoenix Players**. I know of the Phoenix Players through attending a performance of theirs in Auburn Prison where they are incarcerated. It was emotionally very charged, and powerfully affected me, to hear their words both acted and as testimonial. They are reaching out to you, the members of the PE program, to see if you would like to get more information about their work and the personal growth they are finding through their theater study. Please read their story below and sign up if you are interested in learning more.

The Phoenix Players Theater Group

To our fellow sisters and brothers, incarcerated and free:

Who We Are

We, The Phoenix Players Theater Group (P.P.T.G.), are a troupe of incarcerated people. Our Mission is to reconnect with and fully engage our humanity through the aesthetics of acting—the mirroring of life as experienced and narrated by others. (see Mission Statement)

*As offenders of the law, we remain poignantly aware of the pain and suffering that our actions or inactions have caused our victims and their families, our own families and community. *Flames*, written by Michael Rhynes, is our empathetic declaration of action and faith. It acknowledges that it is our burden and duty to prove ourselves worthy of forgiveness and trust from those we have offended. Like the mythological 'Phoenix', we [each] want to rise from the ashes of an unproductive and shameful past to live in the present as a redeemed person.*

The involvement of community members, as 'Observer', 'Participant', 'Guide' and most importantly, 'Fellow Human Being', provides the critical perspective and engagement essential to our group's healthy balance.

Our desire and commitment to touch the suffering and joy of others, to learn the way of empathy, compassion, forgiveness and self-love, defines who we are as a group.

What We Do:

We begin once a week workshops with P.P.T.G.'s motto and a guided meditation. Then we reacquaint ourselves with the range and experience of body expression through Qi-Gong, Yoga, and stretching. We warm-up in order to integrate mind, body, spirit (heart), and group consciousness in the moment. And just like that, "voila", we've spent hours exploring particular niche skills of performance

(Bioenergetics, Laban movements, rasaboxes, etc.) Each session stimulates internal recognition of exactly 'where we are'—as individuals, and a maturing theater group.

In addition to exploring acting skills, we are preparing for presentations of our work. We set aside time to share ideas about our work and, when requested by members of the group, we take time to check-in with each other [to process personal issues that affect each of us]. Our process is fluid, responsive and organic.

P.P.T.G. is distinguished from other theater groups that function within a prison setting. P.P.T.G.'s existence and goals are the manifestation of its members' intimate prayers for an authentic and effective means to achieve personal and socio-political 'redemption'. An audacious prayer made within the small confines of our cells. With due deference to the professional skills and humanity of community supporters, P.P.T.G.'s developmental path will continue to be defined by the active and organic product of our group's consciousness.

Our Future

P.P.T.G. is still in its early stages of development. We rely upon and appreciate any involvement and support you can provide:

Incarcerated People

- **Submit monologues for possible use in our workshops and performances.**
- **Sign-up with Prisoner Express to receive a newsletter about our work in Auburn: Our activities, exercises, and writings about our mission and working process.**

Community Involvement:

- *Be a participatory volunteer*
- *Sign-up to be added to our guest list for our first performance*
- *Sign-up with Prisoner Express to receive a newsletter about our work in Auburn*
- *Do research work*
- *Share your theater skills with us as an instructor*
- *Donate to support our performances*
- *Donate time to do administrative work on behalf of PPTG*

For more information on how to get involved in any of these areas, please contact us via:

Durland Alternatives Library.

P.P.T.G.'s Motto:

*We are a community of transformation.
Through the power of self discovery,
We create the opportunity
To know and grow
Into ourselves*

Mission Statement

The Phoenix Players Theatre Group utilizes theatre to reconnect incarcerated people to their full humanity.



Actors make first-hand empathetic connections to the broader experience of human suffering, struggle and happiness, by learning to “live truthfully under imaginary circumstances”.¹

This process will enhance compassionate engagement among human beings, prompt recognition of forgiveness’ role in human development, and establish a renewed commitment to self-love.

The awareness acquired through thinking and acting beyond self-interest becomes the catalyst for choosing to live from one’s higher nature. This experience significantly increases incarcerated people’s chances of transcending the negative labels and histories of criminality that define them within the greater society.

¹This concept is attributed to Constantin Stanislavski (1863-1938)-- actor, theatre director and developer of modern acting theory and technique.

Flames

By Michael Rhynes

We who are the Phoenix Players Theatre Group of Auburn believe in the redemptive flame of rehabilitation. We affirm that we live in the dark ages of prison expansion and the warehousing of souls.

While our legislators and the courts debate how many souls can be stuffed into a single prison cell, we have embarked on a quest to become better human beings and productive citizens.

We seek atonement for catering to our base nature, because we acknowledge that the choice to do right or wrong has always been within our power. We wish to atone for those human beings for whom we’ve caused so much pain and suffering. We wish to atone to society for not living up to our organic contract by loving and caring for our neighbors. We wish to atone to our families for failing to reach our potential and their dreams for us.

We who are the Phoenix Players make a conscious decision to walk into the flames of your pain, suffering suspicions of our motives, disbelief of our goodness, your downright anger and your grief, in hopes of being recreated in your loving, compassionate and empathetic images.

Higher education is a myth behind these walls. In order to resurrect our souls, we have decided to grasp the Holy Grail that is in the arts. If the arts can transform mud-baked villages into metropolises of light, why can’t it transform us who live in hovels of despair?

We would rather have men writing plays than conceiving how to deprive innocent people of their lives and property. We would rather listen to men in this prison eulogize Caesar from the stage than hear it from the mouths of the clergy about how innocent people’s lives were shattered by violence. We would rather have twelve men acting angry on stage than face a jury of their peers.

Based on the polling of the men in this prison, we’ve drawn the astounding conclusion that drama courses, with the hope of putting on a production, would make a successful reintegration tool for us.

We seek not to make every man in this prison a professional dramatist, but to reconnect us to society, our

communities, and our families by learning through drama how to love, what it feels like to be compassionate, to forgive and be forgiven, to reach into the depths of our being and bring forth our humanity.

We don’t come to you as beggars but as men with hopeful hearts, along with the vision of changing this dark, dank world into a kaleidoscope of hope, where the diseases of idleness and worthlessness are banished forever.

Another special project comes your through Jim. It is specifically directed toward veterans of the armed forces a. You can write to Jim directly at the address listed at the end of his statement

Non Violence Project for Veterans

The Fellowship of Reconciliation seeks to replace violence, war, racism and economic injustice with nonviolence, peace, and justice. We are an interfaith organization committed to active nonviolence as a transforming way of life and as a means of radical change. We educate, train, build coalitions, and engage in nonviolent and compassionate actions locally, nationally, and globally.

VFOR Programs: Collection of life stories, insights from war and creation of collective journals for publication. **We actively recruit incarcerated war veterans in order to give their writings an audience. We support veterans’ groups in prisons to serve to assist them to understand their war experiences, heal and “be all that they can be for peace”.** We provide regional workshops to train veterans on counter-recruiting (Truth in Recruiting) in their local schools.

Purpose: A legacy that veterans can leave young people that is based on ethics and morality; Education of young people to make choices that embrace spirituality and an egalitarian society, not the promotion violence and racism; Supporting and working in conjunction with other groups promoting peace and justice with young people;

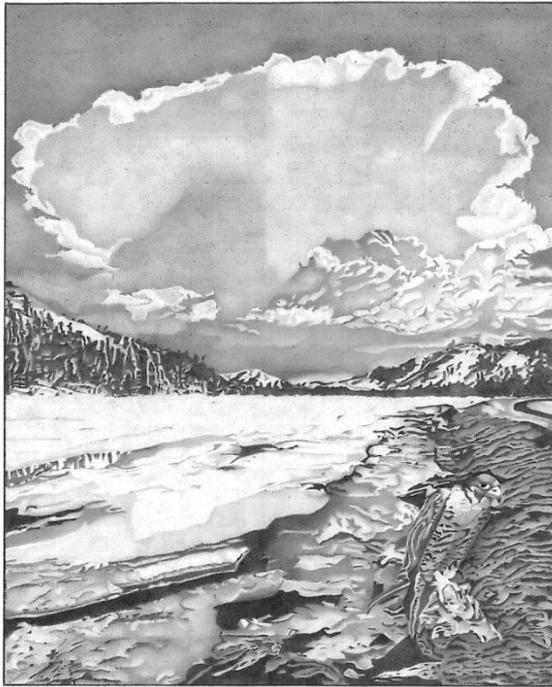
The healing of veterans....

Jim Murphy: c/o Fellowship of Reconciliation, 521 North Broadway, Upper Nyack, NY 10960; (845)358-4601 or Autumn Leave Book Store, The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850 (607)319-0980

Theme Writing

This, my favorite of the PE projects, invites you to share your thoughts based on a monthly writing topic. You can write whatever comes to mind, fact or fiction on the topic. Everyone who contributes a story will receive a packet that includes all the other writings on the subject that were submitted. It is a great way to get mail and share in the thoughts of others who face similar stress and environment. The writings are also put up on our PE website, available for anyone with access to a computer and internet to read. We also select a few writings from previous topics to include in the PE newsletter. We cannot put too many in as we would run out of space, so if you enjoy reading some of the selections included in this newsletter please know you can receive a complete packet just by sharing your written thoughts. There is no right or wrong in this project, but just whatever your





Jose Gomez

imagination or memory conjures. Sometimes I select topics listed in a magazine titled "The Sun". It is a thought provoking literary magazine, and we recently had donors send us hundreds of back issues. **For anyone who writes on a theme topic starting in January 2011, I will send you a Sun magazine along with your regular theme packet. I will do this until all the Sun's are mailed out. It is a unique magazine that keeps it real.**

Below are the upcoming topics and due date followed by some selected writings from previous months. Please remember to write legibly and to put your name on all your writings. We get a lot of mail and sometimes an essay gets separated from the envelope it comes in. If your name is on it we will always know who sent it to us.

NEW THEME TOPICS

| | |
|-------------------------|-------------------|
| Heroes | Due 1/1/11 |
| Rumors | Due 2/1/11 |
| Cheap Thrills | Due 3/1/11 |
| Authority | Due 4/1/11 |
| Rites of Passage | Due 5/1/11 |
| Practical Jokes | Due 6/1/11 |
| Paying Attention | Due 7/1/11 |

Body Art

By: Gilbert M. Davila

When it comes to body art, prison is one place where you'll find it in abundance, and in some of the strangest places. Some of the work in here is so unbelievably good that you can't help but wonder why the artist isn't making millions selling his work in galleries, instead of in prison doing tattoos for commission. The talent in this place is amazing. It's just a shame that many may not see the outside of a prison again.

I can't recall exactly when my love for tattoos started. All I know is that I've had a fascination for it and art in general, ever since I was young. Maybe it was because I couldn't (and still can't!) draw a straight line. I don't know how. But from the age of 13, which is when I got my first home-made tattoo, I've liked them. I thought the capital "G" that I put on the inside of my left ankle was the coolest thing ever. By the age of 15 I had a couple more home-made tats that my parents couldn't help but allow me to cover up. I went to our local professional shop owned and run by Bob Shaw Sr. and Jr. That experience resulted in an even greater appreciation for body art.

My younger brother, Johnny, began to tag along with me and we started doing odd jobs for the Shaws. They offered to pay us cash. We opted for tattoos. Eventually we began helping in the shop by cleaning, stretching someone's skin or both. It didn't matter to me. I just liked being in that environment. The occasional breast shot was always exciting as well.

Now that I look back on it, I realize that the experience had a greater impact on my brother. He is the artist in the family. I remember him drawing cartoon characters at a very early age. By 14-15 years old, he was already designing t-shirts and car patterns for the low riders that he and my step-father owned. When he finally picked up a tattoo gun in 1992, I was one of his first victims. And though his work was far from what it ultimately became, the potential for greatness was obvious. It was evident even in his earliest work that he had "IT."

It wasn't until I came to prison the first time in 1994 that Johnny's career as a tattoo artist took off. He went from doing tats out of his apartment to running his own shop for Electra-Arts out of Corpus Christi, Texas. While tattooing he apprenticed as a body-piercer and, as we both are when we like something, he took that to an extreme level too.

By the time I was released in May of 2002 he was free-lancing again. We wasted no time in getting to work on my arms and back. I didn't get any work done while in prison so there was still a lot of virgin skin to be covered. My brother does custom work, straight from the dome. He loves doing fantasy imagery. I prefer his darker art. He has a very twisted mind that can produce pieces that would make even Paul Booth or Bob Tyrell cringe. He's that good. Unfortunately we both ended up in jail (and ultimately prison) not long after my release so my work was not finished.

I was in Ad.Seg. That prevented me from getting any work done. I did have some patterns that my brother drew for me and I have since had them forever placed upon my sides, which hurt like hell, by the way. Then again, compared to the Mahomet that I had done on the back of my head, the side pieces were like a walk in the park.

I had the opportunity to visit my brother on the Bill Clements Unit this past October. We were cellies for a weekend and, all things considered, had a great time. It had been 6 years since we'd last seen each other. Needless to say, it was a very emotional time. It was Bitter-sweet in every sense of the word. Nevertheless, I enjoyed it all and was especially proud to see how well he was doing. Equally satisfying (but no surprise to me) was hearing the other convicts tell me how my brother was the best artist on the unit.

That may not amount to much in the free world, but in ours, that's saying something.

My brother didn't work on me while I was there. We didn't want to risk jeopardizing our visit for that. I did, however, bring back some patterns he had drawn for me. I've already had two of them done and await more as I write. If I can't have him do it personally, then I at least want his work.

A lot of guys talk about regretting the day they got a tat or how they'll have them removed the first chance they get. Other than a few gang-affiliated ones that I have, I don't regret any. Each and every one marks a time in my life that I can remember. Some are more significant than others. The work that my brother did and the patterns he drew for me are especially important to me as they are reminders of him, who we are, and what we're about. That's one thing that I will never change nor regret.

By: Perry Allen Austin

Body art; commonly defined as tattoos. Is it really art, or is it just meaningless pictures etched under one's skin? Is it a self-expression, or is it self-mutilation? Everyone has their own ideas as to what constitutes art so the answer to those questions will vary greatly depending on whom you ask. Myself, I think it can be all of the above. It can be art if it is beautifully done, or expresses something meaningful to the person who gets it. If it's just a bunch of lines and/or letters that don't really mean anything to the wearer, then it's just meaningless etches under one's skin. They can be means to define who you are, what you were thinking and feeling when you got the tattoo, and at the same time, it is self-mutilation because you are altering the natural outward appearance of your body.

I was talking with a friend of mine the other day and he was looking at my tattoos. He asked me if I was ever given the opportunity, would I have my tattoos removed and do I ever regret getting them. My answer was an empathetic No!

I got my first tattoo in 1976 at the age of 17 in Augusta, Georgia; I had just graduated from Army Basic Combat Training, and was soon to begin advanced training in my chosen career field. This was my first all day pass and my friends and I were off to explore the city of Augusta. The tattoo parlor was located right across the street from the bus station and we all decided to take a look. It was a small and dingy place, dim and not very well kept, but when we walked in it was like

walking into a different world, a world entirely different from the one we had come from. We stared in awe at all of the beautiful and strange colorful patterns that covered the walls. Right then and there my friends and I decided we were going to get a tattoo. It took a long time for me to finally decide on a tattoo. I was an extremely skinny kid and most of the tattoos wouldn't fit on my arm. I finally decided on a skull tattoo with horns, a jester's collar, and a spider web on its head. It was in color too! It cost me \$85 dollars and at the time was the coolest thing in the world to me. I was so proud of that tattoo and I showed it off every chance I got.

My next tattoo was in 1981. I was in prison by then and living on the Wynne Unit. It was a dragon's head and neck coming out of the top of a cloud and covered half of my back. It was handpicked by an old Mexican guy using three sewing needles tied to a Popsicle stick and real India ink. It took three days, five hours each day and was one of the most painful experiences in my life! Since the work area had to be completely relaxed and pliable I could not tense up from the pain and had to remain absolutely still. I also had to keep an eye out for the guards since getting Martin Rivers was against the rules and to get caught would have meant solitary time for both of us. So for 15 hours, from the neck down I was completely relaxed, but from the neck up I was tighter than a drum, teeth clenched and grinding and thinking to myself, "What in the world am I doing? I must be crazy!" The tattoo never did get done. Several days later the old guy unexpectedly caught the chain home. I've often thought about having the tattoo finished but just haven't come across anyone that good who can handpick like that old guy. The cost of the tattoo? One bag of Maxwell House coffee (\$1.75) and the three sewing needles used for the tattoo, which I had gotten from work.

In 1986 I started getting involved in Satanism and began getting tattoos of skulls, daggers, pentagrams, and the like. All of these tattoos were done with various types of homemade tattoo guns and homemade ink. One tattoo was even done using a staple sharpened to a point and soot from burnt plastic! Ten years later in 1995 I abandoned Satanism and went on to other things. But that's another story.

I haven't gotten any more tattoos since then. They were no longer "cool" and the chances of getting hepatitis C or HIV was no longer a risk I was willing to take. I hadn't been the most careful person in the world and I had been extremely lucky so far.



Martin Rivers



Looking at my tattoos now I can see that with the exception of the handpicked dragon on my back, the others were very childish and amateurishly done, even the one I got in Augusta. But I have no regrets and while I am no longer “proud” of them, neither am I ashamed of them. Each one had a story to tell, a memory to recall. They are a part of me and a part of my past. Getting rid of them or regretting them will not change that nor remove what has already been.

Cousins

Blood Love By: Robert L. Hambrick

They call it forbidden. They say it's immoral. They've named it incest. And they've made it illegal.

But how can I deny what is?

Since we were very young, VERY young, we were attracted to each other. There was just something in our chemistry that drew us together. Every time the family would get together, she and I would naturally gravitate to each other. We'd play together, take walks and talk. She had the greatest laugh, a fantastic wit, and a precocious look upon life. I was three years older than her, but she always seemed to be instructing me. And indeed, when it came down to it ... she did teach me of love.

As children, we'd play. As we became sexually aware in our pre-teens, we'd play there as well. Not knowing what was what, we'd simply fool around ... experiment with rumors we'd heard about. Once into our teens, indeed, every chance we got, we'd slip off alone to kiss and caress. But it was so much more than simple sexual energy. We both knew it was more. We were not only in love with each other ... we LOVED each other.

But with this realization came the agony of realizing our love could never be. The morals of society, the morality of our up-bringing, would never allow us to be together. What pain this brought our hearts.

Then came the night at the family reunion. The grown-ups all busy with themselves, the kids all scattered through the woods playing. She took me by the hand and led me well away from everyone. I was 16, she was 13. But somehow she knew what to do. I simply followed her instructions.

Oh, what a feeling. Besides the obvious physical pleasure – even more so, was the ecstasy of loving my love. The head of our passion overwhelmed all other senses. We melted into each other in a bond of such beauty that nothing else mattered. Again and again, our bodies reacted to the screaming demands of our hearts, our souls, our very beings.

Much later then, I fought with my conscience. Yet, how could something like what we just shared ... be wrong? not the sex, forget the sex! How could such a pure love be wrong?

As the years went by, we had very few chances to give ourselves to each other so completely. The older we grew, the more we had to face the reality of the hopelessness of the situation. She had boyfriends, lovers, and finally a husband and Life. I never married, but I was not celibate either. Indeed, I've had many, many women. Some stayed for awhile even. Yet, through all these years, no woman has ever had that look in her eye when she looked at me ... no woman

has ever said she loved me with such honesty and force ... no woman has ever felt sooooo right in my arms, as my dearest cousin. I have to this day, never been loved nor loved as profoundly and sincerely as what we shared.

Looking back over the years now with mature eyes, I find that what we had was not a lie. It was true, it was real ... and now I've learned – IT WAS ALRIGHT! I happened to be studying in my Bible the other day, and came upon the laws against incest. A man is not to have: his mother, sister, step-mother, sister-in-law, etc. NOWHERE DOES IT SAY FIRST COUSIN IS FORBIDDEN! Read it! Indeed, Abraham, and others, took cousins to wife.

Most states in the U.S. forbid first cousin marriages. But there are a few that allow it. Just think, after all these years, we COULD have been together. What joy and love us could have shared. But, the misunderstanding of the laws of incest cost us a love – I am sure – was meant to be.

It's too late now ... she died last year.

How sad is that?

By: Chad Lawson

My cousin is my hero. He's daring, bold, and he's a very positive person. I might as well start from the beginning. It was a summer to remember. I went to the lake and there was a bunch of us going swimming. I was 12 years old and my friends and I went to the swimming hole a few miles back. I saw that my dream girl was swimming and smiling and laughing. Long brown hair and the best looking skin in a two-piece swimsuit. She was beautiful. I went home and laid back as I dreamed about her. Something was nagging in my mind but I dismissed it. The next day of summer I see her again, and that long brown hair was flowing in the wind as the sun coursed through it and highlighted the brown that showed through. It was like a dream. I was scared to ask her out all the time. One night, at a dance, I built up my nerves and took her hand and danced with her. That's the night I fell in love with this girl. Shannon was her name. Shannon Piers. It seemed familiar but I did not know why at all I felt that nagging again, so the school year we were together, laughing and telling jokes, walking across the railroad, then finding smashed pens, and she kissed me on the bridge as we stood there. I found the love of my life, or at least until the ninth grade. I had been dating for four years, finding myself in love with her; we have been there for each other. One of my friends told me that she was a HE and I did not believe it at all, and I refuse to believe it at all or even ask, some how I did not believe it. So many years I got made fun of because I did not believe it. It was prom night. She was beautiful. My heart was soaring as we danced to songs that we knew, and then I heard a scream from the hall. When I came to the hall, I saw my date on the floor. She was being held down to show that she was a he. Her mouth was jagged and she helpless. I saw she was a he, and also a female at the same time. My stomach felt sick as they were going to rape her. I went into frenzy and started hitting and hitting. I don't remember much since all that, but when I came to, I put my jacket over my date. “Why did you not tell me?” As I had tears in my eyes and blood all over my hands and face. “Because I knew that you would not see me any more and I was afraid of being alone. I'm sorry I ruined your life and that

now they will say you are gay.” I shook my head and just looked at her. The only thing that I felt was love and betrayal, but I shook my head and walked her out of the dance. I made a decision and since then I have not regretted it. It’s been 20 years and I’m at a high school reunion class of 1978 and that same person that I fell in love with became my wife. Many years later, as I found out that she’s a distant cousin of mine 7 generations away. My family and I don’t talk. I don’t care. The guys that were going to do the act that night are all in prison, I found out at the dance, and I also gained respect for standing my ground. True, she cannot have children, but we cannot worry because we have adopted and I have loved this woman with all of my life. I love my cousin.

Music

By: Rickey Pearson

Music makes me feel many ways, depending on the genre, the song and the memory that particular song or chord is connected to. It can make me hurt—ache inside, can make me hate. It has the power to make me sigh and cry, smile, grin and laugh. It makes me think, dance, spin in idiotic circles, sing, curl up, reminisce, travel, write and celebrate. It makes me dream. It can make me fall asleep, tap my fingers and toes, nod my head, shake my entire body, sway and talk. It makes me do back flips, front flips and cartwheels. More than anything, though, music makes me love, makes me *feel*.

I love music. Very simply, music is my refuge, my therapy, my life. Throughout my hell called life, music has remained the only constant. People have come and gone, forests cleared and neighborhoods built, things have dramatically changed, I’ve matured... And through it all, I was carried by music.

I have *no* bad memories associated with music. Every good memory I can think of has music, a song that goes along with it. When I hear that song I’m instantly transported, and the resulting feeling or action is wholly dependent upon that memory. I don’t have many good memories compared to other people, but the ones I do are very special—sacred, even—to me.

When in a bad mood a chord is all I need and the sun begins to shine in my soul. I know when I feel the wet droplets traveling down my face, leaving a glistening trail, when I get all choked up, that I am still alive, truly alive—that I am still me. I know then that all the hell I’ve been through, all the pain I’ve suffered... I know it has not succeeded in killing me, in deadening my soul. I know the hell hasn’t taken away my sanity or robbed me of my humanity. That’s a special thing.

A lot of the world finds comfort and solace in religion. Me... I find mine in music. Music is my religion, and my Gods are the skilled people who play those instruments and say those words **Jose Sanchez** feel. That’s what music is to me, ~~and without music, I can~~ honestly say right this minute that I would be nothing. To me, without music, there simply is no purpose in continuing to live. There *is* music, though, and I love it. I love life with music, and music inspires me to live. Let it inspire you to do the same.



Jose Sanchez

***The Ghost in Tink’s Toy* by Jackey R. Sollars**

Henry ‘Willie’ Williams. Nicknamed Tink in reference to the man’s bladder function. Tink was seventy, older than dirt. A medium-sized, frail, thin, dark skinned black man with big puppy dog eyes and a toothless smile. Tink’s fall came eight months after his wife’s death. He and Isabella trekked through fifty-three years of personal and world history together. Tink caught a hard twenty for a rock of crack cocaine. The sentence itself was capital punishment but hey! That’s the only kind of punishment the Texas Christians know of. Depression set in quick, within weeks Tink had set up his own rendezvous with death. Nothing I could think of could get him off the path to self-willed termination. Then came

the day of enlightenment. The day Papa watched Tink rush to the television to listen and dance to a band on the Moore News Program. Finally, Papa knew what he needed to get Tink in order to keep him alive. The radio proved worthy and kept Tink happy for two years where he died with a smile in his sleep, clutching a photo of his wife with the music drumming on through the headphones.

The radio had become a nightmare for Papa, music was the one thing he came to hate as much, if not more, than he once loved it. Tink terrorized Papa and the entire A-block population. The radio had become symbolic to extreme irony; “The very object bought to solve Tink’s mental problem and pending self-willed death had become the very object that had others contemplating murder, my murder!”

Tink lived out his last two years with headphones on singing out in an obstreperous falsetto, dancing about in the center of the cell. It became a double whammy of pain for Papa who endured it only with the aid of earplugs. Then Tink passed on. Papa had to admit to himself: the old man’s horrid singing and showmanship had filled a void in the world of cold stone.

Papa lost a good cellie and now had to deal with something much worse. His new cellie was a ‘Hood Beast,’ meaning the man was a radically militant racist black that flaunted the timeless excuse of being “deprived by the white man.” What made matters worse, the new guy didn’t believe in respect or headphones. His radio stayed on the tasteless noise pollution of rap or hip-hop. Papa couldn’t tell the difference since both were emanating negatively charged messages. Life in the ten-by-ten cell had become cramped, tense, and hostile. Both men were equally empowered with one exception: Papa never played; his idea of war was with deathly finality. After a near incident, his cellie avoided the physical confrontations, choosing maximum mental warfare. For three months, Papa and The Hood Beast clashed over the anti-social sounds that someone actually considered music.

Papa walked into Warden Williams’ office expecting chastisement for the continual confrontations that often had guards standing ready with pepper gas and batons. Williams pointed at a straight chair in front of his desk as he spoke to some peon via radio. Papa sat down. Williams opened a lower desk drawer, retrieving a shipping box slightly larger than a cigar box. The younger man pulled out a letter from an envelope taped to the box, then eyed Papa.

“I received a call and a request from a woman in Houston,” Williams said, unfolding the letter while sitting back. “I guess she didn’t trust me, so she included a letter.” Williams held his head back and flexed his eyes before reading. “Dear Warden Williams, I spoke to you earlier about the possibility of my giving an inmate in your charge, a Jackson Joseph Flash, a radio. Jackson was my father’s cellie during the last two years of life. After my father passed on, I received the few possessions that my father had: a Bible, some photos, and a cheap AM/FM radio with headphones. I personally do not know Mister Flash. But I do feel as if I owe him, for it was him who gave my father something to quicken him in his final days. The radio meant so much to my father. He wrote and spoke often of how this radio gave his life meaning. Now, I would like to repay the favor to Jackson by giving him the magnificent gift he bestowed upon my father. I thank you for allowing me to do this. Sincerely, Roberta Williams.” Williams folded the letter, then pointed at the box. “That belongs to you,” he said.

Papa hesitated before taking the box. He wasn’t one who smiled, but the sight of Tink’s little toy warranted one. There was nothing special about the Centurion AM/FM radio. It was, as the woman stated, cheap. The headphones, a generic brand designed to break at the least neglect, was still in relatively good shape.

“I was informed you acquired this radio for this old man right after he arrived. One of my trustees has told me it gave the inmate a reason to live,” Williams stated.

Papa nodded. “Classic hopelessness. The old cat knew he’d never walk out of prison. With a future like that? No sense in prolonging the inevitable.”

Williams stared at Papa for a few minutes, then smiled. “Yeah. It is hard to do time when you have no time left,” Williams surmised. “Take the radio.”

“I really don’t want it. I mean, I have no use for it. Especially music. I hate music.”

“Well. I’m sure you don’t like a lot of things. But you adapt. Take the radio. Give it a shot in the dark.”

“But I—”

“Humor me, Flash. And! Humor Miss Williams.”

Papa nodded. One didn’t argue with the one man that could make your life complicated. Rising quietly, he moved toward the door.

“Oh,” Williams snapped. “In speaking to this woman, she explained to me of how her father spoke of your complete disdain of music. So you concurred a few minutes ago. May I suggest you sincerely give that radio some serious attention.”

Papa, gripping the doorknob, glared at Williams who had sat up, rested both arms on the desk, and had laced the fingers. The man was asking entirely too much. But again, common sense and experience, that one didn’t fare well with bucking.

The radio sat on the table near the head of Papa’s bunk. He had set the clock, a silly thing to do in a place where time ceased to have meaning or definition. Months later, in an evasive action to maintain control of his anger, he slipped the headphones on to drown out the artless cacophony. Scanning the stations, he found one with a recognizable song. It was the mid-seventies, back before Papa was Papa. Back when Papa was J.J. Flash, a kid working his first summer job.

A distant radio in the grease bay echoed, Garry Rafferti taking another trip down Baker’s Street. J.J. leaned peacefully against the polished pulpit of a slowly fading religion, full service with courtesy. The four stainless steel gas pumps atop a raised concrete island set only thirty feet off the curb of Main Street. Bartel’s Exxon in Andrews, Texas, wasn’t just another gas station. It was a tradition, heritage, and an institution among young teens that had such a firm grip upon life in a small town. His boss encouraged such loitering, the casual leaning upon the pumps with a red shop rag in hand. To stand there watching the teenagers cruise the drag.

Cruising the drag, the social activity that each generation inherited from the one before. Yet, no one generation ever really gave up cruising Main Street. Even the elderly mom and pops were known to lose themselves in time by taking an occasional drag. J.J. stood listening to Rafferti; all the while, passing vehicles with stereos cranked radiated a heavy bass beat to Foghat’s “Slow Ride” or Nugent’s “Cat Scratch Fever.” Even the goat ropers could be heard with Willie Nelson or Waylon Jennings wailing out a ballad. It was an eclectic binding of audible flavors seasoned with the sensuous aroma of sun-baked asphalt, hot rubber, exhaust and broiling burgers from a burger joint. Passing vehicles laid down hard on their vehicle horns, greeting each other in passing. J.J. absorbed the moment, wondering if this was the way the kids did it on the West coast.

“Yeah,” he thought. “They had to. They had Jan and Dean. The Beach Boys. They had real hot rods, sandy beaches, surfing, and bonfire dances in the late night after that glorious golden orb sank in the ocean.” J.J. shook his head and waved at a passing car. Deanne in her new Pontiac Trans-Am with the T-top. The Simpson twins, a notorious pair, screamed at him while waiving. Deanne had Frampton crooning, “Do you—Feel like I do.” J.J. cocked his head, waving. Even though the car had passed, he could mentally hear Frampton riding the strings, straining the chords. Then came that lapse in traffic from the natural interruptions of the four traffic lights. Back in the grease bay, The Hollies were chasing A Long Cool Woman in a Red Dress.

A vehicle caught his attention. J.J. spun to watch Mister Cargyle slowly pass. “Ding ding,” the bells announced. J.J. grabbed the gas nozzle, flipped the pump on, and then stabbed the nozzle into the spout. He let the pump go on automatic, moving to the windshield with chamois and squeegee. Cargyle paid him no mind. Vehicles passed, honking. J.J. ignored them. The customer always came first. In less than five minutes, he had the oil executive back on the road.

J.J. strolled out of the lobby after ringing up the sale. It was time for his evening soda. He fed the machine a quarter, stooped to pull one of the icy, frost-covered sodas from the bottom slot. He retrieved his dime in change while popping the top.

Ding ding!

Turning, he froze, staring at Deanne. Deanne sat staring at him across the front seat. The Simpson twins mischievously watched. Fate began to put the wheels in motion. The old cheap radio filled the absence of sound.

“Darling if you want me to be. Closer to you. Get closer to me.” Seals and Croft had found the perfect time to intervene.

“Hey,” Deanne said softly.

“Hey!” J.J. countered.

The Simpson twins giggled, “Oh, for Pete’s sake. Ask him?” Donnita said, looking at Deanne.

“She wants to know if you’re going to cruise after you close up,” Annita said from the back seat. She peeked out between the back of the seat and the window frame.

J.J. nodded.

“Well? She wants to cruise with you,” Donnita stated.

“Ah, yeah. Su—re,” J.J. countered.

The twins snickered.

The burst of light shattered Papa’s thoughts. He pulled the headphones off, rose, and stepped to the door. A guard was counting. Stepping to the mirror, he stared into the aged blue eyes, now void of the hopeful twinkle. His face had been creased by time, with the season of many lives. Papa ducked his head in thought a minute, then glanced at the headphones. The past began to whisper to him, all those ghosts in Tink’s toy.

Music—My Own Personal Theory

By Michael Pace

Suppose Music was something far out in space and unknown, theoried only like a black hole. Black Hole: highly concentrated mass that has collapsed to such a degree that the escape velocity from its surface is greater than the speed of light, trapping light and all other energy and matter in an intense gravitational field.

Sounds like a place created by an evil wizard, which not even light can escape. “Call Merlin and Gandalf and Glenda, the good witch, to fight this evil.” It must be the dark side of the Force. Where is a good Jedi when you need one? Maybe they have all already been sucked in and all we have left is that kid—Harvey Putter. We don’t even have a decent Superman.

Music! The art and science of combining tones or sounds—in a single line (melody), in combination (harmony), and in their timed relations (rhythm)—to express ideas and emotions in a structurally complete and unified work having

an appealing sound when produced by one or more voices or instruments, or both.

Huh...?

I have no concept of music other than that it something I cannot conceive. I have no practical experience. It is like a desert-dweller trying to imagine an ocean. I can give definitions—classical, opera, vocal, tempo, rock ’n’ roll, muzak, R&B. Music is a sound. It causes vibrations, as does dynamite and earthquakes.

I am deaf. I live in a world without sound. “Welcome to the sound...of silence.” Black is the absence of light but not color. Silence is the absence of sound, but is it the absence of music? I can talk—limited but fair. I cannot sing—yet. I taught myself how to whistle—accidentally. I can also dance, the greatest dance—Ballet. See, I had a theory and went about it like any other theorist—trial and error.

I have a theory about music as well.

Music? The Art and Practice of combining life experience and passion—in single line (Brotherhood), in combination (Friendship), and in time relations (Life Partners)—to express ideas and desires in a structurally complete and unified work having an appealing effect when produced by one or more individuals or happenings, or both.

This is my very own theorem (theoretical proposition). Adjustments will have to be made. Trial and Error—you know. I think kites make music, and sailboats, and spring days. I think lovers make music, or lovers are music. Let’s see—where would Einstein start?

-The Kyle

Music By Rene Joe De la Rosa

“Take your seats, children,” says the Conductor. “This is a sight reading, there is no practice. Instruments up and keep your eyes on me. Trust me, I will guide you.”

So we played. We played our lives and each note recorded on the scale was an action in our life. Some of us play loud and sure, strong in an ability with our chosen instruments. Others muddle through, content to play low and in the background. We crescendo in parts of our lives. Vibrant, loud, in harmony, together!

Then sometimes even us, sure in our ability, get confused and decrescendo, decrease the melody. It’s the music of our lives. The high notes and the low notes. We sit and play out our lives, right or wrong, in harmony or out of sync. Our Conductor without fail cranks out time, cues us, directs us, if we but just look up from our music. It’s hard though, because we get so caught up trying to make it perfect we get lost. This word and hands never tire though. What’s sad is some of us give up and lay our instruments down. We lose trust in our teacher, our friend. What is sad is some never look up from the start. They stand out playing the wrong notes at the wrong time, never realizing it’s not the tune.

What is even more heartbreaking to the Conductor is when one of his players lays down their instrument because they hit a rough part in the music called life. He knows if they just pressed on, they would catch the beat again. Once more they would play, loud and proud. Each time the Conductor sees one of his players lay down an instrument he sheds a tear. He longs to hold them and comfort them but he can’t leave his podium. So he watches and alternates between smiles and tears. There are times when you will play a note and if you’re

really lucky, an unending, perfect duet. He smiles then too because he knows it's good.

Music is in us. In our blood, it's a universal language. Music crosses all boundaries, connects people. How is this possible? Because every day we're playing notes. Our lives, our existence has been written out on sheet music, specifically for us. Written with love from the Conductor. He who is standing up there to guide us in our play. He who has made it possible for us who have really screwed up in our music to begin over. That's right, start from scratch with a warm-up process. Actually able to look back at our previously misplayed music, correct our mistakes and join the band again.

How do I know this? Because years ago I ripped an instrument out of two different peoples' hands. They didn't want to stop playing but I made them. I looked up and I saw the blood drain from the Conductor's face. I heard him gasp, I saw his tears fall from his eyes. Not just for these two lost musicians, but for me too.

I looked past the Conductor and saw behind him the reason I was able to start playing music again. Sitting behind the Conductor was his son, battered and beaten, bloody and tired, crying his heart out for me, and the loss of music. I saw the son reach out his hands toward me, and I saw the holes in them. The hole in his side that put the finishing touches on cutting him out of the music.

In shame I looked back at my music and alternated my eyes, from the music, to the Conductor, to his son. I looked down in shame because I realized the Conductor sacrificed his son's music so I can start over. The sweetest sound ever made, from the most perfect instrument was intentionally cut out. He was sat down, and had his instrument torn from his hands. For me. For us. For we who intentionally play wrong, the lead was cut out.

With a deep breath, I looked to the son for a clue, a hint. He in turn looked to the Conductor. With a sad smile I raised my instrument again and let the Conductor cue me back in. For some reason, and I don't know if it's just me, my music got a lot harder. I, like many others, who have started over, do my best to keep my eyes on the Conductor. His hands keep me in time. Every now and then I'll slip, but the memory of the Conductor's son snaps my eyes back where they need to be.

No, I'm not always in rhythm and I don't always play loud, but I play and I like to play right and help my fellow musicians around me. My eyes sometimes stray back to the seats

where the two musicians played and my eyes tear up. When they tear up, that part of the music rewinds in my mind and I have no choice but to look to the Conductor and pray and play.

I look to his guidance, I look for his love. I'd be a damn liar if I said I play good because I don't. I try though. I have a fear, but you can't tell from my playing. I have a fear that at the end of my part in the music, when I can put down my instrument, I'll have to face those two musicians. I'll have to answer their "Why?"s. I won't be able to do it, but I'll try. Actually facing them isn't my fear because in my music I've faced worse. No, the fear Kenneth Warwick embracing me and walking me home and helping put up my instrument.

I know that at the end, when the Conductor says it is done and asks for my music, I'll have to answer for my intentional misplaying. What tears me up, and what makes me cry is I know the Conductor's son will take my music from his Father. He'll gather it up in his bloody hands, pull my music to his chest, and tell his Father *he's* keeping it. He, the son, will keep my music and his Father will agree. That is what scares me. The ending. The Conductor telling the band to put down our instruments.

Music is life. Music is love. Music is a gift given to us, all of us, by the Conductor, the Father, God. He cues us and keeps time. He wants us to play to our fullest potential. He knows we can, and He knows all. I didn't mean to get all religious on everybody, but I love music. I played a trumpet for 7 years and that trumpet, band class, was, at one point, the only thing that kept me in school. The theme was "Music" and to me, music is life. It's funny because it felt as if my pen flowed freely. This is my first copy, my only copy. Feels weird because I wrote from the heart and my heart is the reddest.

Closing note and then I am done. We're all playing music, we're all living. If you are feeling lost or unsure in the melody called life, *look up, damnit!* Look to the Conductor because he will guide you true.

Best Friends

By: William Tyler

My best friend cannot be qualified by listing his ideals or qualities of character, such as loyalty, sincerity, and selflessness, but they all do apply. After a fruitless search for simple definitions I admit defeat. I can only say the difference between my best friend and any other friend is the very fact that I consider him my best friend.

Friends and best friends cannot be compared as easily as one would compare, say, average apples to best apples. You can try to categorize a batch into groups like bad, average, good, and best, but the science of such a comparison falls short as soon as personal taste enters the equation. One person says sour apples are best, another prefers soft and yet another hard. The only thing we might agree on is that



Kenneth Warwick

they're all apples and that the rotten ones aren't good for consumption. Likewise, the only absolute agreement men and women might have regarding best friends is that they are friends and not enemies.

We will all differ in our opinions as to what separates even the good friend from the average friend let alone the best friend. For example, some people require their good friends to tell them unpleasant truths, from how silly or tacky they look to the harsh revelations they may need to face in their personal or family lives, truths many others would rather remain blind to. There are just as many people comfortable with mediocrity as there are people who want to rise above it. Most of us claim friends in both classes. Material and social prosperity should have little bearing upon whether someone is considered a friend or not. Moral judgments similarly fail to distinguish the esteemed friend from the mere acquaintance. I count several gang members and killers as good friends. I'm sure both Barack Obama and Osama Bin Laden are respectively considered good friends to various people.

But there is a psychic chasm that must be crossed from the designation of good friend to that superlative classification of best friend. We can each have several good friends, but most only claim one best friend. I'm sure there are plenty of exceptions, such as trios and quartets of best friends. Spouses as best friends in addition to the traditional best friend. And the numerous best friends accrued from different eras and areas of one's life. We will agree, however, that our best friends possess that *je ne sais quoi* that forever evades definition and defies duplication, that is to say: people become our best friends by being our best friends.

Best friend is a purely subjective assessment of someone's status in our heart and mind. Therefore it can be revoked as easily as bestowed. Most people who live in our fast-paced and often unfriendly world have more ex-best friends than they'd prefer. People move and fall out of touch. People change and grow apart. Hardships arise and our best friends fail us, or we fail them. We betray each other. Life happens and we move on, alone. But our best friendships can also survive, if we so choose. I've had the same best friend now for about ten years, and we haven't seen each other during most of that time. We're only able to write every year or so because we're both long-term prisoners at separate prisons. We can only communicate through third-parties, and neither of us have close outside ties. Yet of all of the several close friends I've made in prison in the meantime none have come close to dethroning him as my best friend. Listing

the myriad components of our best friendships like a recipe would only shed light on their mundane attributes; it would fail to reveal friendships platonic substance. Ideal friendship is always spiritual whether consciously or not. IT originates in and develops through our highest possible virtues such as love, trust, and altruism. Our best friendships only amplify these qualities within us and reveal them further to us through our counterparts. Enmity, suspicion, and selfishness find no lasting residence in such friendships, which typically exist as rare places of refuge from the disturbances of the world. It has been said that "we can choose our friends, but we can't choose our family." We do so by offering them our utmost, highest, and best self in what we can become a reciprocal dance between kindred souls. It has also been said that "he who would have a friend must show himself friendly." Therefore,

the quality of any friendship depends solely on the character of the friends themselves. No material fact or outside interference can arbitrarily destroy our true and best friendships, a species which can only be assailed from within our own hearts.

Until The Wheels Fall Off By: Daniel H. Harris

Over nine years ago I met a very special person in an accident caused by the boredom that comes on the verge of insanity. I requested a book I thought would be free and received an application to join College Guild. Since I couldn't afford the book I filled out the form and returned it to Maine.

The first course I selected was called travel. My first big question was, "What's the catch?" There had to be one. I figured they were studying prisoners. My teacher's answer was simple, "The catch is that you'll only get out of the College Guild what you put into it."

Made sense. I put my heart into those studies and it was the beginning of a new life and a slow return to sanity. I stopped taking other people's meds to get high. It was the only way I could converse with a person so much more intelligent than myself. The more I put into College Guild the better I felt. I built confidence.

At the time my life was a cycle of violent conflict with officers. Rules meant nothing because I had nothing they could take from me. After my rounds of violence she'd say, "That was one option." Her never saying I was wrong felt great. Not the reaction I expected. Then the meaning hit me. If violence was one option there must be others. She realized that no one on the outside could advise against violence. How can they know what is appropriate here? At the same time she nudged me into exploring options without violence.

By the time my friend told me she was leaving College Guild, which she had co-founded, I was addicted to her counsel. I asked if I could I keep writing. Then she admitted she was leaving to get medical treatment. It was the first time in years another person's needs came before my own. I wanted to be there for her and told her not to worry about writing, knowing she'd feel like shit. I started to write letters to lift her spirits and make sure she never doubted there was a reason to get better and someone that cared. I knew what that could mean when facing a chronic condition. After all, she had done the same for me.

The last wall between us crumbled when I told her I didn't want any sort of love relationship. Neither of us did. I needed a friend. Since I was never getting out of prison nothing meant more to me than one person I could depend on to care.

Her promise was, "I'll be there until the wheels fall off." That became our euphemism for the death we both knew loomed over mortal existence. The wheels are still on and rolling, though we've had to get a few flats fixed, and I've learned that one best friend is the best family I ever wished for.

By: James Bauhaus

Best Friends are everywhere, and in places you would never expect. When I escaped Oklahoma's slow-death camps, I expected the whole of mankind was against me,

excluding my family, of course. But the cops had them surrounded, and they and their news-media propaganda – artists were doing their best to demonize me to them, which is one of the reasons why we used to have working privacy laws – to keep the state from using our families and friends against us. Now we only have anonymity and dis-information as tools to try and keep vicious state actors out of our affairs. (They’ve long ago made the merchant class into de facto police.)

So, I could not endanger my family, and had to be extremely wary of any merchants. When they can’t see you, they can’t get curious and thus become suspicious. With this in mind, I stayed in the bush, traveling cross-country, for over three days, always heading just west of due south. The first friend I met was a rancher who caught me drinking out of a spigot near his barn. It was almost 4 a.m., and still pitch black. No one should have been up at that time, but the pipe knocked when I shut it off. I was standing there like an idiot, stretching and yawning when his light suddenly blinded me. While looking wildly around for the lowest, nearest spot on the fence of his corral, preparing to make a mad dash back into the forest, he said, “You don’t want to be drinking that water.” (It had been rusty, at first.)

“The iron was good for me”, I replied. He chuckled, then asked, “what are you doing out here this night?” Thinking quickly, I told him I was hiking to Arkansas. (I did have a makeshift “pack” full of snickers and Jerky; more of a bandoleer, really and a plastic coke bottle on a rope slung over my other shoulder.) He politely quit shining his light in my face and began playing over my pack and water jug. He was old and grizzled, tall and sinewy, weathered and wrinkled, about 65 or 70, of Northern European Ancestry. A dark brown Wiemeraner came around the corner, took up a position at his right, stiffened and growled at me. Shushing his dog first, he asked, “Arkansas? Which way is that?” I saw his eyes sparkling with amusement and a slight smile on his face. Without hesitating, I pointed perpendicular to my true path, due east, saying, “can’t you smell the chickens and pigs?”

He chuckled a little louder this time, and replied, “That’s well water; full of arsenic. Good enough for stock since they don’t live long, but not good enough for us. Help me throw this feed out, and we’ll get you some good water.”

“Smitty” Schmidt had been filling 5-gallon buckets of cottonseed cake when I’d unwittingly attracted his attention. We carried the heavy things, two at a time, to a trough where his cattle ate. With both hands full, I couldn’t swat the dog, who was determined to shove its nose up my ass. Four days without a shower made me doubly interesting to him. Also, he seemed to be clairvoyant about the jerky

drooping down by my hip. Though it was hidden within a mesh bag and still in its individually wrapped plastic, it riveted his attention. He followed me on each trip, begging. Last trip, I fished one out and began gnawing the plastic off for him. It was like the stuff was bulletproof. Smitty winked, saying, “Leave the plastic on; he’ll enjoy it for longer.”

Smitty and I worked together until dawn, when his wife called out that breakfast was ready. They had plenty, and insisted that I join them. Eggs, bacon, biscuits, gravy, hash-browns, jelly, milk and butter (no coffee, thanks) filled the table. Mildred was only slightly surprised to see me, and only raised one eyebrow at my gear. He told her only that I was “Jay”, and that I’d been helping him for a couple hours or so. While we ate, they asked the obvious questions, and I sold them a story between deflecting their questions with ones of my own. Homelessness and unemployment were common during this time. Reagan was trying to fix the Johnson-Nixon “stagflation,” caused by our attacks on Vietnam and Southeast Asia, not counting their secret wars on Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, Chile and Libya. I was just another victim of The Elites, broke and migrating to where the jobs were. It was easy to believe, and mostly true.

They seemed to accept most of it, and, when I tried to leave, they insisted on helping me. Mildred made sandwiches, Smitty dug out an old canteen with a strap in it that was far too big and heavy to lug around. He offered me money, advice and a ride to the highway. I accepted the sandwiches and money, and left the canteen on a fencepost at the farthest boundary of his estate. The food was good, the money would come in handy later, and I didn’t want to explain why the canteen was useless to me.

A few days later, I was filthy, dirty and in central Dallas. With no papers to stave off police curiosity-stops, I was obliged to join the underground. This is the community of transients who live short lives of desperation on the fringes of society. Some are the mentally challenged who were emptied out onto the street when the health industry bought the right to do this from the politicians. Some are addicts, most are alcoholics; the rest are any of the thousands of flavors of criminal created by busybodies outlawing everybody else’s conduct.

The harder the life, the deeper the friendship. My life was as hard as theirs, but, like many of them, I managed to slowly work my way up and out. This

took me considerably longer than usual, mostly because I don’t like to take favors. I’ll give them, but taking them is not for me: I don’t like the sense of obligation they give me. I can’t rest while it’s unpaid. I didn’t want a favor so bad that I wouldn’t stay in any homeless shelter or hardly ever eat at free food places. I’ve slept under a car hood someone had thrown away at the base of the dyke at Lake Arlington. I’ve left groceries at Fort Worth Food Banks and dumped work clothes



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at the Salvation Army, years after their services helped me move up to prosperity after prison.

Only one year later I had a new identity and a good job delivering electrical services with a crew throughout Texas. My employer had me driving a huge aluminum van with an aid named Pat, when an odd thing happened. We were flying east, down Highway Twenty when I saw a stalled car stuck in the median. A woman had tried to U-Turn, but the tires had cut through the grass into the thick mud beneath. She had the door open and could be seen weeping with frustration, gunning the engine in an obviously futile attempt to escape that damp trough.

I stopped. Pat and I confirmed that we had no way to help her except to take her a mile or two back to the last gas station we'd passed on our way out. This lady was about thirty, and paranoid as well as distraught. Probably because my big white van was unmarked, and we didn't wear spiffy uniforms, she was leery of us. She wanted many assurances before accepting my help. She seemed to think, outrageously, that we were shady people, and wanted to know how I planned to get such a heavy, loaded truck across the trough where we had failed. Pat gave her his seat and braced himself in the doorway to the back. "The trick to crossing soft ground is momentum," I said, trying to ease her mind with a lesson on how to properly break a traffic law. (I knew that there were paved turn-a rounds for the cops every mile, marked with colored reflectors, but this lady was overwrought and would not calm down until we were headed straight back To the mesquite instead of away from it. "You've got to build up a little speed, first, then slog on through the pit, like this!")

The van sank deep into the muck and wallowed like a garbage scow. The swaying was so bad that I was afraid to turn the wheels at all. Good thing we had six of them. Soon as

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That 454 cubic inch engine threw us up to speed quickly as I grimaced at the double diagonal trenches I'd torn in the median. Someone at the Highway Department wasn't going to like taking a crew out to fix that mess.

The girl, whose name was Sarah, stopped crying. Pat was talking to her while I wondered where all the gas stations with tow trucks had gone. He had a good way with people, which is why I liked to work with him. He was my public relations man. Two miles back toward Mesquite, we found a Shell station. As we were making sure she had everything needed to get safely away again, I noticed that the credit card she used had a familiar German name on it. Out of the blue, I asked, "your grandparents are Smitty and Mildred?"

"Why, Yes, they are," she replied, "you know them?"

Incredibly, I did, only barely, for a few hours, but some cosmic coincidence had allowed me to repay the favor they'd done me that morning when I was so tired of pushing through the bush to get a drink and a canteen filled at their farmhouse.

As I said at the beginning, friends are everywhere, and in places you would NEVER expect. Sometimes you don't even have to look for them; They just show up.

On The Road

"Some Moss I Never Gathered" By: Harvey Angel

There is a light pole on the side of the freeway north of Los Angeles. If you've ever tried to hitch hike away from Los Angeles going north, you may have seen it. This may be one of the hardest places in the world to hitch hike away from. The Los Angeles people must have a good case of the willies about picking up hitchhikers so you're likely to be stranded along that patch of road for days. And eventually, you'll come up to this light pole. It's a place where many other have been stranded and scratched messages for years. Last time I passed it, I saw some of the same graffiti that was on it 20 years earlier and remembered right then and there when I stopped exactly in that same spot 20 years ago and looked at that same light pole and same graffiti.

After a while, people get bored standing there and become engrossed with the messages written on that pole over the years. There are peace signs, catch phrases and icons from several generations there, as well as the personal logos of countless travelers, no doubt as tired and weary as I was. After studying this eclectic mesh of cultures scrawled out over the years, I suppose most of those trapped there decide to add a signature of their own. I know I did, at least the last time I passed by there.

But eventually, even the pole becomes uninteresting and so people decide to walk a few miles further, hoping to get out of the "dead" zone. I had to make that decision over and over again before I got past it and back into the regular world again where I was able to catch a ride.

It's been many years since I was out that way, but the pole and its messages are probably still there. Maybe someday they will declare it to be a historical monument and put it into a museum. Until then probably the only way you will be able to see it will be by trying to hitch hike out of Los Angeles, in which case seeing it will be inevitable.

On The Road By: Ruben Benavides

From all of the themes, this one caught my eye. This is a saying that goes many ways and like us youngsters do. I blew it off like always. You know the sayings. "Which way do you choose on the road of life?? Living in the fast lane, we heard them all right. Here I will try to explain something in my life I've never encountered and honest to God, This happened to me. But first let me fill you in on some history. Well, I had a girlfriend that had touched me in a way that only a woman can. She made my heart beat faster. Smile for nothing. Most of all she blessed me with two wonderful sons. I'll be honest I wasn't living the right kind of life. I was young and trying to make money the fast way. In hindsight I can see it all clearly. I started to mess with other girls, started coming home at 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning everyday! Wake up, shower, and hit the road. Through all this bullshit my girl stayed by my side. And I thought shhh! It's cool, I'm going to continue this. Then one night I came home in a drug stupor and wanted or tried to go to sleep. But my girl kept trying to talk to me. So of course I got mad and we drove to get something to eat. On that drive she told me something no other girl had told me before. She told me our souls were linked. That nothing I could ever do to her could break that

link. We were bound, only death could tear us apart. So in this I thought she was trying to tell me she would kill me someday. I asked her if that was what she meant. She stared out into the night and told me she used to dream of me. I told her “that’s normal, we live together.” She said no, before we even ever met. “I would see you in my dreams”, she said, “and I would wonder why. I wondered if I had made up this face I saw in my dreams.” And she turned to look at me and said, “Do you believe me babe?” Hey, I’m not going to lie. That not only scared me. That or those words went into my soul. Like that night she put or wrote or weaved something into our spirits. So I told her I believed her.

Now you got to remember in prison we have time to rethink and go over all of our mistakes. At least I do. And I see all this clearly. And it still freaks me out how two simple people could come so close. Even though we were so far away. What do I mean by this? I’ll explain. Now remember in hindsight I saw this. And in prison we become creatures of habit. In Ad Seg you do anything to keep your mind sharp and moving. So I write everything down. If I was sick or had a bad day, you know normal stuff or not so normal stuff. And this day was not so normal if I come to think of it. Forget the day. It was at night that it got weird. Now we are in Ad Seg so they shake down cells at night. So I had to stash my contraband. I got ready to go to sleep. I laid down and went right to sleep. And I never had done that before. Well I can’t exactly tell you when or what time of night it was. But this is what happened. I saw not dreamed! Saw little pieces of like a movie or something. But I could not see faces. But I felt the tension it’s hard to explain. But it felt ugly. I felt cold air. No, freezing air in my face. Like if I was moving fast. And I could see streetlights and the night was so clear, the stars shined bright with vengeance. Then all of a sudden I was spinning so fast it seemed like I was in a tornado. You know like lights spinning and the ground was hot. I seemed to be spinning for a while. Then I saw the night clearly! I was looking up at the night sky. So clear and I was breathing in short gasps! I was asleep and I felt myself struggling for or with some thing. My ribs hurt, my head ached, my skin burned, it hurt to breath. Then like nothing I opened my eyes. I was in my cell. But I was struggling to breathe and my ribs hurt! I’m awake now but I can’t move and I’m breathing in short gasps. I have tears in my eyes and I feel hurt. Pain love sadness happiness. Like a high, then a low. It’s weird to explain this feeling. Like all the emotions you ever experiences with somebody you loved. I just focused and it got harder to breathe! I tried calling out or yelling. But my words felt muffled. Like I was not supposed to cry out. Like I was supposed to feel this “experience.”

Like a snap of a finger it was over. Nothing hurt. I breathed normal, the only thing that remained the same were the tears on my face. I got up walked around and washed my face. And the cellblock was quiet. I took out my note pad and wrote down what I went through. And I put the date. And something I regret is, I never wrote the time. It might have slipped my mind. Or I wasn’t supposed to remember, like to keep me thinking.

Two days later all this was just a note on my paper. I went through the whole day expecting mail call. And the law didn’t pass out the mail till after 9:30pm. I’m asleep at this time. I hear them in front of my door telling me I got mail. So I get up and get the letter. I see it’s from my mom. So I tear it

open. And I see a piece of paper fall out. I see it’s a piece of newspaper. So I pick it up and I see a face on there. So I go to turn on the light. There looking at me is the obituary of the mother of my kids! Yeah the girl I was with. Taped on the back were two newspaper clippings. One article said that they found an unidentified woman age 25-30 with a Ruben tattoo on her arm. The second one said that she was found on the side of the road. Apparently she was thrown out of a moving car and left for dead. Those words there, I could of hit an elephant and kicked it on its ass! That’s how it affected me. So many emotions and feelings filling my heart. So I sat down and asked why. It truly hurt. A hurt I’ve never felt until this day. The hurt lies in my heart. So I start to read the clippings again and I look at the date. So I get my notebook to write back to my mom. I had written the date I had the dream in the red pen. The date was the day she passed away! It took me awhile to put this together. And people I tell you this. That night, that dream, she was calling me. Our souls connected, became one, I swear to god! If I knew then what I know now I would have fought to keep her here. I was with her when she was dying on that road. All the pain, the love, the hate, the happiness was what she was remembering.

She had called my soul to her like I’ve always done. Through everything even in death she called out to me. And we connected. It might sound weird but I’ll be honest with you. That was some beautiful shit! I mean, how we connected so far away, but so close! How many times will that happen? Who knows. But I regret that I didn’t fight more to keep her here with us. But I didn’t know! I didn’t know she was dying, fighting for her life. It hurt to lose her. Maybe that was her way of giving me the last good bye. Never in my life will I forget this. I still haven’t told my sons. One day when they get older I’ll tell them or show them this paper. I tell you people. Love is powerful and like they say breaks all kinds of laws, or hearts. Don’t take it for granted, the people you love, show them in the simplest ways that you love them. It doesn’t matter who it is: mom, dad, kids, and siblings. I lost someone I cared for, loved. If I knew I swear if you can still hear me Roxanne Cobos, rest in paradise. Love always in my heart and soul.

Hiding Out

The Price By: Daniel H. Harris

It’s the nemesis of the criminal class. The one question every criminal must answer at some point: “Where you gonna hide when they come for you?”

My form of hiding was to never stay in one place long enough for the cops to catch up. My mistake was to go to the same place too often. It didn’t matter. By then I was tired of running.

Paranoia hovers where you hide. Who can you trust? In the end you trust no one. You have a gun close at hand ready to fight your way free and knowing inside that the only freedom you’ll ever have again will be in the grave.

Your nerves become frayed. If you have a partner in crime you’ll soon be snapping at each other. The constant need to watch for cops wears on your sanity until you just want it to be over.

It's never worth it. Crime doesn't pay. You can't have a life when you know that, at any moment, the cops could come for you. It only takes one mistake. Once the running takes its toll the mistake is sure to come. Maybe it's subconscious; you want to get caught so the running and hiding can end. There's one undeniable fact: No matter how brilliant a criminal may be or how intelligently they have avoided capture or for how long; you only have to get caught once.

I got caught 18 years ago. I'm still here. I'll die here. It wasn't worth it. It never is.

The Jig is Up By: R. Rex Rivera

The pounding in my chest is audible. "THUD! THUD! THUD!" I could feel my chest cavity expanding with every beat. "Thump! Thump! Thump!" I could feel the blood pounding through my body. My body vibrates, my ears pop. The pit of my stomach feels hollowed, empty and cold. I feel nauseated. There is something intangible in the back of my throat. It tastes sour, like the aftertaste of a good throw up. I could taste it. It is choking me. This is fear. I recognize it because I am scared shitless. With every step I take, I grow more and more afraid. My mind is wildin' out with all sorts of escape plans. But it's no good. "THERE'S NO WAY OUT!" That tiny voice inside me keeps screaming. I wonder when it acquired such a deep baritone? When the voice begins to scream, it's a sure sign I'm in deep trouble. It's like my spider-sense, but I'm no Spiderman. Although, right now wish I were, because the tiny voice is right: I have no escapes. My "goose is cooked," as Grampa likes to say. "Yap, 'adios' goose, you was a fine goose." What to do? What to do? Gosh, I'm scared. My heart again wants to break through my chest. I wonder if that's possible?

Why the hell did I decide to skip school today? "Dumb, dumb, dumb, dumb fucking idiot!" I can't even remember why I did it. The pounding in my chest and the gripping fear doesn't allow me to remember. I don't want to remember. I want to forget. The only thing I could think of is the image of Mom staring at me across the Mall. "Why the fuck did I go there, anyway?" I can't remember that either. All I remember is the humongous neon-red "OH, SHIT!" sign that flashed across my mind as I hauled-ass outta there.

"She-didn't see me. She-didn't see me. She-didn't see me," I keep repeating with every pounding step, like some insane religious mantra, praying for the ability to turn back time. "Why, God? Why didn't You give me superpowers?" I asked myself for the gazillion time in my short life. "It-didn't-happen. It-didn't-happen." But I can't convince myself of the lie, because she did see me! We made eye contact, for Pete's sake! She saw me and cocked her head to the side in that peculiar way mother's do, as if to say "Hmmm?" Not when they end with a big, fat question mark and they're directed at you.

For a minute, I thought about rushing to school, sneaking in, finding my classroom, and blending in like I've been there all day. I'm a pretty good actor and could probably pull it off. My body, which often has a mind of its own, was already running in the direction of the school. But, I quickly dismissed that idea and put the brakes on my disobedient body. Mom is really, really smart and would've thought of

that already. She also knows that I'm a good actor. The Lady knows me way too well. I bet she was on the phone with the school before the trash can I knocked over in my mad dash outta the Mall hit the ground. And believe me, I don't have a friend in Principal Matthew or in Ms. Applegate, my sixth grade homeroom teacher. That lady HATES me! I am dead, I tell you, DEAD!

Now, the "jig is up," as Dad is so fond of telling me. "The jig is up, Kid, I know you broke that window." "The jig is up, Kid, I know you placed those firecrackers in the wedding cake." There must've been three-hundred people at the wedding! But Dad inevitably zeros in on me and exposes the "jig." I don't know what a "jig" is (I've always meant to look it up in my dictionary, but never have), but it is always "up" when it came to Dad and me. He has this sixth-sense, like that kid that saw dead people, to see right through me. He stares at me for a minute, opens his mouth to say "the jig is . . .," and I spill the beans like the Beanbag I had experimentally poked holes into at Uncle Joe's house with my Swiss Army Pocket Knife. There were beans everywhere! The jig was up then also. Well, the jig is up this time, because Mom's second call was probably to Dad. I would bet my ass on that if it wasn't already on the line.

It is way past three o'clock. I vaguely remember the school buses passing by, but I paid them little attention. My head is filled with the horrors waiting for me at home. The worst part, the very worst part, is not knowing. Not knowing what punishments await, what will happen – that's the worst! What's the possible punishment for skipping school? They should have books on these things! Oooh, I am so busted! I can't escape. I have to go home and "pay the piper." Where the hell do parents get all these little sayings? They are meaningless to me, but they always come up when I'm in trouble. I hear them a lot! Gosh, I'm in deeeep shit! The fear is eating me up. I gotta keep running.

It must be about dinner time, because the sun is going down and the smells of dinner are in the air. But I ain't going home. No, sirree! They're waiting for me there. I'm just going to keep wandering around the neighborhood until I can think of a good lie, I mean, explanation to tell Mom and Dad. But the fear doesn't allow me to think. Maybe if I got hurt, or even kidnapped . . . Yea, kidnapped is the ultimate! Mom and Dad would be so worried that they'll forget all about today's 'incident.' Like the time I was 'cat-walking' on the roof, slipped on a fresh glob of seagull shit, lost my cat-like agility, fell off the roof, and broke my arm. Mom and Dad were so worried that no one even asked what I was doing on the roof in the first place! That's what I need, a good emergency and a kidnapping would be the ultimate! But there is never a good kidnapper around when you need one. Here I am, an unsupervised eleven-year-old, a perfectly good and willing kidnapping candidate, and no one even notices me.

I am cold, hungry, sleepy, and still scared shitless. I also have a humongous headache. It is way past any time I could remember. It is darker than Hell and I am hiding in the bushes in our backyard, peeking at my house, like Jack Bauer scoping out some terrorists. The lights are on and I catch glimpses of Mom and Dad through the window from time to time. From what I could see, they look mad as hell! I saw Mom yelling at Dad with her arms flaring in the air before she moved outta my field of vision. Dad just looked pissed. He is

so big and strong. I once saw him move a whole tree that had fallen across the road with his bare hands! I could envision him throttling me like Homer does to Bart Simpson . . .

The drool running down the side of my face tells me that I must've fallen asleep while on recon. I am freezing! The lights are still on in the house. It looks nice and warm in there. Yeah, nice and warm. "Fuck this, I'm going in." The jig is up. I'm cold, hungry, sleepy, and I have never felt so alone. I am still scared, but not as much as I want some Mac & Cheese and to sleep in my nice, warm bed, surrounded by all my things. "I wanna go home," this tiny voice whispers, and that thought makes me feel like crying. Once again, my body is ahead of my thoughts and my face is already wet with tears.

I begin my walk down the 'Green Mile' and the gripping fear returns. "thud0thud-thud" my heart pounds, but I resist the urge to cut and run. I ring the doorbell and wait.

Nothing happens.

Where are they? Did they sneak out while I was sleeping? Maybe they decided that they don't want me anymore. Maybe they decided not to love me anymore! Maybe they're getting a divorce! What am I gonna do then? My stupid body again betrays me and I begin to cry my head off and to pound my fists on the door. I pound and pound and pound to the rhythm of my heart. Suddenly, I am pounding on air and I'm snatched up into the air by the strong arms of my Dad. I am being hugged. I am being kissed on top of my sweaty head. My face is buried in Dad's chest and I can't breathe. I could hear the "Thuds" of his big heart and my fears melt away. Mom was fluttering around calling me her baby. I had never seen Dad cry. The jig was up.

Picture Writing Project

Many of you find *it* inspiring to tell a story based on a picture. We take the same principle we use in the theme project and we will send all who write a story on the given picture a copy of all the stories that are submitted. **We will also reward each story writer with a copy of the previously mentioned Sun Magazine.** So if you submit both a writing theme and a picture theme in a given month, you will receive 2 Sun Magazines with your theme packet. Below are the pictures for you to create your story. Happy Writing



Due 2/1/11



Due 3/1/11



Due 4/1/11



Due 1/1/11

**It's true that we don't know what we've got until we lose it,
but it's also true that we don't know what we've been
missing until it arrives.**



Due 5/1/11

**"Let us not look back in anger or forward in fear, but
around in awareness." - James Thurber -**



Due 6/1/11

**"It's better to light the candle than curse the darkness." -
Eleanor Roosevelt -**



Due 7/1/11

Here is a sampling of some stories sent in on past pictures. I hope they can inspire some of our readers to pick up a pen and share their stories with us all.



New Haitianica

By William Tyler

It's easy to become confused as to just how the small island nation of Haiti and the Dominican Republic grew from being the least among the civilizations of earth, to being voted chair of the Earth Council as a model for sustainable civilization on our planet this year, 2110. I stand before you humbly to accept this honorable appointment on the behalf of all Haitianican people, the light of the world.

It was but 100 years ago this week that the nation of Haiti was stricken by the earthquake that inspired them to unite with their Dominican neighbors. The birth of New Haitianica in 2011 was only the first of many vital steps that have brought us to this glorious day. Inarguably more important was the spirit of unity with which our ancestors set out to rebuild their nation and consequently to reshape our struggling world.

The first real step was the choice to devote the entire Haitianican economy to recycling, Haitianican ports opened to accept the garbage of the world – E-waste, paper, plastic, even organic matter arrived by the shipload to form the yards and plants that soon replaced the shanty towns and slums. All working-age men and women found compulsory employment in the several plants and factories that had been built with the bulk of the money from the disaster-relief efforts. Nearly half of all Haitianican children under 14 were released from the country under the New Adoption Act, under which they retained a modified form of dual citizenship, which required them to return and serve 4 years of social service in their Mother country upon the mandatory completion of both primary and secondary educations. The student exchange program shaped Haitianica's future more than any other factor by trading nearly an entire generation of troubled youth for a future influx of grateful adult professionals.

With this sudden stream of New Haitianican scientists, doctors, engineers, philosophers, politicians, and lawyers at work, Haitianica soon dominated the world's recycling market, which proved to be a boom bigger than both the .com explosion and the world fossil fuel market combined. Gone forever were the primitive days of our people scavenging for whatever nature might passively yield them. All of their age long struggles with hunger, poverty, homelessness, and aimlessness were solved in less than 100 years by simply agreeing to do the work nobody else wanted to do. Rag pickers became builders, foremen, dock workers,

sorters, consultants, and sales people. Orphans returned to rebuild the land. Industrialized countries bursting at the seams with prosperity sent us their trash and we became the world's alchemists who learned how to turn it into gold.

It has only been by virtue of our meek ancestors that we the people of New Haitianica have come to inherit this honorable chair of the Earth Council. What the world has now come to admire as a rapidly advancing civilization was the land of the barefoot wanderer, slum dweller, and daydreamer but a century ago. Truly, the meek have finally inherited the earth.

Walking Down Memory Road

By Juan F Figirova

I remember as if it was just yesterday, momma and us walking all over the city.

See...throughout my entire childhood, we never owned a vehicle. She'd wake at four or five in the morning to go to work making breakfast tortillas. Two times, two different restaurants she'd walk to, and be home before noon. She'd take a nap until 2pm. Then walk to her night job at 3pm. At around 11 or 12 midnight, she'd return home. This exact same routine took place as far back as I can remember.

Sometimes happy, sometimes tired and agitated. But always there to fix us dinner. We never had much, but regardless what the meal was, momma always come through for us. All five of us.

She'd let me take her shoes & socks off to rub her feet at home, while she tried to relax at night. I never realized the struggle, or what it meant. I just knew that momma was very tired.

There were the days before we had a washing machine that we 3 boys would have to carry all of our clothes to the Laundromat.

We didn't own any baskets that were in good condition, so all of our clothes were wrapped in sheets, great big bundles: whites, colors, & jeans. We boys carried the clothes, & momma carried the laundry detergent, & bleach. There we went seven blocks walking, the spectacle of the neighborhood. I regretted this task so much because we'd walk past our friends' houses. And there their mom's would be sitting on the porches laughing & having fun gossiping.

Were they talking about us? ...I couldn't be honest in saying yes, or no. But in my mind. Yes they were.

There were also the days that momma got paid. I think I hated this the most. We'd walk from my hood, all the way across to H-E-B. Then after a couple hours of being there, we'd walk all the way home with two or three bags apiece. Momma always carried the heaviest of bags. But I still hated it so much.

Now today, almost 17 years later, I regret all of the hateful emotions I held towards momma. She made us work & walk.

But truth is, if we hadn't helped her...who would? One thing she believed it was, was strength in self-dependence. And value in a family unit. Momma never relied on anyone, & always regretted having to ask for help....example: I remember being around 11 yrs old. I walked in the house & found momma in the kitchen crying. I tried to hug her but she sort of shrugged me off. She gave me a

letter sealed in an envelope, & told me to take it to a lady that lived down the street that went to the same church we did. I had no idea what was in the envelope. But as soon as I gave the letter to the lady, she quickly came back to the door & handed me a pot of cold left over beans.

She said to tell my mother "that was all she could spare". That night we ate tortillas & beans for dinner. I can't explain what it felt like to be amongst the poorest, of all the broke families in the hood. I just know we were.

But now as I reflect, & bask in these memories, it sometimes feels good. To know that we survived the streets. That momma taught us how to survive the struggle of the streets. She's the strongest person I know, the most indignant person I know, & the person I know I'd never be able to match up against in a million years. I love momma, & would never choose to be raised by anyone else but her. I have no idea how she did it, & if there were more room to write down, I'd try my hardest to explain.

But here we come to the exit off memory road. I suppose to always have to see the big picture...& at last here we are. Thank you.



Visitor

By: Jesus Felan

It was an early December day, still two weeks before Christmas and the late afternoon sun was quickly descending to the west behind the high-rise buildings of the city. The visitor, clad only in a white robe of a thin, silky fabric, walked about the streets looking for his people. His hair was long and thin, yet wavy. His beard was of a modest length and the same color as his hair. Around his neck, hung a crucifix made of wood and unadorned. In his right hand, he clutched a wooden staff which he used for support as he walked down the street. In his left hand, he carried some ancient parchments with words written in the old language. His sandals were worn and dusty, yet very comfortable as he walked on.

He noticed that from everywhere, people rushed out from different buildings and onto the sidewalks signaling the ensuing rush hour mayhem. The visitor continued up the street, scanning the many faces in the crowd hoping to find someone that knew him. From behind, someone rushed by brushing the visitor's arm and quickly disappearing around the corner of the street. The visitor thought to himself that everybody seemed to be in a rush with little regard to anything

else. Finally, reaching the corner of the street, the visitor stared out into the throng of humanity not moving at all, even when the sign across the street flashed “walk” in a dark green shade.

Around him, people pushed and shoved as they crossed the street. Now cognizant of that fact, he also crossed the street scanning left to right seeking a familiar face, but finding none. The traffic was heavy all around him, horns blared from different directions, piercing the cold air as drivers jockeyed for position on the streets. Above him, the buildings rose into the sky blotting out the sun and the only source of warmth on the streets. The cold weather did not seem to bother the visitor as he walked on in search of a familiar face.

Soon, he stopped in front of a store-front window that was painted completely black, as to conceal the contents of what lay beyond. A large sign above the window advertised X-rated entertainment: Both Topless and Bottomless! He quickly looked away and started to walk up the sidewalk until he came within distance of two women haggling with a driver of a parked car on the curb.

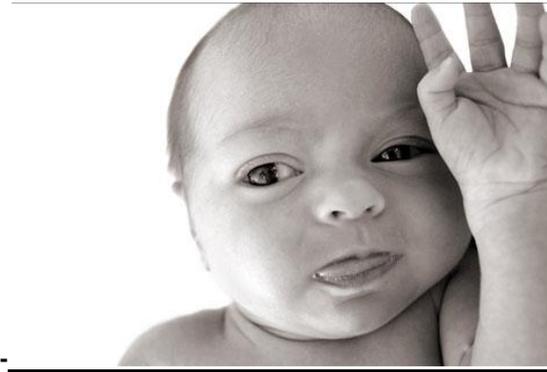
Each woman promised the driver acts of sinful pleasures for the right price. Both women were attired in skimpy, sexy outfits and seemed unconcerned with the cold temperature outside. The visitor had known such women on his earlier visits and many of those women had changed their ways and followed him.

From across the street on his left, loud music blasted out from an establishment named “The Devil’s Den.” The loud rock music assaulted the visitor with the lyrics: ...I’m on the highway to hell... I’m on the highway to hell...! He looked in the direction of the establishment and saw several young couples walking either hand in hand or with their arms around each other, happily entering the Devil’s Den.

Once again, he started off up the street and soon walked into a crowd of people who were shouting in anger and protest. Some of them carried signs supporting their points of view, others just milled around in the chaos, and still more people ran in to join the din. Finally, not being able to find anyone that knew him, the visitor slowly turned to walk away from the crowd. Hanging his head down looking at the sidewalk, he softly spoke, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” Once again he started off and disappeared into the crowd looking for someone that knew him.

"I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble." - Helen Keller

Time is a great teacher, but unfortunately it kills all its pupils



“Twenty-Seven Years or So”

By: Dave Gordon

In twenty-seven years or so
You’d think a man called “Dad” I’d know
But in those many years you see
My dad was never there for me
Like when I had taken my first tiny steps
Away in a prison my dad he was kept
Of course way back then, such things didn’t matter
Since my heart was too young to know how to shatter
But after so many birthdays had passed without him
The tears that I cried taught my heart how to swim
So off it did swim to a land far away
Forgetting the myth of my dad on the way
It made up a world where the children are glad
Because every child there has a trustworthy dad
For years my heart lived there, it felt so like a dream
Then in walks my dad to a chorus of screams
How could you drop in at this point in my life
Don’t you know just your name stabs my heart like a knife
But still you expect me to just let you back in
To a heart that’s been broken by you from within
You think in my heart there’s a place you can stay
Because little girl’s hearts are made in that way
But in twenty-seven years or so
I think it’s time to let you know
That deep inside where your love once lived
A scar has grown that now has hid
The part of me that cried for you
And ultimately died for you
Oh Daddy, if you only knew
How much of me that died with you
So please forgive me when I say
My heart is still broken
Now please go away

I listened to the words she said
About how in her mind, her daddy was dead
But deeply beneath her words so strained
My heart felt the stabbing of my little girl’s pain
Then softly I spoke to her heart so dear
Words from my heart that hers needed to hear
In twenty-seven years or so
I think that you should also know
That as your dad, when your life began
I hadn’t a clue about what makes a man

I simply assumed what a man ought to be
From listening to friends and watching T.V.
Then when all of these things to our lives were applied
I discovered the depths of their misguided lies
The worst part about this, I now see it's true
That the person hurt most by this clearly was you
So in twenty-seven years or so
I took the time to finally know
About the qualities of a man
That helped me to finally understand
That parenting is not an act in a play
It's listening to hearts and the words children say
Like now at this moment, while you asked me to go
Your heart's crying out to me, "Daddy, don't go"
It's true what you said about me not being there
When you took your first step and felt nobody cared
But first steps are taken in so many ways
Like the steps we'll take now if you ask me to stay
I need you to know that my heart cries out too
For not knowing the way it should swim back to you
So in twenty-seven years or so
Together we might come to know
How your heart and my heart can work like two keys
That unlocks a love that sets both of us free
Then happiness will end our tears
And wipe away those missing years
I pray that your heart can hear my heart too
When it cries out in sorrow for what I've done to you
So please take your time and please let me know
If your daddy can stay, or you want me to go
THE END

"God does not require us to succeed, he only asks us to try." - Mother Teresa

Ah, Mom?

By: Robert L. Hambrick

Ah, Mom? Would ya get that thing out of my face? I mean, come on now, haven't you taken enough pictures already? Save some film for when I'm three months old; I'll be even cuter then.

You've taken so many already. Then Grandpa took a bunch just yesterday. And Aunt Carol nearly broke her camera taking so many. I mean really, it's not like you're gonna forget what I look like, I'm right here. You stare at me all the time with that goofy look on your face, making those silly noises at me. I mean, do you really want me to grow up saying "Googy goo"? And then after each Polaroid develops, you stare at it for 15 minutes with the same dumb look, making the same dumb noises. Geez, that blasted flash again! Hey Ma, you trying to blind me? I just got these eyes ... remember?

Com'on now Ma, knock it off. I'm hungry again. Put the dang camera away and give me some lunch, would ya? Maybe I should call child services, this has GOT to count as abuse.

Ah, hey Mom? Can't you smell that?

Memories By: David Jackson

Upon flipping through the "Fall 09" edition of Prisoner Express newsletter and finding the next six pictures to birth some sort of story, the first picture pulled on the old heartstrings. I immediately thought of my daughter Amanda whom I have not seen since July 31, 1995. This was the day I dropped her off at my ex-in-laws after a two week visit. She was 3 ½ years old then, and numerous memories of my little girl were birthed during those years. Memories that keep me going strong through this physical incarceration I am presently in.

My little girl was born in January 1992 at approximately 7:12 in the evening. She came into this world in trouble, her heard stopped and they had trouble getting her to start breathing. Finally she let out a tiny shrill cry in announcing her presence. Her mother and I could not hold her for a few hours because the medical staff had taken her to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), so we had to await word of when we could hold her. While the medical staff took care of Amanda's mother, I went to call my parents. My mom answered the phone and I said "It's a girl." She did not know it was me at first but upon her realization, she told my brother "David had a girl!" What a laugh we had at that one. Unfortunately dad was not home so I could not talk to him.

It seemed like forever in waiting for clearance to go see Amanda, and during that time we continued to struggle to choose a name for our baby girl. During the pregnancy Kristen and I threw a few names around. Kris liked Moccy and Sara, and I liked Ashley and Nicole. It was Kristen's mother who finally said, "She looks like a Samantha but we already have a Samantha in the family (my niece), so how about Amanda?" We looked at each other and agreed to name our baby Amanda.

After Kristen had recuperated for three or four hours, we were finally taken into the NICU and to Amanda. They had a rocking chair which I sat in and rocked Amanda. We had to be careful because she had an IV in her foot and wires taped to her body and head. Every two hours I was in the NICU to feed and change Amanda, and Kristen would get upset when the nurses would call her room as she wanted me with her as she slept. I never missed my daughter's feeding times.

The job I had had me working swing shifts and I had come to enjoy working the 11-7 night shift. Amanda was sleeping through the night by the time she was two weeks old. I was at home to kiss her good-night and pat her back until she drifted off to sleep, and returned home about thirty minutes before she woke for her morning bottle. After feeding her I would get comfortable in my chair with my feet on the stool and hum to Amanda until we both dozed off. Kristen would wake up and get upset because she thought I would drop Amanda which never happened.

We took Amanda trick or treating with her two cousins, and if I remember right she was a cat. Amanda was still too young to eat candy (but I did sneak her a few pieces of chocolate). However, it wasn't the trick or treating that made it great, it was this daddy's time spent with his baby girl.

Unfortunately I ended up leaving Kristen when Amanda was a year and a half due to reasons that need not to be mentioned in this writing. I had moved into my parents home and Amanda came a little over a month later. She ended up staying with

me for eight or nine months. My parents spoiled Amanda tremendously but not by buying her a lot. They mainly spoiled her with love and time. Mom often took her to lunch, the grocery store, Wal-Mart and the craft store she worked at. On the weekends my parents would usually take Amanda to breakfast as I was still sleeping. Many times I would wake to find the house empty and I could only say "Spoiling Amanda." One day they took her to the zoo and Amanda came home with a stuffed spider monkey which she slept with. One thing I especially remember about my dad and Amanda is how they would sit in his recliner together and watch TV while eating popcorn. Amanda would lay back on my dad's belly and drink out of his "big cup." Grandpa would not mind the food particles (usually popcorn) that became known as "Floogies." We got a kick out of her trying to say the word which came out as "Foodgies."

During our first winter months at my parents, we had a day with snowfall. I bundled Amanda up in sweats and her winter coat, and took her into the backyard to teach her how to catch snowflakes with her tongue. Grandma came out and snapped a few pictures of Amanda's quest to catch snowflakes. This was Amanda's first snowfall and I'm glad I got to share it with her.

Christmas that year was one of my best, due to it being shared with Amanda. Like most Children in the early 90's, Amanda loved Barney and learned to use the VCR and tape re-winder so she could watch Barney. It is no surprise that she received a talking Barney, Baby Bop and more Barney videos. I don't complain as she learned from the videos. After we ate Christmas dinner I drove Amanda to her aunt and uncle's so she could spend time with her mother's family.

Amanda ended up back with my ex-in-laws and it took me a while before I saw her again (though not for lack of trying). After six to eight months and a custody hearing I was awarded standard visitation. Unfortunately visitation had become sporadic due to my work schedule, alcoholism and no baby sitter while I worked. However, the times we did have I made sure they were enjoyable and filled with love.

In mid 1994 I had begun to attend church due to needing a change in my life, and visitation became as it was scheduled by the judge. I would take Amanda on the weekends, she was with me and she insisted on staying with me, she would not go to the nursery and I did not force her to. She would sit quietly with her head resting on my arm as we listened to the sermon. When it was time to sing, Amanda would stand on the pew and do her rendition of singing while helping me hold the Hymnac.

Amanda and I did not have much time together, only 3 1/2 years. When we last saw each other it was 6:15pm on July 31, 1995. Not a day goes by that I do not think about that night and reflect upon Amanda's final words to me as we hugged by: "I love you Daddy and I will miss you. I will see you next time, bye-bye Daddy." I used to struggle for 6 years when I thought upon her words, but for the last nine years I have found inspiration and encouragement in them. They help me get through the difficult days and inspire me to make my incarceration beneficial so I may hopefully be released sooner. Now, I know I really did not go into detail concerning my memories of my daughter. Why? Well, my memories are cherished to one day be shared with my baby girl.

"Amanda, I dedicate this picture writing to you with love. You are a blessing that the lord has given me and I do cherish the blessing. Amanda, I do love and miss you greatly and pray to be back in your life one day soon. I also want to tell you with your upcoming 18th birthday in a few weeks: 'Happy birthday my precious daughter – I pray the Lord above blesses you with an abundance of love, peace, and joy on your birthday, and a prosperous year to come. Happy birthday Amanda, I love and miss you greatly.'"



“Birds of Feather” Inspired by Metallica’s son “King of Nothing”
By: Troy Groves

The year is 2040. The world is a much different landscape than it is now. 2022 there was a war over the I.S.S. (International Space Station). It started over ownership rights then as a way station to other planets. Anyways there was a nuclear blast so strong it destroyed all satellites that rotate in the outer atmosphere of Earth. When that happened there were triggering effects. First the satellites started coming out of sky like fiery jet bombs. Not all at once, but over time. And since there were no computers, phones, NASA etc., that was useful, people were absolutely in fear. Of course, there were people saying it was God, aliens, our own fault for neglecting our world! Ultimately it was the political powers that created the problem. For the first time in a very long time people were not linked anymore. And they were dying by the millions due to riots, the satellites, and their own ignorance of how to survive in times such as those. As the first satellite came crashing down, it was a sunny clear day. The sky looked like a clear turquoise shell to a little boy named Drake. Drake was about seven years old when he saw the giant fiery mass pass over his head like a low flying plane, he was scared and a little curious as he had never seen anything like this before. As his eyes followed the huge glowing subject it hit farther away than he could see. At first there was a thing that looked like a heat wave shoot right above his head. Suddenly he was unconscious. When Drake awoke it was very quiet. There were no sounds whatsoever.

Drake knew he was hungry but there was no one around. His house that he was sitting in the back yard of was gone. He cried for his mother, but no sound came that he could hear. He fell down and then didn't move any more that day. Paralyzed with fear he started walking out of the blast zone. He came across unopened cans of juice, soda, and some food stuffs. He walked out to an unaffected area and stopped.

He found a home vacated full of everything he needed in the country. It had an orchard, garden, and was on the edge of a lake. Drake had seen people fish on TV before and had no idea how to make it work at first but he eventually made it work. So there he stayed and prospered for ten years. He learned how to fish, cook, and garden. After a while he became very content.

Ten years later is where we start our story. Drake had all he needed but he was curious whether there were others in the world. His desire to connect overwhelmed him. One day as he fished he watched the birds overhead. His mind twirled with the possibility of flying. At first he thought about eating the birds. He knew chickens were birds and he remembered he liked that. So he thought and after a few days devised a plan to catch some. After a little while he started making a net which he had planned to string up to enclose the birds. Between two trees he strung the net. Drake thought how he could get those birds to fly into those nets. He was puzzled and it took a few days to come up with a plan to drive the birds into the nets he designed.

As he ran through the woods he hooped and hollered waving his arms wildly. Of course he had birds flying from him in all directions. He caught a couple birds, cleaned them and cooked them. They weren't as tasty as he thought they'd be. So Drake would watch them and wonder-when he decided to trap a few as pets. He went through the same process again. Over a week he caught five. He fed them and took them everywhere he went. He loved their sounds. He decided to let one bird go and follow it. So he let the bird go and it meandered for a bit, but eventually took off. Drake followed the bird but lost sight of it. Upset he tied a string to one bird like a balloon. The bird struggled but didn't get away. Drake walked with the bird for a while till he discovered a village where people were. Drake met some of the people and told them where he lived. Later after a few days he walked back home with the bird in tow. When he got home he started to untie the bird, but the bird got free. Drake was upset at this. A few days later a girl about his age brought the bird back. Her name was Tory. Tory told Drake how she found the bird at her village going all the places he had been when he was last there. This got Drake to thinking again. He wondered, could he train the birds? After Tory left Drake was thinking of her and her pretty blonde hair and Dark green eyes. Drake wrote a small message on a little piece of paper and wrapped it up in some old plastic and tied it to the bird's leg.

As he thought the bird flew back to Tory. A few days later Tory showed up at Drake's again with the bird in a make shift cage. The bird very happy and content sang its song. Drake noticed how happy the bird was and decided to give it to Tory and she gladly accepted. A few days later she sent a message to Drake by way of her bird. She wrote in the message "My friend in a village far from here would like a bird too. So Drake packed himself a walking pack and tied Tory's bird and another up for their flight. Drake entered the village late that evening. Tory happily met him and they walked and talked. Tory made a place for Drake to stay and a place for the other bird. Early the next morning Drake and Tory set out with both birds tied to strings. A couple of days later they started seeing the village in a nook of a mountain. A day later they reached the village. Tory's friend happy to see her embraced her. Tory introduced Drake. They stayed for a

few days then left. Drake explained that the bird would return in a few days. In exchange for a message bird Drake would receive all kinds of things as money. Finally Drake was training so many birds till you see this picture of him running with these birds tied to their strings. And he and Tory became the bird trainers of the new age.

"A Time to Fly"

By: David M. Gordon

They rightfully said that Pheng was a strange man. Of course, to people with weak non-understanding minds, every person that they did not understand was strange.

It wasn't that Pheng was being difficult, it was more to the effect that he spoke in a language that went far beyond words.

I met Pheng while serving in South Korea. I didn't know when we met that he would become my constant companion whose strange behaviors would lease me to a deeper understanding of who I truly was. Beyond this, he also would be the one who showed me what that crazy Korean War was all about.

It was after I had hired Pheng as my house-boy that he began to do the most peculiar things. One of those things involved the first day in my new shack. Pheng refused to let me put any of my belongings into the shack until he burned incense and mumbled words that I couldn't understand until dark. His dazed state left me wondering what sort of drugs he had been taking.

Even still, Pheng continued to mumble until the sun went down. Each time that I tried to enter my shack, Pheng would lash out at me in a protective way. At sunset, he went about putting my things back where they belonged and acted as though nothing at all strange had happened.

The next morning, I woke up with only one thing on my mind. I had to talk to Pheng about his strange behavior and what it meant.

To me his behavior seemed ridiculous. I simply couldn't figure out why he would do all of this. But then it dawned on me that Pheng, being what I considered to be a primitive man from an equally primitive society, must have been engaged in some ritualistic cleansing of my shack. It isn't uncommon to find people who were lost in their superstitious beliefs. So when Pheng and I sat down for breakfast, I fully expected to hear his affirmation of my suspicion.

Instead, what Pheng told me was humbling down to the core of my being. His actions had nothing to do with any superstitions. They had everything to do with simply being thankful for having a roof, be it ever so tiny, over our heads.

The war had left its effects on all of us who served in it. But for those, like Pheng, who had lived with this war effects so deeply folded into the soft fabric of their character. My respect for Pheng was rooted in this understanding of what my presence had caused in his life.

While Pheng did many other things that all ended up having a strong lesson attached to them, the strangest of all the odd things occurred every morning at sunrise.

Pheng had collected a number of large birds and kept them all in a home-made wicker cage. He had named each bird and tied tethers to their legs. Each morning, he would grab the leaders of these tethers and open the cage. He would

then bow before these birds as they frantically flew upwards pulling away at their tethers. It was after Pheng had spoken each of the birds' names in his Korean tongue, that he would reel them all back in and shut them all back into their cage.

It was the neighbors who had spurred me into questioning Pheng about this strange ritual. They all agreed that Pheng was being cruel to the birds by him preventing them from doing what God had created them to do.

The next morning, I accompanied him out to the hillock behind our shack and asked him what all of this bird stuff was about. Pheng said that he could best describe what he was doing if I would listen to him perform the ritual in English.

He began by doing things just a little bit differently. He did this to make it easier for him to explain each action. He reached into the cage and pulled out one bird at a time and introduced me by saying the bird's name in Korean and in English.

The names of these birds were unforgettable. The first one was "Hatred", the next one was "Murder", and the rest were, "Theft", "Poison", "Famine" and "Rape". The other smaller birds were named after horrible diseases like, "Cancer", "The Plague", "Ebola" and more.

Pheng released these birds each morning so that all of them could spread their wings and fly. I found myself wondering if my neighbors would still think it cruel to see such horrible facts of life held in tethers. Pheng stated that all things must have their time to fly just in order to insure their survival. He went on to say that just because we don't see these horrible things on a daily basis that we often tend to forget that they exist. He added that it takes a man with experience to understand that peace is only a gift. Just like the present war was a gift.

Pheng lost me on that one. In my mind, war was the most damnable act that a man could participate in. To say that a war was a gift is to say that death is also a gift. Pheng stopped me there and said, "For many people, death is the greatest gift of all."

Pheng's eyes explained far more than his words. The human suffering that he and his family had endured spoke in whispering echoes through his understanding eyes. It was then that I realized what I was a part of and how terrible my presence was in his life.

I reached over for one of Pheng's tethers and symbolically tied it to my leg. In tears I begged him to forgive me for flying into his life with such evil intentions. Pheng met my tears with an understanding smile and he untied the tether from around my leg. He then explained that America is a strong eagle who must on occasion be let out of her cage to spread her wings. No one man can tether such an enormous power. Only God himself can guide her into accomplishing His divine will.

Pheng placed his hand on my shoulder and said, "It is in knowing this that you and I can remain friends and brothers."

When I left Korea, I left behind much of who I was. The war had exposed so much of who I never knew that I was and so I was glad to leave that part of me there with Pheng. Today, as I rest in the peaceful comfort of my home here in America, I understand that many of Pheng's birds are still tethered in all of our hearts. I know that some day, some of

those tethers may be cut and some of those horrible birds will once again fly freely into our lives. But until that day comes, we must never forget how Pheng taught us to live under them.

"We can not choose our external circumstances, but we can always choose how we respond to them." - Epictetus -



Out My Window
By: Kody Kelm

This window,
my window,
is a window among windows.
It's full of magic, it makes me free.
I look out my window and I see...
The Sun.
Hello old friend,
another day right?
It's gonna be a good one.
The clear blue sky, fresh cut
green grass, brings the smell of
summertime on the breeze.
I see birds fly, and bees buzz by,
and sometimes if I look real hard out my window,
I see me, younger, stronger, wearing that smile
that the girls loved, hair always a mess ... happy.
I see my wife, she was the only one for me,
said we'd be together forever, where'd forever go?
She's holding hands with my little girl, my precious
child, my hopes and joys, my how she's grown.
They wave, I wave back, I watch them
fade away... No! ...Please, don't go.
Stay awhile longer ... please.
Too late, out my window time
keeps going.
The world is still spinning.
I am standing still, dead within this
shell of who I used to be.
The day grows old,
and I seem to get tired
earlier these days.
Think I'll take a nap.
Wonder what'll be out my
window tomorrow?
Goodnight world. I will
see you when I wake.
I know where you can be found,
right out my window.

I do the very best I know how - the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference." - Abraham Lincoln -

Stuck Inside

By: Lucio Urenda

I'm looking out the window. The land is covered in a white wool fleece. I can see a leafless tree with icicles hanging from its branches. I stare at it and somehow I picture an old man pointing fingers here and there...

I wonder if it feels the cold like I do. There is about two feet of snow out there. I know I won't be going out today: at least, not for a while.

I'm stuck inside. We have to wait 'till either the snow melts or someone comes to shovel us out. I'm inside a two-room shack. The stove is on so that the shack can stay a bit warm. There is an aluminum bucket up on the stove with water in it getting boiled. This will be the warm water I will be using for my bath. I hear music on the background. Either my cousin or Aunt is listening to the radio on the other room. I'm pretty sure the rest of the family is still asleep. There is coffee on a pot steaming hot. I look at it set on the table. I know I'm not allowed to drink it. They say I'm too young to drink coffee. Drink chocolate, they tell me. But then, I wonder why? I do everything you all do. I'm only up because I thought we would have to go to work today. I pick up a cup of hot chocolate my aunt has set in front of me. I say "Thank you, Tia," and turn around and look out the window. I take a drink from my cup. And offer it to the tree outside. Somehow, I felt as if it said thanks. I know it's just my mind and its make-believe world. In a way I am glad we are stuck inside, though I would love to be out there running around and jumping in the snow. It's because we are stuck today I don't have to go out to work. I can still feel and picture what it was like yesterday. Wet, cold, muddy, and my hands. One frozen stiff open and the other one clutched tight with a knife that I used to cut the heads of the cabbage, that I set inside a crate being pulled by a tractor. I can still picture the endless rows I had to walk through. I feel a tap on my head. It's my cousin. He is 12-years old. He is 3 years older than me.

"Hey, we don't have to work today. What do you want to do?" He says to me.

I look at him and shrug my shoulders. We both turn around and look out the window. He looks at me and says, "He looks like an old wizard."

I say, "Who does?"

He turns around to look out the window and nods his head and says, "That tree does."

We both laugh. We look out the window. Yes, I'm glad I'm stuck inside.

Final Notes

There is so much I would like to communicate and include in this issue, and always feel so constrained by the limits of my budget. I have a lot of writing and art you all have submitted that I'd like to include in the newsletter, but postage

and copying cost prohibit the newsletter from growing larger at this time. If any of you have suggestions for fundraising please send them my way. I know the services PE provides are valuable, and as long as I can find funds to continue I will. I also am open to hearing your suggestions for educational programs we can create to help you grow intellectually. There is a lot of human suffering on the planet right now. Some of it is due to the very fact of existence. If there is life there will always be decay and death. Watching that process in others and ourselves is sobering, and can be distressing. Yet with the understanding that life is a gift, and it is not forever we can take joy in the small things, for instance a sunny day, a smile from a friend, something good to eat.etc. There is also suffering brought about by human to other human.

There is such great inequality in the material comforts people have. It seems barbaric that folks starve while others have more possessions than they could possibly use. That people can be mean and hurtful to others so that they may feel powerful seems like the basest of human responses, yet I see it all the time in the world. I'm sure all of you see that particular form of insanity even more than me. I ask you, as a gift this holiday season to fight the urge to put others down. Instead take a deep breath and realize we are all in this together. United we can do a lot to create a better existence. Divided we become the tools of those in power who seek to oppress and control through dividing us into smaller groups fighting amongst ourselves. In many ways whether free or imprisoned we deal with the same forces at work in the world.

Take the time to become an agent of positive social change. You have a partner here with me and all the folks at Prisoner Express. Tell us how we can help you stay centered and balanced through a changing and difficult existence. We are here to support you, though our means are somewhat limited. I hope the new programs offered this cycle attract your interest, and you follow through on any program you sign up for. Please remember that funds are low and only sign up for programs you can commit to finishing. Every program sent means that much less is available for the next person. Whatever your faith, I wish Happy Holidays to you. My personal favorite celebration is the winter solstice as I know daylight is on the increase.

Best wishes for a bright New Year,
Gary

**YOU ARE IN OUR THOUGHTS THIS HOLIDAY SEASON
AND WE WISH YOU PEACE, JOY AND GOOD HEALTH
IN THE YEAR TO COME.**

Best wishes for a bright tomorrow,
From all the folks at Prisoner Express

Prisoner Express
127 Anabel Taylor Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853

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:

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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:

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Poetry Project – Please send me the next Edition [Vol 7] of *Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology*. **I understand that to receive the anthology I have to submit a poem for consideration in the anthology.**

Civil War – I am interested in studying about the Civil War. Send me this packet.

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

Sign me up for **Math Studies**. I understand this will be a repeat of the previously offered math program.will be available next cycle.

PE Book Club – Please send a copy of **“Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep”**. I will participate in the discussion group **Prisoners Exploring Humanity**.

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

2011 Prisoner Express Newsletter I wish to enroll for another year as a member of the Prisoner Express Program.

The Phoenix Players Theater Group-Please send me the newsletter generated by the theater group in Auburn, NY

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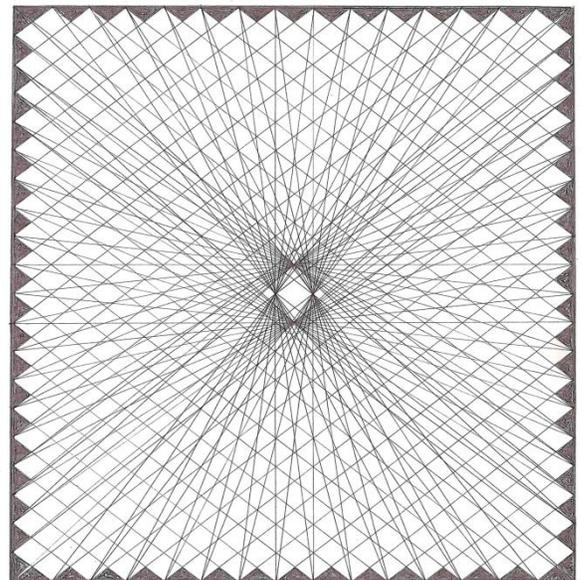
Prisoner Express promotes rehabilitation by providing information, education and opportunities for creative self-expression to incarcerated individuals throughout the United States. Subscriptions are free to prisoners. All others please contact Prisoner Express for rates. All proceeds are used to fund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

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J. Dyks



B.D. Freestone