

PRISONER EXPRESS NEWSLETTER

FALL 2011

Prisoner Express is designed to provide you with opportunities for creative self-expression, educational materials as well as a vehicle to bring your ideas, writings and artwork out from behind the walls and into “free society”. We can do this in a variety of ways, and I rely on you who are reading this to help continue to create and reinvent this program so that it continues to serve you while also highlighting the humanity of incarcerated men and women.

For those of you new to the program I'd like to introduce myself and then return back to the theme of this program, its' purpose and your role in creating it. My name is Gary and for the past 10 years I have been co-creating Prisoner Express with those of you who are writing to me and participating in this project.

I work in a small library, “Durland Alternatives Library”, on the Cornell University campus. Over the years the library's mission and focus has evolved, and currently it is stated to be “The Durland Alternatives Library is dedicated to providing free and open access to materials expressing viewpoints and information not readily available through the mainstream publications and mass-media sources. We are committed to providing information and educational materials to underserved and incarcerated people.”

While the library is unable to provide any funding for the Prisoner Express project, I am able to use some of my staff time and the time of student workers to manage the project and keep it moving forward.

There are a number of challenges faced in growing this project. The first, as any longtime member of the program will tell you, is the financial strain of raising the money to pay for photocopying and postage. Also much of the work is done by volunteers. While I am very appreciative of all the help and support I receive, some folks have higher work standards than others. Sometimes addresses and names are mistyped and items I mail to a person are returned to me as undeliverable. Other times a journal, essay or poem is typed incorrectly and the author takes offense. Sometimes so many of you write and want a personal response, and I do not have the time or financial resources to respond to most individuals. I write this so you know if you do not hear from us, it is not because we have gone away, or something you wrote caused us to delete you from our mailing list. You will be taken off our mailing list for

only 3 reasons. If you want to be reinstated please let me know.

Reason 1- We have not heard from you in 8 months. As I get ready to send this newsletter I check to see when I last got mail from any of you. If you have written something since Feb 11 to us you stay current, and will receive our mailing. It is up to you to write every so often. Returning the registration form or a short note telling us what programs you want to participate in, is enough to keep you registered to receive the newsletter.

Reason 2- If the previous letter we send you bounces back to us we remove you from the current list. If you see someone down the way getting mail from us that you think should also come to you send us a note and most likely we will correct some address mistake and get you back on the list.

Reason 3- You send us a letter telling us you no longer want to participate. Hopefully this means you are released, but it could mean our program is no longer interests you. Money is tight so I so much prefer to spend it on folks who follow through on the programs they join.

Think of us having a big pie. The more ways we slice it the less there is for each of us. The more we can share resources the bigger pieces I can send out. So please share whatever of our material you are allowed to share with others. This is especially important regarding any book mailings we do. The book mailing program has slowed the most due to budgetary constraints and I hope any books we manage to mail are read by as many people as possible.

The Durland Alternatives Library is part of a larger organization called the Center for Transformative Action. [CTA]. **Transformative Action is an alternative model for social action that moves us beyond complaint, competition and “us versus them” thinking. Transformative action has 3 basic components.**

- 1. breaking the silence that surrounds injustice**
- 2. building an inclusive movement where adversaries can become allies**
- 3. articulating an inspiring, proactive vision.**

I find those ideas inspiring, and want to work with all of you to see how we can use these principles in Prisoner Express to help improve the prison environment and the quality of life of all who are involved in the prisoner industrial complex.

First I would like to point out some ways in PE is already expressing these concepts. Your writings and art featured in many of our programs, including this newsletter, serves to break down the silence around incarceration. Even when you're writing has nothing to do with prison, when folks on the outside read your words, it humanizes you. Thinking of you as a person not a number causes people to focus on the issues of incarceration and prison reform.

Many of you in prison bring the prejudices you may have had prior to incarceration, and grow them even stronger when locked up. It sometimes seems like many of you find your strongest identification in your race or ethnicity. It causes you to build walls between yourselves and others who are not like you. We are all human, and all of us are looking for creative engagement no matter what our race, religion or ethnic background. The pages of our PE publications can be a useful tool for all of us to see how much more similar we are than the differences of skin color, religion and culture. I hope you can see how brother and sisterhood have nothing to do with race and religion and everything to do with kindness shown to another being. We all have so much more in common than the things that cause us to separate. The writings I receive come from members of different races and religion, but they all seek similar ideals.

We all want respect, creative engagement, good books to read, someone to acknowledge the common humanity we share, a kind word, support. Imagine finding a way to let these ideals begin with you, and how you could be offering these attributes to others in prisons. I know it is not easy, and that many will think you weak for standing up for uplifting common ideals, but really I think it heroic when someone can buck the trend and stand for what's right even when it is easier to join the usual crowd in creating us vs. them situations. In the biggest picture I hope one day we can engage prison administrators and guards in this conversation. There is no need for such polarizing conditions to exist in prison. Granted not everybody needs to be best friends or like everyone, but we are talking about treating one another with respect. It seems as if everyone's life could be better if we could add mutual cooperation into the equation. So here at Prisoner Express we hope to help you expand as a human being by offering meaningful opportunities to gain information and education. We want the world to know you as beings not numbers. We are limited currently in what we can do, but we will continue to engage you in stimulating ways.

The goal is not simply for us to think hard and come up with interesting projects. Rather I want you to help create this project by sharing your ideas for creative low cost projects we can help initiate. I want you to help me articulate an inspiring, proactive vision for Prisoner Express, that we can take out to the world. I want us to

continue to break the silence around the injustices that occur behind the walls. Help me in creating a program that can make a difference. It is your life. You have the expertise regarding prison life and what you might need to transform your lives and the environment. While I have access to resources to help, you best know what types of programs and actions can help stimulate creativity, develop needed skills and keep you centered. Together I hope we can partner to create a better world inside and outside of prisons.

Every newsletter begins a new cycle in Prisoner Express. Currently we send out a general newsletter 2X per year and each newsletter will list the current projects we are providing for the cycle. Please know that we mail most of our programs through bulk mailings. It is more affordable, but it places restrictions on how we mail programs. We have to mail them in identical groups of at least 200. Usually we collect registrations for a few months and then mail a program out as a group. If you send back your registration after we have already sent out the bulk mailing most likely you will not be included in the program. I wish we could respond to individual requests as they come but it is way too expensive. As it is, I have to raise all the money needed to keep the program going, and right now I am not doing such a good job. As you see from the upcoming offerings I am trying to create projects that are affordable.

Projects for the Current Cycle- I believe this may be the most interesting array of projects we have ever offered and hope you can find some that speak to you.

Book Mailing- Our most expensive program is the individualized book packages. The books are all donated, and volunteers are available to read your request letters and create book packages for you. I have been stumped recently in finding funds to pay the postage costs. Last cycle we began the **Expedited Book Program-** If you are able to send us 8 or more stamps we can use those stamps to place you at the front of the request line and mail you a package of books. It is our hope that whoever receives books finds a way to share them with others. We are still sending out books if you don't send stamps, but it is only when we have extra funds. Right now there are over 1200 book requests waiting to be filled. As long as you continue to write us and stay registered in the program, we keep you listed in order in the book program, and when the money is there your package of books will be sent. Just understand that without funds we can do little. If any of you is sitting on a pile of money I can think of no better way of using it than sending some to us so we can mail more book packages. Any checks should be made to **CTA Prisoner Express**. When you send in book requests, offer us a

number of subjects that interest you. If you just ask for a specific book, odds are we will not have it, but if you generalize your request we can often find something good. Of course you can also ask for something specific and if we have it great, but be sure to include a more generalized list as well.

Right now we are close to 1 year behind on requests so please take any books you receive as a bonus. If anyone wants to suggest people I should contact who might donate postage money for the book mailing program, write and let me know. I can follow up and contact any potential donors. I have just received a donation of Law Books from the law school next door. Many of them are on Civil Procedure, Constitutional Law, Legal Research and much of it is case studies. Given I don't know about the law I am not always sure which of these books are best to mail to those of you who want law books. Again if you want them please send at least 8 stamps to get a book. Please give us a few choices on the type of law books you want and we will do our best. These are mostly large heavy hardcover books and they cost quite a bit to mail. If you are unsure if you are on the book request list, you can remind us when you reply to register to other programs that you are waiting for books. Your stamps and donations help keep us going.

Share Letters with Students/ Pen Prison Writing

Program -Are you looking for someone to talk to? If so, a group of students at Cornell University would like to connect with you through our Pen Prison Writing Program. We will try to match you with a student who is interested in writing with you on themed monthly letters on the topics of race, religion, books, family, politics, etc.

We may not be able to match everyone with a Pen Pal, but **if you are interested please write us a letter and include in it information about books that have inspired you while in prison, and/or in some way helped you cope, understand fellow prisoners better, or in some way felt meaningful to you as you spend time behind bars.** We will use these letters to match you up with students who are being recruited to join this Pen Prison Writing Program. It is our hope that we can create a program that will focus on a monthly exchange of letters between you and a student. There is a student group working on finding students to participate.

You must send a letter to be considered for inclusion. If you send a letter to be shared with a student please write attn. PPWP on the envelope, and send it to us by Jan. 20, 2012 so we can get it to the proper students and begin this program in a timely way. We will also use your letter to compile a list of book recommendations we can share with other prisoners, and we will share your letters with a reporter from a national news service called the Huffington Post. Andrew a reporter from the Huffington Post contacted

me a while back asking about my experience with prisons censoring the books you can receive. From that conversation, came the idea of finding out what books you have read that inspired you. A great way to introduce you to a student correspondent is for you to share information on what inspires you. Please know you do not have to find some profound book and write about it. What we are interested in is what interests you, and what books have meant something to you. You might also include in the letter your age, where you were raised, something about your family, and your interests and skills. I hope a number of you join this experimental program, and that we can find students to respond to your letters. If we cannot match you up we will certainly write and let you know.

Journal Project-The journal project has been ongoing for 6 years. I believe keeping a journal is a great way to explore your world. Sometimes the same thoughts that roll around in circular ways in your mind can be better understood and processed by writing them out. I notice that many of the ongoing journal program participants improve their writing skills, and often tend to become deeper thinkers through the process of keeping a journal. We have tried in the past to send blank paper into the prisons to help you in recording your thoughts, but it seems that in many states blank paper is not allowed, so you will have to find your own. What we do send is a number of writing cues that can help you focus your thoughts when starting a journal.

We just sent out an intro packet and will send another when the next 200 folks sign up for the program. We take a number of journals entries and post them online. They are available for anyone in the free world to read. If you would rather we not post your writing let us know. I often hear from folks who read your entries and other writings online, regarding how much they appreciate getting to hear of your thoughts and experiences. We have a number of student volunteers who read through your entries. You can sign up for the intro packet, but if you are ready to begin sooner, just start sending your entries in to us. You can send them as often as you like. We will keep them organized in a file. Please remember to date each entry you write. You can send multiple entries in an envelope. Some folks send their entries weekly, others monthly, and some are very random in their submissions.

Book Club- Our book club is a way to get you a book to read, think creatively about the book, share your thoughts, and then receive back a compilation of the most interesting thoughts that are shared. Currently we are working on a book project for “**Sunbeams**”, which is a book of quotes. I am inviting all the participants who are reading the book to send in quotes they have heard in

prison that mean something to them. You can also write original quotes.

Even if you were not part of that book club reading, you can still send your quotes in to us. Be sure to name the source of your quote. We are more interested in original quotes than something you have read somewhere else, but we will accept anything you want to share. Student workers will go through the quotes you send, and we will create a booklet of meaningful quotes. Everyone who sends in a few quotes will receive a copy of the quote booklet. The deadline for sending quotes is Jan 1, 2012.

The book we are offering this cycle is “**Homer and Langley**” by EL Doctorow. This book was read by all incoming Cornell Freshman this year as part of a University Read Project. Along with the book we will send you some critical thinking questions for you to consider. We will create a compilation of the most interesting responses sent in by the participants, and send a copy back to everyone who submits answers to the questions.

Below is a description of the novel we will be sending. Please sign up if you would like to be part of this cycle’s book club.

Homer and Langley Collyer are brothers—the one blind and deeply intuitive, the other damaged into madness, or perhaps greatness, by mustard gas in the Great War. They live as recluses in their once grand Fifth Avenue mansion, scavenging the city streets for things they think they can use, hoarding the daily newspapers as research for

dateless newspaper whose reportage will be as prophecy. Yet the epic events of the century play out in the lives of the two brothers—wars, political movements, technological advances—and even though they want nothing more than to shut out the world, history seems to pass through their cluttered house in the persons of immigrants, prostitutes, society women, government agents, gangsters, jazz musicians . . . and their housebound lives



“Princess” By: C. Velencia

are fraught with Odysseus peril as they struggle to survive and create meaning for themselves.”

Please be sure to sign up if you want to get a copy of this book and participate in this community read project.

Art Curriculum/ Followed by Public Art Show-We are very fortunate to have an art instructor Treacy who is focused on bringing art into the life of folks behind bars. She is creating an art course for you. Below is a description she has created for the course.

An art course will be offered addressing basic approaches to drawing; color harmony; and painting through different exercises and homework assignments. However, most fundamental to learning how to develop skills as an artist is learning how to “see” the world for oneself. How can this be done in prison when what is offered to “see” is minimal?

In addition, the course addresses philosophical questions such as: what is the difference between “illustration” and “fine art” and why does it matter? Why did Plato dislike artists and what does Plato’s dislike of art and artists mean to the artist, today, almost 2500 years later? Art history is crucial because when a person is cut off from one’s history, they have less freedom. Therefore, art history is another focus of the course using art history as a tool for gaining freedom as an artist.

This course is taught by Treacy Ziegler who is an exhibiting artist with over 30 solo exhibitions in the past 20 years in major galleries in New York City, Toronto, Philadelphia, and Boston. She is a graduate of Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and University of Pennsylvania. More recently

Treacy has donated and exhibited her work in several prisons. In addition to donating her work she conducts workshops on art in prisons in various states.

If you are interested in receiving the first mailing of the art course curriculum please sign up. **Due to cost we will limit the initial mailing to 200 participants so please do not wait to sign up if you are interested in expanding your art education.**

PE Art Show-for the past 5 years PE has been displaying the art you send at a show on the Cornell University Campus. We will do again this March. Students are organizing the art work already submitted, and we hope you will send in more. Art generated by Treacy's class will be included. You do not have to wait until then to send in art for the show. It really opens peoples eyes to see the range of beauty, suffering and other emotions that your art can elicit. It does not have to be prison themed. Your artistry is not limited by walls, and yet again everyone is influenced by their environment.

You are free to submit work in any style or medium for the show. **I know some of you in Texas believe you cannot send art. As long as it is on a regular sized 8 by 11 paper I have been told you are permitted to send in your art work.** It seems like each prison has its own standards. We will offer art scholarships to participants, as we have in the past. Scholarships will be awarded by a panel of students and community members. **There will be 1 scholarship for \$100, 1 for \$75, 1 for \$50 and 10 for \$20. If you send in art we will contact you with more information about the show. If you do send in art please include a short note about yourself and what motivates you to create art.** Be sure your name and address are clear to us so we can contact you.

Introduction to Astronomy- This packet will provide an introduction to larger study on Space. This packet explores our solar system, and the star, planets, and other celestial objects within our own solar system. This packet will explain, why the earth has different seasons and how the moon affect our tides. It will include a brief history of how Astronomy and our perceptions of space have changed over the past few centuries. It will explore how technological changes allow for us to study space better and how our current technology allows for us to explore stars and systems much further away from us. If there is significant interest and follow through this will be the first in a series of lessons exploring outer space. As with all of our distance learning units there will be a series of critical thinking questions for participants to answer. All who respond will receive a compilation of the most interesting responses. This packet will be created by Vishal, a former student at Cornell, who helped in creating a past anatomy project.

Poetry Project Vol. 8-We recently mailed out Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology #7. It took us an extra-long time to get this edition put together and mailed. Hopefully Volume 8 will come together with fewer obstacles. We were never looking to start a poetry publication, but we received so many interesting poems from you all it seemed like the right thing to do. Now a

few years and thousands of poems later we continue to refine this program. I'd be curious as to whether there is a group of you who would like some instruction in writing poetry. If so let us know when you send in your poetry. Perhaps I can find a volunteer to lead a creative writing project focused on poetry. To participate in the Poetry Vol 8 project you need to send us at least 1 original poem. We already have a few hundred that have come in since we finished selecting poems for Vol 7. Students have already begun reading them. Everyone who submits a poem will receive a copy of anthology # 8. My guess is we will be accepting poems for this anthology thru February. If we receive your entry after that most likely it will be considered for PE Poetry Anthology #9.

Please understand everyone who sends in a poem is not guaranteed to have their work published. We receive too many entries to include them all. We have a student selection team that reads through the poems and decide which poetry to include. I tell them to select poems that touch and move them. It doesn't mean yours is not good if it isn't chosen. Poetry is very subjective and I notice some students love a poem that others dislike. It makes sense really as we all see the world through the veil of our experiences. Like art please know your poem does not have to focus exclusively on prison life. We are all so much more than our current activities, and you all have a lifetime of thoughts and experiences to share. Of course if it is the prison experience you wish to highlight, it is always easiest to write about what we know best. If you are not published in one edition do not give up. We really appreciate your participation in this project.

Here is a sampling of poems the student selection team has submitted for this issue of PE News.



By: Victor Fuentes

“7th and ___ St.” by Leroy “Doc” Floyd III

Solace left this neighborhood and placed into our hands,
A home of silent longing built in storms of loves demands,
Where strangers in the shadows hold to coarse and cursed commands,
And find that life and death are but blood and dust to chance.

Within are barren house resides the fear that casts alone,
Where madness feeds the poetry your nakedness has shown,
Where physical torture lessens morale the outside world has sown,
Down this hole both mind and soul complete with flesh and bone.

Thru its battered window there’s a hope he cannot reach,
The sacrosanct of hidden tombs where secrets have no speech,
Where passion threatens purity and by violating each,
We taste the aura of Nirvana both pain and pleasure teach.

His question haunts those derelict halls in sanctuary unattained,
And rules this realm of all recall by acts so long unnamed,
Where all resistance whispered sparks till no reason more remained,
Here, where chains define our hearts, what freedom could be blamed?

“Penny Heroism” by Leroy “Doc” Floyd III

I

...Our plague began when the plan for man changed hands and
times ran thru savage sands supporting the cogs of caravans
carting away each connection conscience strand in small bands
of tribal brands marked for foreign lands whose clans never chanced the dance and so miseducated advance...

II

There’s conversation in the stall down concerning god and psychotrophics,
It’s a hallucination of order and reason returning to out of focus

‘Cause by tomorrow journalists will have redirected the sirens
sponging penny heroism off a saddened highways back,
Reinventing clever coincidences for the horror real life lacks.
Just conned into residual intelligence, a pact of “Just Relay”
Forging commonplace from far fetched fact...

“Big Girl” by John A. Rodda

Johnny, I’m a big girl
Big girl things I can do
If you give me half a chance
I will prove it to you

I’m tired of toys and dollies
Of merry-go-rounds and swings
I’m all grown up and ready
To do those big girl things

Like a newly-minted penny
I shine bright and clear
You’ve never had a girl like me
Admit it Johnny dear

Give me a chance and you will see
I’m better than the rest
It’s so easy to prove this
Just put me to the test.

I want to do that grown up stuff
I’ve outgrown childish fears
Don’t tell me I’m not old enough
I’ve blossomed with the years

Tho I’m a girl and you’re a man
Our age don’t matter.
I can do this. I can! I can!
I’m grown up. I’m mature.

Please do not discriminate
You must be fair to me.
Give me the only thing I want-
An opportunity

“Eccentricity” by G.L. Proper

Free thinker, free thinker
From where do you come?
Surly not here,
Like you there are none

Your thoughts are not round
Centered nor square

Shapes unknown
Birthing a scare

Free, thinker, free thinker
Who will give ear?

Trading our tenents
Quixotic and queer

Are you to hide,
When dogma appears?

Bringing about
Societal tears.

"A Haunted Heart" by-J.S. Slaymaker

Other times and other places,
 Fade with dreams that broke apart.
Cherished names and dearest faces,
 Haunt the wreckage of my heart.
The ruins that stand were once our lives,
 Love traded for shame and sorrow.
Other lovers with their knives,
 Here today and gone tomorrow.



By: Martin Rivers

Chess Club- Two hundred twenty of you received our last chess packet which was a compilation of the lessons created by Ettie, our resident chess master. Ettie

graduated and I have been looking for someone who can help us supply you with interesting chess material. I have met through an internet search, James Schroeder, a chess master from Vancouver, Washington. He has created an 8 page "How to Play Chess" packet. It is geared to help you learn how the pieces move and how to play the game of chess. He is also willing to put together a packet of chess lessons for experienced players. You can sign up for either or both of these packets. The good news is that James is also willing to answer your chess questions if you send them with a stamped self addressed envelope to him

James Schroeder
3011 E. 9th St. Apt. #15
Vancouver, WA 98661

Theme Writing- I always sing praise of the theme writing participants. I believe your work makes the program special, and it also does a lot to help the other PE members who read your work. When you share your thoughts you often are speaking for an even larger group who do not write. Each of you represents many others in prison. When someone reads your words and realizes they have the same thoughts, you writers bridge the walls of your cells and enable connection and lessen isolation. So often when we are alone with our thoughts we can lose our path, and by sharing your thoughts you not only set yourself on a cleared path, but you help others on their journey.

I do ask that some writers stop spewing hatred. I find that individuals often generalize against specific races, religions, and groups of people because they have been hurt by the actions of a few. Instead of such broad generalizations I suggest you write about the incidents that you witness that hurt or disturb you rather than fanciful prejudicial essays that spread hatred and division. I acknowledge that hatred and division exist, but how do any members of PE gain in making it stronger. Strength comes from unity, not from tearing others down. It is a false strength that grows from making others look bad or stupid. True strength comes from lifting up those who most need help. I wish I could include more selections of the submitted essays in this section, but due to cost I have to keep the newsletter to the current size. If you want to read more essays on a theme you can submit entries on future topics, or ask someone with internet access to go to the Prisoner Express website www.prisonerexpress.org to print stories and mail them to you. I personally hope more of you will send your own submissions.

Future Theme topics are
The Awakening due 1/1/12
Roots due 2/1/12
Role Models due 3/1/12
Promises due 4/1/12
Dreaming due 5/1/12

Courage due 6/1/12
Forget About It due 7/1/12
Barter/Trading due 8/1/12

Here is a sampling of some submissions on previous topics.

Rumors

By: Steven Lee Smith

Dearest son,

Your mother may have told you I was dead, that I left you long ago and did myself in. Maybe she said it was drugs and/or alcohol. I'd be willing to bet she said I didn't love you, that I was incapable of love, that I didn't know the first thing about it. Undoubtedly, she claimed that I was selfish, that you never came first, or that my disappearing act was pulled off without one second thought.

How many nights I've laid under an imaginary sky, wondering if you saw the same moon and stars and remembered our short time together. I go over those years we had, reliving every stage – your birth, first words, first steps ... I think of that look of illumination when you figured out your BB gun, your first bicycle, how to spell your unique and beautiful name.

I know your mother can't find kind words, or ever tells you how I felt my heart would explode like a thermonuclear missile as I held you first, the exact moment you opened your eyes to see this world, your first light, and your father's face as he witnessed the wonderful miracle of your grand entrance. You were magnificent.

EVERYONE who knows me may have told you I died long ago. They may have said your father never loved you, he was selfish, and he never gave you a second thought. I hope that a teenager knows a rumor when he hears one.

I've never stopped thinking about you.

The following story was submitted for the theme topic Rumors. While it seems to be about something else I liked it too much not to print it here. Gary

Smokey the Cat By: John Mouseman Jorado

At the young age of twenty-seven, I found myself sitting in a dark, dank and musty prison cell. It is my tenth year of being incarcerated in the hole (that is jail-in-jail). Some days I spend 23 out of 24 hours in the cell, staring out the cell bars. I see the San Rafael Bridge. My home is San Quentin State Prison, Fifth tier, East Block, Bay Side.

Prison is a micro-society, it is your world reflected and magnified a thousand times to give everything crystal clarity. You either accept it for what it is or you ignore it and no one ever knows about it..."

Ironically, you can say it comes as quietly as a cat and passes the same way, often unnoticed. At the time there was an abundance of felines in San Quentin



By: Victor Fuentes Ortega

Prison. They exist here just as they do in your society, in fact they thrive here. Yes, they are separated by societies as well. There are "alley cats" that you might wonder where they get their meals from, and there are those felines who are much too happy being part of a family in prison, thus being well fed and groomed.

One fine evening while I was about to eat my meager meal my eye caught some movement something not normal at the bottom of my cell bars. Enter into my life. "The Fat Cat of all color"...

Sitting there outside the iron bars was a fat cat; it was staring at my tray! At first, I attempted to ignore the fat cat hoping it will go on its way. However the fat cat in his mind has arrived at the place where it wants to be, perhaps it felt if it stood there long enough I might toss it some scrap off my tray...Good assessment on its part. Eventually, I pick up a small piece of meat from the tray and flick it towards the fat cat, it unintentionally lands right between the fat cat's eyes. The fat cat shakes it off. It falls down and the fat cat sniffs it slightly acknowledging it as food, yet does not attempt to eat it. The fat cat does not shudder nor move at all, it just continues to stare at my tray.

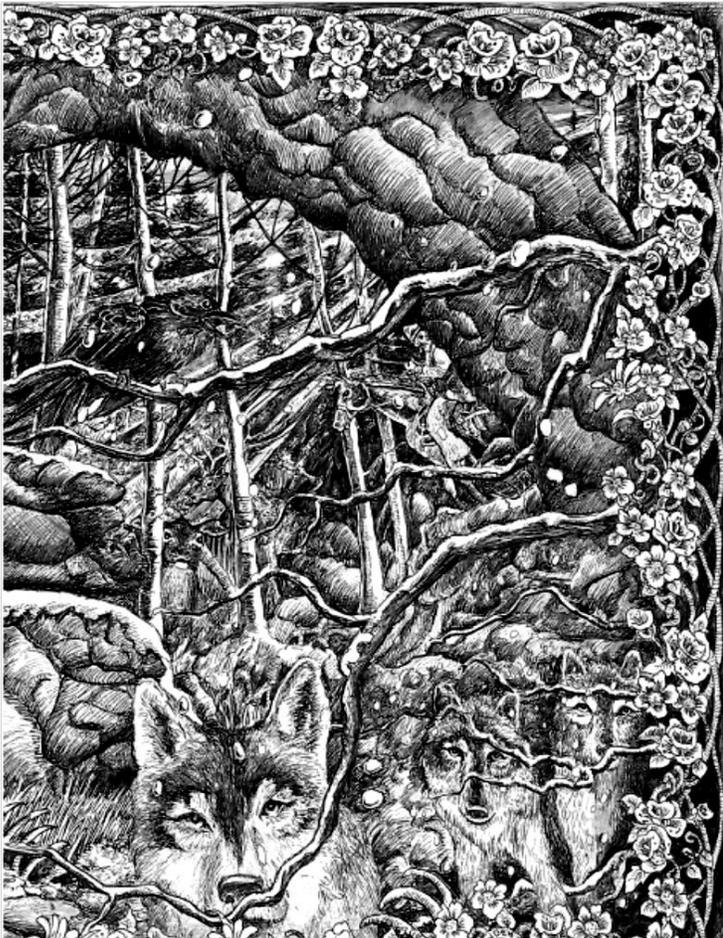
You as cat lovers might think little of my story at this time. Allow me to take a moment to point out a few things about felines within this society. Foremost, felines are predominantly ground dwellers in prison, and I live on the fifth tier (fifth floor), so a cat at this altitude is very uncommon to say the least! Secondly, a cat

strolling about while there is still human movement is very unheard of. The felines normally avoid human interaction. Why, perhaps it is because they know if they are caught, they will be held in the cell just as we are, some are even sold into what I call “cell slavery”, to the highest bidder...as I said, “things are born here and die here and no one ever knows about it...”

The fat cat is staring at my veggies! Who of us knows of a cat that prefers veggies over meat? Now, shall I continue with my “Cat’s Tail?”...

Realizing it is not staring at the meat, rather the veggies on my tray, I tossed the fat cat a carrot, and it landed outside the cell. The fat cat wasting no time pounced upon it as if it were a virgin mouse awaiting sacrifice!

With the passing of time, the fat cat comes to my cell every evening awaiting its veggies, with regularity I feed the fat cat what I can. I never try to coax the fat cat into the cell I have reservations about locking things up in a cell (wonder where I get that from!!) Having this



By: Jeff Harden

constant dinner companion gave rise to me thinking about the fat cat, not it just showing up for dinner, but deeper questions. Had it ever known existence beyond the prison walls, or had it been so long ago, that remembering what was, had become a fleeting thought.

That thought saddened me very much and gave new meaning to the term “animal shelter”. I felt sadness for the fat cat and what might have been its turbulent life. But I never had the ability to turn back time, so I just learned to appreciate it had come to me for survival.

One evening while flicking carrots, one ricocheted off the bars and back into the cell. The fat cat stared at the carrot and then at me, I knew instantly just what it was thinking, “was it safe to go into the cell?” What it needed was in the cell, survival is a job in prison, and it does not matter on a daily basis. I did not blame the fat cat for thinking about me like it did. I have witnessed inmates coax a cat to the cell bars with offers of survival, just to be pitted with a cup of cold or hot water.

After some hesitation, the fat cat decided to risk entering the cell. I making no effort to move towards look at or move suddenly, continued to toss carrots towards the fat cat. All the while I was thinking what a leap of faith it took for the fat cat to do what it had done, sitting in my cell eating carrots. Times were lean and I gave what I could as I had to eat as well.

About a month passed and the fat cat would just squeeze through the bars at dinner time waiting to be fed. Sometimes, I would wait for the fat cat to arrive before starting my meal, and at times it would be late, this gave me cause to think something might have befallen the fat cat. Remember survival is the job in prison. At night the cell block you can hear the felines fighting for territory on the lower tier. A gutter, a garbage can, the end of the tier, or a dumpster which is Prime Territory, all these areas and where ever else a morsel of food might be found are all hotly disputed every night. Some nights you could hear cat fever rising, and know it was a matter of moments before cats collide. Sometimes fights would be simple and one on one, other times it seemed as though all the cats in San Quentin Prison had gathered together for one big brawl.

My interacting with the fat cat, however limited it was gave me cause to wonder about things I thought long out of my mind, I was becoming attached to the fat cat. I would wonder when it was late if the cat fever I heard last night was the fat cat! The fat cat did show signs of being in very many fights, or one very costly fight. Looking at the fat cat I would wonder was it a victim or a fighter, ultimately deciding it did not matter; either way it was born into this life, no choice in the matter—just another statistic known to few and cared for by less. I would sit at times on the edge of the bunk like a teenager waiting for his date to show up. Then the fat cat would arrive after a night of cat fever, still in one piece and I was happy for that and my new house guest.

I never took the opportunity to try to pet the fat cat and as it were, it never tried to rub against me either, for all our time together thus far kept a respectably distance from each other at all times, even eye contact

was on a limited basis that is till one fine day the fat cat did something out of the normal, it pranced into the cell, all but getting it's fat self through the bars, and went straight under the bed. Flabbergast by this new action, I looked under the bed for satisfaction, the curiosity I had was answered with folded back ears and a hiss! LEAVE ME ALONE!! Message received and understood. So I went about my daily business. Round about dinner, I realized the fat cat was not coming out from under the bed, this posed a potential problem. You see back in those years I use to sleep under the cell bunk partially, and the fat cat was in my space a degree. That night as I rolled out my mattress I was greeted with another hiss, evidently my mattress was still too close for the fat cat's comfort. So as suggested, I moved.

Another day passed, two then three, and on that morning I awake to the sound of six kittens making noise. I was now a Papa. Ironically, I am Native American and my name is Mouseman!! The spirits do have a sense of humor, do they not?

Call me ignorant or uninformed but it never entered my mind that this fat cat might be a female and pregnant at that, I just thought it was a fat cat! In my defense, I have been in Adult Prison since I was sixteen years old, some things I just do not know too much about and some things I will never learn. But, I was about to get an education on raising cats right now and it would seem at the time nothing was going to stop that. How wrong my last statement would prove to be...

Six balls of fur were complicating my life in ways I never imagined, it would seem everything owned was getting scratched and urinated on, including me. The joys of kitten keeping. One of my first thoughts was what is going to happen to all these kittens? Surely I could not keep them all, and there was no doubt that I would not be able to keep it secret, but that question was going to be answered sooner than I liked and in a manner that still brings a ball to my throat and tears to my eyes. After all, I did not want them to end up in "Cell Slavery", but what options are left...they were born into this world, this society, no choice in the matter as a matter of fact!!!

My name is not Old McDonald, but here is a cat, there a cat, and everywhere a cat...I cannot write a letter without a cat pouncing on my pencil. One of these little balls of fur takes the greatest pleasure waiting for me to try to sleep so it might pounce on my eyes during REM

sleep! This was the only kitten I named, the dark grey kitten was to become Smokey the Cat, that was his first, second and last name. This kitten was much dialed into my moods, it was very strange but it seemed as though Smokey the Cat was very aware of it when things were going wrong for me. As well as good, Smoky even became a Security Cat for me, whenever the bulls (cops) were getting ready to come down the tier he would rush over to the bars, take a peek and rush under the bed and all the other kittens would follow. He would hear the key long before I did. As soon as the tier was clear of traffic he would bring his brother and sisters out from under the bed, thereby avoiding trouble.

Time passed and I enjoyed the company of the kitten, trying not to laugh for years and then wanting to laugh, but holding it so much you chew your mouth raw...I still never tried to pet the fat cat, as always if I came too close she would hiss, I understood all too well, she had endured some type of torture, something (Life) or somebody had twisted her so-called perception of humanity or humans. The monster smashed because it can, not because it derives pleasure from it. I felt deeply for her, but there was nothing I could do for her save, take care of



By: Carlos Delegarza

the kittens. But I did not understand, I have always suffered in ways known only to me. Nothing I would care to speak of, but it is always there, sitting the back of my mind when dealing with other humans.

A few things were evident to me, the kittens were in my cell, and therefore Mama trusted me to some degree. I understood that for what is was at the time too, I was blessed by something emotionally crushed and spiritually broken; it sought protection from me a Murderer! She did not trust me 100%, how could she? She was born into bondage, destined to feel the almighty Sun but for one moment in one day of her life...it was fine to play with the kittens, but do not get too close to her. I often wondered if she chose the cell and me because she wanted something better for the kittens than what she had. She was not going to allow that.

Smokey's resting spot was the top of the TV; he liked watching me doing whatever I was doing. One day while I was watching TV he was looking at me and he jumped off the TV, someone was on the tier, yet Smokey did not run under the bed as he always did. He stayed looking out the bars for a while, this puzzled me very much and not in a good way, then he returned to the TV and stared at me, not good, not good at all!! No need for

me to second guess Smokey, something was very wrong, dreadfully wrong. Change in prison is seldom for our benefit. So I put my little chip of mirror outside the bars, and what did I see, the Bulls were coming down the tier methodically with the S.C.P.A. and they were taking all cats from San Quentin Prison. My guts were rolling, my mind was failing me, I had not one idea of what to do, a mental melt down was coming on fast.

Looking down the tier I saw none were passed, but bulls were pulling everyone out of the cells and the S.P. C.A. was checking all nooks and niches for cats. Begging, pleas and idle threats of injury were all unheeded and to no avail. No mercy, no pity, all cats were being removed from San Quentin State Prison.

Looking down the tier, I saw a man I considered much tougher than I crumble and cry for his loss, empathy I did have. Refusals to exit the cell were futile, the bulls would just do what they do and drag you from your cell, cats would still be removed. All the while Smokey the Cat, sitting on the TV staring at me like his mother did so very long ago. "What 'cha gone do Dad?" Me standing there lost and literally dizzy from impending doom as the hang man creeps closer and closer...

All but too soon the Bulls were at the cell next to mine. I had no idea he had a cat some cats were very well kept secrets. He was cuffed up, weeping, yet too choked up to beg. I know he wanted to make some kind of last plea, but he was too choked up, the lump in his throat would not allow. I looked into his eyes and saw what was going to visit me next. In seconds my family was going to be torn apart. No reason, no rhythm or notification, nothing was going to change what was going to happen this day. Smokey was still sitting on the TV, and Mama and his brothers and sisters were under the bunk still.

I turned towards Smokey as I saw my neighbor's cat being loaded into a cage, without hesitation I grabbed Smokey and stuffed him down my pants, using the bottom of my shirt as a pouch. At the same moment a Bull stepped in front of my cell saying, Mouseman, you gonna give us a problem?" I said, "No, come get these smelly cats out of my house!" Doing so, my heart crumbled, broke and shattered. As the fellow from S.P.C.A. stepped into the cell, I faded to times past when one of the other kittens had gotten into trouble, I do not remember how many times I had to rescue one from the sink or toilet, always some sort of Tom Foolery going on, how they all followed Smokey to and fro.

As I regained my focus, I noted the S.P.C.A. guy reaching for the Fat Cat, to my surprise the Fat Cat made no objection at all, not a hiss, not a growl, not one hair did I see rise. As he brought her out of the cell to awaiting cage, she stared at the spot where she knew Smokey was hiding, making that motion cats do of meowing but nothing came out, and she glanced at me as

well. I am not too romantic, but I do think she realized if she made a fuss, Smokey was going to start crying as well. So she left willingly, did she know what was awaiting her, I doubt it, but then again, even if she had known I do not think it would have made a difference in her reaction. I asked the guy from S.P.C.A what you are going to do with them. He was honest. "We do not have room for all these cats at the shelter; we are going to have to put them to sleep." Sleep means MURDER, I was glad to be cuffed to the bars as I felt my knees get weak, I needed support. When they finished searching the cell and putting the cats in cages, they placed me back in my cage!

When the bulls were gone I took Smokey from his hiding place and said a short prayer and a much, much longer curse. Smokey walked around the cell looking for something that would never be there again. Where was Mom? Where were the brother and sisters? Smokey cried all night for his lost family and into the next day, it is twenty years later. I am still in prison and I still cry for them every now and then.

I never got out, I figure I am much closer to the grave now than the cradle. Yet, all this hurts like it happened hours ago. Fate and carrots taught me to keep what is sacred very sacred. A fat cat was my reflecting pool; a fat cat was one of those in my life who adore or love. Reminding me I am still capable of being trusted. Can one learn from or love a cat? I never thought so till then. It is possible.

The fat cat showed me love as best as it could along with a measure of trust. Anyone can be giving when times are good, try giving when the hangman has his hands around your neck, try when things are toughest. Try being as brave as a fat cat...then you have accomplished something grand.

Cheap Thrills Curtis Colvin

His name was Potter Ronald Potter. Funny name. But a great guy. He was from Olympic Penn. Washington, down in our area for a short while. He taught me how to hunt rabbits, ride motorcycles, and smoke weed.

His parents would let him smoke it, but wouldn't let him smoke cigarettes. He introduced me to "Pink Floyd". He was 15 going on 21.

One day we rode his Yamaha TT500 dirt bike to the oilfields in orange field. He finds a can, puts some gasoline from the bike in it. Then puts some raw oil in it, and shakes it up.

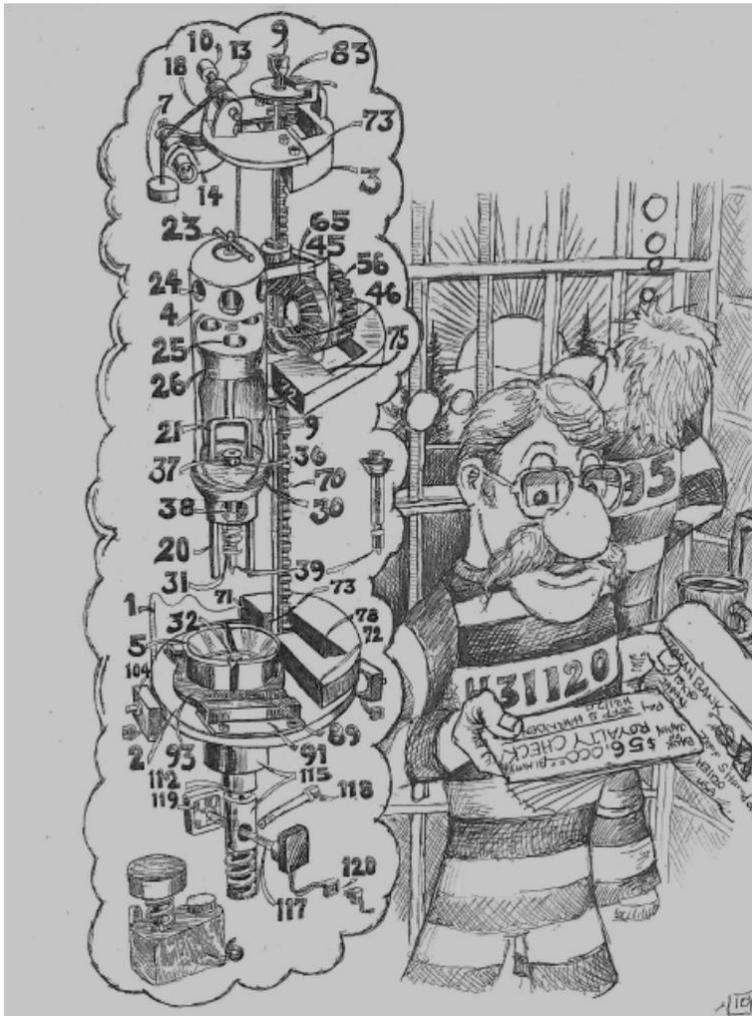
There's this wooden bridge that crosses a finger inlet of Cow Bayou. It's made of 1' x 1' boards and no guard rails. The length of the bridge is about 50 yards. It's mainly there for the oilfield hands to check on the rigs that are pumping.

Ronald pours his mixture across the first board of the bridge then lights it up...smoke galore, more smoke than fire. He cranks up his Yamaha and jumps the smoke a couple of times, landing perfectly like Evil Knieval of the days. "Your turn," he says to me. Damn, am I sweating? I knew he was going to say that. The smoke/fire was almost out. But he goes over there and adds more...damn.

I crank it up, put it in gear, and take off. I hit the ramp leading up to the bridge pretty fast, BAM, I'm air born—through the smoke—coming out—then landing...but I'm aimed out toward the water when I land...damn! I lay it down and slide about 10' over the

bridge. When I stopped the front wheel was hanging over the edge. I broke a foot peg and fender. But what hurt most was the 20 plus splinters all up and down my left side and ass.

Ronald was laughing his lungs out, not worried about the bike much. Me, lesson learned. I'm not a dare devil. Case closed.



By: Jeff Harden

Authority

Elijah Allen

So often time people make the mistake of thinking authority rests in their position. Authority does not rest in the position of a title such as a C.E.O. or President, Governor or Senator, Sergeant or Warden.

Ironically, the president of the United States, who is considered as the most powerful leader in the free world, does not have authority to implement laws or declare war just because he is President. He has to get permission from Congress to sign a law or declare war. His executive power is limited.

People confuse authority with power and do not understand the concept of them. Authority – deals with the characteristic leadership within an individual who's gifted with a unique ability to bring people together and empower them to work harmoniously.

Power – deals with the responsibility of ability in a leader. It is a supernatural force that gives one in leadership the ability to exercise authority in a manner that's accountable when it does not bring harm to those a leader has rule over.

Authority gives power its lawfulness. And power that operates without legitimate authority is simply a dictatorship, or tyranny with authority that inevitably will result in abuse, or oppression that leads to ultimate destruction.

The pages of history repeatedly show how leaders of famous nations mistook their position as authority to invoke oppression and abuse on human lives with no conscious. Have we not seen their ending chapter result in a destructive legacy?

Sadly, the same type of authoritative tyranny we see in some world leaders is silently going on within the United States of America prison system through wardens and other ranking officials.

True authority in a right standing leader, has principles which upholds and protects the sanctity of what is right even to the most unworthy men; but the leader with no conscience will use his gift of authority for cruel principles that harm, oppress, and abuse the lives of those they rule over.

I see the latter so often daily with the officials on this unit and I wonder how they sleep at night. But the answer always is the same – they rest not until they find another way to use their authority to oppress and abuse us, all in the name of their positions.

Michael Jerome McKinney

This is a good essay topic for the month of April. Authority. I am in prison; I have been in prison for a very long time. I had to learn how to respect. the people who had the authority to make my time very hard, or make it easy for me. When I was young I rebelled against the prison authority. Some of them used their authority in all the wrong ways. I could not respect them

telling me what to do, when they were not living right. So for some years I had a hard time respecting the prison authority, because I felt they were trying to put down on me when they told me what to do. But from a reality point of view they did have that kind of authority to tell me what to do, because I was in prison. And during my younger stages I always fought against the prison authority that was over me, and things always got harder and harder for me. And some old time prisoner who I used to have big respect for, who had been in prison for years and years, used to tell me, Mike, you got to use your head, you got too much time to be making things hard for yourself. That's not being smart, and that if I had to do time it was about making things easy for me, and that I had to learn how to get along with the people who had power over me, such as authority over me. When I did not know much better, that was not making good sense to me, because I was caught up into ego tripping. But deep down in my heart, I knew they were telling me something for my own good. Because these old timers were not having a hard time as I was having with the prison authority. And I thought I always had something to prove by showing the prison authority that they did not run nothing. But that only got me into more trouble. Because facing reality they did run something. They had the keys to everything. Now I can see what they mean don't bite the hand that got to feed you.

When I'm Gone by Daniel H. Harris

Some bow to authority without question. Others, like myself, look a little deeper. We challenge rules and insist as much as possible, that enforcement is within set guidelines. It's not easy.

Texas prison is inhabited by prisoners that are suspicious of grievance writers, as if we are their enemies. They blame our grievances for bringing about retaliation without realizing how important our work is to preserve what few rights prisoners have left.

Speakers are not allowed in TDCJ. Prisoners have learned to make their own and compete to see whose radio can play the loudest. Of course, that's the same competition that caused TDCJ to ban radios with built-in speakers in the first place. Prisoners refuse to govern themselves and then complain when rules are created to govern them.

When I came to Telford Unit Ad-Seg 3 years ago officers constantly turned off electricity to punish prisoners for playing their radios too loud. One prisoner would get 13 other men punished and expect them to accept it with him.

Officers don't have the authority to impose punishment and such mass punishment is illegal. I've been writing grievances on the officers' conduct ever



By: Candido Sanchez

since and it did bring some heat on the use of contraband speakers, but it's rare to have electricity turned off on the rest of us these days. I refuse to allow myself to be punished for another's offenses. Prisoners hate me for it and blame me for shake downs, even when I lose as much or more than most, rather than blame the prisoner with the speaker that caused the problem to start with and didn't see fit to act like a man (convict) and admit his fault and offer his speaker to the officer to get the power on. That's what convicts call riding your own heat.

More and more often I find myself standing alone when I complain about officers' conduct and misuse of rules. Everyone is quick to suggest I write a grievance about their pet peeves or to help them once they have a disciplinary to deal with but few stand with me when I question officers about wearing sport/work gloves while handling our trays. These are the same gloves they wore to escort prisoners and to pick up trays that were dirty the last meal. No one takes action when our trays have half-portions. They just accept anything rather than chance retaliation out of the fear of consequences.

I can only write one grievance each week and that limits the issues I can address. It took over a year and 4 lock downs to stop officers from dumping our sack meals in dirty garbage cans to make it easier for them to deliver them. I did it alone. I'll keep picking my fights where I think I can do the most good and the least harm to my fellow prisoners. But who'll fight on when I'm gone?

Rites of Passage

Chad Lawson

Take your time, my father told me as I got up from the ground with my bike and a skinned up knee when I felt a tear in my eyes even though I felt defeated I got back on the bike and tried again feeling my father's exes telling me to try again when I got upon the seat feeling scared but my father was there to pick me up and I knew that. If I was going to do this I was going to ride this bike and determination gave the reasoning to let me know what I was capable of.

When I was old enough to understand what a crime was, I had already committed one to my foolish reasoning I felt hated, betrayed, I was unstoppable but I was outsmart. The day I was sentence to 20 years in prison I felt my heart sink to my feet add a cold feeling of recognition I was going away fro along time as I looked at the judge with fear in my eyes I knew "there goes my life down the drain." Nobody knew what it means unless you have sat in our shoes being in prison feeling the presore of what we feel, the thing that we see, the thing is that we go through, the problems that we face of speaking out on what we see. My right of passage was meant for me to wake up and grow up because of the lies I created to make the truth come out, and awaking experience that brought light to my eyes, of how low a person has to go, broken, beaten and how low thing get before you open your eyes to reality. I could have made a different life but there's a reason why I don't have that dream because I did not listen to my elders not knowing what was ahead in life and the wisdom thrown away only to lay in some mental grave

yard to be resonated every once in a while. I feel the hurt that I have caused to myself also to family even though I cannot change the past, the fortune will hold the key for me it called, change, growing up, being a man, and showing what a man does to change what was destroyed, all his hopes and dreams when he was a youth learning how to be a man, living up to his word, treat others with respect, rite of passage is about becoming a man or a woman of worth, value, and belief in a better life that can exist.

Matthew Hall

As a young kid I thought a rite of passage was something only different cultures had and did. For example, when I was in the 3rd grade I did a report on young Native American Indian boys and all the different rite of passage they had. I remember so clearly one that consisted of a young kid about 12 or 13 who was laid down on his back and honey was poured on him. Then,

to my amazement, he had to endure thousands of red fire ants crawling all over him and biting him. This was his rite of passage. I also remember seeing a documentary on Indonesia and it showed how all young boys about 12 had their teeth filed flat! The older men would take a file, the kind you had in your high school woodshop class and file this kids teeth until they were all perfectly flat (ouch). We've all seen the scarification rite of passage rituals in the African countries. Some older tribesman breaks out his sacred tools, which consists of little more than some old rusty piece of metal. Then he proceeds to carve some sacred pattern



By: Candido Sanchez
"Only the Strong Survive"

into the face and body of young boy or girl. For whatever reason, rites of passage in so many places on our planet consist of something associated with pain, blood, and a lasting imprint on the body. Something that says... I'm a man now... look, look at me and see that I

am now a man! (or woman). I've often wondered as a young kid 'why' torture, blood, and pain had to be somehow synonymous with a rite of passage. Was it actually important? Could I become a man without it? Clearly I would never be laid down on my back while my mother poured honey on me then lovingly allowed ten thousand red fire-ants to have their way with me. Nor would she grab some antiquated file, tell me to keep quiet, open my mouth and don't cry, while she files my teeth flat. In the good ol' U.S. of A., we have a name for these types of actions... "child abuse"! Any parent seen or caught engaged in such a activity would quickly find themselves slapped in handcuffs and vilified on the cover of every newspaper in the country.

So what do we do in the land of the free and home of the brave? What is our rite of passage? Maybe if you grew up in a time and place where hunting was apart of your upbringing your dad would strap you up with a 30-30 and off you'd both go to find Bambi, put her in your crosshairs, squeeze, and send poor Bambi to dear heaven. Then dad would hang Bambi upside down by her hooves, open her belly up with his Rambo knife like a Christmas turkey so all the "unwanted" parts spill on the forest floor. Then maybe dad hands you a small tin cup and inside that cup is some of the still warm blood of Bambi He tells you to drink it, that that's what his father did for him blah, blah, blah. This strikes me as a very American rite of passage, not Native American, but European American. This way all the torture, blood, and pain is put on Bambi, not you. Or maybe dad just takes you on a special camping trip. Just you and dad. Your out in some woods together, making your camp fire with two sticks, sleeping under the stars, etc. what one would call "ruffing it." I also believe organized sports has been a long-standing rite of passage in the stars and stripes. Little league baseball and pop warner football are huge for kids in this land of milk and honey. It's a culture kids want to be apart of sometime during their childhood. Dad also plays a major role in this milieu. He's most likely the first person to toss a baseball with you in the back yard or throw the pigskin. Dad's also the one who puts on your first pair of boxing gloves and shows you how to throw and block a punch. He's the one who takes you to sign up for pop warner or little league. He takes you to practice and can always be heard in the stands at game day. Maybe, maybe if you're one of those really lucky kids, your dad is the coach. My memory banks are filled with how good the coach's kids always were. Of course no one can leave out the ever elusive.... Girl! They are a rite of passage all of their own. From that every first moment when you realize you like them, your forever smitten by them. The attraction is so primordial it leaves you feeling clueless in the beginning. It's not until around 12 or 13 that you start to act on those primordial feelings. It's peculiar how these feelings come about the same time as 'any' rite of



By: Martin Rivers

passage does. Whether your blasting a hole in Bambi, having your teeth filled down, getting eaten alive by red ants or having your first real sexual encounter with the opposite sex, it always seems to be around 12 and 13.

Here's my story. Now I'm not one who would find any enjoyment in stalking and murdering Bambi. I would much rather simply watch a deer. With that said, I would gladly slaughter, fillet, eat, and drink Bambi's blood if I had a father to do it with. I grew up in a single parent home with one older brother who pretty much stayed picking on me. My mom had us both by her 20th birthday. She raised us by herself and she did the best she could with what she had. There was never a shortage of love, food, clothes, or toys. There was a shortage of my father. He was 2000 miles away in Michigan. I've never tossed a baseball with him, never threw the pig skin, never went camping, never went to a Dodger's game, never learned how to throw and block a punch from him. Never received any advice on girls and damn sure never blew Bambi's brains out with him. By the time I hit Jr. High at 11 I was feeling the residual effects of never having a father. I don't think it was as hard on my older brother as it was for me. He was cooler than me, all the girls loved him, and he had me to pick on. That first year of 6th grade was extremely hard. Everyone seemed to have a niche and I was desperately looking for one. I had skateboarding, BMX-ing, and surfing, but I wanted something that not only involved other kids, but fathers as well. During 6th grade I observed what I called

the “cool kids” always having some kind of practice after school. It was football practice! I’d known I liked football for quite some time. I actually played flag football one time and loved it. But this was not flag football. This was pop-warner! Full pads, helmets and organized to the teeth! But how? How could I become apart of this culture? I started at the only place I knew, my mom. I knew in my gut it would not go well and it didn’t. “Hell no. I’m not paying for that! You’ll get hurt! Football players get hurt!” If I was going to play pop-warner football by the 7th grade I’d have to network it myself. My mom softened up a little as she seen how much I wanted to play. She actually made the

suggestion of calling my grandma Grace. Grandma Grace was my Dad’s mom. As far as Grandma’s went, she was top shelf. Everything one would want in a grandma, she was. So I found out how much I needed and made the call. Of course I promised to pay her back... somehow. With just a little convincing I got the green light. My grandma sent me the dough and I was off and running. I was still on my own. My mom simply wanted nothing to do with it. I found my way to the sign-ups at perry park, paid, got fitted for pads and helmet and got the quick little physical, the schedule of when and where to show up for practice and I was done. Well, not exactly, I still needed to find out how I was

going to get to said practice. I needed to make friends quick. It was all very intimidating. It seemed like every kid there had his dad and mom with them. All the dads talked amongst one another about the upcoming season and who’s kid was the best player while all the moms seemed to be talking about food parties and fundraisers. All the kids seemed to know each other as well. Here I am, almost 12, I finally got what I wanted and I’m scared to death. Shhheeeesh. OK Matt, don’t break down. Then it hit me. The coaches! Don’t they give rides? I find one, size him up and decide he’s the person who will take my butt to practice every darn time. Coach Reagan was super cool. His son was the start Q.B. (of course) I think he knew I was on my own and he told me where he lived and if I could make it to his house he would drive me to and from practice. His house was about a mile from mine. I can make that. So I was in! I did it! A pretty big feat for a 11 year old. I remember coming home with all my gear and game uniform and seeing how my big brother was impressed. I turned 12 and started the 7th grade a member of the “Redondo Rebels” things were looking up. My mom never came to one practice and only a couple games but I learned to live with it. Now at the age of 12 you pretty much have all your second set of teeth. But for some reason, I never lost “one” tooth. It was an upper molar. I never gave it any thought until the day it started to hurt. I told my mom about it and she said it would come out on its own. Well two weeks later it was still killing me. It became a “little” loose and I assumed it wouldn’t be long till this damn tooth fell out. Well two more weeks went by and still it would not fall out. I remember my brother calling me a “pussy” for not pulling it out. It was really starting to mess with me. I didn’t want to go to practice and eating really hurt. A really bad toothache can drive someone mad and after another week I felt like I was going crazy. There were actually a lot of bad things going on in my life. Football was cool, but it was not going how I planned. For one, I was good, but there were people who were better. I would work my butt off in practice and only get a little play time on game day. The Redondo Beach pop warner program was one of the best in all of Southern California. We won almost every game. Most players had been playing since they were 7 or 8. I just didn’t have the experience they did, or the dad they did. Junior High was tough, girls seemed to like everyone else, especially my brother, football was becoming a drag and now this damn tooth was driving me to the brink. I came home from school and I was in a lot of pain. My big brother was leaving as I was coming and he said “what the hecks wrong you?” I told him it was my tooth which he replied “pull it out pussy.” He left, my mom was not home and I couldn’t take it anymore. I went to the kitchen and opened the drawer that had what I was looking for. A pair of needle-nose pliers that we’ve had as long as I can remember. They



By: Carlos Delagarza

had a yellow grip handle and I used them a million times on my bike, skateboard, and many other things but now they would be used to pull this damn tooth! I got the plier and headed to the bathroom. I opened my mouth, put a good grip on my tooth and pulled. Ouch! Pain shot through my whole body. I thought about simply waiting for my mom to come home. But what would she do? Pull it herself While my brother watched and laughed? I grabbed the tooth again and pulled even harder! Again, an incredible pain shot through me. I started to cry. I was right in front of the mirror so I seen myself crying and I didn't like the way it looked. Pussy!!! I grabbed the tooth again hard and began to pull. I could feel this tearing going on as pain found home in every square inch of my body. What the hell? What the hell's up with this God forsaken tooth? Now tears were pouring down my face. Saliva was streaming off my chin and my face was beat-red! I looked at myself in the mirror and I was a mess. I'd never seen myself like that. My whole body ached. Then something happened. I got mad! I looked at my face and said out loud!!! Pussy!! I grabbed that tooth and pulled! With tears pouring down my face, snot dripping out my nose, saliva streaming off my chin, I pulled and I yelled out loud.... AAAHhhh!!!! An incredible ripping was going on. I no longer cared. I didn't care about the pain, the ripping, the snot or spit. I notted up in a way no 12 year old should. I yelled again and pulled more ripping. I pulled and pulled and finally the tooth came out. The second it came out blood poured out of my moth! I'd never seen that much blood. It was like turning on a faucet. It was going everywhere. The sink, the floor, the toilet. "Crap!" look at all this blood. I looked at the pliers and couldn't believe what I saw. A giant tooth! It was so long! I would later come to learn it was an "impacted" tooth. Basically a tooth that grows out of control. What I did was the equivalent of a grown man taking a pair of pliers and pulling his own wisdom teeth. Most people having wisdom teeth removed – go under – I couldn't believe what I'd just done. I looked at my face in the mirror and couldn't believe what a mess I was. Blood was all over the place. I was completely exhausted! I looked at all the blood and became enamored with it. I felt... proud of it. I wanted to leave it all. I wanted my brother to see it. To see what "I" did. I wanted my mom to see. I wanted my friend and coaches to see. I'd just been to hell and back and I wanted people to know. I packed some toilet paper in the hold in my mouth hand just relaxed for a minute. I washed my face and a lot of the blood in the sink was going down the drain so I decided to clean up. I cleaned and cleaned until all the blood was gone. I took a shower, went to the living room, turned on the T.V. grabbed our cat "metoo" and just relaxed. I was going over in my head al that happened. "Man, that was crazy." I think my mom came home first. "What'cha doing honey?" "Nothing, I pulled that tooth out." "Oh, that's nice." Then my brother

showed up and I told him. "About time, you've been crying about that tooth for two weeks pussy." I knew I would never be able to convey what happened, what I went through so I simply buried it. I never mentioned it again. I didn't' even show that Goddamn elephantiasis of a tooth. I was not conscious of it at the time, but something was different. Something deep inside myself. I started playing better football. Most of it consisted of hitting harder. The coaches started to notice me more and I liked it. I don't recall exactly how long it was, but over that year I started to really get fed up with my brother. Something in me was telling me it was time to



By: Martin Rivers

take a stand. I think I was 13 and he was 14. I was now in the 8th grade and my 2nd year of pop warner. Mom still never came but it no longer bothered me. My brother was a freshman at Aviation High. My mom had cooked some spaghetti for us before she went to work that night. A mutual life long friend of ours Richard Harris was at our house and I went to eat some spaghetti and my brother Marcus told me No! He was again being a bully and I'd had enough. Right there in the kitchen I took flight on my big brother. I think he was in shock. I'd never before hit my big brother in the face with a closed fist. I think I only threw about 4 or 5 punches and it ended. Looking back to that moment, that exact moment,

I now know it was a pivotal moment in my life. At least I thought that was the pivotal moment consciously that became the moment. My brother recovered pretty quick and quickly shouted. ... "The church!!" The church was where kids went to fight. It was "the church" or "pollywog park" people (kids) would yell at whoever they wanted to fight... "the church"!! or "pollywog"!!! It seemed very strange to me that my own brother would yell at me, in our house, "the church!!" But that's exactly what he said. He was not about to go down that easy. He was not willing to surrender his life-long superiority over a random loss, a fluke!! in the kitchen. But I knew in my mind and my heart that it was no fluke so I told him... lets go! The church was only a block away and somehow a couple other kids showed up. Shouts of "the church"!! could be heard for miles to us kids. My brother was being very animated. He was yelling and hopping around. I think he was trying to scare me but I was no longer scared. I would never again for the rest of my life be scared. I remember how calm I was. We squared again and I again took flight. Again, I won. The fight ended with a last shot to his gut. It bucked him. I remember actually feeling a little bad. I knew he was in physical pain but I could also see another pain in his face. I wanted the fight to end and it did. I did not gloat at all. I was very quiet about the whole affair. My brother was still pretty animated. When my mom came home and found out what happened she reacted in a trippy way. She didn't get mad. She acted as if she knew this day was coming. You'd have to ask my brother how the experience of the "changing of the guard" was. I'm sure it was hard for him in many ways. We both changed after that my brother would go on to become one of the nicest people you'd ever meet. Not a pussy, he never became a pussy. Just a nice guy. He's never had enemies and everyone likes him. I would go on to become a "tough guy." I had a pretty big fight right on school grounds the very first day of high school. Cracking someone in the face was something I at times looked forward to. My brother and I would not have another physical fight for many years. I was 21 and he was 22. He took my V.W. Bug for a drive without me knowing. I was living with a life long friend Johnny Verzella and Johnny told me my brother took my car. Now by the time I was 21 I would fight just about anyone. My brother would never try to fight me but I told him we were fighting. I knew in my heart he did not want to fight just like I knew I would win if we did. This time, it was me who was being the bully. I told my brother to go outside and because he's never been a pussy, he went. We squared off and he looked at me like... "Do what you have to do Matt" I cracked him in the mouth pretty hard and busted his lip pretty good. It was over as quick as it started. Almost immediately I felt terrible! It just felt... wrong! My brother walked off somewhere and I went to look for him. I found him in

the alley by a big trash can and he was crying not due to a physical pain, but emotional pain. I tried to apologize but he didn't want to hear it. I then truly, truly for the very first time in my life knew what it was to have "a big brother." It had been nearly 10 years since he last picked on me. That time was long gone now it was time to respect him as my big brother. Physical prowess no longer mattered in our brotherhood. I swore to myself that day that I would NEVER EVER under any circumstance, lay a hand on my big brother. That last fight was over 20 years ago and I've never broke the promise my big brother is a beautiful man. He has 3 beautiful kids. His youngest Isaiah was born only 3 months ago. I've no words for how much I love him.

I'm sure many would say my rite of passage was the day I fought my brother in the kitchen, then "the church" but I know otherwise. I know my rite of passage was the day I pulled that tooth. My rite of passage was very un-American. Like so many other kids in different countries and different times, my rite of passage was violent, bloody, and painful! But unlike all those other kids mine was all said and done by me and me alone! I know it was not the fight that was the pivotal moment, but the pulling of that tooth. It was because of that moment that I made my stand with my brother. As I said in the beginning, I've always wondered why so many rite of passages had to be violent, bloody, and painful. I never would of thought mine would be but it was. The question is, was it a good thing? For me, I think it was. I think it made up for a lot of things I was missing in my life. I think my rite of passage not only altered my life, but also altered my brothers. A rite of passage should somehow change you. Mine for sure did that. A rite of passage should take you to the next level of becoming a man. Mine did that too. I believe the problem with rite was I didn't know it was the tooth. I thought it was the fight. Because of that, I became a fighter in a sense. The Indian boy with the ants and the Indonesia boy with the file had the whole "ceremony" of their event to tell them it was their right of passage. They knew why there was pain, blood and violence.

Pay attention to your childhood. As a young kid I tried on my own to find my rite of passage. Things don't always work out that way. Sometimes you can't find your rite of passage. Sometimes your rite of passage finds you!

Margaret Ryan

The chill of winter was quickly fading away that beautiful Spring day when my first-born grandchild found her rites of passage planted in rich Texas top soil. You see, Caitlyn lived in an apartment house clear on the other side of the big city Houston. I, her granny, lived far south just out of Houston. Too far for my liking but, I was rooted in place.

Weekend became our time together. We'd read and learn colors, watch way too much t.v. and bake. Oh how'd we mix up a batch of this, a batch of that... we were side-by-side until her mommy would come and wish her away. Out weekends went far too fast.

With Spring in the air, a garden was in order. How could I convey the beauty of nature to such a young child; how could I know she would always know that her granny loved her. I sought ways to convey this love but, nothing came.

My daughters lost their mother at a very young age. Prison had called me away far too early in their young lives... They never knew the love I held for them; they never got to spend a day with a mother that loved them. I wanted to make up for the lost years through "my" Caitlyn. The child that saw beauty and wonder in every breath, every bug, every new day.

When Caitlyn would get out of her car seat she'd break out in a run, a run to express her joy at living freed from her long week away. A born runner, she was. Around and around she'd race her ale granny. Our block was large but, she didn't notice. Caitlyn was out to explain her world. Green grass and big trees, she'd play all day the fresh air and sunshine. Never wanting to come in doors, a free spirit born to enjoy. Never to be caged by a shut door.

I'll never forget the joy, the excitement, the pride in my granddaughter eyes when she discovered her own two hands had co-created with the God of the universe.

Caitlyn had claimed her own patch of dirt that coal March day as I worked the ground for planting. Every thing I did to my garden, Caitlyn would do the same to hers. I'd see her trying hard to mimic my moves so very so often I'd try to help her just to be met with a quick response... "No, Granny! This is my garden, you have your own," she'd say as she painted me away.



By: Martin Rivers

"Okay, okay, I'll go but you just remember who's who around here little one. You may need this old granny later today." She'd smile that beautiful smile and grab my hand to lead me away from her private plot of claimed earth.

Weeks went by, the rain fell. Caitlyn had other "granny's" to see. March faded away and April was about over when that faithful day came. The sun was high in the sky when the car arrived. She came out of her car seat without assistance and broke free. Running and laughing; happy to be free on green grass. (I knew the feeling all too well.)

As her mommy and I spoke in the front yard, we both looked in shock as Caitlyn cut the corner.

"Granny! Granny! Quick. Come see! Hurry!"

"What's wrong? What happened Honey?"

"No- ma! Hurry granny! Please hurry!" as she pulled me along by my right hand in hers.

Tears of joy slid down her mama's eyes as she realized the pride in her daughter's eyes. All bright with wonder and excitement as she painted out her little plot of land, made more than dirt last time she left it.

"Look granny, little green leaves! Little green leaves everywhere."

Years have past since I last saw my grandchild. She may not even remember me or the growth we shared. All I know for sure is, those days brought me joy. They gave me meaning to carry on. Some of my best memories of all were made digging in the dirt to watch something sprout from ole Texas top soil.

To Kill a Ford by Robert L. Hambrick

One of the biggest rites of passages is getting to the age where you are able to drive. But it starts much earlier; when you get off your hands and knees and begin to explore the world on your own two feet. Then comes the tricycle, (or these days I guess it's a big wheel). Next comes the real first step in freedom – the bike. No longer are you confined to the sidewalk in front of the house, nope... now you are free to travel the streets. Around the block, first. Then around the neighborhood. Then, as confidence grows, you venture out further into the town, making your own choices to turn left or right. Your individualism finally dawns on your rapidly maturing mind. Then comes the big day – your very own first car. No more family station – wagon with dad protectively (critically) in the passenger seat. This is your own ride, your own keys, your own gas, your own decisions on where (and how fast) to go. This is where that "maturing mind" is supposed to kick in. Unfortunately, some minds mature slower than others.

Back in 1976 I bought my first car for \$300. It was a 1964 lemon yellow Ford Fairlane (license number KZA-942; funny how you remember things like that). Man, oh man, I thought I was hot stuff. I cruised the main drag like I was piloting a Mercedes. Gas back then

was only 32 cents a gallon. That sounds cheap, but you've got to consider that I worked for a dollar 85 an hour back then. Bread \$.20 a loaf, a six-pack of Schlitz went for \$1.15.

Palmer Hwy was the main drag, ran right into town from I-45 turned into 9th ave., dead-ended at the Gulf of Mexico. We'd drag all night, starting at the Weingarden's parking lot on 6th street, thru town out to the Wal-Mart on 146, circle thru the parking lot, then head back the other way. Took about 20 minutes to make the run, depending on traffic and the lights. Back and forth we'd go, playing our 8-trak tapes, sipping suds, hollering at the girls. You could pull off into the high school stadium parking lot to see who all was out and about, but after 40-50 cars gathered, the cops would always roll thru ordering everyone to keep moving. Ten minutes later, the cars would start gathering again. Back then, "mooning" was a popular pastime. It was never unexpected to be parked at the stadium rapping with your friends, then all of a sudden some car would come screaming past honking his horn like crazy Everyone would naturally look up, and there would be some hairy ass hanging out the passenger window. Maybe even another one from the rear window. You couldn't do that today... too many people would fall in love. Chase your car down.

About a month after I bought my car, my friend Karen bought an old Impala. One Saturday night out cruising, I met up with her and her boyfriend Mark. After a while, we got to talking our cars and, of course, the challenge was laid down. We rode out Palmer to the Wal-Mart, but instead of turning into the parking lot, we went forward and stopped at the light at hwy. 146 from there, Palmer became a divided highway exactly 8 miles non-stop to I-45. As soon as the light turned green, we went for it. Tires screaming, engines roaring, Mark and I ran neck and neck thru first gear. Slamming the column-mounted gear-shift into second, I leapt ahead of the Chevy, my big V-8 growling like a rhinoceros.

Suddenly my windshield was covered with water. (Where did that come from?) As I used my wipers to clear my view, Mark passed me in the right hand lane. I dumped the clutch on 3rd gear and shoved my foot into the carburetor's very throat. The Chevy was ahead, but my top-end was higher. As the speedometer buried at 120, I pulled along side, then passed Mark and Karen, smiling and waving. Once they realized they couldn't hang with me, they backed down. As I saw them fade back in my rear-view mirror, I started to wind it down too. Only then did I notice the unusual sounds coming from under the hood of my car. I saw the temperature gage pegged at the far end of the red zone, the engine warning light blinking like a fire ball.

There was a gas station at the corner where Palmer meets I-45, I pulled in and coasted to a stop just as the motor died. I tried to re-start the car, but it didn't

even click. Mark and Karen pulled in and I told them that I think I broke something. I did not know a whole lot about cars back then, and as it was really late, I told them just to take me home and I'd get my dad and his toolbox to come out here in the morning. I tried one more turn of the key. Nothing! "Maybe it's just the battery come loose," I thought.

Early the next day Dad popped the hood and stuck his head beneath. I watched as he fitted a pipe-wrench onto the crankshaft and tried to turn it. He stood up and closed the hood. What had happened was: the 12 year old engine could not hold up to the stress I had forced upon it by racing. As I had shifted into second gear, the water pump had exploded... launching the fan forward into the radiator, chewing it up like an airplane propeller. That's where the water had come from that hit my windshield. So I had driven almost the whole 8 miles at speeds over 100mph, with no water in my engine. As soon as I'd let up, the engine had seized up, the pistons literally welding themselves to the cylinders. That was one dead Ford.

The junkyard gave me \$35 for it. I bought new tires for my trust old Stingray bike so I wouldn't have to walk to work. It was quite a while before I could buy another car. When I did, it was a lemon yellow Ford Fairlane. It only lasted about 8 months, but this one died of natural causes.

Practical Jokes

Same Ole Sucker By: Lonnie Perkins

Being a prankster came naturally to me as a kid and as an adult. But the most memorable joke that I've taken part in took place in my house, when my two best friends "Perry & Chucky" came to spend the night during the summer. We were as thick as thieves, the same age within a month (we're all Libras).

Knowing from previous sleepovers that "Chucky would go to sleep first," Perry and I plotted our caper the day before, so we waited.

As soon as Chucky nodded out, we went to work with some of my mother's fingernail polish, painting his nails.

Once we woke him up and pointed out his painted fingernails, he immediately got loud and started cursing as we warned him to "Keep quiet!"

Once he removed the polish and was able to laugh too, Chucky quickly fell back asleep and although we promised "Stall him out" (not mess with him)," we went to work on him again for getting crazy the first time!

This time when we finished, we poured hot sauce in his mouth and he jumped up sputtering and swinging at us and again cursing. Chucky was the type of person who didn't know how to fight too well, and even though he'd get the snot beat out of him, he didn't know when to quit!

We were about 13 years old then and never imagined that 13 years later in 1991, we'd be together and Chucky would fall asleep. For old time's sake, I asked a home girl who grew up on the block with us, "if she had any fingernail polish?" Now with his nails freshly painted, Perry retrieved his camera from his car and we took turns posing with a sleeping Chucky, his fingernails clearly showing. When he woke up and everyone was laughing, he went to cursing once he seen his hands, saying "cuz we ain't no damn kids no more!" But the same ole joke was captured on film...

James R. Ormand

I think I was 10 or 11 at the time, and I remember it clearly. I just never thought that I would be the target. My uncle loved to pull jokes all the time, scaring the other young kids in various ways. It was his way of showing you that he loved you. I believe every family has a practical joker. My Uncle Robert was the one on my father's side.

Like I said, I remember it clearly. My uncle's girlfriend was visiting that day. Her name, if I remember correctly, was Roxanne. She had brought along her kids, her daughter was also my girlfriend. I don't remember her name. She also had a son, who none of us kids could stand. We just didn't like him for some reason. I don't even remember how many times we fought. He was in on this little practical joke. Since I can't remember his name, I'll call him John.

It was during the summer. I know this because we weren't going to school. My uncle was outside with Roxanne and John. I don't rightly know what they or he was doing because I spent most of the time inside because of the air conditioner. I decided to go outside and visit with my uncle. I enjoyed spending time with him. He is in his little shed I guess you can call it, doing whatever. So I walk over to him to get my hug from him and then I got one from Roxanne too. John is there and being polite I tell him hi. We're standing around talking-Roxanne, John, and me- when my uncle steps out of his shed and asks John a question. John, being who he is, gives my uncle an answer that he obviously didn't like because he got mad. Of course this makes him laugh and he didn't stop. My uncle starts yelling at him and tells him to shut up and quit laughing. To me it seems he is getting madder by the second because he just won't quit laughing.

My uncle goes back to his shed grumbling under his breath. All I think about is getting this kid to quit laughing because it's making my uncle mad and in the process getting me angry. Roxanne isn't saying anything at all. I guess she knew about my uncle's temper. I heard my uncle rummaging around inside his shed while I'm talking to John. When I hear him come out I turn around and see that my uncle has his 12-gauge shotgun in his hands and a wild look in his eyes. He tells John "I'll shut

you up now and I won't have to listen to your damn laughing!"

John took off running and I'm staring wide-eyed. I've never seen my uncle so mad. He took aim and shot John while he was running for the woods. When I saw him drop I took off to the house screaming at the top of my lungs scared he was going to shoot me next. I slammed open and shut the door still screaming. Yelling I tell my grandmother and my older sister that Uncle Robert shot John and was going to get me next. They both went outside and I followed close behind, secretly hoping that I would be able to get away from my uncle if he is busy with them.

When we got to the shed, my uncle is talking to Roxanne. Standing beside her, to my utter astonishment is John... Alive! My sister and grandma loot at me like I'm crazy and go back inside the house. All I can do is stare at John. My uncle looks and smiles at me and then says "Gotcha!"

All I could do is laugh with him. At first I was angry but laughter is infectious. That was the first time my uncle got me with one of his practical jokes and I made it my only time.

Paying Attention

Michael Pace aka The Kyle

Excerpt from the Grapes of Wrath- Middle Chapter 8:

"Tommy, I got to ask you- you ain' mad?"

"Mad, Ma?"

"You ain' poisoned mad? You don' hate nobody? They didn' do nothing in that jail to rot you out with crazy mad?"

He looked sideways at her, studied her, and his eyes seemed to ask how she could know such things. "No-o-o", he said. "I was for a little while. But I ain' proud like some fellas. I let stuff run off'n me. What's a matter, Ma?"

Now she was looking at him, her mouth open, as though to hear better, her eyes digging to know better. Her face looked for the answer that is always concealed in language. She said in confusion, "I knowed Purty Boy Floyd. I knowed his Ma. They was good folks. He was full a hell, sure, like a good boy oughta be". She paused and then her words poured out. "I don' know all like this - but I know it. He done a little bad thing an' they hurt' im, caught 'im an' hurt him so he was mad, an' the nex' bad thing he done was mad, an' they hurt 'im again. An purty soon he was mean-mad. They shot at him like a varmint, and he shot back, an' then they run him like coyote, an' him, snappin an' snarlin', mean as a lobo. An' he was mad. He wasn' no boy or no man no more, he was jus' a walkin' chunk a mean-mad. But folks that knowed him didn' hurt 'im. He wasn' mad at them. Finally they run him down an' killed im. No matter how they say it in the papers how he was bad- that's how it was." She paused and licked her dry lips, and her whole

face was an aching question. “I got to know, Tommy. Did they hurt you so much? Did they make you mad like that?”

This was written in 1939 by John Steinbeck. They say things have changed. We have better laws and what they call safe prisons. Well if things have changed so much then why do we need safe prisons? I am in a medical unit in Texas. This unit was named after a warden who drove men mad in the way Steinbeck talked about. It was one of the largest prison lawsuits ever and the courts sided with the inmate, but still Texas named a unit after him. This is one the most brutal systems today- TDCJ. This unit is one of the top rape units in the nation. Change?

Well, we are still paying attention in here. Are y'all paying attention? Cause, they are broke now and having to let us out-crazy-mad or not.

Photo Stories- Some of you prefer visual cues to get in the story telling mood. Rather than word cues just above, this section of the newsletter presents you with pictures. Pictures, and especially photographs, carry with them implicit narratives, making them ideal writing prompts for generating new short story ideas.

Spend ten to fifteen minutes free writing on the photograph. Choose some aspect of your writing exercise as a starting point for a short story. The story does not necessarily have to explain the picture, so long as the picture has in some way inspired the resulting work.



Due 1/1/12



Due 2/1/12



Due 3/1/12



Due 4/1/12



Due 5/1/12



Due 6/1/12



Due 7/1/12

Sample stories from past pictures



George Dominguez

It's the year 2011, and as hard as it seems, we the world are always at war. No matter what it is or where, you see it on the TV news, hear it on the radio and read it on the newspapers. We just can't seem to find peace as a solution without pulling the trigger. Our "mouth" is also a trigger, as we never think of talking it out, trying to find a peaceful way to work things out without any violence. The first step we all need to do is pray on it. Sit down together and try to figure out the best way to work out the solutions and come to agreements all together. We all want the best, especially for our children as they grow. We all want to leave and give them the best education so they can become the best scientists, doctors, lawyers, engineers, astronauts, and the president of the United States or governor of whatever state they are from. Let's help our children's dreams come true. Let's all work together and build this world into a better, peaceful environment. Yes, we may struggle, but we can do it. By putting our hands together

and helping them reach the stars and making their dreams come true. If we all try hard enough we can solve the solutions, without pulling any triggers. So let's come to an agreement by putting our hands together and making this world a better place to live.

"Dogs * Fishes * Birds" by Robert L. Hambrick

Dogs... Chihuahua, Terrier, Retriever, Sheppard, Greyhound, Mastiff, etc.

These are not different races of canine... they are just dogs!

Fish... guppy, trout, bass, tuna, shark, marlin, etc.

These are not different races of aquatic life... they are all fish!

Birds... canary, quail, sparrow, crow, falcon, penguin, eagle, etc.

These are not different races of avian... all of them are birds!

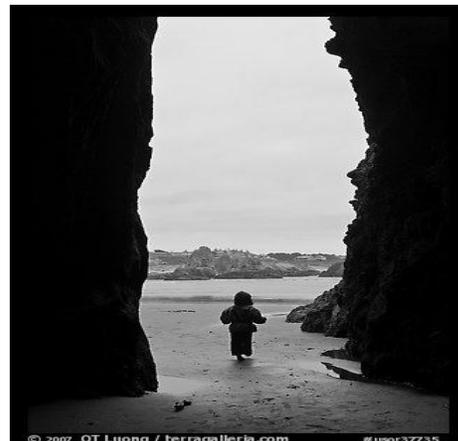
They look different, act different, eat different, smell different, etc...

But they are – every one – dog, fish, or bird.

So what the hell makes you think there are different races of PEOPLE?

Now...Go take hold of somebody's hand- one a different color from yours. Look him in the eye and call him brother.

And mean it!



Lost (Found) Coast by Zachary Newman

The ocean breathes with salty air, sighing with misty puffs of spray, and foam at the corner of the ocean's mouth lines the black sand shores of the Lost Coast. Deeply rooted conifers end at cliffs that are eroded by the never-ending push of the sea. Rocky outcrops are separated by the mysterious directional flow of the powerful sea from the forest above. Some

cliffs have a single, ancient and gnarled tree, mossy and wind blown, hanging on by the shallow reaching roots, spreading out, instead of digging down. Amazing how it can hold onto its perch throughout the unforgiving elements.

The softly blowing wind brings motion to the moss, which clings to the outlying boulders, which dot this particular stretch of the coastline like kids on a playground. The arches and caverns worn into the rocks are ultimately a child's natural playground. Seagulls are screeching and swooping through the air, pleading in their secret bird language, for a crust of bread, or discarded morsel of human made food. Sea lions bobbing in the surf 20 yards out, curiosity painted on their faces, mixed with a look of calm indifference to the delighted squeals of the children, as they explore the natural wonders that abound in this eternally changing, magical kingdom called Earth.

Nothing can beat the happiness found in exploring your surroundings especially when the world offers up such wonderful and intriguing landscapes. My only hope is that we, as a whole, figure out how to secure the health of our Earth, our precious Earth, to ensure future generations can enjoy the wonders of our planet.

I was fortunate as a teenager to embark on a 25 mile, 5 day long hike down the length of the Lost Coast, from the mouth of the Mattole River to shelter cove, camping out on various points during the hike. It was one of the most memorable times of my life.

The most important thing I was told was I had to get a seasonal tidal chart, because the majority of my travels would take place on the beach, and in some spots the waves during the high tide would slam directly into the cliffside obliterating and walkways between the sea and the land.

The word beautiful cannot properly describe the sights experienced during my hike, the smell of the sea, the peaceful solitude of all the open spaces, undamaged by the intrusive progressions of man. All the animals in their natural habitat, leery yet unafraid, the delicious bounty in the tidal pools, scraping lampions off of the rocks boiling them up with lemon pepper and salt, rock crabs, and wild mushrooms from the hillside towering above the ever moving Pacific. The night skies strewn with a thousand upon a thousand shining beacons of dazzling stars, no electric boulevard of streetlights, no smog polluting the sky. The ever present sound of the mighty oceans ebb and flow, the scurrying of nocturnal creatures and screeching of owls and other night birds fills the air

I wake up to a low-lying misty fog, blanketing everything, softening the edges of the world around me. Footprints of raccoons night travels all around, a testament to the curiosity my sleeping bag must have aroused in them.

A feeling of disappointment as I begin to see the specks which will soon become people on the beach at Shelter Cove, knowing my trip will soon become a memory. In a way I'm glad for the humanity, but I know I'd soon be planning the next excursion into the woods. I can't imagine a world with no truly wild places left, and I'm wondering what the world beyond these walls will be like in 20 some odd years, when I'll be free to search out some solitude amongst the sentinels on the shore, relaxing on the beach, or lounging beneath a tree on a cliff overlooking the still wild, rolling water of the life sustaining Pacific Ocean. Hoping the Lost Coast remains unfound by the masses.



The Fishing Trip by Thomas Worland

"Hello. Yes, Mom, I'll be there on time. I know Dad's looking forward to this trip as much as I am."

I crawled out of bed and got in a quick shower to wake up. That done, I gathered my fishing gear and loaded the flat bottomed boat into my truck.

By the time I pulled in the driveway at Mom and Dad's place, he had all his fishing gear and a cooler I'm sure Mom had packed for us on the porch ready to go. As I walked in, Dad asked if I was ready to go. I walked over to where Mom sat and gave her a kiss on the cheek, and said good morning before we left.

"Sure dad, let's go, I'm ready. Let's get this show on the road so we can be at the river by sunrise."

By the time we pulled up to the river, the sun had just risen in the east. As the sun rose higher over the river, I couldn't imagine a more perfect day. We were all set, in the cooler the day's fair – cold Budweiser and ham and cheese sandwiches. "Let's get going, Dad, I can't wait to get at 'em." This day had been planned for the past four weeks.

While we were lowering the boat in the water, the sun went behind some dark clouds to the east of us. I looked up, ready to cry. Not now, please, Lord. No sooner had I said this that the sun reappeared. Thanks! Let's go son.

We started up in the middle of the slow moving river. I thought to myself how peaceful it was out here at dawn. I had turned and looked at my dad in the rear of the boat and he was smiling.

As we rounded the first bend in the river, the water rolled on the far bank under an old willow tree at the water's edge. I asked my dad if we could stop and try here. "Sure thing, son, it looks good to me." I dropped my boat anchor, a concrete block on the end of a nylon rope. After I had the boat set, I picked up my pole and tackle box. When I had rigged up my best lure, I cast to the far bank. A good one too, about five feet from shore, right under the tree. As soon as I set my bait and started to slowly reel in, I got a hard strike. My rod bent almost half into, the fight was on.

By the time I had that one on the stringer, my dad said, "You won't outdo the old man today, son." I turned to see him fighting one of his own.

When the fish broke the water's surface, I was shocked to see the biggest Bass of my life. After boating his fish, I got out the scales to weigh him. The monster topped the scales at over thirteen pounds. We continued to fish there for the next hour and a half, catching a total of five nice bass.

We headed up river and found another good spot, where we caught two more nice sized Bass to add to the stringer. By the time to stop for lunch, we had a total of seven. At lunch we pulled the boat half out of the water onto the bank. After we finished our lunch, we again headed up river. I asked my dad; why not go with the current?

He explained that at the end of the day, we would be able to coast back down to the truck with no effort and enjoy the trip. At three in the afternoon, we had our limit, a total of ten nice sized bass on the stringer. We coasted with the current and had a nice, easy ride back. We enjoyed the trip and didn't have to work to get there.

Once I helped get the boat and all our gear in the truck, I turned toward the river with thoughts on the great day we had so far. My dad asked if I was ready to head home. "Sure dad," I said."

While driving home, we listened to the radio and talked about the good day we had, and the fish we caught.

We got back to Dad's place and cleaned the fish, and stowed the poles too. Mom surprised us by having all the fixings to go with the fish for dinner. When we had enough cleaned for her to cook, I took them in.

By the time we had finished cleaning the rest of them and cleaning up, dinner was on the table. We sat down to fried fish, grits, hush puppies, and homemade coleslaw too. As dad said often, we were sitting back fat, dumb, and happy. We sat in the living room talking at the end of a fine day. The kind of day I wish would never end.

Around eight o'clock, I dozed off on the couch, content with the day.

I woke to what I thought was my dad saying it was time to get going. "Sure dad," was my answer.

"I'm not your dad, I am your roommate and they just called first call for breakfast. Are you going or not?"

"Sure, thanks." What a reality check to wake up and find yourself still in prison. Also, that it is 2011 too, and that my mom and dad had both passed away almost three years ago.

But, the nice part is that they still live in my dreams and always will. I am thankful for dreams in a place like this, where we need to get away every so often and escape the reality of it.



Mother Nature by Tommy Sanders

Since I was a child, I have loved the woods. I have camped out in them, hunted in them, and ran wild and free in them. The moonlit nights were the best times to be in the woods, and it was during one of these moonlit night escapades that I discovered her. She attempted to hide herself, by pretending to be a tree. She could not hide her curves, and it was obvious to me, that I had found Mother Nature. Though she stood still as can be, the wind rustled her hair. I made it a goal to get a photo of her, and to do it soon. Because I did not know how long she would be available, and in this spot. It is extremely rare for one to get a glimpse of Mother Nature in her natural surroundings. I spoke to her, "Please stay here, until I get back." with that said I ran to my car, I was about a mile back in the woods, and planning to spend the night. I had all my camping gear, and simply dropped it in the clearing as I ran to get the camera from my car. It took all of half an hour to get back to the highway, locate my car, and grab the camera. I checked it to make sure there were still batteries, and film in it. Then I fled back to the moonlit clearing I had been in. As I ran I thought I do not remember such a tree in this clearing. I had been coming to this particular spot for years, ever since I had found it as a child. We used to hide in a trailer on a cliff, when I was 7 years old. During that period of my life, I was curious, and had made me a rope to climb over the cliff with. At the

bottom of the cliff, was a sandy incline, that sloped away, to a stand of woods. Inside those woods I had found a place that looked as if it was dug out to be a stock pond, though the base of it was only 3 or 4 feet, and had a bank all the way around it of dirt. It was on this bank of dirt, that the trees began. The inside portion of the dry stock pond was level, and covered with pine needles. I love this open area, and the fact that it was surrounded by trees. The opening allowed the moonlight in and on a full moon night, it was almost daylight in this area. I could not believe my luck at discovering Mother Nature in this place.

Once I made it back to the clearing, I was elated to find she was still there. I walked to the base of her, and laid down on the ground so as to get the moonlight behind her, and snapped my photo. I took several shots from the same position; I did not wish to take a chance that the photo might not come out. I made my camp in the clearing with her in full view, spread my sleeping bag out, and made a fire on which to roast the wieners I had brought along. It seemed that as the smell of roasted meat drifted through the woods, that she began to move. I determined it must be a figment of my imagination, as I continued to eat. I filled my belly with the warm hot dogs, and then curled in my sleeping bag to sleep, with my eyes fixed on her. As I drifted off to sleep I seem to remember her moving. I watched as she stepped out of her pose, and though her legs were perfect. She was completely nude, and her steps brought her to me. She bent over me, and spoke "son, you may never see me again. You have photos and you will have to be satisfied with those. Remember this, my son, as you spend your time in the woods, I have watched over you all your life, and will always be somewhere close when you are in the woods. Take care." I slept one of the soundest nights I have ever had in those woods that night.

In the morning before daylight as I awoke I looked for her. She was gone. I lay there and pondered what I thought was a dream. I looked for my camera, and it was beside my backpack. I got up and stoked the fire, and made my coffee, as the sun came up. I sipped my coffee, I thought about it being Sunday, and that it may be hard to find a place to develop my film. I finished my coffee, and packed my things to leave.

That has been many years ago, and I still return to my camping spot every now and then. I have never seen her again. But the photos I have placed in my family album of Mother Nature prove to me, that I really did see her. I know she exists, for she spoke to me, and I have seen her with my own two eyes.



A Piece of Me by LeRoy Sodorff

While keeping an eye out for the mail man, a poor single mother of one sits quietly on the front stoop of her ramshackle abode lending an ear to an elderly woman. Tiring of holding her tongue, she finally gives voice to her frustration.

"I don't know what to do. Everyone wants a piece of me. My daughter wants my nose while my sister has my back. My ex-husband has my heart, but his new wife wants my head. The ladies at church want a hand and my mechanic wants an arm and a leg, just to repair that old clunker out there. My ex-mother-in-law is standing on my last nerve and I have half a mind to call and give her a piece of it. And my boss... why he just wants a piece of ass. What's a mother to do?"

Giving her a shoulder to cry on, the elderly woman looks down into those tear-filled eyes and says: "There once was a time when a little girl came running up to me on this very porch swing holding two silver dollars in her hand. She opened her mouth wide, exposing her two missing front teeth and said, 'Look what I got for these, Momma!' Well my dear, we can learn a lot from our children if only we listen with our eyes. It seems that she sunk her teeth into the problem and put the bite on the tooth fairy back then. And as for that little girl, well she's all grown up right now and I'm holding her here in my arms."

Karen by Robert L. Hambrick

Hi! My name is Karen and I am 7 ½ and I want to be a boy. I don't like being a girl. I like girls for friends, but boys are funner. I mean, I still keep my Barbie and other dolls, but I like playing with the boys better. I'm good at baseball and I love football. I don't like playing army because I don't think people should get killed. I got in a fight the other day because Curtis kept calling me a girly-wirly so I socked him good. The next day he had a black eye and I felt sorry for him so I polojized to him. Then Jimmy kept teasing Curtis, laughing at him saying he got beat up by a girl. I got mad and told him to shut-up or I'd beat him up too. He acted like he was going to be real tough, but when I put my dukes up and came toward him, he said he had to go

home. Everybody else laught at him when he jumped on his bike and ran off.

I know I'd be a good boy because I can't stand wearing dresses. Mama makes me wear them to church and sometimes on special days, but most of the times I wear T-shirts and jeans. Mom says that in a few more years I will start to like boys in a different kind of way and will be glad that I am a girl. But I don't know; I like them just fine right now and I don't see why I can't be one. I mean, I know boys got thingies they pee with and I have to sit on the toilet. But why can't I be a boy anyway? Donna says I can't because I will grow boobies pretty soon, but I don't know for sure. Lori's big sister Tammy told her that some girls pay doctors some money to cut off their boobies and sew on a thingie so they can be boys and kiss girls. But I don't think that's true. And even if it is true, would not want it done to me and I sure don't want to kiss no girl. Jill says all I have to so is lick the back of frogs and that will stop me from growing boobies. But I'd have to lick the Frog every day for the rest of my life. I like frogs alright, but I don't want to lick 'em every day.

I asked Dad if it was okay if I became a boy. He said NO! God made me a girl because he wanted me to grow up into a lady to have babies. I said I could be a boy and still get babies. He said, "How?" I told him I'd just go to the hospital and get a baby. Then he told me that babies don't come from the hospital, but they come from wimmins; wimmins go to the hospital to let the doctors take the baby out of their tummy. Well, that's the first time I heard that. I thought they made babies at the hospital. But Dad says that's what makes girls better than boys, cuz they are special and turn into wimmins and can make babies in their tummies. I guess it would be cool to have my own baby, but I still want to be a boy. I think I'll wait till I'm 10 before I make up my mind for sure. By then, I'll know everything.



“The Big Picture”by: Steven Hatfield I

This in essence, is a picture of our galaxy, the Milky Way. It is a spiral galaxy and we are on the outer

part of one of the arms. It is also the picture I had in my mind as I was trying to write a poem about our galaxy as one in an infinite Universe and how the whole thing worked. But something eluded me. I could not find an end to the poem, so it sat for almost three years. Then one morning about two years ago I woke up and the ending was in my mind. I had no intention of the poem having a religious tone but there it was. And, as bizarre as this sounds, it was just before dawn on Easter morning in 2009 (that did not click in my mind until later that day).

Then along comes this picture. Obviously this is not our galaxy but one like it. Still, that does not really matter. This could be any galaxy; any light- any life- in our Universe and it would change nothing. It makes me wonder if somebody was looking at our galaxy and thinking the same thing. So many times in the past I would watch the stars in our galaxy and wonder if someone was looking at our sun as I look at theirs in the night sky. Now even that seems small. As Stephen Hill says, “safe journey space fans- wherever you are”.

“Dawn’s Breath”

We speak of the Sun
As though ours- the only one
But of all the God-Breathed stars
Merely a spark is ours

In the Universe countless abound
Ever maxing- never a sound
Most will live and die
Their light seen by no eye

Yet ever are we in His sight
The galaxy’s edge- our celestial night
Because from somewhere we call above
The brightest Son shines with Love

The Power of the Universe by Robert L. Holloway

People say the Divine is just the Universe answering what we want or desire. Some call it God some call it the universe, does it really matter as long as you believe in what you seek? Your desires, prayers, wish however you choose to flavor it comes true. You could right now be inside a whole different dimension you just don't know how to reach out to that probable-self on a different plane, because rest assured my friends this is far from the only galaxy or dimension where there are people living.

Strange? I'm sure to most, some probably think I've spent a little too long in prison. No, you just have to expand your thinking to see other aspects of life and the world around us. Are we not all just built up energy moving around? Well what do you think the Universe is? I mean the Church and Science have finally come to a form of agreement about the Divine. We are just

energy vibrating in our own vibrational Universe, and science tells us everything is a massive energy field and all form is created of the same energy. So what you see in that picture is a form of a Zero Point Field, which is Omnipresent. So ask yourself what is Omnipresent? Is it not something that can never be created or destroyed? All that ever was or will be is already here, we just have to know and understand how to tap into our potential.

Some say positive thought is nothing more than luck. What if you never thought positive, would you really receive anything good in life if all you attracted was negative aspects? Like attracts like! The Universe will see to everything you ever desire, but you must think differently than you ever have. Trust me it goes way deeper than the Laws of Attraction. The laws of our vibrational Universe are vast and varied, but they are immutable. The Universe is more than just the Laws of Attraction, there are other aspects that are equally as powerful and if you can align yourself with those as well as the Laws of Attraction you will win. If you don't you will lose. The Universe is very powerful and is just waiting on you to send your thoughts to it and you will get what you desire, but you must hold firm to your thoughts if you want to receive an abundance of wealth in any aspect of your life, you can't send mixed signals. You must stand firm on what you desire and the Universe will send it 10 fold. Just picture your thoughts of abundance going into the center of the picture, and believe the Universe will work for you.

Do we not always apply energy to where our attention is? Energy flows where attention goes. So if you are focusing on "I don't have it", The Universe says, "Okay your wish is my command", and you don't get it. You just have to get out the mind frame of I can't, won't, don't, etc., to receive what you want or desire.

I'll leave you with a quote from a great man:

"Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth, that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon and under every deep a lower deep opens"

By: Ralph Waldo Emerson

It's never too late to change your thinking and evolve into a new person and the Universe can help you.

Final Notes

There is much to share and so little space to do it in. I only get to write this every six months and much happens in the world. My life is the easiest to recap as I'm pretty much in a routine of work, home, and family. As I mentioned before I moved from my country house into town. The transition has been good for my family, and especially my wife and 12 year old daughter. I miss the country, and in particular working in my garden. The new tenants did not want me hanging around gardening, and while that was a change of position from when we

rented the land to them, I lost interest in gardening in a hostile environment. I do not think they understand how important gardening was to me. I stewed about it for quite awhile, but their lease is up next summer, and if I need to I will find someone who can accept my presence on the land.

Town life is easy. I can walk and bike many places, and there are few outside chores to do. I miss bringing in firewood, but it sure frees up my time. I'm reading more and going online watching videos on the internet. The videos I most enjoy are the Occupy Wall Street films filling the internet. It is so inspiring to see folks standing up to the corporate power that is enriching a few, destroying the middle class and the social safety nets that I believe are necessary to keep the playing field level for all citizens. The disparity of wealth distribution is a direct result of the tax policy that really began with the Reagan presidency in the 1980's.

People are taught to blame unions and working people for the financial crisis and budget deficit, while the bankers and corporatists are getting richer while shipping jobs over seas and hiding money offshore. If you could see some of these videos of ordinary citizens standing up to the big money interests and the police that carry out their bidding I think you too would be inspired. Occupy protestors are put down by the same right wing media that praised the tea party and their right to protest. What hypocrites! With winter coming on I am hoping the momentum of this movement does not wane. The most heartening aspect of this movement is the diverse groups that come together under the occupy umbrella.

When I was coming of age during the Viet Nam debacle, the protesters were mostly the young, and in fact blue collar labor was often the opposition. Now if you look at these occupations the age range of the protesters is young to old, and long hairs and gray hairs are marching together with the folks in hard hats. This is a movement that represents the 99% that is not getting rich off of faulty tax policy, bailed out banks, and Wall Street illegality. All of you doing time for crimes have to wonder about all the financial fraud that has gone unpunished from the crash a few years ago. As you know, better than I money buys well connected lawyers, and well connected lawyers are able to work magic for their well heeled clients.

Oh my god, I wish you could see the Republican Candidate presidential debates. These guys are starting to make George W. look intelligent. Last week Rick Perry looked so stupid on national TV that he had my sympathy through my tears of laughter. Last night I watched Herman Cain make a fool of himself talking about Obama and Libya. It seems that the most sane candidate Mitt Romney is hated due to being a Mormon, and as the other candidates implode on their ignorant utterances Romney's base of support never increases. Every week a new Republican rises to challenge him as

last weeks front runner has to eat some words or explain some past ignorant action. Now the polls are telling us that Newt Gingrich is the most serious challenger to Romney. If it wasn't so important it would be funny. I myself do believe Ron Paul makes sense on many fronts foreign and monetary policy, but is equally whacked out when looking at health and education policies.

I wish Obama could get past these Republican obstructionists in Congress and get some legislation passed to even the playing field and give more folks opportunities for work. All the Republicans want to do is lower taxes on the rich. After all that policy worked so well in the Bush years. So what if the country lost millions of jobs, while the wealthy became super rich.

Okay, I know you are saying enough already, but I don't know what type of news you get to hear in prison. Perhaps in the next newsletter I will offer a current events project where I compile interesting articles from the magazines we have in the library and send you a progressive reader every couple of months.

Please take my invitation to help steer Prisoner Express in a direction that most benefits all of you. We are all in this together. I think our limited 5 senses cause us to see the separateness of things rather than the strong underlying connections. Whether you believe in a god that created the world in 6 days and then rested, or that all life evolved from a common single celled organism over the course of millions of years, or some combination of the above, somewhere in all that is connection. I ask that all members of PE think on this in some quiet time, and resolve to strengthen connections rather than getting ahead at someone else's expense.

Those of you who read the last newsletter might remember one of the pictures I used for the Photo Essays. It was a photo of the actor Charlie Chaplin from the film the "Great Dictator".

The Great Dictator is a [comedy film](#) by [Charlie Chaplin](#) released in October 1940. Like most Chaplin films, he wrote, produced, and directed, in addition to starring as the lead. Having been the only Hollywood film maker to continue to make silent films well into the period of sound films, this was Chaplin's first true [talking picture](#) as well as his most commercially successful film. More importantly, it was the first major feature film of its period to bitterly satirize [Nazism](#) and [Adolf Hitler](#).

At the time of its first release, the United States was still formally at peace with [Nazi Germany](#). Chaplin's film advanced a stirring, controversial condemnation of Hitler, fascism, [antisemitism](#), and the Nazis, whom he excoriates in the film as "machine men, with machine minds and machine hearts".



I figured many of you might not recognize this picture, and it was fun reading all of your writings. For all who contributed to that topic, the final packet should be mailed out in a few weeks. I bring this to your attention, not only because this was a dynamite movie, where Chaplin, a humble barber resembled a war mongering leader in a fictional country, but at the end of the film circumstances have him dressed as the great dictator and he is being asked to make a great national address to his ready for war country. Please read the words he spoke as they are as appropriate now as ever.

Final Speech of "The Great Dictator" by Charlie Chaplin -
Written and delivered by Sir Charles Chaplin

General Schulz: Speak - it is our only hope.

The Jewish Barber (Charlie Chaplin): I'm sorry but I don't want to be an emperor. That's not my business. I don't want to rule or conquer anyone. I should like to help everyone if possible; Jew, Gentile, black men, white. We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that. We want to live by each others' happiness, not by each other's misery. We don't want to hate and despise one another. In this world there is room for everyone. And the good earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful, but we have lost the way.

Greed has poisoned men's souls; has barricaded the world with hate; has goose-stepped us into misery and bloodshed. We have developed speed, but we have shut ourselves in. Machinery that gives abundance has left us in want. Our knowledge as made us cynical; our cleverness, hard and unkind. We think too much and feel too little. More than machinery we need humanity. More than cleverness,

we need kindness and gentleness. Without these qualities, life will be violent and all will be lost. The aeroplane and the radio have brought us closer together. The very nature of these inventions cries out for the goodness in man; cries out for universal brotherhood; for the unity of us all.

Even now my voice is reaching millions throughout the world, millions of despairing men, women, and little children, victims of a system that makes men torture and imprison innocent people. To those who can hear me, I say "Do not despair." The misery that is now upon us is but the passing of greed, the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress. The hate of men will pass, and dictators die, and the power they took from the people will return to the people. And so long as men die, liberty will never perish.

Soldiers! Don't give yourselves to brutes, men who despise you and enslave you; who regiment your lives, tell you what to do, what to think and what to feel! Who drill you, diet you, treat you like cattle, use you as cannon fodder! Don't give yourselves to these unnatural men---machine men with machine minds and machine hearts! You are not machines! You are not cattle! You are men! You have a love of humanity in your hearts! You don't hate! Only the unloved hate; the unloved and the unnatural.

Soldiers! Don't fight for slavery! Fight for liberty! In the seventeenth chapter of St. Luke, it's written "the kingdom of God is within man", not one man nor a group of men, but in all men! In you! You, the people, have the power, the power to create machines, the power to create happiness! You, the people, have the power to make this life free and beautiful, to make this life a wonderful adventure. Then in the name of democracy, let us use that power.

Let us all unite. Let us fight for a new world, a decent world that will give men a chance to work, that will give youth a future and old age a security. By the promise of these things, brutes have risen to power. But they lie! They do not fulfill their promise. They never will! Dictators free themselves but they enslave the people! Now let us fight to fulfill that promise! Let us fight to free the world! To do away with national barriers! To do away with greed, with hate and intolerance! Let us fight for a world of reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all men's happiness.

Soldiers, in the name of democracy, let us all unite!

[Huge hurray from the huge crowd – scene changes to Hanna (Paulette Goddard) a refugee on the floor with eyes still in tears from having been beaten down by the Dictator's soldiers. Romantic string music in the background. Hanna's beautiful face and eyes are in awe as to how her Jewish barber friend who was imprisoned by the Dictator's troops is now speaking as the Great Dictator!]

Hanna, can you hear me? Wherever you are, look up Hanna! The clouds are lifting! The sun is breaking through! We are coming out of the darkness into the light! We are coming into a new world; a kind new world, where men will rise above their hate, their greed, and brutality. Look up, Hanna! The soul of man has been given wings and at last he is beginning to fly. He is flying into the rainbow. Into the light of hope! Into the future! The glorious future! That belongs to you, to me, and to all of us. Look up, Hanna! Look up!

Hanna's Father: Hanna! Did you hear that?

Hanna: Listen! [as her great acting and incredible cinematography turns her face into a goddess as the music takes the movie to conclusion.]

Chaplin's speech is the good news I want to bring to all of you this Holiday season. I know being behind bars during the holiday times can be especially hard. Please know that all of us at Prisoner Express wish you the best this holiday season. This newsletter is our gift to you this holiday season. You matter to us! We wish the spirits of peace and prosperity dwell within you this holiday and beyond. Shine on-Gary



By: Carlos Delagarza

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Please note: If you received this newsletter, you are on our mailing list for 2012; 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 greatly slowed the 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. If you want a book package sent you must send at least 8 stamps. Otherwise you must wait until we find more funds..

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 Vol. 8 –. 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 2012, and share my entries with PE. Please send me a Journal Starter packet

Book Club-Please send me a copy of “Harold and Langley” by EL Doctorow. I will read the book and answer some questions regarding the book.

Penpal / Share Letters with Students-I will submit a letter regarding a book[s] that inspires me along with some background information about myself to be eligible to receive a college student pen friend.

Chess Club A-Please send me the How to Play Chess beginner packet.

Chess Club B- Please send me chess lessons for experienced players.

You may sign up for both!

Introduction to Astronomy]- Yes I want to learn about our solar system, and other information about outer space

Art Curriculum- Please enroll me in Treacy’s art instruction course. It will be limited to 200 students.

Spring 2012 Prisoner Express Newsletter -I wish to enroll for another year of the Prisoner Express Newsletter.

Art Show- I will submit art 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,

PRISONER EXPRESS
DURLAND ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY
127 Anabel Taylor Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853-1001

You do not need to send in this sheet if you do not want to rip your newsletter. You can write and tell us what programs you wish to join

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NEWS LETTER
Prisoner Express
Fall 2011

**The Durland Alternatives
Library, which funds
Prisoner Express, is a
project partner of the
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Additional Support comes
from the Cornell Public
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