

Prisoner Express Newsletter

Spring 2011

Greetings and best wishes to you.

I hope this edition of the PE news provides you with some useful information, new opportunities for creative self expression and a deeper sense of appreciation for the miracle of life and your place in it all. My name is Gary and I coordinate the activities of the Prisoner Express project. It is based out of the Durland Alternatives Library on the Cornell University Campus . I work in the library, and have made part of my job serving all of you with educational services. The Alternatives Library unfortunately does not have funds to support this project, and I am always searching for money to be able to support our programs.

This program has been going for over 10 years and it all began with a single request for books. I repeat that in each newsletter, because it illustrates the importance of your words. Danny's letter to me 10 years ago touched and moved me in such a way that a large part of my life has been utilized for sending books and other educational materials to prisoners. Please understand that your words have power and that your words can create. This project is focused on providing you with an opportunity to practice creating with your words and keeping you creatively engaged while you are locked up in prison.

Every 6 months I will send out another edition of this newsletter. In it I bring you up to date with the happenings in the program. I share a few thoughts I have about my life in these times. Usually I start ranting, and of course you're free to skip over this section. I get so many letters from all of you sharing your thoughts and adventures, that I like to reciprocate with mine. I cannot afford the postage on 2000 separate answers, so this is the venue I have for answering questions about the projects as well as sharing my story.

I'm sure I sound like a broken record [remember those] to many of you long time readers of this newsletter, but as usual, programming funds are scarce. I have had to cut back on intended programming. I am sorry, but until I learn to fundraise on a larger scale, I will have to be very careful about the projects I offer. It is better to offer less than not be able to follow through on my intentions. I can imagine that many of you are wondering where your, Math Packet or package of books have gone. Unfortunately they are held up by lack of cash. Later on I will go project by project and explain the current state of each of our endeavors. At the end of the newsletter there will be a form you can use to register for new projects we are offering in the next cycle.

This summer I plan on moving out of my home of 25 years. I am not looking forward to this change, but it is in the best interests of my family. We will move into a house in town. With any luck the rent on our country home will pay for the rent of the town house. We will have to pay to heat the town house, where the country home can be heated with wood. I figure all the money I save on gas for

the cars will hopefully make up the difference. The schools are better in town, and my wife feels like she is living in her car with all the commuting she does. With this new move she'll be able to walk to work and so will I. The kids will have neighbors to play with, and hopefully their public schooling will improve. I am making it clear that I will still garden on my homestead. I am already planting now that the weather has warmed up.

As I grow older many of the pleasures of my youth seem lost to me, or at least faded from my current reality, but gardening and growing food still gives me great pleasure. This year I have 4000 garlic plants growing, and in my head I think in the fall I will replant them into 30,000 garlics. The following year I hope to sell them somewhere. I am hustling all sorts of little jobs to try to supplement my income. This past spring I have been also offering rototilling services and I go to a few homes a week and rototill out garden spaces. My pick up truck is on its last legs and I so hope it will make it through our summer move and the tilling season. I am also growing masses of green vegetables: spinach, lettuce, kale, chard, lettuce, collards. I have many warm weather plants started in a small greenhouse. Tonight I hope to replant my tomato seedlings and start some cucumbers. Last year I made the best pickles and want to do as well this coming season.

I know I have to do some fence repair for the garden, and if I don't the critters will devastate the garden. As I get ready to move I see all sorts of things that need fixing. I can live with things falling apart, but as landlord I know I can't expect others to accept those same conditions. Hopefully whoever we find to rent out house will be handy.

My 3 children are all well and growing in their own way. My eldest daughter is 23 and almost done with college. She is on her 4th college, but I think this one may be a keeper. She studies biology, has found a summer job working in a lab. She has become an expert at henna tattooing.

My almost 12 year old daughter has become a marvelous saxophone player. We have to fight her to practice, but once she does it is well worth it. We are primarily moving to get her in a new middle school. She does well enough in her current school, but it is too easy and there seems to be a culture of meanness among the children her age.

My son is going on 9, and has discovered reading. He has become superb at pogo sticking, jumping rope and playing videogames. Needless to say being a parent is a full time gig, and I am lucky to get much done other than tending to the needs and wants of the kids. It's good, and certainly it was a choice I eagerly made when deciding to have children.

As I continue to manage the Prisoner Express program I have to remind myself to stay focused on what I can accomplish rather than put my attention on the frustration generated by the financial obstacles facing the

program. I can lose my center when I find my intentions are thwarted. Parenting has been the biggest teacher of that lesson. I have the intent to work on a project, but the needs of the family can get in the way. If it goes on go many days, I start simmering with resentment and can no longer enjoy what I am doing. There is a lot of letting go called for in those times, as no good comes from simmering resentment.

Eventually I come back to the here and now and what is real in the moment. It does not mean I stop striving for my desired aim, whether it is a finishing a project at home, or raising funds and creating great programs at PE. It does mean that given what is available, how can I find satisfaction. I imagine many of you struggle with thwarted intentions, and that the prison system is set up to limit your ability to accomplish tasks which could better your life and help prepare you for a life outside of confinement.

With that said I will review the individual programs we have been working on and describe what our plans are for the next programming cycle.

J.E.Forbes



Book Program

Our most popular program is also our most expensive. I sent a letter a few months ago alerting you how far behind we have gotten in mailing out the packages. We have about 200 packages that were due to be sent in Nov 2010 sitting on a shelf, without the funds to mail them. I do not see that situation changing soon. I have many donated books waiting to be mailed, and I am starting to turn down book donations due to lack of storage space. **The only solution I see to this is for those of you who can to**

send at least \$3.00 in stamps or check to pay for your book package postage. I figure if those who can afford the postage cost for a package of books share what they receive, then everyone gains. I'm not sure what to do with the 1000's of you that are waiting for books and have no funds to pay for the books. I hope you understand our financial shortfall, and have a connection to someone who could send money so we can reconnect this book pipeline. Hopefully in the next edition of the PE News I will have an answer to this problem. But for now I can only send books to those of you who send at least \$3.00 to cover postage.

Poetry Project

We have received a record number of poems to be considered for inclusion in **Anthology #7**. It is being put together by 2 students this month and I hope to have it in the mail this summer. Many of you are new to PE and I will explain the process. Every poem submitted is considered for the anthology. If you send in a poem we will mail you a copy of the anthology when it is printed. Your poem may or may not be included. A team of students read through all submissions and chose which poems to include. They are not professional editors and they choose poems that have meaning for them. Poetry is so subjective and there are no right or wrong ways to write.

If you are not chosen for an anthology please don't take it personally, as we are limited by space. We usually have to keep the anthology to 24 pages as it keeps the postage and copying costs within our budget. Many of the entries we have received in the past 3 months are probably going to be considered for volume 8 as we filled up the Vol#7 page allocation a while back. I know many of you in Texas heard about the program through a short article in the Echo. I am hoping this newsletter answers some of your questions about this program and how to be part of this poetry project.

I have included a sampling of poetry

Miss Understood by Heidi Myers

Please do not misunderstand me
And mistake me for being cold
The truth is that I am very sensitive
And really don't want to be left alone!
I am not really the snob
That you say I am
I am only protecting myself
By not letting you in.
Please don't hate me
Or hold against me
The cold words that I sometimes say
I do NOT mean to hurt anyone
I am only trying to push them away!

"If I Were a Wave" by Mitchell Yelverton

If I were a wave,
A thousand miles I'd travel—
To softly crash upon your shore,
And feel the safety of your warm sands.
To cool you from the burning sun,

And quench your deepest thirst.
To savor our sweet and tender embrace,
And gently fade into the sea.

So You Say by Lucio Arenda

So you want to say that the world is cruel
That no one cares for you
That your life is full and gray
That this world isn't fair
Yet you never stop to think
About the little things it brings
About the rain drops that it pored
When it was hot out doors
Or what about the times it blows
And you feel the cool breeze upon your face
When it sprinkles you with snow flurries
And covers the land with a white wool fleece
When it covers the land
With all the colors of the rainbow
So how can you say the world is cruel have you ever stop to think
It might just be you?

Book Club

While I am unable to send individualized book packages due to cost at this time we are still running our Book Club Project. Some of the books we have featured in the recent past include *'Do Androids Dream of Electric sheep*, a sci-fi novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, a classic novel of the great depression, and *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, which was an investigation of the speech Lincoln gave and its historical context.

This cycle we have an interesting book to share with you. It is called *Sunbeams; a Book of Quotations*. It was created by Sy Syfransky, editor of the Sun magazine, and they have donated 500 copies to our project. Here is a summary of the book as listed on amazon.com:

Here is a wealth of quotations--witty, humorous, insightful, touching--ideal for gift giving, personal reflection, bedside reading, or anytime one wants to get in touch with the beauty and wisdom of the human spirit. The authors include actors, gurus, philosophers, rock stars, film directors, baseball players, poets, and sages from fifth-century China, the celebrated and the unknown--all of us, in a sense.

We have approximately 500 copies and the first of you who send in your requests will be enrolled in the book club project. Along with the book we will send some critical thinking questions for you to answer. We will look for your insights as to which quotes meant something special to you as well as ask you to write original quotes and share quotes you have heard in prison that are meaningful. At the end perhaps we can create a prisoner book of quotations that we can share with the Sun magazine. It will cost close to \$1500 to mail these books to you, and I'm working on finding those funds.

Journal Project

One program that is especially dear to me is the Journal project. Many of you participate already or have done so in the past. There is a small team of student volunteers who read your journals and file them away so your writing is all together in a folder. The students elect a few participants to have their journals typed and put online at our website www.prisonerexpress.org. We do not have the resources to type every submission sent to us, so only a select number of you are chosen, but everyone's journals are read.

Keeping a journal is a wonderful opportunity to write your self to sanity. Often things go on around us that we must process in order to understand. I know that in prison it is not always wise or prudent to share your innermost thoughts with others. The journal is a great way to work through your thoughts. It is also a good way to let folks on the outside know your thoughts, hopes, dreams, and basic daily routine.

Too often folks on the outside get so busy trying to maintain the details and responsibilities of life that they tune out much of what is around them. People forget about prisoners and the common humanity we share. Sharing your journal with free world people demonstrates the humanity of the people who are in our nation's jails. It serves as a reminder of the importance of education and the need for educational and creative programming in prisons. By writing a journal you not only help yourself, but you have the opportunity to help all prisoners by raising the awareness of all who read your writing.

We send out a "How to Keep a Journal" beginner packet when 200 people sign up for the program. You do not need to wait for the packet to arrive. If you want to join, you can simply start sharing your thoughts and memories. Remember to date each entry. Send in your entries as often as you like. Some people send them in weekly, others monthly, and some whenever they have filled up an envelope. It is your choice. Our team of students will add you to the list of folks participating and you will receive the journal group handouts when they are next mailed.

Distance Education

This last cycle we offered 3 distance education programs. One was on **Norse Mythology** and the other two were on the **Civil War** and a **Math Study** unit. The Norse Mythology unit was run by Laura and she did an excellent job creating the study unit with critical thinking questions, and then a compilation document of the most interesting responses sent in by the participants.

I still have not mailed the history unit on the **Civil War**. I have just found the money to do this and will be taking it to the printers next week. When you get it please read it and answer the questions. Mail them back and we will create a booklet of the most interesting responses. The booklet will be mailed to all who answer questions in the packet.

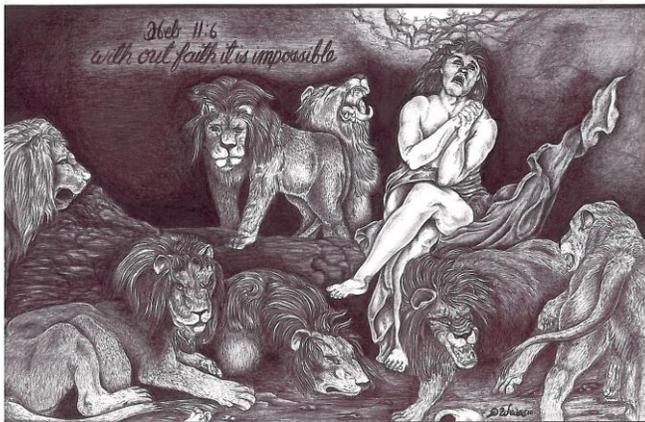
I have not been able to send the math units, as once again money has not been raised to print and mail this unit. They are already to go, and while it seems a shame to not

be able to send them, perhaps I can find an alternative. One suggestion is for us to post our lessons on our website, and you can write someone in the free world who can print it and send lessons to you. I know that many of you do not have those kinds of contacts, just as you do not have money to send for your book packages, but doing this would at least make the lessons available to those of you who did have outside support. I would be interested in hearing your opinions on this method of delivering programs to you. It changes our focus in that we would create the program content, but you would have to find someone who is willing to print it from our website and mail it to you. I am hesitant to offer any new distance learning programming this next cycle until I connect with that well-to-do donor of my dreams.

Chess Club

Ettie, our student chess master is graduating from Cornell this semester. She has promised one final chess club newsletter to share with all of us. It should be done soon. I know many of you have been waiting for it awhile and Ettie has been planning to do it after she finishes with her semester's work. If you have already signed up for it please know we will mail it when she has finished it, and if you are new to the program please fill out the registration form and ask to receive the chess newsletter.

Dean Weiss



Art Project

This past spring we had an art show of prisoner submitted work on the Cornell Campus. Andrea framed or matted hundreds of pieces of art for display. The night of the opening the room looked stunning with all of your art on the walls. People were amazed at the depth of skill displayed in the art. The art was judged by art students and other PE volunteers and prizes have been awarded. The winners have been notified and we will be sending their prizes to them.

We are collecting art work for our next show. Art work submitted may be featured in our PE News and our Poetry Anthology. If we sell it, we use the money for postage for our program. Do not send art work that you want returned to you, as I do not want to guarantee we can do that. If you would like your artwork displayed and judged at our next

show send it to us and we will store it for the next show in fall 2011.

The following artists won awards at our last art show:

1st: J.E. Forbes 2nd: Robert Avila 3rd: David Gordon

Honorable Mentions

Martin Rivers, David Velasquez, Duane Sosbee,

Dean Weiss, Glen Vivencio, Ron Stewart

Jackey Sollars, Heriberto Rodriguez, Joe Delgado

Some artwork is included in the newsletter for your enjoyment. Much of the art was is either too big to scan, not suitable for black and white reproduction, or was sculpture, and wood working. One day I hope we can send images of more of the work that was submitted so that you might all enjoy the collective creativity of PE members.

Phoenix Players

Last cycle we offered up an opportunity for you to receive a mailing from the Phoenix Players, a prison theater group in Auburn. I know they have still not mailed out their newsletter, but it is my understanding that they have gotten sidetracked by a piece they are working on performing. I will stay in touch with the coordinator of that project and find out when they will be mailing their newsletter. If you want to receive it please sign up for it. As with the chess article, if you have already signed up we will send it to you as soon as it is ready.

David Velasquez



Prison Writers Project

This is my most favorite program. Perhaps it is because it does not cost much money to operate and all participants produce something as part of the project. Most other projects we offer involves us sending something to you, that you may or may not do. With this project you first send something to us if you wish to participate. Here's how it works; every month there is both a written cue and picture cue you can choose. You can write on one or both cues. If you send in a submission we will send you back a copy of

everyone else's writing on the same subject. We will also include a few submissions in the next newsletter. If you like reading the submissions in this newsletter, you can get a complete packet just by writing something on a selected topic and sharing it with us. We will put your writings on our website, which makes them available to anyone with a computer and internet access. This program is something created by you for you, rather than something necessarily created by us for you. It really gives the power to you to create something, and I know the ripples of your empowering actions can extend past the walls you live within. Just as with the poetry there is not right or wrong way to write on all of these subjects. All you have to do is share your thoughts or imagination. You can write a true story or make something up. You can write prose or poetry. I have seen dramatic improvement in writing ability with participants who stay with this program. A little practice goes a long way in developing skills. Instead of just exercising your body, this is an opportunity to exercise your mind. I envision a day when PE News morphs into a literary magazine of your art, writing and poetry.

Word Cues

Just to shake things up, this cycle's topics are the names of renowned literary works. Don't let the names intimidate you. Let us see what sort of story these words inspire you to tell.

Crime and Punishment	due 8/1/11
Pride and Prejudice	due 9/1/11
Great Expectations	due 10/1/11
Brave New World	due 11/1/11
Call of the Wild	due 12/1/11
The Awakening	due 1/1/12
Roots	due 2/1/12

Following are some stories sent in the past year on previous topics

Stars

Shining Star By: Cody Robinson

When I was a free man, those clear cool nights when I was sober enough to walk from this house to the front lawn these grew increasingly rare as the days went by – I would sometimes wander out onto the grass to watch the stars.

I was fortunate enough to live in a section of town that contained only a few lights. There was truly no feeling in the world that was more pure, cleaner than the soft tickling of grass blades all along my neck and arms, or the aroma of nighttime air slipping across my face like a silk breeze.

The only thing that could possibly have made it better happened the day I met Lindi. She was a beautiful woman, half Lakota Sioux, and she had the type of figure that made every lonesome wolf stop in his tracks.

She was more than a body, however. She was the kind of woman that would pretend to like anything her man liked, just to make him feel loved. Those wonderful nights when we lay together in the grass were the best of all.

I wish I could have realized at the time just how comparably miniscule those distant fiery orbs were when juxtaposed with her. Shutting your eyes to Lindi was like shutting your eyes to

the sun. I shut my body off to her healing warmth and opened it instead to the ravaging teeth of alcohol that almost killed me.

Maybe prison isn't quite so bad. I was always taught that life is pretty much what you make of it. Prison did, after all, help me to quit drinking. Once I was on the outside of my own life looking in, I was able to see the person I had become.

It's an uphill battle from here, so to speak. I know I'm fortunate to be alive. I should be a memory right now, a scar on the heart of all I loved as I return slowly to dust six feet beneath the surface of the earth.

One thing I can never have again, however, is the star that outshined all others. Her benevolent heart and twinkling smile are lost to me forever, a beam of light zipping out beyond the boundaries of another galaxy.

By: Robert C. Fuentes

When I was a child, I used to look up at the night and try to count the number of stars it held. I would sit or lie on the grass endlessly, without rush, as numbers slowly clicked by in my mind. It was me and the universe alone, as the world around me had melted away.

I had been told that wishes would come true if made upon the first star a person saw. I never tried it. I was too afraid that if I made that wish, the star would disappear like a blown out birthday candle. So I contented myself with admiring each, as if they were individual pearls in my own personal treasure chest.

In my simple mind, I wondered how those stars hung in the sky, never falling. I reasoned that they must have been secured to heaven with thread spun by the hands of angels.

And so it was I had solved that mystery of the universe, regarding these beacons of paradise God had surrounded us with, so that we might know that we were in his loving thoughts.

I would easily go sleep unafraid, knowing that I could carry the memory of those stars with me, so that I could plant them each within the darkness I found behind my own closed eyes.

Comforted, I was assured to be blessed with pleasant dreams to guide me through the night.

Now that I am guilty of growing up, I cannot help but think of how uncomplicated the world of a child is. With age, I have lost my interest and awe in those miracles living in the sky. My eyes have grown heavy with time, so that I am only able to concentrate on things before me; as my life has become crammed into seconds, minutes, days, months, and years, leaving no moments to spend with the stars. As a result, my nights have become no more than spaces I can only hope to stuff a few hours of sleep into, without an ounce of dream.

No longer do I own a universe of unlimited adventure, but have become the property of the world inside a box of invisible walls. The lights of my stars have disappeared so deeply, taking with them every wish I should have made.

By: Michael Atterbury

When I hear the word "stars" only one thing comes to mind; those twinkling beauties in the night sky. So many of them, probably too many to count, seeming to be just out of arms' reach though they are billions of miles away. Most of them are burning balls of gas like our sun that warms our planet. And if each of these suns have orbiting planets like our own, could one of those planets support life? Tough are the

questions that run through my mind on dark clear nights when I'm laying on a chair gazing to the sky. Are we truly the only planet in the entire universe that has intelligent life? Honestly, I don't think so. There are just too many planets to say that just one out of, possible, billions supports intelligent life.

Some people might argue that God only created us and that the stars were created to give us something to look at in the night sky instead of just darkness, some proof of His existence. While it does say in the Bible that He created the stars, us and all the animals, it fails to mention anything about Him creating any other life on another planet. This doesn't mean that He didn't. Because God is all-knowing perhaps He didn't want to burden us with the knowledge that we have planetary neighbor's galaxies away. But who am I to say that I know the ways of Adonis (God). I guess intelligent life on other planets is like the animals of cryptozoology. There's no solid proof that they exist but at the same time there's not a definitive "no, they don't exist" because you never know. Fact is often stranger than fiction. Now despite the many conversations that the topic of "the stars" can arise, they are also very romantic in an othe-worldly way. I'm sure most could agree that spending time with your loved one under the stars can be a touching and romantic gesture.

Stars, merely a romantic gesture or something more?

Jeff Harnden



Teen Years

“Summer 1984”- By: Matt Hall

It was 1984, school was out and summer was here. I had my best year yet on my football team but now it was time to surf. No practice, no school, and no worries. Not that you ever really had any at 16, you only think you did. At 7:00am my natural summer alarm clock went off and I got up and headed straight to the phone to call the local surf report. I can still hear the voice. It was always “John Stall”, the head lifeguard at Manhattan Beach pier. I'd known him my whole

life. I haven't called that number in over 20 years but know it to this day: 379-8471. John would make a recorded message of the size of the waves, the tides, which direction the swell was coming from and how hard the wind was blowing. It was busy, always a good sign that lots of people were calling. It meant there was a good chance the waves were up. Off to the kitchen for a bowl of grape nuts (no sugar cereals in my house). Halfway through the bowl I called again, still busy. Taking a quick look outside at the trees (no wind), another good sign! Finished the bowl, back to the phone (busy). There must be waves. Normally I'd be calling a couple friends to meet me on the south side of the pier. But not today. Today was special! Mom was still asleep and my big brother Marcus never came home last night. He was 18 and had more girlfriends than I could ever dream of. I played all the sports and he got all the girls. Last try at the surf report but the line is still busy. There was no wind, the surf report was very busy, and my belly was full of grape nuts. It's time to go. I grabbed my surfboard, grabbed my skateboard, my backpack and out the door I went.

I've taken this path a million times. Up two small hills, down one, up one big hill, then down one long hill that took me to the sand. Every hill was like a big pre-wave. I'd carve the street doing these long turns back and forth across both lanes of the street. Sometimes, I'd even slow down traffic. This was my street, my sidewalks, my town. I knew where every crack was. I could always smell the big beautiful Pacific before I saw it. Salt, sand and water, all together make a distinct smell. At the top of the last hill I always took a second to look at a concrete slab in front of this big bright yellow house carved in what was then wet cement, “Matt loves Tracy.” Shooting down the last hill, the smell would get stronger every hundred yards. I could see the whitewash hitting the end of the pier. There were waves! At least 3-6 feet for sure! Whatever happened today at least I was going to get some good waves. My heart was pumping.

John Stall was in his lifeguard tower. I waved at him and he waved back. “What time is low tide?” I yelled. “11 am” he responded. It was now around 8 am and I'm putting on my wetsuit as fast as I can. It was a summer suit. Six people were already out in the lineup. I knew five of them. We always surfed right next to the pier on the south side. With my wetsuit on, my area marked on the beach with my towel, skateboard, and backpack, I ran full speed into the water. The cold water hits me and it feels good. I taste the salt and the sun is shining. Its summer!

I stay in the water for over two hours on my first session. During that time I would constantly look to the stairs coming down to the sand, “Will she show?” I'm on my second session now. It's almost noon and the beach is filling up quick (locals only, damn it!) There are two people in the water next to me who I've known since elementary school who told me they saw my big brother Marcus out the night before with the hottest chick they'd ever seen. (Tell me something I don't know is all I could think). I caught a wave and as I was riding it, I took a quick glance at the stairs. Is it? Is it! It's her! And she was alone (I prayed she'd be alone and she was). If she showed up with one or two of her friends I'd never get the time to really get to know her.

“Cindy Welsh” was her name. She was a senior and just graduated. She was seventeen, a whole year and grade older. She was super popular, star of the girl's volleyball team,

and the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen. It took me a month to build the courage to ask her to a beach date. I knew she'd be off to college after the summer, so it was now or never! I asked, she said yes, and there she was! I felt my stomach tighten as I kicked out of that wave; I paddled back to the line-up. I wanted her to see me on a wave before I came in. I could see her lying on her beach towel. She looked at all of us in the line-up and I wondered if she knew which one was me. Now was the time. I caught the next wave. I called everyone off. No sharing this one. "Don't fall Matt", I thought to myself. I ripped that wave all the way to the beach. I hopped off my board like a real pro, put my board under my arm and headed up the beach. As I was heading toward her she was heading toward me. God, she was so pretty. She was as tall as me, super long, super blond hair and crystal blue eyes.

"Hi Matt, I saw you on that last wave, not bad. The waves are pretty good today. South swells. Where are you at the beach? Is that your skateboard over there? OK cool, I'll move my stuff over by yours." She got settled next to me, our towels were close, but not close enough.

We started to talk and time stood still. She was so cool. Hours were flying by. Before I knew it, 5pm came and went. I'd never been so happy. I didn't want it to end. When would she leave? The sun started to set and next thing I knew she moved her towel right next to mine. She said she was a little cold. She laid her head on my chest. I couldn't believe it. It was me and Cindy Welsh, alone! She seemed to really like me. I would have stayed right there for the rest of my life. We kissed, laughed, and talked. We watched the beautiful orange and crimson colors of the sunset. She told me how she loves sunsets and I concurred.

She offers to drive me home, but I said I was stopping by a friend's right up the street even though I wasn't.

I watched her leave. I saw her car drive up the hill. I stayed for about another hour just reminiscing on the day I just spent with Cindy Welsh.

I finally got my things together and skateboarded back home. I came in the house and my mom was making her special chicken. The whole house smelled wonderful. My mom asked me "why was I so happy?" "Because its summer mom," I replied.

We finished dinner around 8pm and the phone rang. My brother jumped up and headed off to the phone. We all knew it would be for him. My mom then asked me if I wanted some peanut butter pudding.

"Hey Matt! It's for you! Some girl named Cindy!"

It was the summer of 1984

By: Matthew Clark

I can remember my teenage years like a flash. It seemed back then; I would be that way forever! I never thought I would see the age of 24, ever. I couldn't see past today to see my tomorrows. I look back now and see the bliss of youth. I can remember high school and all the friends I had. Man! That was the life, no worries about bills, kids, work and money, just school and friends. Life seemed hard then, I was waging war with my mom for a choice she made. I had no father and a woman was assuming his role. As the eldest of three boys, I felt my man hood challenged by someone who wasn't even a man!! We went toe to toe and went blow for

blow, her and I. We fought like two warriors of separate tribes for the same land. I hated and loathed her with a fiery passion! As I advanced into my puberty I realized that she was here to stay. I conceded the mantle of head-of-the-house to her. She had become my "Dad." She helped me through my teenage years just like a father would have. She was, in all but gender, the best dad I could have ever asked for. Like I said life was sweet then, as little responsibility as possible, and the wanting to grow up fast was all I had.

By: Tim Hampton

My teenage years were probably a lot different from most people in the beginning if not all the way. My teenage years were a bunch of struggle, work, disappointments and pain. At the age of 13, I took the initiative to help out my family with all the struggling. I would go out at 6 in the morning pushing a lawn mower with its gas and oil cans. I would try to cut the yards from that time until it got hot. I would usually cut and clean 4 yards by 1 or 2 o'clock, making \$80. That would go toward the washing (\$20), phone bill (\$20) and groceries (\$40). That was what I took upon myself to do every day. I rarely had time for games or cartoon watching. Maybe two hours of that and that's when I was going to school. It seems like the older I got, the worse it got. Then I started to sell a little crack just to make ends meet, or I do a little robbing. I grew up faster than my years. I learned responsibility when I should have had a childhood. Now I take everything serious and rarely play. The stress shows on me, making me older than I am. Even though I hate my teenage years, I've learned something from them, and that's how to become a man, and step up when it's called for, be a leader and take responsibility for my life and those that depend on me

"My Wasted Youth- By: Troy Groves

My early years were moving around a lot, but when I turned 13 we settled in a little town in Oklahoma named Mooreland. We lived there until I was almost 14. Then my mom had a real bad car accident. That accident gave me a permanent place because my mom was without a leg now. It was real hard for us. I was an only kid and my mom was still trying to heal physically, mentally and emotionally. She was a model so it messed her up even worse than most people. I went to High school and played football. My mom didn't come to my games and my dad wasn't in the picture. I worked to bring in money for our family and things I wanted and needed. I went to work at about 4PM and got off at 1AM, and then walked 2 miles home. Then I got up at 7am and did it over again. Some people knew I had a job, most didn't know or care because they were teenagers. My mom still tells the story like I'm some kind of hero or something. It's in her eyes every time she tells people the story like she is ashamed of herself. In all of that I had a girlfriend and drank and partied a lot. I took my freedom for granted back then. I wish I could have those days back sometimes. Somewhere in the struggle is what defines me I guess. At the very worst of times I am graceful. It's when it gets easy that I lose sight of what's important.

The Smoke Bomb"-By: Cody Robinson

I sat in the cab of my pickup truck that had been lying dead in the garage all summer. My buddy, Dan, was in the passenger seat, eyeing me intently as we both faced the rear of the Chevrolet Silverado my father had bought me as a fix up project the previous October. He had long ago given up trying to keep me interested in it.

The rear sliding window of the truck was open, as well as the remote-controlled garage door. This afforded us a clear view of Burrows Street, which was the steepest residential street in town. It ran from one end of town to the other, a distance of seven and a half miles, with only one stoplight to ease the flow of traffic.

"You sure got balls, man," said Dan, a little bit wide eyed.

No I don't, I thought. I was too chicken to turn down your dare.

To Dan I said "Yup, Maybe someday you'll learn something from me."

He had a cigarette lighter in his right hand. In my left, I held a smoke bomb, one of those novelty bits that would spit out red smoke once it started to go off. I was right-handed.

We had spent the better part of ten minutes studying the pattern of vehicles as they passed, which at our age was bordering on the extreme outer edge of our ability to focus on anything other than girls and hard rock music.

Finally, I decided we had it down, meaning I had no idea what was going to happen, but I was tired of looking like it in front of my best friend.

"Light it," I told him.

"Are you sure about this?" he responded.

"You dared me, knucklehead. Now hurry up and light the thing."

As he did so, I instructed him, "You gotta let me know when the fuse is almost all the way down. I don't want to throw it too early."

He nodded.

I turned my attention to the street, where at the penultimate moment, a car or truck, or maybe even a school bus carrying band students from the rival high school would pass by. That would be great.

I was so wound up that when Dan signaled to me, my arm responded like a slingshot, flinging the smoke bomb toward the street, expertly arching it through the air... and directly into the ceiling of the truck.

Instantaneously, the cab was filled with a dense, burning red smoke. It rose from the floorboard like flames from a dragon's throat.

"Get out!" I shouted.

I grabbed the door handle and pulled, but it would only twist ineffectively in my hand. It took several long seconds for me to realize I was turning the window crank.

Eventually, we both made it out of the truck. Dan came running to the driver's side just as I scraped the crimson-spewing sphere out of the cab and onto the ground. He stomped and smeared it to dust with his hiking boots.

We started at each other for the moment, the pungent odor of sulfur smoke clinging tenaciously to air and fabric.

Suddenly, there came laughter, both scratchy and derisive, from the direction of the open garage door. We turned to see a disheveled old man in grungy work clothes and

a ski cap. He held a lunch pail in one hand and a thermos in the other.

Upon seeing the confused looks on our faces, he began to laugh even more ferociously. The whiskers on his face bobbed joyously as he turned and walked away.

Dan and I wandered out onto the sidewalk, where we watched the old man until he disappeared down Thomas Street four blocks away, carrying his laughter through the streets.

"Who the heck was that?" I asked.

"I don't know," Dan replied. "But I'm pretty sure we just made his day."

By: Sean Poulton

My teen years were one adventure after another. My adolescent years were spent in a small town of about 5000 people called Sellersburg, Indiana. I was raised by my mother and two older sisters and we were extremely close. I never remember feeling unwanted or unloved. We were dirt poor and had our share of problems for sure but there was never a lack of love.

Then at 11, my mom got pregnant and married. That changed the whole dynamic of our family. Of course mom wanted to find romantic love and she is a queen. She deserved it but it was still a huge adjustment for us.

At 12 we moved to some government subsidized apartments in a bigger town called Charlesville. It's about 10 miles North of Louisville, Kentucky.

Now I had an older step-brother and step-sister and a baby brother and he became my son almost. He was with me from the time he was born until the minute I was arrested.

But there are a few years between those two points in my life.

I think my memorable, early, teen years were of me and my step-brother Danny playing DOD and biking out on the horse trails out at Fapping Park. We used to ride all through the creek. It was blast! But my brother Danny was pretty violent and we didn't always get along. He had problems in Arizona with his mom, he had problems with his grandma and he stabbed me for no reason giving me 11 stitches in my hands. I didn't tell on him but Mom knew what happened and they put him in Madison State Hospital when I was 14.

I loved the apartment complex. I could run the whole neighborhood and I had crushes on two of the girls. Shawwna Curry and Mona Billard. Shawwna was beautiful with long light brown hair and she was thin with not much of a figure. She wouldn't even mess with me. We were all young and going through puberty. Mona had this wild curly hair and she was short with a little more of a figure. She was so sexy! I wanted her so bad. We messed around a little but never had sex.

The first woman I had sex with I won't name. My dad got me drunk and set me up with a woman. I don't want to hurt anyone's feelings and I doubt it's something she'd want to be common knowledge. A year or so later I met Maria. I was 15 and she was 16. She lived next to me and I took her virginity. A few months later I came home from school and she was gone. The news from her friend Melanie Doss is that Maria got pregnant, her mom and dad found out about it and her father relocated to North Carolina to preach there and to get her away from me. I'm not sure if that's true but it's possible I have a 23 year old child. I still wonder about her.

She was another beautiful person. Her parents were really strict and I think she used me to rebel. She used to keep a bag of makeup and a pair of Guess jeans in a plastic bag in my back yard. Her parents made her wear dresses and long shorts and absolutely no makeup. Even plain as she was, she was gorgeous. I was crushed when they left.

I moved on and often realizing I could get my own girl, I set out to get them all! I only even cheated on one girl and I regret it still. We dated for over 3 months, her name was Katina Ridlinghafer. After three months, I gave in and slept with her best friend. I felt like a dog and told her that same night. Of course she broke up with me and went camping with some jerk that took her virginity then dropped her off.

After that, all I dated was juniors or seniors because they had cars and they were easier! I did learn from that experience. I never cheated again. I'm on good terms with damn near all my exes.

Also, at 13 my mom bought me a lawnmower and told me she would feed and clothe me but if I wanted running money I'd have to earn it. I learned at an early age that there was plenty of money out there if you were willing to work hard for it. At 16, I was making more money roofing houses than my mom who was a nurse. Of course I threw that at her when I quit school. I became a bit of a workaholic. But I liked my life style and I felt like it was better to work for it than to steal or rob.

As a teen my thing was collecting cassette tapes and smoking weed. I can remember times sitting in my room with incense burning and my black light posters, getting high and listening to Black Sabbath and Slayer while talking on the phone to girls all day every day. Or I'd sit at the park and talk to the girls while my little brother played.

When I was 16, I got serious with Christine Stubble. We dated until I was almost 19. She was my first true love. Unfortunately, she died in 99.

In the summer my dad would come around a little more. I'd go to biker parties with him or camping out at Hardy Lake. I loved being around him. He wasn't a great father but he was a fun buddy to party with. Our relationship became harder once I finally learned about how he had beaten my mom. My mom was my everything, and she never ever talked bad about my dad. They split up when I was one or two. I never knew he beat her. When I was 17, I went to a party out on Bluelick Road and dad saw some boxing gloves in the backseat of my buddy's car and he picked a fight with me. He was drunk and could barely stand up so of course I knocked him out. I think I snapped a little and went overboard but I felt like he put me in a corner and I was angry at him for hitting my mom so I let loose. He and I were never close after that. He is dead now too.

For the most part, I loved my teen years and I miss them. I'm close to 40 now and I've been in prison nearly 20 years so I've missed a lot but I cherish my memories.

Duane Sosbee



BASIC NEEDS

By: Tommy Sanders

The Franklin Reality Model teaches that Basic Human Needs consist of (1) To Live; (2) To Love & Be Loved; (3) To feel Important, and (4) Growth & Becoming. These needs are all necessary to develop, for a mature adult character. When these needs go unmet, the character of the person becomes deficient. In order to see if these needs have gone unmet, you have to examine your Belief Window, to find out why you act the way you do. A behavior is always fueled by a **belief**. If it is an incorrect belief, that belief must be changed, and when it is changed, the behavior will automatically change. The concept of to love, and be loved is illustrated in this simple but true story.

“The Rescuing Hug”

“I heard an amazing story about a set of twins who were just a few days old. One of them had been born with a serious heart condition and wasn't expected to live. A few days went by and one baby's health continued to deteriorate; she was close to death. A hospital nurse asked if she could go against the hospital policy and put the babies in the same incubator together, rather than in individual incubators. It was a big ordeal, but finally the doctor consented to allow the twins to be placed side by side in the same incubator, just as they had been in their mother's womb.

“Somehow, the healthy baby managed to reach over and put his arms around his little sick sister. Before long, and for no apparent reason, the heart began to stabilize and heal. Her blood pressure came up to normal. Her temperature soon followed suit. Little by little she got better, and today they are both perfectly healthy children. A newspaper caught wind of the story and photographed the twins while still in the incubator, embraced in a hug. They ran the photo with the caption “**The Rescuing Hug**”. (Your Best Life Now, page 224, Joel Osteen).

The Franklin Reality Model has more to do with psychological well-being, and keeping our thoughts rational. It's a very important tool that should be taught to all who will listen.

Then there is the legal side of Basic Human Needs; where the needs are basic to survival only. The need for food is very basic, thirst is also a basic need, and heat protection from the cold is a basic need. Sanitation and Hygiene is a basic need, so is exercise. There are needs that have been recognized as basic human needs by the Courts, such as lightning, protection from

excessive noise is also recognized as a basic human need. Needs for humans seem to arise from two different perspectives. One is the psychological, which courts have failed to recognize in the behalf of prisoners to this date. For instance our Department of Criminal Justice (in Texas) is not interested in meeting the needs of its incarcerated felons for love, or to feel important. Of course this leads to detrimental mentalities among prisoners. However most of the basic needs to keep prisoners alive are met. We are given food, water, heat, exercise, and noise levels are usually controlled. Even though, we are not where we used to be in regards to meeting human needs as a society, we still have a long way to go

By: James Murphy

Food, clothing, and shelter. Are basic needs really that simple? In a purely physical way of thinking I suppose the human needs, or do they? Sure, those three items will keep you alive, but don't really do much more than that. I do believe our needs go just a little deeper.

The food and the protection from the elements doesn't go far, I'm afraid concerning the will to live, or in providing the essential elements needed to flourish, to be happy and at peace. Those things are very rudimentary, very basic to human survival I think. A kind word, a warm genuine smile, a simple touch, a bit of compassion or maybe understanding, the chance to feel needed or of some value, the opportunity to feel like you belong somewhere. These things too have got to be included in "Basic Needs", don't they? Of course the concept of "basic" starts getting more complicated when such ideas are added.

Steaming back to San Diego from a west-Pac deployment with the U.S. Navy, a lifetime ago it seems, we came across some Vietnamese "boat people" floating out in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. I could hardly believe so many people could fit in such a small ramshackle craft and actually cross the ocean. We slowed and stopped, throwing them a line and pulling them alongside. We were going to help them. The idea of helping these people, perhaps even saving them was very exciting to me.

Basic needs. I'm thinking basic needs are in the same philosophical filing cabinet with common sense. There's nothing common about common sense and basic needs can be quite complicated, if not complex. Far from basic.

In a perfect world common sense would tell me that every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth has a birthright, a god given right to have their basic needs met, that they are provided with those basic needs, or the conclusive means to provide for themselves and their families those basic needs.

There again though, in that boiling pot of thought soup I'm stirring on my mental stovetop, I know that common sense isn't common and basic needs just aren't that simple, or we wouldn't live in a world like we find ourselves in.

Is there a standard for basic needs? If so, are those standards universal? They should be but obviously aren't. Should anyone have the right to decide what someone else's needs are? Why is it always someone who has an abundance that decides what someone without anything needs?

That's all nonsense though, because we of course don't live in a perfect world, and the reality is that the whole

world operates on some form or another of a classic system. It's probably not right, surely not fair, and has nothing to do with the most basic needs, the most basic ideals of humanity, but it is the reality of our world.

As it turned out though, the help we offered was no help to them, nothing that they needed.

From the hangar bay elevator of our ship we dropped fifty pound sacks of rice overboard and into the packed little boat of refugees. As the sacks of uncooked rice landed in their boat, they tossed them overboard. They couldn't risk sinking the boat with the added weight of food, especially food they couldn't cook. We offered them food...a basic need...that these brave souls had no need for. Their basic needs were a bit more complex, but still basic nonetheless.

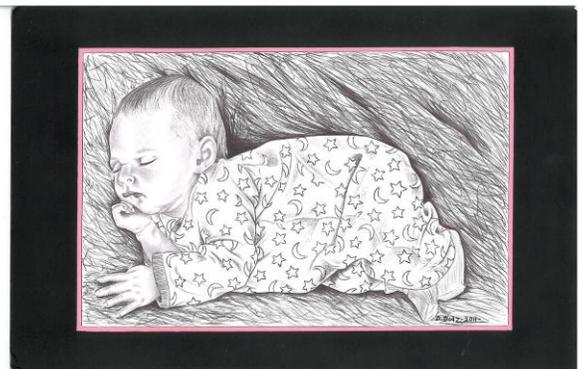
The image of steaming away and leaving these human beings drifting in the middle of the vast expanse of the Pacific is still very vivid in my mind. What they needed, the real help they deserved was very basic and in all reality probably owed to them. Why did we even stop? We couldn't help them with their basic needs, or I should say, wouldn't help them, because someone had decided what those needs were and were not.

Can you see how it gets much more complicated than fundamental, than rudimentary, than basic? It's only complicated because we make it that way. It's not right. Common sense tells you that, of course that's why common sense isn't that common, not anymore anyway.

As my circumstance in life has changed dramatically I've become aware of basic needs that I have that I've never really thought about, and that I've surely taken for granted. I do know that whoever is in charge of handing out whatever has been decided are the things I need to satisfy my basic needs hasn't really thought about it either. I can't blame them though. All I know for sure is that I have a whole lot of respect and understanding as far as basic needs go, and I'll never look at someone else's needs in a simplistic manner, nor will I take the satisfying of any of my needs for granted.

I hope that all of your basic needs are being met, or getting closer to being met, but just as much I hope maybe you can see how far from basic our basic needs really are, how complex human needs can become, and that you'll remember that, and as you do, maybe you can be the one to help a fellow human being have their basic needs met. In doing so you may find your own basic needs being satisfied.

D. Diaz



Heroes

“My Hero”-By: Anthony Kershaw

When there’s a gun waving around three inches from your face, I suppose the last thing you should be thinking about is who your personal hero is. Maybe some people think about being heroes themselves in such circumstances, but not me. I’m a coward, and I’m pretty certain I’m about to die a coward’s death.

In any event, I’m staring at the gun’s twitching barrel and all I can think about – aside from my imminent death – is how the guy threatening my life is my personal hero. I suppose there are worse ways to die, right? I mean, I could be in some dark, dark alley surrounded by mange-infested rats and fetid dumpsters and puddles of stale urine while some rabid homeless crack addict robs me for the twenty-seven bucks in my wallet then shoots me point-blank between the eyes just so there won’t be any witnesses. Instead, I’m in a nice clean, air-conditioned bank lobby surrounded by mahogany desks, leafy potted plants, and smartly-dressed tellers with little bowls of lollipops to hand out to the kids. Kids... I guess it’s a good thing there are no kids here. This could be pretty traumatic for a kid. Fortunately, I stopped being a kid about a month ago, when I turned eighteen. Eighteen is pretty young, I suppose, but still older than a lot of the gunmen. But anyway, it’s no sweat. I mean, if I have to die sometime, why not now? Why not at the hands of the greatest gang of young criminal masterminds ever, Blackie Baker’s Bandits? These guys have knocked over twenty-two banks (not including this one) and left a trail of more than a hundred bodies in their wake. Now Blackie himself is waving his high-powered AK in my face. It’s better to burn out than fade away, right? Well, what better way to burn out than at the hands of the most powerful and infamous criminal mastermind since Al Capone?

There are at least fifteen or twenty Bandits, all of them heavily armed, stuffing cash into bags and generally intimidating all of the cringing bank customers, but as he barks out orders and directs the controlled chaos, it is Blackie himself who guards me. I know it’s him because he is the only one of the robbers not wearing a mask, so I can see his long jet-black hair pulled into a tight ponytail, and the all-black contact lenses that are his trademark. Talk about style! And if I have to die anyway, why not die in style, right?

I know, all of this fearless talk about death doesn’t make me sound like much of a coward, right? Well, did I mention why I’m here at the bank to begin with? I’m here because I’m a coward. I came to close out my savings account. I was going to take the money, put it into a brown paper grocery sack, leave the brown paper grocery sack on a bench in the park for anyone who wanted it, then go find a quiet spot where I could put the barrel of my old man’s .45 in my mouth and pull the trigger. Yeah, I’m a coward alright. I’m scared of death, I’m just more scared of life. Blackie’s Bandits showing up at this bank at this moment is the one and only example of fate smiling on me in the last eighteen years. At least, as one of Blackie’s victims, I’ll be remembered. There are dozens, maybe even hundreds of websites about Blackie, and by tomorrow morning my name and picture will be on every one of them.

For about half a microsecond, when the Bandits first rushed in, blowing holes in the ceiling and screaming for everyone to get down on their knees, I considered reaching

into my gym bag, pulling out the .45, and blasting Blackie into oblivion. That would surely make me just as famous as he is. But, Blackie is my hero – he’s fearless, cunning, smart, and at once worshipped and reviled; he’s everything I’ve always wanted to be – and I could never kill him. So instead, I’m waiting for him to kill me.

I decided to talk. If I’m running my mouth, he’ll be more likely to blow my brains out.

“Blackie,” I say, “you’re the best!”

“Shut up!”

I feel something warm and wet rolling down my leg and realize that I’ve just pissed my pants. I told you I was a coward. See? Even though I want to die, when I’m staring death in the face, I pee on myself like a three-year-old.

“I just wanted to tell you, you’re my hero”

That’s when my plan backfires. Instead of shooting me, Blackie calls out to his Bandits. “Time’s up, boys! Get Outta here! Go! Go!”

As the Bandits rush past carrying their bulging bags, and Blackie turns to go, I realize I’m not going to die and I only have one choice. I reach into my gym bag and pull out the .45.

“You’re the best, Blackie!” I cry, pointing the gun at his chest, but never even taking off the safety.

There is an ear-splitting roar and a blinding flash from my hero’s weapon and...

“What is a Hero By: Joe Alvin Parish

A HERO is someone that I have the utmost respect for. A “HERO”, to me, is someone who is brave, and courageous. A “HERO”, is someone that I can look up to, and emulate like my brother, “Freeman Parish”, for instance. I admire him and look up to him. I am forty seven and he is fifty seven years of age. He is my big brother. My mother, Katie Lee Wafer, AKA Beatrice. She birthed twenty one kids altogether. Ten of her siblings’ lives were lost in a house fire. My brother – Freeman was a hero to me that particular day. Freeman ran back into the burning house in an attempt to rescue anyone he could. He saved one life. He has burns all over his body because of the fire. He is my hero because of the bravery he showed.

I’m sure that you would agree with me, that he is a very courageous man, who is worthy to be praised and worshipped. My hero has a good heart too. Even though he is physically blind and cannot see. I really can’t say what for sure affected his vision. Maybe it was the fire. I’ll ask him the next time that I see him. OK, now back to the part where I said that he has a good heart.

My brother, my hero is also soft-spoken. He’s gentle; he’s mild, not easily angered, quick to forgive. His heart of compassion causes him to think the best of everyone. He is very generous to a fault. At least, he has never let me down. My hero would give you the shirt off his back. Even his last little bit of whatever he’s got. Being without sight does not phase him. He is content no matter the circumstances. Here I stand amazed. My hero has all the qualities and virtues that I am striving to achieve in my own life. Can you relate to what I’ve shared with you so far? Are you getting an understanding? Freeman Parish is my hero because I find it hard to believe that there are such people out there in this sin-filled world. People such as him. At this day and age, sin is having its way. Many hearts have grown cold, including mine.

We stress, we worry, we indulge in sin, and disregard the consequences. Knowing the right way to live, and knowing that we will have to live with the choices that we choose. It's like our inherent nature tends to lean toward making bad choices. We always end up regretting making that bad choice, but however that is our sole responsibility.

We always are longing to do better but somehow the very next opportunity we get to right the wrong, we find ourselves unable to do so. Can anyone sensible tell me, what is our dilemma? Who can save us from ourselves, who can help us do the right thing? Where do we find the inspiration we need to face the man in the mirror? I believe that "heroes" inspire us, and cause us to stop and do a self-inventory. In my "HERO", I can't find fault. I truly am, my own worst enemy. I continue to remain stagnant with no spiritual growth. I keep making positive resolutions, but when the rubber meets the road, I find that self-will is not enough. I am in need of a power greater than I, to make any long-lasting changes. You may be asking yourself what does any of this have to do with heroes? And my response is – I'll leave that up to you to figure out. Heroes march to a different drum-beat.

Spirit of Heroes" By: Daniel H Harris #622851

Today's society reveres anyone that gains riches without ever having questioned the cost incurred. We pay fortunes to people of beauty and great salaries to athletes for doing what they love without holding them accountable when they refuse to be good role models for the kids that worship them.

True wealth is stored in the heart and no beauty shines so bright as that found in the spirit.

Heroes are formed by sacrifice. The fallen soldier that gives his life to defend his homeland. Teachers that live on meager salaries while trying to educate unruly children. Men and women that donate their time to help those less fortunate than themselves. All give more than they ever hope to recoup in material wealth.

These are our heroes. They don't see themselves as special. Their lives are spent wishing they could do more and thinking themselves blessed to live a life of service to others. They are simple, common people of uncommon spirit and with a wealth of love in their hearts. They are heroes everyone. More so because they don't see themselves that way.

By: Margaret Ryan

Heroes. We all have someone we look up to, someone who we aspire to be. For many, it's our older family members, the one who seems to have it all together. My hero as a child was my brother James. He was older and wiser, he was my brother. Looking back, I realize I never knew my brother. I placed high alliance because of how I perceived him to be. He was never a hero, he was a zero, but I aspired to be like him. I was "bad", I was cool. I was hip. I tried so hard to fit in and to be accepted by the older crowd. Baby sisters are not wanted to be kept around. My life has been a lot of rejections. A lot of trying to fit in. Now, in my older days, I realize my hero is me. I inspire me to be... I love and respect me enough to be who I desire to be.

The hero lies in me.

J. Dycks



Pretending

By: John Wilson

We have a saying in Texas prisons: "Be all you can be." We use it to describe the person who claims to have seen it all, done it all, and had it all. They claimed to have owned items, like cars, that cost as much as some Third World countries. They claim to be members of elite societies like the Masons, or even the Illuminati. These pretenders claim to know more about even the most specialized fields such as law or religion.

In contrast to these pretenders, I see myself as grounded and real. I don't try to contest their claims, for only a fool pits himself against the word of a fool. I humbly admit that I don't know everything, but when I do speak, you can be sure that I can back up what I say. I've spent the last ten years studying the things that interest me, so I can show where I got my knowledge. I'm smart enough to know my opinion isn't fact.

But I hope in vain that the pretending will stop. People will fool themselves into believing what they want to believe, even their own lies. Prison is a fantasy-land filled with escapism, one-upmanship, and story-telling. Some of the stories are entertaining and some are downright ignorant. I just keep my head down and let them pretend to be all they can be.

Pretending! By: Robert L. Hambrick

Such a vital part of growing up. Playing make-believe as small children is a very important part of development. Practicing the use of the imagination helps the mind to create the ability for the skill of problem solving later in life. It allows the child to create their own concepts of situations available to them, and becomes an exercise of how to cope with what they have conjured within their own mind. Thus, they are faced with choices, and must decide then how to continue the fantasy. Many times their choice is a wrong one, and the child is then faced with calculating a correction. This gives them practice at trial and error learning, and higher cognitive function. It also kills a lot of time, and is just plain fun.

If you can hide and watch as a child is playing pretend, you will discover how very sophisticated a child's mind really is. Although they lack understanding, and their logical reasoning is faulty, these are due to simply lack of experience. Yet the scenarios they create in their play are quite impressive. Most parents will tell you that children are indeed smarter than we give them credit for. As I watched my own children growing up, it also gave me an insight as to how they perceived the way we (the parents) were raising them. When my daughter picked her doll up and screamed in her face for some supposed disobedience—I knew whose behavior she was mocking. My wife was a screamer. I cannot tell you how many times I had told her over the years, "If the kid does something wrong, either spank that butt or sit them down and explain what was wrong and why, whichever is most appropriate. BUT DON'T SCREAM AT THEM!" Of course, my wife paid little attention to me. Guess I should have spanked her butt.

When I was a kid back in the 50s and 60s, pretending was very important because we didn't have many toys. Sticks were our rifles and pistols for playing army or cowboys and Indians. A broom was our trusty steed. We would fling the tops of Crisco cans back and forth years before Frisbee was invented. A blanket over a few chairs became a fort. A long line of oleander bushes which grew close together became our Amazon as we'd crawl through the center. Breakfast cereal boxes sometimes had cut-out patterns of cowboys or soldiers or spacemen—these were our action figures, and we'd play outside for hours perfectly happy. It is sad that today's kids hardly ever get told to "go outside and play." They have been saturated with TV and video games, numbing their minds and ruining their health. Today's children have a marked lack of imagination and creativity. The syndrome A.D.H.D. is a directly caused problem from TV, video games, and an instantly gratification culture. Kids are only learning to react, instead of direct acting. And it will not be long until society starts to realize the damage to culture this is producing.

Sadly, there is another side of pretending which is dark. It's when adults use pretending to avoid responsibility. When they use imagination to lie and deceive. When they deny reality and delude themselves that everything is fine when there really are problems that need to be maturely addressed. But, some people never grow up.

Sadder still, is my situation. I use pretend everyday, abusively. I am constantly creating worlds of pretend for myself. I've been in prison over 21 years and I know that I will never live long enough to make parole. So I have resigned myself to the fact that this non-life in a cage is the only life I will ever have. I have lived through all the changes the prison system has undergone, and the stress is overwhelming. I am too chicken to end it all...so the only way I have found to cope is by drowning myself in books, and spending hours upon hours in day-dreaming. I fantasize about all kinds of things (e.g. What if I had married Esther instead of Lisa? What if I'd stayed in the Air Force?) I might spend a whole week, every waking hour, imagining every detail of a life I would have as a rock star or a successful business man. I lose myself to these musings every day. And I know it's unhealthy, but it's all I've got. I have no one in the world; my family is all gone; my children have all grown and gone about their lives; I get no visits or letters. So pretend is all I have.

A man can go to prison 3, 4, 5 years or so, perhaps learn his lesson, change his ways, get out and put together some kind of life. Or, he can go back to what he was doing before and end up back in prison. But after 15-20 years of incarceration, there is no denying that there are mental health issues, no matter how strong-minded a fellow is. Of course, the fellow does not think anything is wrong with him. He believes that once he gets out, he'll be able to deal with whatever comes up. BUT HE IS WRONG. That many years in prison cannot help but affect mental and emotional levels of stability. And sadly, the prison system does not provide any real, meaningful adjustment programs either pre- or post-release. Oh, they have their little BS programs like Changes and Project Rio; but these are useless scams just to get the Fed dollars saying they have rehabilitation projects. It's a joke—no, it's a shame. Prisons psych counselors all seem to be psych patients themselves. I've got a degree in Behavior Science myself—and ended up counseling my counselor.

The fact is, being locked up too long takes one out of normal society where he's missing the natural growth and changes of the real world. He is forced into a violent, abusive, incredibly stressful environment 24/7/365 x however many. It affects emotions and mental health silently. I myself know I am slipping. I feel it. I catch myself lately having utterly ridiculous thoughts, yet I'm at least still sane enough to realize it for what it is. (So far)

So, I pretend. Constantly! It is my refuge from the madness until my own madness makes nothing matter anymore. A slow insanity.

Cervantes wrote in Don Quixote, "I shall truly go mad...and being mad, suffer no more."

I can hardly wait!

Martin Rivers



The Pretender By: Jackey R. Sollars

First call of the day comes at around two-thirty or three. Sleepy eyed and ever aware of fate's cruel joke, I roll out of the bunk, dress hastily, ignoring to tie the laces on my brogans. Grabbing my dirty clothes, I hurry down the stairwell, zigzag through the dayroom to the door. Along the way, I pass several inmates but they hold their tongues. My expression says it all. I'm not a morning person even though the body sets habitually to the routine

of twenty-one years. There are no bright shining salutations; the stony expression replicates my posture. A posture set thousands of times with the chipper attitude of society's rescued. The whole time I stand in line for clean clothes, people, bosses and inmates, avoid eye contact or talk. God help the loser-bastard that issues me some screwed-up clothes. Fifteen minutes later, I stow the clothes on a bunk rail and stand pondering the idea of going back to sleep.

It is a never ending routine that results in either crashing back out or staying up, mixing a cup of gun powder coffee and write an entry in my journal. I choose the coffee and journaling. It is in the journal that I pretend to have a friend to talk to. The conversation often reflects the stress of my psyche. But like a true friend, I can write what I feel and my friend doesn't judge. Sometimes, my friend gives me reason or logic, reinvigorating my right to dream. In better spirits, I down the coffee then head down to the dayroom. It's near three-thirty. Before walking out of my cubicle, I don the mask of experience. Once again, I am the hate filled worthless unpredictable straight-talking bastard.

It is a hostile environment but the mask empowers me to be a strong actor. In the dayroom, the faces glance at me but quickly turn away. I take a seat on a bench under a fan. I even do this in the winter where the temperatures are in the forties. I turn the big fan on, look around, challenging anyone to say just one word. My inner script is so well engrained that I could sell Satan a hot bath. Chow out the door, inmates amble out in low toned conversation. I walk alone, silently inattentive to everything while being totally aware of all things. Impossible? No! It's easy to pay little attention to the world but be aware.

In the chow hall, an old convict who knows me doubles up on the servings of oatmeal or grits. Usually somebody will say something to me, someone who's built a repertoire with me over the years. The talk is limited. My voice radiates a deep rooted anger. It's just part of the game. If you plan on winning an Emmy you got to put your whole heart into the part. Life is just a never ending drama in which we are taught to pretend in various ways in response to the scene we find ourselves. Through the years, I've come to learn every act a person can try to sell. The food is tasteless and unfulfilling, I toss the tray in the skulley and march out as if I'm a soldier headed to war, and I am! I pretend I am in a war, a soldier with discipline and skill. It's a good act that often catches people's attention.

Back in my cubicle, I drop the façade, fix a cup of coffee and sit down. Cranking up the radio, I slap the headphones on and close my eyes. The music plays. For a few minutes I listen like a statue, unmoved. Sometimes a song comes on and the stone of my being melts as I listen. The memory recalling long ago scenes from this movie to which I was born the fucking star. But as the lyrics resound I'm moved, remembering what it was like to be human. In the absence of others I can risk a smile or even a tear depending on the song.

A love song comes on and I pick up the ragged card board picture frame that displays one of five paper

dreams, women, real beauty queens that have fallen prey to a camera wielding fellow who knows the power of unity. Ginnie is my favorite. She favors my ex-wife. I pretend she can talk. We have many good conversations just like my wife and I once did. But I trust Ginnie more because she isn't pretending to like me. She and the other four beauties are like my journal, important, personal friends. Ginnie tries to persuade me to believe in love. It is a game we play; she talks about how some women are real. I pretend to listen; eventually I will silence her preaching with a truth. "Women only pretend to love but the truth is, they only care as long as their necessities are being met or the dicks big enough." Ginnie says I have to believe. I respond by telling her that it is in pretending she is real that becomes real. She smiles; I pretend to feel her sweet lips on mine before walking out.

Before stepping out of the cubicle, I stop, look around and make sure all is in compliance. With a stone cold look, I return to the very real world pretending I am inhuman. A soldier trained to endure pain, ready to lace up and take care of business. And so, I will be the great pretender until I can return to my semi-private six by ten foot world, my friends, my lovers and the imagination that will allow me to pretend I am someone until sleep overpowers me.

Sympathy By: Robert L Hambrick

"What are we supposed to do?""The earth is one great sentient being, a planet saturated through and through with man;A living planet expressing itself falteringly and stuttering;It is not the home of the white race or the black race or the yellow race or the lost blue race, but the Home of man and all men are equal before God." Henry Miller
Dogs! There are Chihuahuas, terriers, boxers, retrievers, St. Bernard's, and so forth. These are not different RACES of dogs. They are just...dogs! Different kinds, different behaviors, different likes and dislikes, different attitudes. But, nevertheless...dogs! Fish!
You have guppies, eels, catfish, trout, shark...on and on. These are not different RACES of fish. They are...fish! Pee-wee, sparrow, owl, falcon, eagle...These are not different RACES of bird...they're all just birds! So what the hell makes you think there are different races of PEOPLE? Human nature is such that, deep down inside, we are not happy with who we are. We want to be a better person than we currently are. Now this is a good emotion. It is what gives us a sense of morality; it also drives our work ethic. It can also instill empathy, a caring for our fellow man. We usually do not think overtly about this, this - longing to be better - is subconscious, mostly. Unfortunately, this same feeling of inadequacy can stir up negative forms of expression. We, man, become arrogant, selfish, and apathetic. Indeed, this is the MOST common way people deal with that inner feeling of lack-with-the-self. From this then, some people convince themselves (on the outside) that in fact they are superior to others. (But make no mistake; deep inside they are locked in that age-old struggle, even though they don't even realize it.) This is where prejudice and racism come from. In

order to feel better about themselves - because they feel they are not yet "all they can be" - they HAVE TO HAVE someone they can look down on. It is the normal way people react to that inner psychological conflict. It is natural to respond that way, but that does not make it right. The Jerry Springer Show made a fortune by exploiting these human tendencies: "Ooooo, look at the freaks, aren't you glad YOU'RE better than them?" Race is not real, as I've illustrated in my opening. It is a made up thing to cover up for those uncomfortable feelings inside. And governments have a bad habit of exploiting the race concept. It's used to control and justify greedy intentions. And make no mistake, this is a human condition, everyone is susceptible. All through history there are examples. Alexander marched to spread the superiority of the Greeks. Hannibal believed the black race superior when he marched on Rome. In the U.S., the justification for both slavery and the near obliteration of the Indians was that they were "sub-human." They said the same thing about the Irish and Italians when they began to immigrate en masse. The Japanese truly believe (d) they are THE superior race; as did the maniac Germans, in WWII. And still today, you have separatist groups all over the world - white, black, yellow, Jewish, brown, and Arab - that all teach the exact same hate-filled doctrine: that their people alone, (for whatever reason) are superior to all others. But they are wrong. No one is better than anyone else strictly based on their color of skin or place of birth. Let me put it this way: THERE IS ONLY ONE TRUE SUPERIOR RACE (You prejudiced bastards)
THE HUMAN RACE!

Once you come to accept that, life will become easier Now, the only way to get over those feelings of self-loathing is to stop thinking of yourself so much, and find a way to do as much possible good as you can - for others. Yes, we've all heard it over and over again, and I'm not here to preach at you. But the fact is, until you get your heart right with God; your life will always be screwed up. Plain and simple as that.

It's not really that hard folks. Some organized religions tend to make it hard by adding their own rules and restrictions, (e.g., don't eat that, pray this way, bow seven times, etc., etc.) But all Christ ever asked us to do is two things: 1. Recognize that God IS, and give Him the reverence that's due; 2. Love your fellow man. THAT'S IT FOLKS! That is all that's required to practicing true religion. All those added-on rituals are fine if they help your worship, but NOT demanded.

So, what are we supposed to do? Love each other - everybody! Once you start caring for others...guess what? You are actually feeding your own spirit at the same time. You no longer have those belittling feelings, because you realize you are a child of God - thus worthy; and as you serve others, you are aware that you are obeying the Lord's commands. The only way to find happiness in this life is to give yourself away to others. And that does not mean just your own (kind). Everybody is your (kind). Damn, why is this so hard to understand? Once you realize this truth, in yourself, you can then realize that everyone else in

the world had those exact same emotions which you had. That's where sympathy comes in! Instead of wondering why someone acts the hateful way they do, you can now say, "Poor soul is still struggling inside, he hasn't learned the truth yet." Then, perhaps by your loving-kindness, you can lead them to the light. Fact: Nobody - period - is better than you;

And you sure ain't any better than anyone else. Make this real in your own life - then spread the word. Dogs - Fish - Birds - People! Live it.

Strong Sympathy-Daniel H. Harris

Many empathic emotions are rare in prison. It's human nature to crave what is hardest to come by and prisoners are no different. But it seems they are more likely to want from others what they are least willing to give. Sympathy, compassion and love are all hard to find in prison. To give them is seen as a weakness and prisoners try to avoid any such signs while craving the soft touch of sympathy, a manly hug of compassion or a loving kiss. The hard truth is that you have to give to receive. Until you can ache for another's pain, cry for another's loss, or feel affection without lust you are lost.

A hardened heart is a heavy burden. It is not strong for it is brittle and easily broken. It takes a strong man to ignore the opinions of his peers and offer comfort to a brother to ease the ache in his heart.

I can only hope to one day be so strong that I can give a shoulder to lean on not only to my friends and stranger, but to my enemies.

Picture Writing Project

It is commonly said that a picture is worth a thousand words. See if the following pictures call a story up from inside you. If you send us a story based on any of these pictures you will receive the full compilation of all the writing done for the topic and if we can afford it we will send you a back issue of the Sun Magazine with each compilation for your reading pleasure. I encourage all of you who like to get mail, and also read the thoughts of other prisoners to submit a story on at least one of the following pictures. In this newsletter I can only print a story or two from each picture. If you enjoy these think about the thrill of receiving a complete packet. New pictures with the submission due date are followed by some select writings from the last cycle. There is no right or wrong way to do this project, just open yourself to the words you have to share.



Due 8/1/11



Due 11/1/11



Due 9/1/11



Due 12/1/11



Due 10/1/11



Due 1/1/12

Previous Pictures and Selected Stories

Dave Gordon

The Aries IV was the brainchild of the same engineer who had developed the Apollo rockets of the 1960's. "Professor Pete", as the other NASA engineers called him, was NASA's resident rocket guru whose 1959 college thesis on staged rockets won him the attention of the space administration and the attention of the American people.

At 89 years of age, Professor Pete was seen by the other engineers as being more of an institution than a



serious modern day engineer. Pete found himself consistently being left out of the higher level think-tanks

where the younger engineers competed and argued out theories that Pete himself had invented. Pete felt forgotten and useless.

Gaining the younger generation's professional respect proved to be an impossible task. It wasn't until the modern day shuttle system was scrapped and a new program, that employed an upgraded Apollo-style delivery vehicle, was announced that Professor Pete was once again the most sought after engineer at NASA.

Pete forced himself to work long hours in order to keep up with the younger engineers. With his old body struggling to keep up with his impetuous young explorer mind, Pete soon found himself suffering from physical exhaustion. It was hard for Pete to accept the order to take a leave from the program.

In every man's life you will find a monument that is crafted by the man's character. Pete felt that the Aries IV was his monumental achievement. Its completion required him to ignore his Superior's orders and sneak back into the office to oversee his designed monument. His decision left him hospitalized just weeks before the scheduled launch.

The only job that NASA left to Pete was the selection of the six astronauts who would fly his ship. It was an honorary function that left everyone surprised when Pete assembled six of the youngest astronauts of the space program.

After Pete's selection, it seemed as though the world had forgotten him. All eyes were turned to the titanic rocket and the six brave young souls who were to fly it into the nation's history books. Pete watched the news reports as the countdown to launch drew near. He realized that this launch would be the end of his reign as the younger engineers would take the credit for all that he had lived for. Something inside of him changed upon this realization. He turned off the T.V. and lay in bed with his eyes closed. Drifting back into his early years as a boy in Iowa, he remembered then that space travel was only possible in "Buck Rogers" comic books. Pete's boyhood dreams saw space travel as a challenge that would guide his life from that cornfield in Iowa to the head of the nation's space program. It was from that distant past where he once again heard the words he spoke so long ago, words that laid the foundation of Pete's monumental achievement, "One day, I will fly into space." Pete opened his eyes and gathered his clothes. He felt an inner strength as he stood waiting for the elevator door to open. The launch was only two hours away.

Pete's celebrity status gave him carte Blanche access through every NASA security check point. Upon his arrival at the Kennedy Space center, he was greeted by a room full of engineers and scientists who gave him a standing ovation. Not one of these men and women noticed when Pete typed a few short commands into one of the mainframe control panels. Words that would change the course of the Aries IV and his own personal life.

Sabotage is a word with two sides. Its definition requires a person to commit to a way of thought of action that runs contrary to someone else's overall expectations. It is a change of direction in an unexpected manner.

The countdown continued as Pete stood watching with his cadre of engineers. At T minus 9, the automated countdown mysteriously stopped.

There appeared to be no explanation for the delay. Every engineer scrambled to their respective consoles in effort to discover what had gone wrong. After four hours of searching, the launch window was lost. A disembodied voice spoke out through hundreds of loud speakers, "The launch has been scrubbed."

A press conference was soon given by the six young astronauts. Without a clue as to what had gone wrong, the reporters asked if the problem could have been caused by human error. After all, the Aries IV was heralded

as the first rocket that could fly its mission automatically without any human interference. The young astronauts had little to say in response to this.

The press conference was interrupted by that same disembodied voice from the intercom system, "The countdown has resumed starting at T minus 20 minutes and counting..."

As the large digital display clicked down to 19:59, 19:58, 19:57, the six astronauts turned to run back to their ship. NASA security officers ushered out the reporters and once again, the engineers in the control center went to work trying to stop this apparent automatic launch.

At T minus 5 minutes and counting, the mission commander was informed that the launch could not be aborted. The engineers remained confident that even with an unmanned vehicle, the mission would still be a success. They recommended that the sequence be allowed to continue.

The mission commander knew that a higher security issue was at stake. The payload of each NASA mission is always a top secret mystery. Reluctantly, he made the call to Washington. Their reply was to activate the self-destruct sequence so that the ship could be destroyed over the Atlantic Ocean. Washington gave no further explanation for this decision.

As the mission commander relayed the executive order, a familiar voice echoed over the intercom system, "Aries IV to ground control, this here's Pete! Can you hear me?" The mission commander grabbed the com-link, "Pete, where are you?"

Why captain, I'm in the driver's seat of the biggest, baddest space ship that God's green earth has ever seen!"

The mission commander muttered to his engineers, "Oh my god, he's gone insane." Pressing the com-link button, "Pete, we have been ordered to self-destruct the ship at plus 25 miles- do you read me? Plus 25 miles."

Pete thought for a moment as he accessed the ship's automatic self-destruct program. At the touch of a few buttons, the program was disabled. "Captain, I'm banking on you not pressing that button on me. You know that I can handle this trip- besides, after all I have done for NASA, they owe me a ride!"

The digital countdown registered T minus three minutes and counting.

"Pete, this isn't my call. If it were up to me I'd let you fly the damned ship to the moon. But this order is directly from Washington, D.C., I've been ordered to destroy the ship even with you in it."

Anger welled up in Pete's breast as he realized that his ship was carrying some other top secret piece of

Washington crap. He hated the idea of all his work being used for these shady purposes. He yelled back into the com-link, "Then press the damned button and destroy the damned ship!"

"What the hell has gotten into you? Are you wanting to die?" a long pause crackled on the intercom as all eyes watched the countdown continue.

Pete laughed into the com-link. "Didn't any of those bright young engineers wonder why the countdown stopped at T minus 9?" The commander looked around the room at dozens of empty faces. "No, Pete. No one did."

"Captain, no one did because not one of them cared to know. Did you know that not one single person from NASA inquired into how I was doing in that god-forsaken hospital?"

"We all thought that you were just suffering from exhaustion."

Pete laughed, "I'm 89 years old! Didn't any of you rocket scientists stop to think that...Never mind. Exhaustion is only a symptom, just like apathy is a symptom of selfishness. I joined the space program in order to bring space travel into a reality for everyone. But NASA's selfishness sabotaged my life's ambition. Then, after giving everything I had to the program, I collapsed and was told that I only had nine weeks at most to live. Get it? T minus 9?"

The countdown registered T minus 15 seconds and counting.

"So blow me up you selfish son of a bitch! Blow up the dream of every red-blooded American boy and girl. Isn't that what you are being paid for?"

A metallic clattering shook that super-structure. A solid thump resonated as the main engine ignited, imperceptibly lifting the massive Aries IV off of its launch pad. The great noise of the powerful engine increased as Pete felt himself being pulled down into his seat from the acceleration of the ship. Looking out a portal window he could see layers of clouds whipping by at an incredible rate of speed.

Back at the control center, the mission commander took a key from around his neck. He inserted it into a console that gave him access to the red self-destruct button. He spoke without emotion to a young tracking officer, "How far out is he?"

The Air Force lieutenant answered, "24 miles up, 14 miles out." He added, "Sir, you aren't really going to kill him are you?"

Without blinking the commander repeated, "How far out is he?" His thumb remained poised over the self-destruct button.

"Sir, 17 miles out." Sweat was beading on the

young officer's brow. "I can't believe this shit!"

"How far out now?"

"24 miles...25 miles."

The lieutenant noticed a trembling in the commander's thumb. "Sir, the ship is now at 31 miles and accelerating at 41 miles up." The commander yanked his thumb away from the panel. Slamming his fist down onto the com-link, "Goddamn it Pete, you win, you've got your damned mission."

High above the Atlantic Ocean a very old man became a boy again. Pete radioed back, "Thank you, Captain." He then stretched out into the blackness of space and as a million never before seen stars came into view, the rocket shuddered and in the blink of an eye the ship disintegrated.

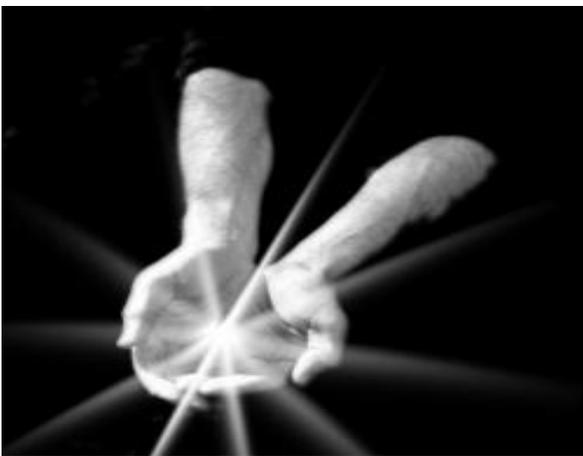
Back in Washington D.C., in a dark hidden room under the Pentagon a group of officers gathered around another console. A man in a black suit turned a key that hid another red button that controlled a back-up self-destruct program.

There were no news about Pete's death in the "accidental destruction" of the Aries IV. The whole incident was seen as a terrible tragedy that promised to set back the American space program a number of years.

With billions of tax dollars spent in order to make an American dream come true, only one American was able to live it- and for this, he paid for the privilege with his life.

It was said that on the night of the Aries IV explosion, a small boy who was lying outside his village hut in Africa saw a cluster of bright falling stars high up in the night sky. The display sparked to life a dream within this child's mind that prompted him to say, "One day, I will fly into space."

And in that young boy's heart, Pete's monument was complete



Sparkles In Hand"By: Anthony J. Machicote

"I want you to grab one of those stars out of the

sky and hand me it's twinkle," Janice tells me as we lie atop the hood of my white Ford Probe, parked along the edge of the bay on our one year anniversary. We are alone, watching stars, sipping beers and by her adorable slur I can tell one too many is already in her. "One sparkly just like that one!" She says, pointing to what is probably Venus or a distant sun due to its glitter. "I would but it'd never fit on this bony finger of yours!" I tell her holding her left hand in my right running my thumb across the inside of her ring finger. She giggles that giggle which always causes my heart to swell like balloons on one of those helium canister thingies. She doesn't say more but her sigh speaks bundles. Though I don't look at her I can feel her glistening jade eyes like lasers on the side of my face.

One year with her has been Elysium. That's all I can call it; paradise! Nothing else illustrates it! At 26, I know what love is but love like this was a fairy tale that folks told you to not put faith in finding. But I've always shunned folks who say, "Don't believe..." or "I tried and failed so..." because to me, that is more personal than all inclusive. When I met Janice, it was automatic! Her laugh like candy her smile a melting agent to my body. Her sweetness and allure captivating. Her patience and innocence...I was in love after our first date. Can't say why I'm so lucky but a blessing is she to my world and I never dare pretend she's anything less. My angel, "Angie's angel" I often call her when we sit alone talking.

So we are tonight. "Let's stop the beers, love," I say to her. She drinks rarely, but after our anniversary date of dinner at a restaurant which we'll probably never afford to eat at again and our slow walk along the pier where we witnessed the Gulf swallow the sun we decided to indulge in the High Life. "I'm done," she says, continuing, "I hit my limit with this one." Around us, the air is tepid; the bay water smells heavy yet crisp. I sit up and slide off the hood. "Bottle." "Thank you darling," She replies in her Carolina drawl, so rich and syrupy. Janice is 23, and the more mature one by miles though we are both extremely playful. She left Kitty Hawk North Carolina at 19 for the big city of good ole Spring Hill ,Florida to do community college. She finished and never left for large expanses. But to her, 30,000 compared to 3,000 is like leaving Buffalo for Brooklyn. So she says though neither of us has ever been to either place. I drop the bottles into a steel grated garbage can near a few covered picnic tables and walk back towards the car.

As I near the car again, she's sitting up, her trim, blue jeaned legs in a giant 4. Janice reaches her arms for me beckoning with a mischievous, so heavenly smile dynamic in the silver spotlight from the moon above. "Nope!" I tell her, pausing just a yard beyond her reach, her face scrunches up so the freckles over her nose partially disappear in the folds. "Come!" she states, more forcefully but I shake my head. Her hands fall to the hood and she uses them to push herself off the Probe's hood. Arms extended she walks my way. I back up eluding her. Her red and orange-ish hair is flowing like a gorgeous flame caressed by a sudden breeze and dances in her wake. I only walk backwards a dozen or so steps until blacktop is

beneath my shoes. Janice stops near me, but I stop and lower to a single knee. In front of me, she pauses; a quizzical expression falls over her delicately featured face, like curtains falling at the end of a play. "Yeah right!" She exclaims after a second. Then excited she squeals, "Yeah right! Yea right! Yeah right! YEAH RIGHT!"

Kneeling before her, I recall the second she first spoke to me. "That's a cute hat!" She told me. I see the first time she laughed at my jokes and the first time she laughed at my missteps. I see our first date, first kiss, first love making scene. I see the many dinners shared, the nights spent talking about our pasts. I see our dreams and how they fit perfectly into each other like us.

I see her standing before me, tears spilling from her cheeks as I go into my right pocket. I pull out the box, open it, and hold it in both my hands. For a single instance, the moon's beams ricochets off the diamond and its glint reminds me of the stars Janice gasps then shrieks. "You did it; you stole me a star's twinkle!" I take her right hand. "It's been a year today and--" "Yes! Yes! YES!" She interrupts excitedly. "Lady, let me get my spill out, 'kay?" I tell her, but it doesn't matter! All I've waited for was that one word to escape her cherry lips. I slip the ring on her hand, and kiss her long deep and true. When we part I ask her, "Janice Marie Toles, Will you marry me?" "Yes, Angel Travis Dimes, definitely!" "Like it?" "It's perfect!" She tells me and we stand there holding each other listening to the symphony of the bay, our minds and hearts lost in the love we hold for each other.



Imperfect Awe By: Robert C. Fuentes

A camel was born in the desert. This type of event would have been no more uncommon than a drop of water falling during a spring rain, had the camel not been missing its left front leg. Such a birth normally rendered any animal of the sand not suitable for survival and useless.

The herd the camel was born into was one of many a single powerful man owned. After being informed of the birth of the disfigured creature, the owner ordered the herd's caretaker to have it destroyed. Immediately, the caretaker sent several of the workers to accomplish the task. The men tried to do as they had been requested, but each time they struggled to capture the animal, the mother would beat them back.

The men were well practiced at handling enraged camels that spit and snapped at them. However, no matter how hard they tried to separate the newborn camel from its mother, they could not. After several hours of getting nowhere, they went back and told the caretaker of their difficulties and inability to accomplish the task. The caretaker decided to wait out the animals, and allow nature to take its course upon the crippled camel.

Over the first week of its life, the young camel was unable to stand on its own. Its mother was forced to lean herself low to the ground, in order to allow the weak quadruped to suckle. The nourishment aided the animal in its fight and struggle for life, until it was able to collect its full determination to the point it was capable of balancing itself enough to rise, and attain an awkward tripod stance.

The owner was advised that the men charged with destroying the camel were yet unsuccessful in doing so. He summoned for the caretaker to come speak with him. Arriving, the caretaker was asked why he was unable to have the camel destroyed.

The caretaker explained to the owner that his men had tried to do so, but that the mother would not let them get near the other camel. He went on to say that in all his years, he had never seen a camel fight so hard. The mother had injured four of his best men; three with deep bites and bruises, and the fourth with a broken foot, where he had been stepped on by the camel.

Understanding the caretaker's reasoning, the owner agreed with the other's decision to wait out the animals. The owner told the caretaker to advise him when they had destroyed the camel. After agreeing to do so, the caretaker left.

Days passed into weeks. The weeks turned into months, before the owner thought of the camel again. Still not having been advised that the animal had yet been destroyed, he again summoned for the caretaker, and asked of the camel.

The caretaker formed his words carefully, as he explained that the animal was still alive. Not only was it alive, but also thriving. The problem was that not only had the mother remained just as vigilant over her offspring, but that the growing camel itself had been contributing greatly in thwarting all efforts to capture and destroy it.

The owner grew more curious about the animal. Not only had he raised camels and been a cameleer himself, but he had an opportunity to be a camel trader before becoming an owner. He told the caretaker that with all his experience with camels, he had never run across this type of situation before. He knew that it was all too easy for fully healthy animals to die in the hot arid desert sun; yet this lowly camel continued to persevere in its defiance of what should have been its certain death. He decided to accompany the caretaker back to the herd, and see the camel for himself.

As they arrived to where the herd was kept, the owner expected to see an animal with more nerve than muscle beneath the hair that covered it. Looking out over the herd of animals, he saw some of them sitting with legs folded beneath them, some standing, and others

meandering about. He searched for the camel with three legs, but was unable to determine which one it was. He had to ask the caretaker to point it out.

Directing the owner's attention towards two camels in the distance, the caretaker told him they were the ones he had spoken of. Each rested next to one another on the ground, the mother being the larger of the two. The owner commented that both animals appeared to be fine.

The caretaker sent two of his men out towards the camels, one with a rope and the other carrying a short stick in his hand. As the men neared them, the animals stood up quickly. One in normal pose, the smaller camel with its two back legs slightly splayed apart, and the single front right leg straight and centered as possible, like a sturdy trunk.

The camels moved closer together, each keeping their wary eyes on the two approaching men. Stopping several feet away from the animals, the man with the rope swung its looped end over his head. The other man walked closer, jabbing his stick at the young camel. The first man let go of the swinging end of the rope, in an attempt to lasso the mother, who quickly moved its head, easily evading capture.

As the other man jabbed and poked the younger camel, he shouted orders for it to move. Then, having had enough, both camels emitted large guttural moans before charging at the two men.

Dropping the stick and the rope, the two men broke into a zigzag run to escape. The young camel sprinted by moving one back leg forward, then the other. Just as the second leg touched down, it thrust its front leg ahead. As it repeated the process, it gave the appearance of a half-run skip, and moved almost as fast as its mother.

The men yelled excitedly as the camels chased them for approximately twenty yards, biting and snapping at them both the whole way. Assured that the men had no will left to disturb them, the two camels broke off their chase. The owner was impressed by the spirit of the animals, especially the disfigured one, as he laughed at the two fleeing men.

Without hesitation, the owner ordered the caretaker to bring him some dates. Scurrying to the storehouse, he collected a small sack of fruit. Returning, he gave them to the owner.

Carrying the sack of dates in the crook of his left arm, the owner stepped through the herd, until he made it to where the two camels stood. Scooping out several dates from the sack with his right hand, he extended them out to the camels. With opened hand, he balanced them in his palm, as he eased closer. The man spoke gently and soothingly as he offered out the fruit.

The mother camel sniffed the dates first, before eating them. Refilling his palm with several more dates, the owner held them out to the young camel. Cautiously, the camel smelled the fruit, before eating each.

The caretaker and the two workers watched the owner work his spell, in awe, from a safe distance. Within minutes, the owner was petting both animals. After the sack of dates was empty, the owner spent several more minutes stroking the camels and talking to them. Now having

soothed the animals, the owner went back to speak with the caretaker.

"Do you see that camel?" asked the owner, pointing at the three legged animal that was skip walking around with its mother.

"Yes," replied the caretaker.

"I want that camel and its mother to remain together. It can be trained by using a firm caring hand. Can you do that?" asked the owner.

"Well...yes," responded the caretaker, as he scratched his head, wondering what the owner was leading up to.

"Good, you do that. I have another caravan scheduled to go out in three months...that's more than enough time than you should need...we will send them out then," the owner said.

The caretaker was taken aback at what he was being told to do. He began to protest, by saying that the camel could never survive a caravan through the desert on just three legs.

The owner silenced the caretaker, in much the same way that he had the camels, by patting him kindly on the shoulder and calmly saying, "When I was first told about this camel, I did not believe that it would survive. It did. Then I was assured by you that this camel would not live much longer than it already had. It did. Now I see it today, walking, running, still fighting the men off...thriving, as you put it...and it is certainly full of understanding, as it is not a stupid animal.

Seeing and knowing all of this has made me realize that neither you, nor I, nor anyone else can very well tell that animal's full capabilities. So we may as well stop fighting it, and instead, find out what it can do, and utilize that creature to its full potential."

"Aah...you are a wise and kind man for providing that beast with such consideration," complimented the caretaker, donning a large smile.

"No-no, I am merely the kind of man who is wise enough to know when to be prudent," replied the owner, then adding, "I welcome any camel that is willing to live in order to work itself to death for me, for free. If I were a truly kind man, I would accept people to work for me also who had their own shortcomings. I do not. So have this camel ready to go as I said, or you will be fired." The owner turned and left, without saying another word.

The caretaker was left standing, chewing on the thought of how wrong he had been in his admiration of the owner, as he began to feel worth much less than the three-legged camel.

"Nature Lover"By: Gregory Vance 32628

I'm not crazy about camels. To be fair, I've only met one, but it bit me and that sort of behavior can sour a relationship pretty fast, let me tell you. In fact, I have had enough negative encounters with other species to put a person off the whole animal kingdom.

I think it all began when I was in 6th grade. I always got off the school bus at the end of my block. The house on that corner had three dogs in the yard and on this particular day someone had left the gate open. There were

two shaggy ones and a black German shepherd. I was young and innocent and had never had a reason to fear dogs. Heck, I loved dogs. So the two smaller ones approached me, sniffing and wagging their tails. I petted them and scratched their heads and completely lost track of the big one. Totally unprovoked, it snuck up behind me and bit me on the backside. I yelped and ran all the way home. What a set-up. I bet they all had a good laugh. From then on I got off the bus one stop earlier and skulked through neighbors' yards, a 12 year-old fugitive.

My older sister had a myna bird that lived in a big cage in her window in the front bedroom of our house. His name was Woodstock and he was really cool, talking and whistling all the time. I'd get off the bus - before those dogs ruined it for us - and start whistling an ascending scale as loud as I could and Woodstock would answer with the descending scale. But as much as I loved him, he was a mean little so and so. He would bite and peck your finger if you put it through the bars. I only tried it once.

My sister took a trip somewhere and paid me - not enough, I assure you - to feed and water her bird. You had to put your whole arm into the cage to remove the food and water dishes and Woodstock would attack, I just knew it. So I wound a towel around my arm and donned a gardening glove. Sure enough, he pounced and got his claws stuck in the towel. We were both squawking loudly and my mother came to investigate the racket. She turned into the room, saw me trying to shake the little black demon off, and did an immediate about face. Outta there! Woodstock's wings were clipped so he couldn't fly, but he sure could hop. He hopped right onto my mother's back and she ran screaming down the hall with the bird on her back, flapping and shrieking like a dragon carrying off a damsel. I threw a t-shirt over him and put him back in his cage. I slammed the gate with him clutching the bars, still itching to get at me. He got his food and water through a funnel after that.

Then there was the monkey incident. On a beautiful summer day my friend and I hopped on our bikes and set off on about a 10 block trek over the back streets of our neighborhood. We had saved up some money by returning deposit bottles and doing chores and were going to a convenience store to blow it on cokes and treats. On the last corner before the busy street was a house with a huge, spreading tree in front. We could not believe our eyes; there was monkey living in the tree. Not just a monkey, either, a chimpanzee just like Tarzan's little pal. We gawked for a minute, deciding to stop for a longer look on the return trip. I had a wire basket on the front of my bike so I was carrying our stash in a brown paper bag. We stopped at the edge of the monkey's yard and dismounted. The monkey swung down from the tree and came toward us with that funny bow-legged walk they have and his whole teeth and gums bared. We thought he was smiling at us. He wasn't. He had a thick collar around his neck from which ran a long chain secured to the trunk of the tree. By the time we realized he could reach us it was too late. He wrapped one hand around Ronnie's handle bar and a tug of war ensued. A chimpanzee is a lot stronger than a 12 year-old boy, even two 12 year-old boys. I balanced my bike

against my hip and wrapped my arms around Ronnie's waist but, pull as we might, that monkey wasn't letting go. Then he swung his other arm around and ripped the bag out of my basket. Corn and chips and honey buns rained down and our cokes smashed on the pavement. The monkey let go of Ronnie's bike, sending us sprawling. He stuffed his cheeks with chips, scooped as much of our other goodies as he could carry and scurried back up the tree. Ronnie swore all the way home that he was going to get a big stick and go back and wail on that monkey but I talked him out of it. That monkey would have killed him.

These traumas all occurred during my childhood, but it wasn't any better after I grew up. I was floating in an inner-tube in the intercostals waterway on a lovely warm day. I had a couple of drinks in me and fell asleep with the sun toasting my body and gentle wavelets rocking me. Suddenly I was blasted awake by an explosion and toppled from my inner-tube. A manatee had surfaced right next to me, expelling a bellyful of air. It sounded like a depth charge. I know I know, they are harmless herbivores and endangered, too, but I can only say I felt a real menace coming from this thing.

One vacation I took a trip down to the Keys to a place where you could swim with dolphins. It cost 50 bucks and you had to sit through an hour-long lecture on the proper etiquette for dealing with marine mammals. The speaker claimed that dolphins descended from primates who were unhappy on land and returned to the sea. X-rays of their lateral fins reveal a bone structure remarkably like that of the human hand. So they get jealous of our long arms and politeness requires us to keep them at our sides. Try that while treading water. Oh, and, ha-ha, watch out because they have also been known to show a proclivity for sexual assault on defenseless swimmers. They don't call the males "bulls" for nothing, and they aren't homophobic, if you take my meaning. Ha-ha.

Three dolphins lived in a deep pen of salty, like-warm water. There was also a little Pacific seal that, they said, just showed up one day and stayed. There were 10 swimmers in my group, all wearing dive masks and snorkels.

I floated face down in the tepid water, remembering to keep my repulsive arms at my sides, unable to see two feet in front of me, when a HUGE dolphin swam up in front of me. You know, they have that playful little grin and those friendly eyes. Well, don't be fooled. They're EVIL! I rubbed its side and reached for its dorsal fin hoping for a ride. I guessed it wasn't in the mood because it swam off, but I wasn't too disappointed. I was congratulating myself for the bond I had felt with this beautiful creature when, out of the murk, it came hurtling toward me like a torpedo, jaws gaping. It ripped the mask right off my face. The lecturer's warning about inter-species rape echoed in my mind and it no longer sounded like a joke. I nearly walked on water getting out of there. I sat on the floating deck, dripping and gasping, when the little seal jumped up beside me. He was about as big as a medium size dog; so cute, with that little Fred Sanford beard and those big watery eyes. I reached over to pet him

and he bit me. I should have gone to Vegas.

It doesn't end there. I've been bitten by blue fish in a feeding frenzy, harassed by an overprotective mockingbird, thrown by a neurotic horse on a trail ride, frightened by a morose iguana. It's been terrible for me. Every time I extend the hand of friendship to one of my fellow creatures, it tries to bite off a finger.

This brings me to the camel. I was at the big county fair in Miami with my 7 year-old son and 4 year-old daughter. In a big tent, along with all the 4-H Club cows and sheep and hogs was a pen with tame animals for petting. There were donkeys and goats, a giraffe, a llama, and a camel. I sprung for a couple of packets of seeds and nuts so my kids could feed them. My son was laughing at the greedy goat that poked his head through the fence rail and tickled his palm as it licked up the feed. I picked up my little girl and filled her hand with food. The camel spotted us from across the pen where he'd been hanging out with the llama and headed our way. Was it my fault the giraffe beat him to it? It didn't even have to move - just bent that lo-o-ong neck. It lapped up the feed with, I swear, a foot-long tongue and my daughter squealed with delight. The camel feeling slighted, I suppose, crept up from the side and bit my shoulder. Personally, I will always believe he was going for my carotid artery but of course I can't prove it. And yes it was a pretty old camel and nearly toothless, but that's beside the point. He had violence in his heart.

Since then I've had as little contact as possible with the world's fauna. Whether of the land, sea, or sky, animals just don't like me. I'm not the kind of man to hold a grudge, though. I have forgiven them all, and taken up gardening.



"Gypsy" By: Dave Gordon

Of what practical use was Steven among other men? This was a question that Steven asked himself repeatedly, a question that was sown into his mind by a mother and father whose hellish marriage was held together by Steven's childhood.

In Steven's early years, life was nothing more than an enormous debt he must pay, whose interest was compounding with each passing day. For most children, such a burden would have overborne their ability or will to live. But with Steven, life was seen as a challenge, an adventure, and a race that he must win at all cost. As if life were not already a struggle for him, Steven found himself

living in a small town that was located north of the Arctic Circle.

Steven discovered early on that the best way to prove himself compared to other men was to compete against them in the annual dog sled race. Further south from where Steven lived, a similar race took place whose fame had made the Iditarod and dog sledding a national event. The race that Steven would participate in held no one's attention other than those who competed in it. For the prize that each racer sought was not a trophy or pocketful of change; it was the undying legacy of how they competed and overcame the mountains, the elements, and those who raced against them.

There are things in life that a boy knows he must do to become a man. These tasks are challenges that test the metal of his character. It is the hardness of this metal that proves to those around him where he belongs in their society. Steven understood very little of this, which is a required blindness that prods on the timid and faint of heart into doing acts of greatness.

Steven owned several dogs. His favorite was a husky named Gypsy. Her ice-blue eyes reflected the purity of her Siberian bloodline. She wasn't as strong as her male siblings, but her intelligence caused them to respect her as their leader. Steven also respected Gypsy, but his respect was to be tested in the disaster of the year's race.

There was not a cloud in the sky as the team readied for the start of that ill-fated race. Each team was released at five minute intervals with Steven's team starting in third place. 127 miles of torturous terrain and bitter cold lay ahead of them. What also awaited them was hidden and churning beyond the horizon.

In the South, it's called a blue northern. A line of deep blue churning clouds appear in the distance, and in minutes a blanket of ice-filled clouds close over the sky like a cold blue eyelid in death. Temperatures can drop sixty to seventy degrees within a very short period of time. In the South, the northerns are a curiosity. But up north, where the warmest temperatures are only in the forties, the resultant plunge in temperature is referred to as a deadly blizzard.

Steven saw the deadly line of blue about six miles into the race. He knew what was coming, but since he had not seen either of the two sleds that were ahead of him turn back, neither would Steven. Gypsy stopped the team as she scented the air. Her natural instincts cared nothing for Steven's desire to prove himself. Panting for breath, she looked back at him, questioning the sanity of continuing in the race.

Animals communicate differently than humans. The hawk speaks the language of the mouse, as does the grizzly bear with the rabbit. There exists between all animals a forgotten brotherhood of love called respect. This brotherhood unites all animals in such a way that enables all of them to understand the movements of the earth below them and the unpredictable sky above. The only thing that confuses an animal is the heart of a man. Gypsy understood this as she received Steve's angry command to continue on.

With the dogs pulling hard against their traces, they welcomed the falling temperature by running even harder. Steven's thick coat and oversized gloves were not enough to protect him from the windblown extreme cold. When he decided that he could not go on any further, he pulled on the traces, but the dogs continued to run. They knew that if they stopped, death would overtake them all.

Steve yelled as Gypsy ran harder and harder. Every few steps, Gypsy would lift her head up to see if any shelter could be found. She knew that their running could not continue for much long. She also knew that Steven's life was in danger.

Snow is one of nature's most amazing building materials. As the snow falls, the wind works like a master builder who constructs snowdrifts that can rise as high as a three-story building. Inside these massive structures, the snow acts as an insulator that protects the earth from icy winds.

Gypsy spied a large drift and pulled the team to it. She stopped at its base and began to dig in. The other dogs followed her lead as Steve huddled into a ball on the sled. The digging was easy, and in no time the dogs had burrowed out a cavern the bitter cold winds could not penetrate. Steven untied the dogs, and together they waited out the storm in their dark, icy cave.

The wind had stopped howling in the middle of the night. All of the dogs were asleep except Gypsy. She sat facing the cave's entrance all night, listening to some far-away sound, a sound that disturbed her so much that every few moments she would let out a subdued whimper and glance mournfully back at the sleeping team. Something was terribly wrong, and Gypsy knew of no way to avoid it. She could only sit patiently, hoping that somehow the danger would pass without noticing them.

Steven awoke when he heard the rumble of what he thought was a rescue team. He sat up to see all the dogs were gone. Gypsy remained at the cave's entrance until she saw that Steven was awake. She then took off, running into the direction of the distant rumbling.

Steven was happy that the frozen ordeal was over. He collected his belongings and headed out of the cave. After one or two steps, he was stopped by the bone-chilling cry of two animals locked in mortal combat. The brightness of the snow blinded him, but his ears did not fail him. One of those savage beasts sounded like Gypsy.

Steven dropped all that he was carrying and ran towards the screaming beasts. To his horror, he saw Gypsy covered in blood and attacking a large polar bear. Steven ran back to the cave to retrieve his rifle. It took seven shots to bring the bear down. Gypsy fell to the ground with deep gashes across her face and body.

Doctoring Gypsy kept Steven's mind off their dire situation. In Gypsy's mad dash to find a shelter for the team, she had led them miles off course with the falling snow and ice obscuring the sled's tracks. Being lost so far out in the wilderness, it could take weeks for a search party to find them.

Survival was ensured by the gift of the dead bear. Steven and Gypsy had plenty of meat, and the bear's pelt

serves as a warm bed. Gypsy seemed to be slowly recovering, but Steven, aided with only his youthful immaturity, began to lose hope.

Loneliness is the greatest foe of an immature mind. The dependency of a person who has not yet learned to depend upon himself leads only to continuous thoughts of impending doom.

Steven's mental condition deteriorated quickly. He cursed the snow, the race, himself, and even the rescue workers who, in his mind, couldn't find him fast enough. When he started yelling at Gypsy, she tried to stand up and walk away. Steven's rage led him to kick her. When she didn't fight back, Steven began to beat her mercilessly. Gypsy took the beating without a sound. When the beating finally stopped, Gypsy's ice-blue eyes stared blankly out into the distance. She pulled herself to her feet and limped out of the cave. Steve cursed her because he believed that she too was abandoning him.

About an hour later, Gypsy showed back up dragging with her a large tree-branch. Steven's empty stare kept him from recognizing her gift of firewood. Gypsy limped over to him and lay at his feet. Her warmth brought Steven back up from his depression enough for him to cry. The tears seemed to clear his mind, and when he finished, he built a fire.

That night, Steven's sanity returned to him. The warmth of the fire had lulled him into the best rest he had since before the race began. With Gypsy at his side, the death-grip of loneliness faded away into the night.

Steven awoke to hear voices outside of the cave. He leaped up shouting for their attention. They met outside of the cave in celebration. The rescuers marveled at how Steven was able to not only carve out an ice cave, but also bring down such a large bear.

The flatteries of the rescuers fed that part of Steven that Gypsy never understood. For what purpose would it serve to race off into a deadly blizzard? How does it help when you savagely beat the ones who refuse to abandon you? Steven joyfully gave his new friends a tour of the cave. He yelled for Gypsy to get up, but she didn't move. Steven's friends laughed that maybe she had gone deaf. When one of the men kicked her, Steven suddenly realized his earlier cruelties. He said that she was hurt badly, and was probably unconscious. The other man knelt down and looked into Gypsy's half-opened eyes. He then said, "Son, this dog has died."

It was at that moment when Steven became a man. He began to walk differently and he started to talk with an understanding that he had inherited from Gypsy. It wasn't the race that matured Steven. Nor was it the battles against the bitter cold or the savage polar bear. What matured Steven was the heart of someone who loved him and would never leave him. What saved Steven was the heart of someone who gave her life for him, a someone named Gypsy.



“Old Barn NO HOME”

By: Brandon Rushing

How long has it been now since I last saw my home? That was the question spilling across that empty cavern of mine, as I walked through a few tufts of winter grass on the lower side of the Rockies. To my surprise, a few decades have come and gone now I recall. It seems as if only yesterday I was there in that old barn pitching hay, sweating like an ice cube in Mexico. Yes, only yesterday. What it was to be young.

No matter now, anyhow. Things are looking up now that I'm almost home. I can smell the Poplar trees and the spruce from the hills as the wind rolls down off those majestic mountains. And any minute I should be seeing Widowers Peak up over the roof of that old barn. About now there'll be snow on the peaks and all those little creeks will be starting to ice over. Gonna be a lot of work splitting logs for the chimney over this winter. But at least I'll be warm and free.

Now that I think of it, what am I going to do for food? Dang, I come all the way out here fresh off the bus and didn't even stop to cash my little check in town. Don't know what's come over me lately. Must be getting old or something. Oh well, I can walk back to town after I get settled in the old homestead, and get some much needed rest. These long hikes just ain't as easy as I remember them being all them years ago. Guess I can't expect even that wouldn't change. Well I'll be, there is that old barn! And wouldn't you know it! The danged house is gone! Now if that ain't some kind of luck. Thirty seven years gone and not one person to write and tell me the log cabin I built with my own two hands has been burned down around its foundation. And here I am a danged old fool done walked out into the wild Rockies in winter with no home to rest my head. If I didn't know better I'd say the Lord almighty is having one great big knee slapping laughing fit right now!

That's just fine by me. Go ahead and laugh oh ye exalted one. Because no matter what happens from here on out, I am free. And even though I am now older than the barn I'll be sleeping in tonight, tomorrow I begin my life at the base of the Rockies in winter, with no money, or

food. And I'm happy. After all, weren't you born in a manger?

Don't Blink

By: Ricky Pearson

Grandpa's cabin out in Madisonville, Texas, was a homey little place, and the times I spent with him and Grandma are some of my fondest memories. That was the only place in all of the many places I had been where a kid could just be a kid. 60 acres of thick woods provided plenty of things for a curious boy to do. Hell, 1 acre of thin woods was enough for me, with all the different species of bugs, plants, and animals. Nowhere else had I been so free to run around at least not without getting into trouble. There was an old barn about 40 yards behind the cabin, and there was my Utopia. The hayloft was an ideal spot for me. Grandpa had rigged up a zip-line of sorts and put plenty of hay in the loft for me. I spent many a day up there just reading, and would often just lie at the edge and watch down over the horses and be soothed by the whinnying and neighing that would gently drift toward me from the stalls. One time I heard some tiny squeals in the loft with me, and after a thorough search I found a tiny litter of baby rats. Needless to say, as cute as they were, we soon parted ways. They were my "pets" for about two weeks, and my observations of them provided me with insight into the "family" or social environment of wild critters. Grandma would always know where I could be found, and she often brought me sandwiches, a piece of her world famous brownies, and a thermos of ice cold lemonade out. Despite my best efforts to get Grandma to climb up and take the zip-line back down, she declined. That old barn was my refuge-seemingly my own little slice of this big ole world. For a little boy who often felt crowded by the world, that barn was just what I needed. I was afraid of the dark back then, so I never slept in the barn overnight, but naps during the day were an ever present thing. When nighttime crawled around I would take the zip line down and make my way to the cabin where a cozy bed awaited me. Grandpa would often sit by my bed in his old rocking chair and tell me about what he called the "olden days" how when he first bought this land it was just scrub land, and how he nurtured it and build it up to be what it was now. Blood, sweat, tears and grandma's good cooking he always liked to say, was what made it happen. As I think back on those times now I can't help but be a little wistful. Those times are gone, the times when a man could raise an empire out of emptiness Grandpa passed away long ago, then Grandma followed soon thereafter, and my father neglected the property until it fell first into disrepair and then decay. Last I saw of the property, the cabin was gone, the stock tanks dry and the animals gone- a veritable ghost town. What reality hit home for me, though, was when I walked into the dilapidated old barn and saw the zip-line still there. The barn was falling down around the zip-line, and I couldn't help but breakdown and cry. I cried for what had been, what was, and what could never be

again. Life sure zips by when you aren't looking. So...don't blink.

Final Notes-I look forward to the day I can add 20 pages to this newsletter. Space limitations force me to leave out interesting poetry, art and prose. We are fortunate at PE to have Joey, a volunteer who has been coming in regularly for the past few months. She has been reading and responding to your letters, and helping us better provide services to you. I asked her to share information about herself with all of you.

Let me introduce myself. I have signed correspondence with Joey and J but my full name is Josephine. I have been involved with Prisoner Express over the years but now that I have retired, I can spend more time and do more work. Before retirement, I was a high school teacher for 25 years, English and English as a Second Language. I even had Gary's daughter as a student at the Alternative School in Ithaca. I have 3 adult children and am blessed with 6 grandchildren! Life in retirement is busy.

Even so, I am concerned about the mass incarceration policy of the U.S. And I knew that once my job-life ended, I wanted to spend time working on prison issues. I am a member of a few political organizations that work to change the way our country deals with criminal justice. And I spend a couple of afternoons each week at Prisoner Express. PE is a wonderful resource, not just for people who are incarcerated but also for people like me who want to help and need a place to put our energy. I am just one of many volunteers who appreciate that Prisoner Express exists and that we can be part of it.

I love reading and books and have delighted in your letters requesting books and sharing about what you are reading. But I started getting sick from the dust and mold that grows in our little, windowless book closets. I had to stop mailing book packages so Gary found another job for me. I am now the person who tries to resolve any problems or questions that you encounter based on our program. Here are some examples of recent issues that I responded to. One person was justifiably distraught that his writing had been changed by our student typist so the published version was quite different. Many people write asking for legal help which we can't really do but I try to find information that might be useful. A lot of people wonder where their books are and I have to explain that we are hurting for postage money. Some people have suggestions for us, including one man who had an idea of a funding source for our book mailings. Gary is calling me the ombudsman for Prisoner Express, meaning the trouble-shooter, the one who will address specific questions and problems about Prisoner Express.

I am always glad to read some of the theme and journal writing and poetry that you send, as well as your letters. I appreciate that we have an opportunity to connect with people who are behind bars and hear your voices. It gives me some hope that we can make a better world.

If you have a problem, question, suggestion, or something else that needs to be addressed, please write to

me: J Cardamone, Prisoner Express, 127 Anabel Taylor Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-1001. I look forward to hearing from you and I will add my two cents to future newsletters. Stay Strong and know that we are thinking of you.

Joey has begun her work by starting a frequently asked questions column which she answer in each newsletter. We know how tough it can be for many of you to write us and wait so long to hear from us, but we are working with the resources we have.

Frequently Asked Questions

We cannot respond to every letter so we are answering the FAQs in the newsletter.

Can you respond to my letter?

We do read all of your letters but we can't write back to them. We are very short of funds so we can't afford the 44 cent stamp for each of your letters. Book packages will still contain a response to the letter you sent asking for books.

Why haven't I received my books yet?

We are operating more than 1 year behind on book requests because we don't have enough money to mail the packages. We value this program, and are trying to find the funds to pay for postage. All books are donated, and we have plenty. If you can send us stamps or money for postage, we are able to send your book package sooner. Everyone else please keep your fingers crossed and send in your best fundraising ideas.

Can you help me out with legal troubles?

Our program does not give out legal advice or support. Your prison library probably has books you can use. One good one is : [A Jailhouse Lawyer's Manual](#).

Will you help me publish my book?

We read all of the poetry and essays you send to us. Then we publish them in our writing packets and send them to all who participated. We don't have any way to help you get your writing published by a publishing company but there are self-publishing companies that can do it for a fee.

What if I have a specific problem with Prisoner Express?

We will respond to letters that ask about a problem with our program. For example, if you are sending us essays or poetry and we are not publishing them, write and ask us why and we will write back.

REGISTRATION FORM

Please note: If you received this newsletter, you are on our mailing list for 2011; if you want to continue to receive newsletters in the future please either send us back this form or a letter letting us know to keep you on the mailing list . If you want to participate in specific programs please let us know what they are. As I have written we have temporarily suspended our program of mailing out individual packages of books until more funds are raised. I need about \$7200 for a year of postage for book packages. Anyone out there have ideas on how to find those funds. The good news is we have no real overhead costs. Everything but the postage, mailing labels and tape are donated.

We like to post some of the writing and emails on the website. We also put some of your artwork on display in local galleries and some is stored in the Cornell Library. We need your permission to use your work. I give the Alternatives Library permission to post my personal profile, writings and artwork on the web using the following guidelines:

Please check one

A. Use my name on my artwork, and my other writings

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

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

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

Book Mailings – On hold

Poetry Project – I understand that to receive the anthology I have to submit a poem for consideration in the anthology.

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

Book Club-Please send me a copy of “Sunbeams.” I will read the book of quotes and send in quotes to use for a Prisoner Edition

Prison Writers Project-I understand that if I submit a theme or picture writing on a topic I will receive a complete packet of writings on that topic. My writings will be posted online through the PE project, and may be included in a future newsletter.

Chess Club-Please send me the compilation anthology of all chess newsletters [6] done by Ettie during the past 3 years.

Fall/Winter 2011 Prisoner Express Newsletter I wish to enroll for another year of the Prisoner Express Program.

Art Show- I will submit at for the upcoming exhibition. I understand some of the work will be digitized and permanently housed in the Rare and Manuscript Collection of the Kroch Library at Cornell University

NAME: (PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS and ID #

This is a new address.

SIGNATURE:

DATE:

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

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NEWSLETTER
Prisoner Express
Spring2011

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

The Durland Alternatives Library, which funds Prisoner Express, is a project partner of the Center for Transformative Action. Additional Support comes from the Cornell Public Service Center and *Cornell University Office of Minority Educational Affairs*

Enrique Zaragoza



Heriberto Rodriguez

