

# PRISONER EXPRESS

## Summer 2014

Dear friends,

Welcome to the world of Prisoner Express [PE]. My hope is that within these pages you will find projects that inspire you. PE is a program of the Alternatives Library, which is a library and reading room located on the Cornell University campus. My name is Gary, I work at the library, and I direct PE with the help of volunteers, student workers and you.

Our programs are designed to offer you opportunities to engage in meaningful and creative activity. I often hear that prison life can be dull and repetitious, and that once you have a GED there are few opportunities for expanding your education. PE attempts to breach that void with offerings on a constantly changing variety of subjects. In this newsletter you will find a description of the programs we are offering this cycle, as well as a presentation of some of the writing and art that has been submitted by PE members through previous programs.

I receive so many letters from all of you. It is not possible for me or the other volunteers to personally answer all the letters, so I particularly look forward to the newsletter as a way to both acknowledge your letters to us, as well as share some of what is going on in my life and the program these days. Many of you have been participating in PE programs for years and much I have to say in this newsletter intro you have read many times already. Prisons are very transient places. People come and go all the time. People move around often. If you are moved please contact us with your new address. If your mail is returned to us as undeliverable we put your subscription on hold until we hear from you again. In fact if we do not hear from you within 6 months of sending this newsletter to you, we also put your subscription on hold. Please keep this in mind if you want to continue receiving this newsletter.

We must raise the funds to pay for the postage and photocopy costs this program incurs. Being financially prudent allows us to serve the most people. For that reason there are certain protocols we follow in keeping PE open and accessible to all who write. The correspondence courses we mail are sent at bulk rate thru US mail. The bulk mail program at USPS is affordable yet restrictive. All mailings must be at least 200 pieces and they must be identical. After you read the program descriptions, and make choices on which programs to join, send back your requests to us. It often takes a few months for most of the requests to come back to us, and then when we have a few hundred participants we send out the mailing. If we receive your request after we have already sent the coursework you most likely will not get it. It's not that we want

to punish you, but rather we cannot afford regular postage rates due to the volume of requests we receive. Most bulk mail packages cost 19 cents postage each, and average regular first class postage for our packets would be \$1.50 per mailing. You can imagine the difference in cost for postage when a couple of hundred folks want an individual mailing for a particular program. It just doesn't work given our available funds.

Many of you found out about PE through resource guides or from an acquaintance. Often people write expecting us to be one thing and are surprised at what we actually are once they read the newsletter. If you are surprised I hope it is pleasantly. Once upon a time we were simply a free book program, but after a few years the program was modified to accommodate the growing demand.

So if this is your first time reading an issue of PE news, you have received it because at some point in the past 6 months you wrote us requesting something. We probably did not respond to your initial letter, but we were not blowing you off, but rather waiting for this moment when we get to welcome you to PE and let you know the actual services we are able to offer this cycle.

Before I describe the upcoming programming I will recap where we are at in completing some programs from last cycle. We are reading through all the responses from our last book club selection, 'WHEN THE EMPEROR WAS DIVINE. Josh is coordinating this effort. Mike, who created the packet, left town for the summer. Josh is reading thru all the answers and has created a compilation document of the most interesting responses and it will be mailed to all who sent in answers. Rachel is reading all the responses to the Jewish History and Culture project and it is my understanding that she will also create a compilation document of the most interesting writing. It has been fun to highlight different religions and explore the history and the practice of the faith. A unit on Buddhist history and practice will be offered in this series. For those of you who waiting for Poetry Anthology Vol. 12, it is still being edited. The selection process is done, but now we have to type and format the entries. Once it is complete we will send it to everyone who submitted a poem for consideration. All poems we receive now are entered for consideration for Poetry Anthology Volume 13.

### Upcoming Programs:

**Expedited Book Project**-This is an outgrowth of our initial free book project, but the requirement is that you need to send us funds to contribute towards postage costs. We have a room full of donated books. They are donated from students,

professors and community members and they cover a wide variety of subjects. The selection is always changing and we cannot tell you what we have because it varies based on the donation stream. I believe we send out high quality books in good condition. We have volunteers who will read your letter and make the best match they can given your interests and what's on our shelf. It usually takes a few months for us to get a book package out to you, but we are reliable. Give us as many selections as possible. The more subjects you suggest the greater chance we can get a good match from our collection. We will send a package that reflects our best effort. Please send \$3.50 thru your account or use stamps if that is allowed in your prison. Please be sure to know the rules of your individual unit for receiving books such as how many you can get, and whether hard or soft cover is an issue. Typically a package has 4 to 6 books unless you cannot receive that many at 1 time. Every state seems to have different rules, and in some states all the individual prisons have different rules. Do your homework to let me know what is allowed. We know the typical books that cannot be sent are martial arts, porn, weapons, "deviant behavior" type stuff but we still can find quality books on all sorts of subjects. I can certainly understand the pleasure of a good book anytime, and particularly when you are locked away. A good book is a giant window into life, and when your natural view is narrowed by a wall, you can see something new in your mind while reading a book.

**I have received a large donation of the following motorcycle magazines: "Cycle World", Motor Cyclist" and "Dirt Rider". Please let me know if you want them in your expedited book request. All our other programs are free, but you must send postage funds for this expedited book program.** Amanda, a college senior will manage the book room beginning this fall, has written the greeting below

*Hello, and welcome to this installment of the Prisoner Express newsletter! We're looking forward to rolling out some new programs for you.*

*My name is Amanda, and I help run the book program here. If you've received a package in the past year, chances are you've heard from me, but if you haven't, I'm currently studying journalism and biology among a bunch of other things, and I play percussion and sometimes bass clarinet. I cook a lot (and eat a lot...), and I like reading and writing, so I've had a lot of fun picking out books for everyone in the book program.*

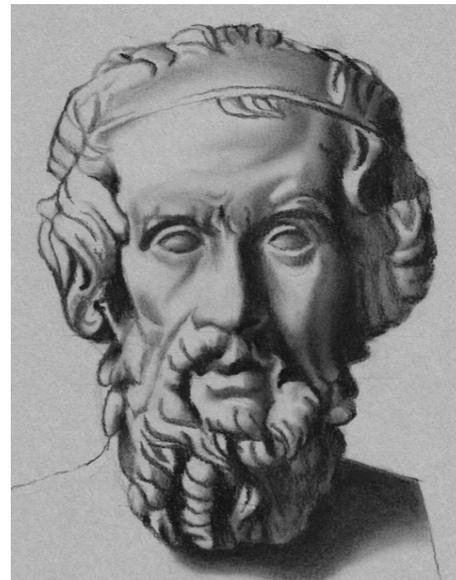
*That being said, I'd like to give a little reminder to our participants, new and old alike. Rising postage costs have forced us to ask for assistance with postage in addition to requests for books, so unfortunately we cannot fill book requests unless we receive the \$3.50. If postage weren't an issue, I'd give everyone all the books we could because books are wonderful and I know how much it means to you all to have a little reading material to get through the day, but it's not feasible at this time.*

ANYWAY...

*I know I can't really compare anything I've gone through to what you all are going through, but I want you to know that there are indeed people out there looking out for you, including us. Here at Prisoner Express, we provide creative outlets like drawing, poetry, short stories, and more, as well as activities to get you thinking via math, chess, history, and sometimes even just a good book. It's fun to take time out of our day to read your work or write a letter, and we enjoy knowing that you like it too.*

*And let us know if there are any programs you'd like to see! Our offerings change every once in a while, and feedback is always welcome.*

**Journal Project-** Keeping a journal is a great way to process your experiences and your memories. The thoughts you have while confined often keep going around in your head until your thoughts can spiral out of control. Writing thoughts down has a way of unraveling that spiraling thought pattern. We encourage you to send us your journal entries and we will keep a folder of your entries. Volunteers at PE will read your journal and send occasional letters to you. Sophie leads this project. She has volunteered with the PE program since she of college. When you sign up for this project we will send you an was in middle school and now she is many years out introductory packet on how to keep journal. It will explain the project in more detail.



You are welcome to start anytime by sending in your thoughts or you can wait until after you receive your introductory packet to begin.

By James Sepesi

**Poetry Project-** Every 6 months we put out a new edition of Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology. Everyone who submits a poem for consideration receives a copy of the new anthology. Students read thru all the submitted poems and select those which will be used in the anthology. There are many entries, so please do not feel discouraged if your poem is not selected. Poetry is not an exact science, and selection is based on the taste of the volunteers who create each anthology. Every anthology has different editor, and each edition has it's own flavor. I hope you will consider sending in some of your poetry

for Vol 13, which I hope will be completed by Dec 14. Below are a few poems submitted during the last cycle.

### T. Williams, "Where Life is Lying"

Far from where tomorrow lies  
Lies the rain, the graying life  
Life in the sun-scorched ashes now  
Now it bleeds but lives somehow

Left behind the peace of mind  
The radiance that made you blind  
And though the bough will break the bend  
This fallen hope may darkness rend

Home is where the heart is dying  
The hardest heart grows here  
Forever know where life is lying  
Though grave the way appear

Illusive dream, a life is sifted  
Recall a time before  
Remember the times a smile was lifted  
Those times you now adore  
Paper planes and childhood games  
Under heaven's powdered sky  
Memories fade to sighing flames  
Once to live and twice to die

### LeRoy Sodorff, "Life."

It's not the length of this sentence  
that bothers me my friend  
it's the shortness of it all  
and that dark period at the end.

### M. Lee Mobley, "The Mind Wears No Chains"

The Mind is chainless,  
No one can bind it.  
Where there's a glimmer of hope,  
The Mind will find it...

As the sounds of Prison  
Fill the corridor outside my cell,  
My body is confined,  
But my Mind is as free as the air...

Free to tour the world,  
And places unknown.  
Free to relive the happiness  
of days long gone...

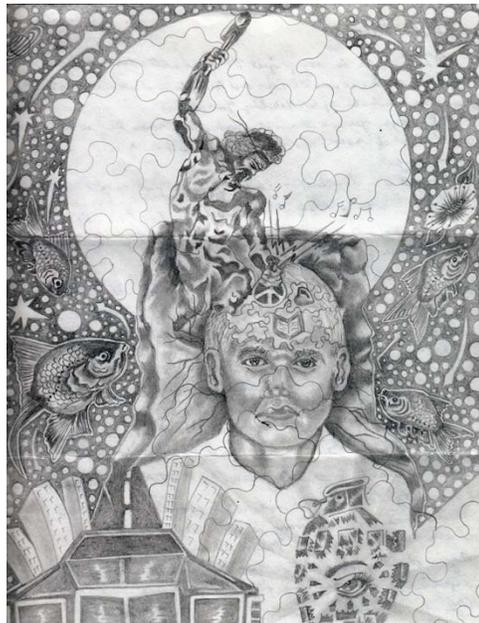
The Mind is our freedom,  
Our cure for all Pain.  
The body can be shackled  
But the Mind wears no chains...

**Book Club**-Our selection this cycle is a book of poems, "Devil Dogs and Jarheads" by Victor Pearn. Below is a description of this book:

The Poetry of Marine Corps Life -In most people's minds, life in the military does not seem very poetic. Where in the world of drill instructors, sharpshooters, and grunts is the stuff of poems? Would you like to know? Then read Victor Pearn's new poetry collection, Devil Dogs & Jarheads.

In Pearn's new book, the world of the U.S. Marine in 1969 comes to life in buzz cuts, reveille, drill sergeants, salutes, rifle ranges, purple hearts, sand crabs, and daily inspections. As Southwest Book Views noted, "The experiences shared in this collection are etched indelibly upon the heart of the writer and now the reader in words that the world can little afford to ignore. This is undeniably exquisite work."

Entering the Marine Corps in 1969, Pearn spent three years repairing electronics for the Corps before getting an honorable discharge in 1972. Having developed self-discipline and learned to study while in the Marines, Pearn went on to college, finally earning a Masters Degree in Creative Writing from the University of Colorado in Boulder.



By Alejandro Benavidez

Along with the poetry book we will send an instructions for reading and analyzing poems as well as ask you to create an original poem. I have 300 copies of the book so don't delay your response if you wish to join the project.

### Spirituality and Math with Professor Dani

Dani recently retired from teaching at Ithaca College. He loves math but does not like the way it is taught. He has a vision for teaching math by encouraging people to see the principals of math in music, art, puzzles, games and nature. He is also deeply concerned with spirituality and enjoys sharing mail with all of you who want to explore your spiritual side. He has selected some quotes which you will see in his letter below. If you wish to write to Dani regarding these quotes he invites your response. Dani will help create a packet with puzzles and explore the idea of infinity with you in the upcoming cycle math packet.

Dear friends,

*I wanted to thank you for the letters that you have been sending. So many of them are full of wisdom and express a rainbow of diversity and wholeness. I am humbled by the richness and honored to play a role of a facilitator that collects and shares pearls of wisdom through the channel of Prisoner Express. When you look at the human journey as a spiritual journey where the body is a temporary vehicle and one lifetime is just a drop in the ocean of infinity you gain strength to continue your journey and do your duty wherever you may*

be. Every good thought, every good deed is recorded and never gets lost. Some of you have gone through such profound transformations that are worth all the suffering that you went through. In reality the only real prison is that of the mind and most of the so-called free people outside are chained with heavy shackles.

I apologize for not having the time to answer individually to many people. Please know that we are reading your letters and sharing them with other people (in particular residents of a nursing home who have no ties anymore with the physical world but are full of Love and wisdom)

So many of you are facing such difficulties that only a spiritual life can penetrate through them, and these kinds of newsletters and spiritual sharing can be like a food for your soul because in the heart of heart it may help you connect to your inner being. The real You that cannot be imprisoned, and that is so gentle and kind.

**In a few months Gary and I will create a math unit. The unit will contain puzzles like the OkiDoku and KenKen puzzles and possibly more diverse kinds of puzzles and other material like the concept of Infinity and Infinite numbers. It will not be focused on traditional learning of mathematics.**

For the spiritual unit we will not continue exploring the Kabbalah book from last year, but rather focus on sharing from your insights and inspirations based on your letters and other sources.

I will reprint sections of letters I have received since the last newsletter

From Julio:--"When mankind, individually and collectively, realizes that there is nothing "unsacred" when we understand that every sense, emotion and thought is not to be "controlled" but embraced, sublimed and transformed, when we come into the re-cognition of our complete - perfect holiness, then and only then will the dawn of the Golden Age emerge - like the prodigal son awakening to his own worthiness"

From James---It is very difficult to find beauty, inspiration and spirituality in prison, especially in the winter. My most inspirational beautiful things are green grass, especially when it is just coming alive in the spring. This is a sign to me that all will be well.... I make a point each day to see where others are in need, especially in spirit. I try to use compassion in my

interactions with inmates, staff and correction officers. Just paying attention to what someone is saying can lighten another's day. The Golden Rule, responding to others as I would like them to respond to me takes intention and focus. When I concern myself with someone else I am less likely to be indulging in self pity." I will not quote directly from James but I feel that he can be our guide and teacher with regards to compassion and getting away from this incessant sense of "Me, me, me..." the continuous brainwashing illusion of separate existence that prevents us from being one with the whole and from being truly happy.



By Elisandro Nava

From Lester---"I am not this hair, I am not this skin, I am the soul that lives within" --Rumi  
 "What you are you do not see, what you see is your shadow" --RabinDranath Tagore  
 "Thousands of candles can be lighted from a single candle and the light of that one candle will not be shortened. Happiness never decreases by being shared" --Buddha

From Dale Becker--- Yoga practice is a means to control our senses and we begin by exerting control over our tongue. By controlling the tongue, speech is controlled as well as our food and drink intake. Exercising such control will lead us gradually to a state of sense purification.

In addition to controlling speech, one should learn to listen both to other human beings and also if possible to authoritative sources that help us grow spiritually

"How can the conditioned mind unravel itself, get out of its conditioning?" "There are many methods and I wish to share one: "by regular chanting a phrase (I do this one: Hare Krishna, Hare Krishna, Krishna Krishna, Hare Hare

Hare Rama, Hare Rama, Rama Rama, Hare Hare (but there are many others also from other traditions). This helps me begin the process of cleansing away all misgivings in my heart thus removing the false idea that I am the lord of all that I survey. All I can hope for is mastering my own senses. I can chant this in any place and any situation including my current prison experience.

From Bobby---As an answer to the question: "How can the conditioned mind become free?" (Also how to transform addiction)

Answer: The first step of "unraveling" our wrapped, conditioned mind is admitting that we are broken. The second step is the willingness to monitor and correct our thinking patterns. The third step is to realize that the distorted views which has been conditioned in us from early childhood has lead us down the path of destruction and that we do not

experience peace and equanimity but indulge in extreme emotions and unhealthy behaviors. The fourth step is learning how to identify and stop those thought distortions and the last step is to learn to "reprogram" our patterns of thinking and replace the faulty choices with rational and good choices.

One of the sources that we can use to set the conditioned mind free is the teaching of Sathya Sai Baba who wrote many books and has many many quotes. Here is a small collection of quotes by Sathya Sai Baba quotes. Each one of these quotes can be a source of inspiration. If you meditate on a quote you may find that you can write a whole book on it and the energy in the words will still not be exhausted.

**Those of you who are inspired by one or more of these quotes please write a response and address the response to me, Dani. Your writing can be of any length and ideally relates to practical ways to apply the quotes; and may include example from your life and have the intention to inspire others. I will share some of the writings that you submit to all who submit a response to 1 or more quotes.**

- Your heart must be transparent, like glass, with spiritual light within illuminating the whole world.
- Peace can only be won the hard way, by eliminating violence and greed from the hearts of individual.
- The secret of happiness is not doing what one likes to do but in liking what one has to do.
- The end of wisdom is freedom; The end of culture is perfection;
- The end of knowledge is love; The end of education is character.
- First you must grapple with the fact that duty is God and start doing your duty.
- I have come not to disturb or destroy any faith, but to confirm each in his own faith - so that Christian becomes a better Christian, the Muslim, a better Muslim, and the Hindu, a better Hindu.
- Transmuting "man" into "God" and experiencing that Ananda or Bliss is the one and only achievement for which life is to be devoted.
- The minimum qualifications for Grace are surrender of ego.
- The treasure that is precious is the quality of even mindedness in all situations.
- The joy of being the master of senses is far greater than being their slave.
- Your progress is reflected back as Grace, your decline is reflected back as its absence. The mirror just reflects. It has no partiality or prejudice.

**Buddhist History and Practice**-In our last cycle we had a lesson on Jewish History and Culture. In the past we had a packet on the Rise of Islam. This cycle we will explore Buddhism. Many of you write asking for books about

Buddhism, so I know there is interest. For those of you who are not interested in the practice of Buddhism, you might still enjoy learning about it. Buddhism seems to be less a religion and more a philosophy of life. The meditation that is a part of a Buddhist practice can bring about harmony and balance to individuals dealing with distress. I have a number of friends who are Buddhists and they gain immeasurably from their practice. Please note, if you feel any religion but yours is the work of the devil this packet may not be for you. PE has no specific religious orientation, but our programs explore different spiritual venues.

**Art Projects with Treacy**- We are fortunate to have Treacy directing our art outreach efforts. Below are her updates for ongoing and upcoming art projects.

News from the art department:  
I wanted to share a recent essay I wrote:

#### The Circus Train

When my mother is dying 3000 miles away in California, for some reason, I cannot fly to see her. Flying seems too immediate, has too much intention, not enough process for a printmaker like myself. I take the 72-hour train.

I tell myself the train will give me the opportunity to draw. I will draw the entire country as it speeds by. The demand to draw quick and without thinking is not new to me. At Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, I am taught to draw croquis, those quick sketches, some as quick as 20 seconds, demanded of the student in a life drawing class. In any late Murray Dessner's class, these instant sketches mean drawing everything in the room; the floor, the ceiling, the chair, the model, everything, and covering every inch of the newsprint in a frenetic mess.

Drawing is the medium by which I get used to things; get familiar with surroundings, experience changes, get used to my mother dying.

I don't know why my mother is dying. She has lots of health problems. Two weeks earlier she calls to ask if I could fly out in order to drive her to Oregon. She wants to commit suicide.

As usual, the options my mother gives me are simple and extreme; assist in the pushing or accept the falling. Years have taught me to accept the falling.

This falling is what the printmaking of etching demands of me; accept whatever happens knowing that ultimately most of the process is out of my control. I create an etching plate based upon a drawing, develop a specific color harmony, a composition and then drag all of that to the edge of a cliff. At the cliff it will fall as it will fall.

That cliff is the etching press and the point clearly telling me I have no control in the process; if I ever thought I did.

I ask my prison art class, "When you were little boys did you dream of growing up to become inmates in a maximum security prison?" They all answer with variations of, "Nah, I never thought I'd be here!" I say, "Great! Then you will all make excellent printmakers!"

Painting works similarly. But because the hands never leave the painting process, unless the artist has developed a Jackson Pollock, the artist can paint as if he/she is in control. The Jackson throw introduces confusion because it suggests that an artist has control and needs to get away from the paint to get rid of control.

Great painters know the flow of paint is its own master and does not care what the artist intends. Any artist who thinks that one can control the flow of paint just creates bad paintings.

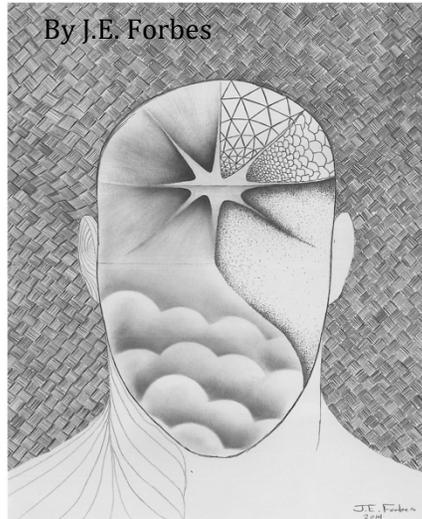
As I tell my class, "If you ever been in a flood, you know that water does what water wants and the water in a watercolor is no different." Some of the students have been in floods and all have known falling.

Art school teaches me to un-think whatever I thought I saw because I saw nothing and then embellished it with a mental something. The 20-second croquis is my new trainer forcing me to see the world without surplus taking only what I need.

The train is delayed somewhere in Colorado and the quick drawings become the three-hour drawing session that I expect of a PAFA portrait class. When I see that the train is stopped next to the circus train I think of Peaches the legendary PAFA model. After years in vaudeville she continues to take off her clothes for art students well into old age.

While drawing the unpeopled circus train, I imagine my mother in the circus; maybe as the tiger trainer, or the snake swallower. My mother had once killed a rattlesnake with a shovel when it almost bit my youngest brother. Death is not sufficient punishment. My mother skins and forces that snake to become a hatband for my father making my paternal grandmother cry, "Madge, that will only bring bad luck to Gene!"

Years later when my father is suddenly killed in an accident and the state trooper gives me a brown paper bag containing his belongings, I find the hat. My brain wanders to a question only my grandmother would ever ask, "Was it the hatband?"



No, my mother's circus role would certainly not be as animal handler. Her place in the circus would be more aggressive; the flamethrower, the knife hurler, the person who shoots from the hip.

Once my mother bought a caboose. She lives in it by herself on an abandoned track running into the woods to nowhere. Despite this, my mother does end up on the local TV news program as "The Woman Who Lives in A Caboose;" a cute sideshow of a strange woman living in a caboose to get away from it all; aired for an audience that seeks entertainment and does not want to know of the seven she left behind; some old enough, some not, and some in-between.

When I arrive at the California facility where my mother is dying, I greet her with, "Hi, Mom, it's me, Treacy." Her answer of "Hi and hopefully, goodbye," carries a finality dismissing any superficial chitchat. Probably inappropriately, I notice and then point out, "Mom, your Philly accent returned."

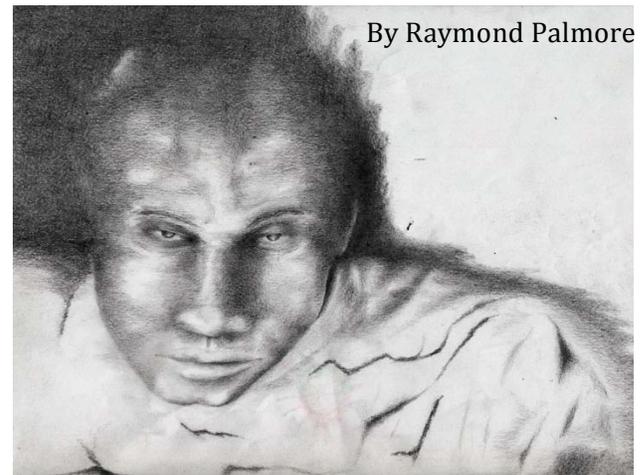
After spending a lifetime fighting the accent and the Philadelphia it represents, my mother is taking it with her

My mother is committed to this death. When she leaves the now six remaining, it is an act of acceptance displaying a profound will to let it be and be gone. Not a flight into anger.

As an artist working in my studio everyday, I know that creativity is not passive. It is, however, a process of relinquishment: a relinquishment demanding the artist to let things become and then a relinquishment to let that same becoming go; underscoring that art is always and ultimately important, and never precious.

Updates:

**The self-portraits project:** I sent out the first assignment of this project with some questions that I needed the participants to answer so that I could tailor the rest of the assignments to circumstances of prison life – mirrors, no mirrors; drawing tools, no drawings tools. I will send out the remaining assignments in July.



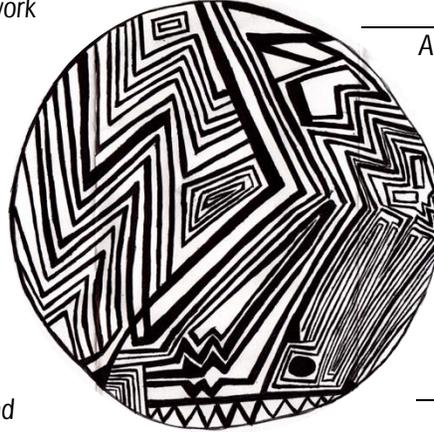
**The Art, Alibi, and Anonymous We Exhibition;** aka, the circle show. The show at the Philadelphia gallery was exciting. The work looked great and there were a lot of comments about everyone's work – both incarcerated and non-incarcerated artists. For those you do not know about this exhibition, this exhibition was the combined exhibition of both incarcerated artists and non-incarcerated artists who were asked to create a work of art in a 6" circle. The exhibition asks the viewer if they can experience the work without the "story of the artist" – asking the viewer not to view the work through how they feel about prisoners but how they feel about the artwork without the label of prison. No one looks at my work and says, "Oh, not bad for a white middle class woman." But I hear the comment all the time, "Wow, not bad for an inmate, " as if prisoner artists are different than anyone else.

The exciting news now is that the show is traveling. It will be on exhibition at the Philadelphia City Hall for the months of July and August. Everyone who participated should be very proud of his or her work.

**Mystery Painting Project:** In this project, participants received a 3x4" section of a famous painting, but were not told what the painting was. The participating artist was asked to redraw and enlarge the section as an 8x11" drawing. These enlarged drawings were assembled in a grid composite and revealed the famous painting as the Mona Lisa. The reassembled drawings improved the ole girl; she is beautiful and on view at Anabel Taylor Hall.

The participating artists were also asked to create a self-portrait and those self-portraits were assembled in the same grid order as Mona – for instance the person, who created the upper right corner of Mona, has their self-portrait in the upper right corner of the composite of self-portraits. These self-portraits are displayed along with the very large Mona – Mona is 8 feet by 6".

**Draw From Life:** In the packet I sent out on this drawing from life curriculum there are some corrections I note on the first page. Unfortunately, correction needs correction as I am a repeat offender. Whoever received the packet, please disregard in the correction section, the page numbers to which I refer. Just use the assignment number to which I am referring in that correction. The page numbers got discombobulated in the printing of the new edition. If you have not requested the Draw from Life, but would like one, there is still time to sign up for this project.



By Rocco Ronaldo

### New project offering

**Two-dimensional design** - One of the things that I see repeatedly is a picture with something right smack in the middle of the drawing paper. This creates a dead zone in that the viewer's eye lands right in the middle of the page and cannot move out of this. In the art world, we call this kind of composition "non-dynamic." In other words, it is boring. In this project, you will be asked to look at various ways of composing a picture that is dynamic; in other words, exciting.

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A couple of other things:

I have noticed that there are not many women participating in the art projects and don't really know why. It is confusing because in art school there are a lot of women. I am asking the women out there, if you have some ideas, please write to me. It is possible that a separate project could be developed just for women.

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Unfortunately, we cannot send things back because we do not have enough money or staff. But what you send we will try to publish in the newsletter, the poetry anthology, and will keep in the archives.

Likewise, it is very expensive to copy work and send back copies. What I hope to do with the projects is continue making composite posters like I did of Mona Lisa. I think that was a great way to display the work and display it in color without breaking the bank.

The Mona Lisa poster and the self-portraits posters can be seen by family and friends on the Internet at:

[www.anopenwindowproject.org](http://www.anopenwindowproject.org). Likewise, the Art, Alibi and Anonymous we installation shots from the Philadelphia Gallery can be seen at that website.

Sometimes, I get requests about selling prisoner art. Again, unfortunately, we don't have the time and money to be a selling representative. Personally, I am not good at the commercial side of art – I hate the money thing – you would not want me to be your representative in the selling department. I tend to give so much of my work away - much to the chagrin of my husband.

Best Wishes,  
Treacy

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**Chess Club-** Jack and Nico are co-creating our chess offerings. Jack has some information below to share with you. Hey guys, my name is Jack and I will be writing the chess newsletters this summer. A few of you may remember me from the last two chess newsletters and I will try to keep answering all of your questions and suggestions. I've been playing chess since around middle school and joined a chess program in NYC called Chess-in-the-Schools in high school. Although I'm sure some of you are even better than I am, because of my

experiences with chess, I can find many chess resources suitable for all levels. One of my main goals is to start a system of playing chess over mail with some of you. The only problem that I cannot find a solution to, is that it would be very expensive to play a single chess game because each move would cost a stamp. I'm open to suggestions and will definitely try to work with everyone so that you can start playing games with different people through mail. I'm open to suggestions and will definitely try to work with everyone so that you can start playing games with different people through mail. Sign up for the chess club to receive these packets and learn more about chess.

**Theme writing-** This program makes up the backbone of the PE newsletter. It began years ago when letter writers let me know how unsafe they felt expressing their true emotions to others in prison. The fear was anything vulnerable that was expressed would be eventually used against them. This leads to everyone posturing as a tough guy and very few people being real about how they were actually feeling. People also wrote that they felt they were going crazy. The fact that so many people wrote this made me aware that these feelings were systemic and common, and that reading each others words was a great way to promote sanity and balance. Once you realize you are not alone in your thoughts it helps to find a comfortable place inside yourself. Every month I give both a word cue and a picture theme. You are invited to write a story inspired by the word cue or picture

If you submit writing, you receive a packet of all the writing on the theme topic. It is a great way to get mail and to read the thoughts and experiences of others facing some of the same environmental handicaps you live within. In the newsletter I will include a sampling of the writing for select theme topics. I do this in hopes of inspiring all the readers to participate. There may be 20 to 40 selections on a theme topic in a packet, but you will only see a sample in the newsletter. The last mailed theme packet was 60 pages, so you can see what a small sampling of the writing you get in this newsletter when I am trying to share themes from the previous six months. If you want to receive a complete packet, you must submit your story on a theme. There is no minimal length to a story. Write whatever comes to you. There are no wrong answers. **Please Note-** In the word cue theme please write about something that actually happened or something you believe. For the picture theme you can write either fiction or non-fiction based on your inspiration, but I would like the word theme portion to reflect your actual experiences and thoughts rather than fantasy, fiction type pieces. Also some folks start writing extra long pieces. Due to space constraints please limit your submissions to 800words.

#### Upcoming Themes

Recipe for trouble—due July 1, 2014

Brothers—due August 1, 2014

Success- due September 1,2014

Sharing-due October 1.2014

Outside looking in- due November 1,2014

Keeping the Peace –due December 1,2014

Getting even- due January 1,2015

High School- due February 1,2015

#### Previous themes selections

##### Security

Cesar Hernandez

Security does not necessarily mean that you need to be super rich. Being secure means that when you start your car it will start the first time. Having a job that you know won't be eliminated at a moments notice. Being able to go to the grocery store and being able to buy as much food as you want; not just unhealthy cheap processed foods. Being secure means living in a safe neighborhood where you don't have to be vandalized or robbed. Being secure means being able to save money for retirement so you don't have to rely solely on social security. Being secure mean that if you fall ill you can afford to go see a doctor and not have to wait until you are so sick you need to go to the emergency room. Security doesn't mean you need to be super rich, it just means you have enough money to pay for your needs.



By Leroy Sodorff

Catherine LaFleur

When I was a child, I took comfort in many things: the canopied bed my father built from maple, Honeybunch, my rumbly-voiced Maine Coon cat, the serenity I felt while my mother braided my long whisky colored hair. These things made me feel secure as a child.

Because I was a late surprise baby, I was treated as everybody's baby. My siblings were well into their teens while I

was a little girl. Patrice and Paloma were willing baby sitters and sewed outfits and play clothes for me. Michel and Jean-Alain taught me the patient art of fishing and took me bowling. I even had miniature bowling shoes. At school plays, piano recitals and chorale the whole family would be in the audience clapping madly and beaming with love and pride. I don't have a single picture of any event from my childhood where my family doesn't appear. I was wrapped in love, petted and praised. Perhaps this might seem claustrophobic, but the chrysalis my family spun around me made it feel like I would be surrounded by them forever. I was secure in the knowledge I would never be alone.

The ugly truth is my family tried too hard. So many things were hidden behind a veil of normalcy. My mother suffered from severe debilitating depressions. Father worked to support five children and often acted as the sole parent. Our church was part of a cult-like religion that drained everyone emotionally, spiritually, and financially. Both of my brothers escaped to the military while my sisters escaped to marriage and families of their own. Our happy family was not so happy and for most of my childhood I was blissfully unaware. When I came to prison, I began to lose contact with my family, with my friends, with virtually everyone outside of prison. Of course this did not happen immediately but slowly over more than a decade. First, my circle of friends dropped away. Due to my narrowly circumscribed existence, we just didn't have much in common anymore. My days rarely changed from the same dull routine, and I find the "sturm und drang" of the daily prison soap opera is not very interesting when you try to distill it on paper.

I can't find much to say to my family because the majority of what happens to inmates is horrifying to outsiders. I have become injured to casual cruelty, to the perpetual ordeal of life inside, and the abusive treatment duly meted out by the staff. Sometimes, I have to catch myself when I am talking on the phone. I begin to relay some incident from my day when there is a sudden silence on the other end. The person I am talking to is shocked and doesn't know how to respond. I try to limit my conversation to 'safe' topics: the classes I'm taking, my work in the law library, and books and magazines I have been reading. When I talk to them, I try to sound upbeat as if I am at Camp Prisoney Land instead of Arkham Asylum. There is hope. If I am very circumspect about what I say, perhaps my family won't be driven away by my neediness and hopeless situation. I suppose I am giving my family security now by constructing an elaborate cocoon to shield them from the truth of my life.

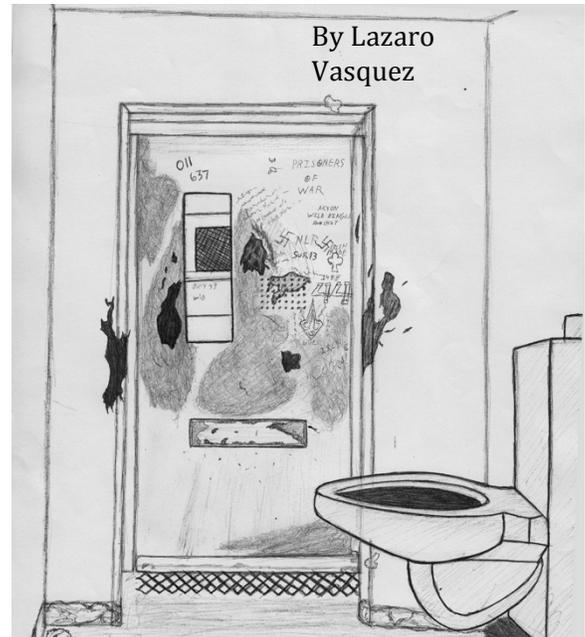
Don Brown

When I hear the word "security" it is hard for me to feel anything but anger. It is a lie, a myth, a fire-sided ghost story. The word is synonymous with control and slavery and abuse of power. I am in prison and many would say that fact would make it difficult to be objective about the issue. I would argue

that you can't tell if the water is nice simply by looking at the waves, you have to jump in.

Prison has countless rules in place that are intended to insure the security of the prison. These rules deny me some of the most mundane freedoms such as being allowed to bring my own seasoning to the chow-hall, and offense punishable by 30 days in the hole. I can shrug most of these silly things off. I committed a crime and I am paying the price for it.

It's some of the bigger things in which the lie becomes apparent. There are four phones on my block but if you want to call somebody I need to submit their name, phone number, address, and date of birth to the administration then wait upon



prison approval for the right to call that person. I can't call collect, I must buy a phone card or the person I wish to call must set up a pre-paid account with the service provider.

To further protect the security of the prison, all my calls must be monitored and recorded. Apparently this is expensive. It costs \$17.50 for a 15 minute call to Oregon; the prison gets 40% of that money. Visitors cannot bring food into the prison. There are many vending machines though which provide five chicken wings for \$7.50. My parents can't go to the dollar store and buy Top Ramen or Beef Jerky to mail to me. They can order those items through the prison at 150 to 300% mark-up. The name of the company that provides that service? Secure-Pac. Security is the primary source of income to this prison and the biggest lie they tell.

The vilest abuses committed in the name of Our Father Security? I have been denied ideas! Books, magazines, correspondence courses and political newsletters have all been denied to me, "unapproved by security". The prison has the right to deny me many things. That, ostensibly, they want from inmates. Desire from change, education, open-mindedness and personal growth. It's not about security. It's not about security. It's about power, profit and conformity.

How many of you reading this activated your home security system when you left this morning? Do you believe your house is actually secure? Did you drop your daughter off at an expensive private school with armed guards and metal detectors at every entrance? Armed guards and metal detectors in every entrance? Armed guards have bad days too. Is she really secure? Did you make a call, send a text, send an email, or use a search engine? Who else knows you won't be home tonight because you are having dinner with your boss and found the perfect wine to go with sea bass on [crushedgrapes.com](http://crushedgrapes.com)?

Security is a joke and we are the punchline. It's not all bad; you can still be secure with your sexuality, right? Oh, one more thing before you go. Do these handcuffs make me look fat?

J. Bauhaus

Usually, when we hear the word "security", it is hissing out of the mouth of some TV speed talker on the "news." These media people are the self-appointed conscience of society, and they are obsessed with security. Above all, they are minutely concerned with the absolute security of their particular national government. Their terror scenario is that government could somehow vanish for ten minutes. In their minds, and many other minds, a momentary lapse in government would cause citizens to immediately go wild in a rampage of crime, violence, mindless destruction and arson. Extreme fear such as this directly related to two primary concepts. The first, and most terrifying fear is that of karmic backlash. This is why gov't politicians are all addicted to accumulating the largest pile of the best, most destructive weapons. They climbed into their elite positions of power and privilege over the backs of thousands or millions of losers; hence they see danger creeping up on them from every shadow and from behind every blind spot. All the most terrified gov't's have nerve poisons, including America, for this reason. Gov'ts fear their tax-herds may suddenly wake up and demand an accounting, as occurred recently across the Arab world. Gov'ts fear their acquisitive, avaricious fellows in their worldwide race to snatch up all the resources and hurriedly convert them into money.

The second fear is losing one's possessions. The more possessions, the greater is the fear of losing them. This explains why the richest people on planet Earth are the most patriotic, waving flags, voting republican with all their fellow elites, and spreading rags-to-riches mythologies. They need gov't to protect them and their lucre from the hungry hordes that they took it from. They need the have-nots to believe that they can get rich too. They need to pretend that they were poor once too, and got rich legitimately, instead of inheriting their riches, power and privilege. This gives them not just camouflage to hide behind, but also a sense of self-righteous validation, when they begin believing that they were once poor. They can do this because poverty is subjective. A poor man can get a job washing dishes, then move out from under a bridge to a flophouse, and feel rich. Another man can feel poor until he is given a fat gov't contract and moves from his dad's

homestead into a Malibu mansion full of servants. [This is an excerpt from a longer writing. ]

Eric Brian Golden

I had a very exciting night along with an interesting revelation once while guarding a telephone company facility. I was about twenty, a private in the Army, and also had a part-time job as a security guard. Being on private's salary and a newly wed as well, the job seemed like a great way to make some extra money for Christmas. Little did I know that I was in for quite an experience on one of my first assignments.

The job seemed pretty easy. The facility was just a fenced in parking lot with a small office building inside. The lot was filled with telephone repair vans and the office building consisted of about six rooms altogether. The facility was located downtown near some projects and from time to time there was a problem with vandalism. All I had to do was stay awake and walk around the lot once every hour to make sure no one was bothering the vans. I hadn't acquired a gin permit yet, so my only weapons were a nightstick and a telephone. I thought the hardest part of the job was going to staying awake all night.

When I arrived I met one of the facility managers. He showed me around the lot and building, gave me some keys, and left with all the other employees. My shift began without problems.

I walked around the lot for a while just checking everything out. I checked doors on the vans to ensure they were all locked up tight. I inspected the chains on locks on the several gates that were around the lot. I even walked around the small building inside and out just getting familiar with my surroundings. Everything was still going smooth.

After I got relaxed with the place, I pulled out novel I had brought to read. The office building had some real comfortable chairs on wheels, so I sat down in one with my book and read for almost an hour. I started getting drowsy and it was about time to make my rounds, so I went back outside and walked the lot again. Everything was "good to go" as we used to say in the Army. I went back inside and cracked open a thermos of coffee I brought.

This pattern went on for hours until just after midnight when I started hearing rustling sounds coming from somewhere in the back of the office building. It really startled me because things had been so quiet for so long. I may have actually been dozing when it started because at first I wasn't real sure of what was happening. Once I realized that I actually was hearing something moving around, I started listening to figure out what it was. As soon as I started paying attention it stopped. I walked around; I started listening to figure out what it was. As soon as I started paying attention it stopped. I walked around inside the building looking in all the rooms, but there was nothing amiss. There were no intruders and no signs of anything missing. I convinced myself that maybe I had imagined the sounds or maybe even dreamed them.

I took another walk around the lot, drank another cup of Joe, and started reading my novel again. All of the sudden the rustling returned. This time I was wide-awake and I knew I

wasn't dreaming or imagining things. I jumped up out of my chair and quickly armed myself with my grade "A" security guard nightstick. I could tell the sounds were coming from down the hall, so I slowly walked that way. After two or three steps the sounds stopped just as quickly as they had begun. I snatched open the doors real quick and inspected each room until once again I had confirmed that all was well.

I went back to my chair and tried to read some more, but I was distracted. After awhile the sounds returned and again I armed myself and set off to investigate. This time I actually narrowed the source of the sounds down to two rooms. The sounds stopped yet again before I could reach the rooms and identify the source.

I was starting to get a little upset. I yelled out, "I know you're in here! I hear you and I will find you! You better just get out here before I call the police!" The truth was I didn't want to find them. I had no desire to get into anytime of altercation. I just wanted to do my shift and make a little extra money for Christmas.

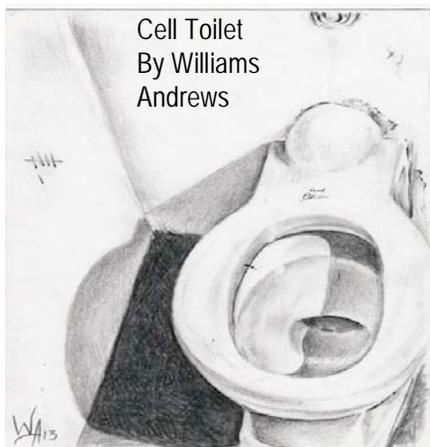
I went outside to walk around thinking that maybe I had scared whoever or whatever off. I hoped to see some cat fleeing through the fence. No such luck. Everything was quiet and cold outside. A fog had moved in and the lot was real spooky looking like some Stephen King movie. So I looked around some and returned to the warmth of the office.

No sooner than I came back inside the sounds started again. As I shut the door and headed towards the rooms, that I was sure where the sounds were coming from, they stopped. This really freaked me out. I started thinking that maybe they could see me and would stop moving when headed their way. I am not real sure why I thought "they", but I did. Maybe it wasn't a "they" but just one person. Or maybe it was just an animal like a rat or something. Or maybe it was... I started regretting watching all those horror movies like "Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>" and "Nightmare on Elm Street."

I had to be smarter than whoever or whatever this was. I decided to hide in the shadows down the hall near the two rooms I had identified. I got still, and real quiet, and had my stick ready. Then I just waited and waited.

I was getting tired of waiting when all of the sudden the sounds started again and I could tell exactly which room it was coming from. The

adrenaline and cortisol flooded my body. My heart was beating out of my chest and I felt a real surge of energy and courage. I snatched open the door, rushed inside, and had my nightstick ready to smash the intruder. I saw movement in the corner of the room, so I flipped on the light. In the flood of light, I could



Cell Toilet  
By Williams  
Andrews

clearly see that the rustling sounds I had heard all night were coming from none other than a huge fax machine! Yes, all the anxiety and paranoia I had been experiencing were over a fax machine periodically printing work orders as they came in for the following day!

So at this point I guess you have already guessed the moral of my story. I learned that night that I should never get upset until I have checked out all the fax!

## Suits

If It Suits You

By Bobby Bunderson

I have never been a big fan of suits. My first memory of wearing a suit is marred in mishap. I cannot recall exactly how old that I had been at the time but it was definitely around my toddler stage. My parents had bought me a nice little black suit white shirt and small red bow tie. This was to be my "Sunday Best" which I was expected to wear every Sunday to church.

I can still remember how my mother had fawned over how "adorable" I had looked in my suit. The women from our church all flocked around me that first day punching my cheeks and telling me how "cute" I was. Well, I didn't feel cute. I felt stupid. The suit was stiff, hot and uncomfortable. Besides, I was completely freaking out that I might wrinkle it, tear it, or spill something on it!

As my parents, my infant little brother Travis and I sat obediently in our pew listening to the sermon, I began to squirm. I had that sinking feeling that a "number-two" was fast approaching. I tugged at my mom's dress and told her in hushed tone that I had to go. Unsympathetic to my pleas she only "hushed" me and told me quite firmly to "be still!" and so I sat there clenching the best I could and decided to do a little praying on my own that I wouldn't have an accident. The sermon lasted forever it seemed. The preacher just kept talking and talking. I thought that after almost an hour that my prayers would be answered but then suddenly they were not. Much to my chagrin I soiled myself. My parents were furious. They made a bigger "stink" out of the situation than I had made in my pants. I was deeply shamed and humiliated. I blamed the suit and refused to ever wear it again.

The second time that I had put on a suit was at my Aunt Bing's funeral. Her name was actually Margerie Bing but everyone knew her as simply Aunt Bing. She had been my best friend and helped me cope with my parent's divorce. Her passing devastated me. At her funeral, all the males in attendance had on their "Sunday Best." To me those suits represented death and I was not a big fan.

The last time that I had ever donned a suit was in 1975 during my 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation. My dad drove me to Hollywood and we stopped at shop called "The Squire." They specialized in making custom suits. I didn't want a suit but I knew I had to wear one to graduation and the dance, which would follow. I felt a little pretentious at having a tailor custom fit me for a suit "off-the-rack" would have been just fine. But

after all was said and done, I really liked the suit. I had decided on a leisure suit. It was cream colored and made from some type of really soft material. I bought a silk shirt with a paisley type pattern and being 1975 I thought that I looked quite a bit like Jack Tripper from "Threes Company."

The graduation ceremony was great. My parents had gotten me a camera and tennis racket as graduation gifts. I was really looking forward to the graduation dance. My girlfriend, Jennifer Lipking was looking pretty "foxy" in her gown. Unfortunately, her father had refused to allow Jennifer to attend the dance. I was going to stag and not even a bit happy about that. A couple friends had somehow acquired a couple six packs of beer and so we hid out behind the gymnasium and guzzled them.

Afterwards, we went into the dance. I didn't think that I would have much of a good time and decided to go home. I felt more than just a little nauseous from the beers and ended up vomiting all down the front of my suit. I could not very well call my parents to pick me up and so I stumbled my way the mile and a half back to my house and snuck quietly into my room.

As I have lived my life, my aversion towards suits has only grown stronger. I tend to associate suits with unhappiness, loss, and despair. I see people on the television and in magazines who wear suits as follows: Politicians, liars in suits only seeking their own hidden agendas, clergymen of every religion zealously trying to guilt you into "tithing" your heard earned money to line their pockets. Detectives and District Attorneys fervently trying to get a conviction at any cost, guilt or innocence of little consequence. And then the endless throngs of business executives, the rich and the famous, all decked out in the most expensive designer suits that money can buy, clamoring for our accolades. These are the pretentious, self-glorifying people that are so wrapped up in their own gigantic egos that "looking good" are how they have come to measure their own self-worth.

We wear suits to weddings as a matter of vanity. And we wear suits to funerals so that we can pay our final respects to our dearly departed. The ultimate insult comes when we ourselves die and our loved ones buy us a suit to be buried in. we become the best-dressed worm food on the planet. Are you kidding me? Please, do me a favor. When I die, slap a pair of faded jeans on my ass and a Seattle Seahawks jersey. That would suit me just fine.

## Styles and Personas

By Delvin Diles

Somewhere there's a photo of me as a child in my Miami Vice suit. So called because it was like what I thought the detectives on an 80's cop show would wear. Mama and I would watch the show together. She liked the one guy, can't remember his name, but he was a man of color had hair like mine. Not as dark as me, but as I stood beaming for Mama's camera with my jacket hooked on my finger, draped over my little shoulder, I was just as cool as that guy.

I'd outgrown the suit, the show was discontinued, and the 80's segued into the 90's. I was at the mall looking up at an outfit in a display window. A stonewash denim, baggy jumper with graffiti-like décor on it, with a matching neon-orange rayon t-shirt. It was just like the ones worn by the cool kids at school. I had to have one. Mama put it on lay-a-way for me. After several payments, I finally got to wear it. I instantly felt that familiar expectation when putting on cool clothes. I could be exempt from jeers for wearing something wack. Well, almost. My shoes were the only setback. They were off-brand Pay-less kicks. But they were new, so I had hope that they pass the fly test. The icon on them, unlike Jordans' jump man symbol, had a silhouette of a group of ballers all jumping for a rebound. When a girl in the hallway mocked, "Ooh I see you with the new J's!" and others snickered, I knew I had to somehow get a pair of Jordans. My cool outfit wouldn't be complete otherwise.

I tried to get Mama to understand the urgency of my situation. But the \$100 price-tag on the much-coveted Air Jordans were over her budget. Tragically, I had to wear the wack shoes all year.

Mama knew how crushed I was so she bought me a pair of Jordans that Christmas. I was so elated to wear those shoes. Finally, I'd be cool.

Before class all the girls just about, lined up to get a hug from this one dude, Devante. He was athletic, tall, and always had something smooth or funny to say. Even in my Jordans and outfit I never got any girls to hug at school. I realized then that some levels of cool couldn't be bought. But some of the guys who got girls' attention were thugs, gangsters. Bragged about having guns. Threw up gang signs. Walked a certain way. I worked on my gangster walk. I just needed a gun. It would be suitable to who I thought would definitely be hardcore. The dude that chicks loved. Thug life! A baad muthafucka!

I finally got a hold of a few guns. A few more outfits. Even a few girlfriends. One of 'em latched onto me before I'd procured my last gun. Trying to sound cool I told her about my plan to get some heat. She sat in my lap and raised her voice above her usually laid-back tone, "WHAT YOU NEED A GUN FOR?!" I guess she didn't get it. I went on to get a gun and use it. Now I'm in another outfit, on a bunk alone. In a cold cell, a lifetime away from cool.

By Cory Ababeiro

So many suits I've worn in my life. And as I look back, each one represents a time in my life that has impacted me for better or worse.

When I was little, my suit consisted of Little League, pee-wee, and various sport uniforms. The lessons I learned, friendships I made, and the fun I had. How silly and crazy life was when I wore that suit.

And to trade that suit for a more mature suit that the girls loved in high school. Boy do I miss my three-piece suit. Girls, music, and the money that came from my job. What more could you ask for in a suit?

But as time goes on, you are forced to trade that for the suit that comes next. And my next suit took me places I only ever dreamed about. My next suit took me through four oceans, a couple straits and gulfs. Not to mention countries all over the world. The stories that my suit could tell you are incredible. Stories of love and love lost, of friends, family, and adventure. Not to mention “close calls”.

But as always, time forces you to trade in your suit. Now, although my next suit has not been decided for me just yet, the one that I am wearing temporarily has “got to go”. This one-piece suit with the words on the back just isn’t my style. And as I sit here, in my little box, all I can really do, other than wait for the next suit, is wonder, “What will my next suit bring me?”

By Denis McGinity

I’ve worn a number of suits thus far in my forty-five years.

Mom always had me wear suit and tie for my school pictures. That is, until high school, when I began to “find myself”. I say that with a laugh, as if I’d been lost in a geographical, rather than emotional way.

Being big and tall throughout my youth made me self-conscious. Not because I was ugly. In fact, I look back now and see many girls had liked me. But because I perceived that I wasn’t good-looking. That was one of the earliest suits I put on myself.

Having discovered marijuana through my friend, who we’ll call “Missy”, I began to gain what I believed was self-confidence. I attended parties, hung out, smoked more weed. I began stealing from Mom and Dad. This time I wore the suit of self-deception.

After a fashion, I married young and went through a lot of jobs. Two years passed and my daughter was born. With her birth, I wore a new suit—responsibility. I tore many holes in this outfit, got it dirty, and ultimately it would no longer fit me at the time.

I discovered Methamphetamine and eventually crack cocaine which I mistakenly believed made me “cool”. In fact, I’d lost all sense of myself. I had been wearing the suit of addiction for a long time. But also, throughout this drug-fueled lifestyle, I’d begun wearing another suit: a prison inmate’s suit.

I sit now twenty four and a half flat years locked up using what we Texas inmates refer to as the “installment plan”. Do some time, get out and eat a few free world hamburgers and then try to get your old cell back. But I know what you’re wondering. What suit do I wear now? Before I tell you, let’s see what we’ve learned. I have two daughters. One, my firstborn, turns twenty-five on March 5<sup>th</sup>. The other, I allowed her to be adopted by her stepfather. He was the one who raised her. My oldest, I last saw when she was nine. I’m five years into a twenty year stretch, looking at maybe five more. But there’s something different now. That process of finding myself I told you about earlier... well, I’m almost there. I’ll be a legally ordained minister prior to my release. I’ve begun to study Nouethics, which is Christian counseling. I found out, I’m a

grandfather. I’ll be looking for my oldest when I’m stable. So I wear the *uniform* of hope. Why not suit? Well, dressing up is putting on a costume. Eunice McGarrahan said, “A costume is something that you put on and pretend that you are what you’re wearing. A uniform on the other hand, reminds you that you are, in fact, what you wear.” So, now I put on the uniform of a successful citizen.

## Pets

*My Favorite Pet* by William Hill

In my life I have had the pleasure of having a lot of different pets, most of which have been horses or dogs. These animals have all had their own personalities and they all related to me in different ways. From a Lassie look-alike my siblings named Ringo (for the white collar around his neck, not for the former Beatle) who, though friendly and fun loving with all the members of the family, would protect me from my brothers and sisters and even parents by getting between me and whoever he thought was threatening me. I remember one time my dad being mad at something I had done, and knowing that I was in line for a spanking, I sprinted for Ringo, knowing that he would protect me. When Dad came after me, Ringo bared his teeth, emitted a low growl of warning and Dad smartly backed off with these words: “Okay boy, but just remember that you have to come into this house sometime.” I tried to stay outside as long as I could but eventually I got hungry and went inside.

We also had a half German Shepherd and wolf mix. We had to get rid of him after only a couple of months because he would go out and kill the newborn calves. He was a great friend for the short time I knew him.

My favorite pet wasn’t actually mine. She belonged to a Christian house I was staying at when I was down on my luck in Pahump, Nevada. Her name was Laverne.

Laverne was a rescue dog. She had been beaten horribly by a previous owner and she needed a little time to get to know you before she would come to you. She was always just a little bit wary of everyone even after getting to know them.

I had been living at the home for a couple of weeks and one day I was feeling particularly depressed about the situation I found myself in. Laverne came up to me. I was sitting on the back porch and she came up to me and laid down beside me. Maybe it was because both of us had taken beatings. Me from the world and life and her from some vicious and cruel past owner. We formed a bond and after that we were usually together enjoying each other’s company.

She helped me get to a point where I could go back out and face the world once again, and I like to think I helped her be able to trust again. Who knows, maybe in her world, I am her favorite pet.

Bobby Bunderson

A topic near and dear to my heart. Over the course of my life I have been blessed with the privilege to share in the lives of a wide range of creatures. I hesitate in using the term “having owned pets” because I never felt as if I owned any of them.

From fish to birds, reptiles to rodents, and of course cats and dogs, I have loved them all and always considered them my friends.

Growing up my pets became my sanctuary. When life became unbearable I turned to my animals for comfort. They never judged me, nor I them. They didn't have any expectations of me other than to love and care for them. I've struggled with many personal relationships but always maintained healthy ones with my furry, feathered or finned creatures.

Most of the turmoil in my life came from a constant, unrelenting barrage of emotional abuse. There was some physical abuse but those wounds easily healed; the emotional abuse leaves scars that can last for decades. Unfortunately, I have perpetuated many of those learned behaviors into my own relationships. Thus the abused becomes the abuser.

Animals are instinctual creatures. They are loyal, forgiving and love unconditionally. Human beings, on the other hand are guided by their insatiable egos. We need to try and start incorporating these natural characteristics of animals into fundamental traits for healthier living.

Recently I have had several field mice as pets. I rescued the first few from those cruel glue-traps that people use to control

infestation. I brought them back to my cell and gave them a nice place to live. Over time, they bred and I had several generations of them. Those little mice really replaced a spot in my soul that had been missing. I taught the little guys some tricks and they taught me humility. I cared for all of their physical needs and in turn they helped me with my emotional ones. Their antics often made me cry. We trusted each other and we depended on each other. I have learned a lot from those little grey field mice, lessons that I now use in my daily life. I am richer for it.

For all of you who read these few words, please love your pets the way they certainly love you. Treat them as your friends, because that is exactly what they are, our friends.

#### B. Phillips

The spring of 2013 brought me the gift of six of my most cherished pets although I never held them, cuddled, or brushed their hair. Rarely have I ever cherished more time spent in their company. Although a prison window separated our existence, it also opened a world in which me and six small prairie dogs became companions and spent time together as if we were best of friends.

Every day I would look forward to their brief examination as one or two would peer into my SHU cell window. It made the isolation tolerable as if to say I was not forgotten. Hours would go by as they would frolic, forage for food, or simply soak up the sun in a private performance simply for one.

As time goes on, pets come and pets go and people move on. I have a new home now but every once in a while I catch a glimpse of one of the six who sees me through a new window. They rise and give me that stare that says, "Guess what? You're still not forgotten."

#### A Lifesaver

William Williamson

My third marriage had ended miserably. I was living in a lonely trailer and I was spending a lot of time being lonely.

It was the winter of 1999 and my life was as miserable as the cold, grey weather.

I tried going out to the local bars to have some fun and a few times I would bring a woman home for the night. I enjoyed the sex but it was basically self-loathing attempts to bury the foul mood my existence had become. It didn't work.

One day I went to have lunch at my mother's house. When I sat down on her couch, a strange black and white cat jumped up on my lap and started rubbing up against my chest, purring like a cell phone on vibrate.

I asked my mom where this cat came from and she said that when she came home from work two days ago he was on her porch shivering so she warmed up some milk and a plate of canned tuna and put it out for him.

That night it was supposed to be ten degrees below zero and as the temperature started dropping, she could hear the cat meowing from the porch. Mom got worried so she let the cat in the house.

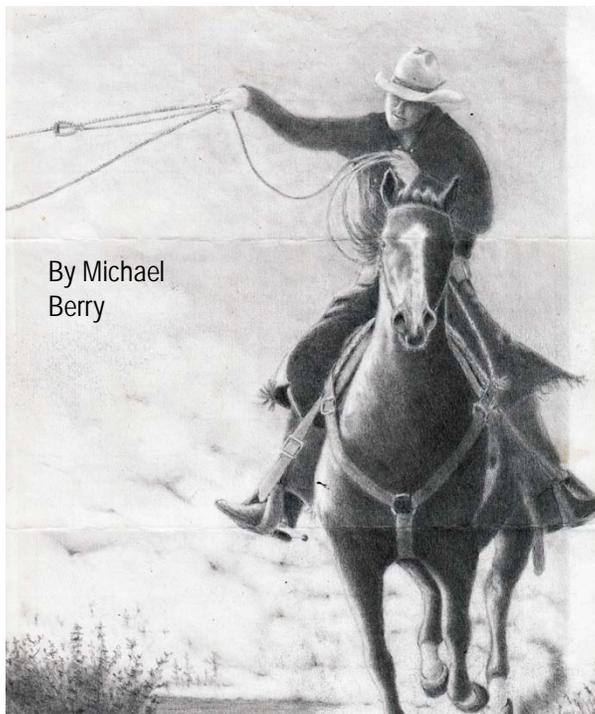
Mom already had her own cat, so there was already a litter box in the house and the new cat knew how to use it. He had no collar on and got along with Mom's cat so he was allowed to stay for a few days until the weather was supposed to warm

up. Mom couldn't keep him beyond that.

The rest of the winter was supposed to stay pretty cold and I didn't have the heart to let this gentle cat go back out in the cold.

I decided to take him home with me and I stopped on the way home to get some cat food, a litter box, and a couple of cat toys.

I named him Oreo because of his black and white colors. He was a one or two year old gentle cat and seemed to be content



By Michael Berry

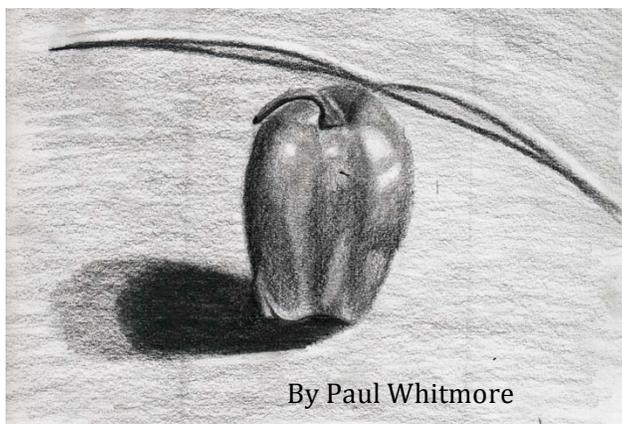
with his new life, which caused me to rise up out of the funk my life had fallen into.

I still spent a lot of that winter alone but now I had a funny little buddy who was always glad to see me come in the door and was always laying next to me when I was lounging around the house. He brought a lot of sunshine into my life.

In 2001 I reunited with my first wife and the mother of my children and Oreo came with me.

He was a welcome addition to the rest of the family. My kids fell in love with Oreo instantly.

Oreo died in 2009 and to this day my oldest daughter has his ashes in a beautiful golden urn next to a picture of her and Oreo sitting on her dresser. Oreo brought a lot of joy into my life and the lives of my family and we were blessed to have had him as a part of our lives.



By Paul Whitmore

## Cooking

*Thoughts of an Unborn Foodhead* by Delvin Diles

In my book collection there is one that was sent to me years ago as a Christmas gift entitled "Everything I Ate" by Tucker Show. The first I ever saw like it, it's an autobiography of pictures of everything the author ate in 2004. Above the small, numbered pictures, the food, place, and names of friends or relatives who were present during the meal and the time were listed and pictured as well. The author ate out a lot (March 10<sup>th</sup> 6:34 – Tuna tataki salad at Nobu Next Door with Susan K; March 13<sup>th</sup> – 10:34 pm Ribollita with black cabbage and white beans, foie gras with citrus mustard and red wine-braised octopus at hearth with Chris and Doc). But just looking at the dinners he entertained his friends with over at this house, I can tell he fancies himself as somewhat of a chef. He definitely was on a more advanced culinary level than I ever was (March 27<sup>th</sup> 10:21 pm: Linguine carbonara with spinach at home; March 30<sup>th</sup> – 8:38 pm Risotto with bacon, spinach, and shrimp at home with Danny).

I left the free world at 18, and the food I prepared at home was mostly of the made-ready-to-eat type like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, and cheerios with sugar. When it came to cooking I'd be in the living room watching TV waiting for it to be done. I did watch Mama prepare friend chicken a few times. So one night as a hungry teen home alone, I flipped through a cook book and thought I'd try the Oven Friend Chicken recipe.

I saw that we had the very same potato flakes listed as a batter ingredient (for a flakier crust I guess) in the pantry. After borrowing an egg from a neighbor, I was all set. I figured if I followed the directions precisely – mixture measured, oven pre-heated, cooking timed – I'd be fine. Besides, I'd be serving myself, so burnt chicken wouldn't cause any embarrassment.

After the allotted cooking time and opening the back door to let out wafts of smoke, I ate a well-cooked and remarkably unburnt, extra-flaky quarter leg. One of which was quite enjoyable after a few intakes of fresh air.

That was my last attempt to cook chicken. My go-to dish was always scrambled eggs. It's hard to mess that up. Put the stove on medium and keep the spatula moving across the skillet. Dash some salt and pepper, butter, some toasted bread, slather it with grape jelly and I'm on!

If I had a chance to go back to the world I'd love to enhance my cooking skills and impress friends and family. Try to show up my uncles at a 4<sup>th</sup> of July barbecue. Bake Mama a birthday cake. Or at least attempt it before going to get a last minute store-bought one. Alas, as a lifer that's a part of life I'll have to sit out.

While here in prison I've adapted to the soup-centered, spread making routine as most do. Once you get the hot water measurement down, you just add to the soups whatever else you can afford that suits your taste. Corn chips, party mix, jalapenos, squeeze cheese, barbecue beef, etc.

Some of my fellow inmates occasionally get the rare privilege to eat free world food because of their job status or whatever. I've recently witnessed a certain class of unit staff who have had several fraternized cook-offs, using a small grill kept out of sight during a certain unit program. Only the officers and their inmate worker/cook get to dine on the fried eggs, bacon, and toast sandwiches. The rest of us pretend to get to enjoy the aroma. Bacon smells exotic. I guess because it isn't served on the unit menu. As it hits my nose I try to see it as a blessing. The absence of the smell is less of a good thing than the olfactory nodes inundating, nostalgia inducing essence of it. A pleasant experience even if had while salivating.

Thankfully we are not deprived of sweets, snacks and name-brand sodas on commissary days. Some clever convict baker even came up with a now popularized way to crush packs of cookies and candy to make pies. Here's a dessert recipe submitted in our prison newspaper:

Ooie-Gooyie Chewies

By Cheryl Haga on the Riverside Unit

Ingredients:      10 chic-o-sticks (crushed)  
                          3 Milky Way candy bars (melted)  
                          1 bag of Butterfinger cookies (crushed)

Catherine LaFleur

Food obsesses me. I think about what I am going to eat every day. The food offered for free in the prison dining hall is mostly inedible. I am not talking about the taste of the food. The vegetables are usually rotten, black spotted or just cooked into

an unrecognizable mush. The noodles and pasta are either undercooked or useful only for a game of pick-up-sticks, or overcooked into a substance resembling Play-Doh. The meat is often soy patty. When you eat a prison soy patty, the intestinal effects may cause you to take a wild ride on the Toilet-tron. If you have a particularly delicate stomach, you will be riding the Toilet-tron and the Vomit Comet simultaneously.

Before coming to prison, I rarely cooked anything. I was adept only at keeping abreast of the phone numbers and location of the best take-out restaurants. Now, I like to buy cookbooks every month from the Edward R. Hamilton Catalog. I salivate over the most enticing recipes, often fantasizing about cooking a grand feast and inviting all of my friends and family. I am also a consumer of gourmet food catalogs. I like to look at the pictures. I am addicted to food porn.

And so I think of food all the time. You will learn to cook in prison, even if only as a survival mechanism. I have discovered 500 ways to cook Ramen noodles, how to bake a cake without cake mix, and how to forage items from the prison kitchen to use with my canteen purchases.

Condiment packages can turn a bland sandwich or plain Ramen soup into something tasty. Five ketchup, five mustard and five sugar packets transform into Super Sauce which can be spread on any beef, pork, or chicken sandwich. I mix Super Sauce up in my coffee cup and pout it onto prepared beef or chicken Ramen. Tah-dah, it's spaghetti marinara! Add a little squirt of squeeze cheese and it's spaghetti with Parmesan. If I'm rich that day, I slice up a sausage or scatter some pork-skins. Stir it all up.

Mama Mia!

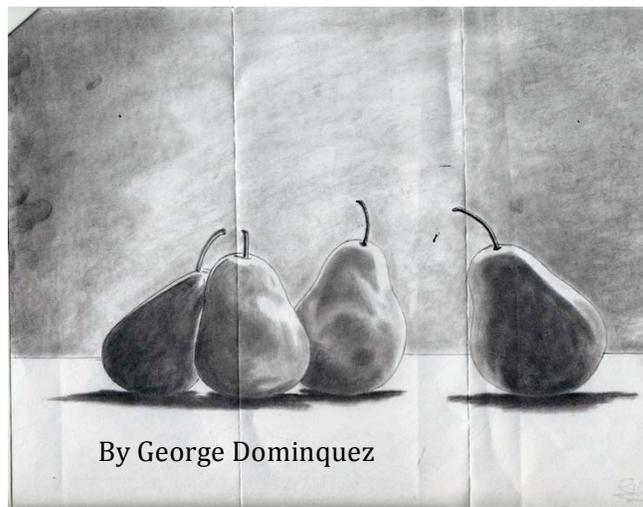
Here at Camp Prisoney Land, I have access to microwaves. I have become a gourmet cooker. For the price of two Ramen noodles, pork-skins, peanuts, a few ketchup, mayo, soy sauce and sugar packets, and a 12-oz. Coke, I can whip up stir fry. It fills me up but I'm always hungry two hours later. With a few packages of cookies, some creamer, dry oatmeal, and a Sprite, I can make a light sponge cake. Chocolate frosting requires a Hershey bar, a cocoa packet, creamer, sugar and a little hot water.

In reality, the food I cook probably isn't all that tasty; in some circles it would be considered a crime. People on the outside of prison, the Eloi, would most likely shudder with revulsion at the taste of my Morlock concoctions. But in my own mind, I am Julia Child, James Beard, and Emeril all rolled into one felonious package.

William Grantham – 01818202

As I sit here trying to conjure up an essay I'm more drawn to thoughts of Christmas. In my family that's really the only time my unique and complicated family cooks I mean we do but only maybe a ramen or mac n' cheese (boring) Anyway so I'm drawn to explain the best story on cooking I know. Winter 1990, schools have been out for a week and it t just snowed last night in my small Southeast Oklahoma town. Mom has cocoa and marshmallows on and a big pot of strawberry's and

cream oatmeal (mmm). I'm the first one up before my little brother and sister, I say little but I'm only 7 my sister 6 and brother 4. I get up wake 'em up, we stare out at the snow, we ask mom to go out and play but she says eat first. So we hurry and eat put on jackets and gloves and go outside. Tomorrow's Christmas, I yell we need a snowman for Santa. So that day we built a huge, probably 6 foot tall, snowman with all the works-carrot nose, top hat, mouth from buttons and sticks for



By George Dominquez

hands a scarf and even put a jacket on him. Around noon we had family all over our little country home. On the kitchen table are two really big fruitcakes, a huge golden brown turkey, a pan of cornbread dressing, three pumpkin & pecan pies, green beans, corn, mash potatoes, ham, a tray of green and black olives, cheese, little sweet pickles, a couple of deer slabs, some deer chili, cranberry sauce, and cookies of all kinds. We ate, talked about the Dallas Cowboys possibly winning the Super Bowl (remember it's 1990), the possibility that Barry Bonds would trade from Pittsburg Pirates (it's 1990), the Oklahoma Sooners and then I left when it shifted to politics. In my life the only honest real family genuine moments we ever had was Christmas but this one stands out so much because in early 1991 my father committed suicide and in 1992 my mom left us and we went to foster care. That was the last time my life felt normal.

Tony Lee Bumgardner

Boy if you could only taste my cookin'! I will make some gal a great husband one day. I love to cook and have collected recipes over the years. I have my own special ones as well. I cook a brisket in a paper sack that will melt in your mouth. I have cooked for people here in prison who have been in here for 20+ years and they claim I am the best cook they have ever seen. It is all about how you put it together. I have a special gift that I reckon is a combination of my own ideas along with my mother's cooking, she was a great cook also. I can make a soup, beans, and some garlic, with a few chips taste like something that is special. I don't have to brag on myself, plenty of people have through my life. I plan on doing some cooking when I get out. I even have a woman in the free world who

wants me to be her head cook when I am released. I have cooked most of my life. I have cooked pigs in the ground, fresh fish over a camp fire, to 20 turkeys at once in a huge oven. Reckon I will always enjoy cooking. I know how to make a variety of things including my own crest for pies and cobblers, to homemade biscuits of various kinds. You can't miss me in the kitchen. Reckon I am a chef so to speak. I am talented in a many of things but cooking is one of my hidden ones. If you were to look at me and not know it, you wouldn't think that of me. Here is one to send to your loved one. Spicy Cajun Salsa Burgers:

½ cup salsa  
1 tsp. Creole seasoning  
½ tsp. garlic powder  
½ tsp. crushed red pepper flakes  
½ tsp. pepper  
1 lb. ground beef  
4 Kaiser rolls, split & toasted

In large bowl combine first five ingredients. Add the beef; mix lightly and thoroughly. Shape in four ½ thick patties. Grill burgers, covered, over medium heat or broil 4 inches from heat 4-5 minutes on each side, or until thermometer reads 160 degrees. Serve on rolls.

Mmmm! Mmmm! Good stuff there. Just one of many of the great recipes I have collected. Hop you enjoy when you're able. If you're ever in Texas, look for the Tony Lee's Fish & Shrimp!

### Speaking up

The Sound of Rain

By Joseph Stanwick

It has been raining here all night long, a continuous dumping of water from the sky with cracks of lightning and rumbles of thunder. I heard as much dimly again and again through the night, consciously and unconsciously, as I lay entombed beneath cotton sheets and a woolly blanket, half asleep and half aware of the glare of electric daylight. It has been a lifetime since I've seen rain. Some of the guards employed here were little babies when I last felt its wetness and when I hear it now, after the sound has worked itself all the way through thirty inches of rocks and wire and sand and lime that fill the prison walls, it doesn't sound much like rain at all. It is a muted noise I hear as faint and hollow as a blind man tapping his cane against floors and walls as he makes his way along. It's not the sound I once knew that pulled me out into it



By Daniel Peterson

to sing or laugh or dance my way through it. Prison changes you. Everyone here used to be somebody else. Even the rain.

Sedrick Brown

One of the most difficult things to do in life is to express yourself. You fear that you will be chastised, criticized, and even discouraged to believe in your own innovative ideas. In other situations, not voicing your thoughts can lead you to become malleable influenced by the company you opted to associate with, leaving an individual self-dubious in what he or she can actually achieve. Sometimes, people are afraid to speak up because of abandonment issues such as myself. However, the beautiful transition to self-awareness gives you the confidence to speak up when you feel something is right or wrong. You take the steps to know yourself to exercise your leadership skills instead of seeking acceptance. See, the person I'm really talking about here is me, the scared little foster child who was afraid to speak up because he wanted to be accepted by everyone at the cost of his common sense. Unfortunately, that cost him 6 years of his precious life and showed him how authority could take control of his life. Speaking up gives oneself the ability to have a sense of direction in life, opening up amazing opportunities and possibilities one could never have imagined if he or she didn't take the first steps to self-freedom.

Paul Pommells

When I hear the words "speaking up", what comes to mind is an image of someone voicing an objection to a wrong. Particularly, I imagine that person voicing an objection when others are silent – which I know from experience is hard to do. The reasons why people speak up or don't speak up run very deep and deserve hours of reflection. I believe that thinking about those reasons could make us better people.

My friend, I still remember that during my first time in jail, I had an opportunity to speak up and failed. That memory for me is filled with shame, which I don't ever want to feel again.

In fact, remembering that shame, since then, has played a part in prompting me to speak up in two incidences since then.

### Toys

The Healing Power of Toys

By Bobby Bunderson

Never underestimate the healing power of toys. I have seen the miraculous transformation with my own eyes. Prior to witnessing the positive effects that a simple toy can have on a child's life, my concept of gift-giving was more obligation than rehabilitation. I gave gifts out of a sense of "social contract" i.e.; giving gifts at birthdays or at Christmas time, rather than out of any altruistic intention. It is not that I was begrudging giving gift—I have always enjoyed giving—but

my intentions were less than selfless. In any event, the following short stories changed all of that in me forever.

During my first incarceration, I was eighteen years old. I worked in the carpentry shop and my supervisor announced that we were going to start making toys for underprivileged children. At first, I was perplexed. What kind of toy could we make in a prison carpentry shop? And what kid would want such toys? Well, we began making wooden trains, wooden cars, airplanes and boats. We took pride in our work and when we were done with our assignment we had created enough toys for over 25 children. Each toy was hand-painted and we placed decals on them as well. However, as I looked at all of the toys that we had created as they lay on a long workbench, I scoffed. The workmanship was of good quality but at the end of the day all they were stupid, cheap-looking toys. What kid wants crap like that under their Christmas tree? It depressed me and I felt ashamed that I had helped make them.

Approximately two weeks after Christmas, our supervisor called the entire crew to the main workbench. I noticed a large manila envelope in his hand. I figured it was our laudatory chromos congratulating us for making those pathetic wooden toys. But what he pulled out of the envelope touched me in a very unexpected way. There were letters and cards and a few photographs from the underprivileged kids who had received our handmade toys.

Our supervisor began reading us those letters written in the shaky handwriting of small children.

"Hello, my name is David and I want to thank you for the beautiful train you made me for Christmas. It was the nicest gift that I have ever gotten. I don't have a mommy or a daddy to buy me any gifts because God said he wanted them both with him and they were killed in a car crash. I guess Santa Claus doesn't deliver to orphans due to so many other good girls and boys he has, but we have you gentlemen to thank. I feel like the luckiest boy in the world right now. Merry Christmas, Love David."

All of the other letters were just as sad. My heart broke with each word those grateful children wrote. Then we were allowed to see the photos. In the photos were these poor orphaned children who all believed that Santa Claus had forgotten them, but these children all wore the biggest smiles that I had ever seen and all of them were pictured playing with or hugging those little wooden toys that we had built for them.

Nine years later when I was twenty-seven-years old, I had gotten married and had my only child, a beautiful girl named Kristenalynne. I had been working at a grocery store in the bakery department but I wasn't getting many hours and my paychecks were barely covering living expenses. My daughter's third birthday was only days away and we simply did not have any money for a cake, let alone presents. I felt like the biggest loser on the planet. But I didn't give up. There had to be a legal way to raise some quick cash. I went door to door asking if I could mow people's lawns like I had when I was a young teenager. I only found one taker out of 50

requests. I had \$7. Not enough. Then I thought about the local blood bank. They paid money for whole blood. So my brother-in-law Mark and I went the next day to sell our blood.

I believe we made like \$12 each. I spent \$5 of the lawn work money on gas so all told I had \$26. I felt sickened. What kind of dad was I that I couldn't afford to provide my daughter with a decent third birthday party? That feeling only intensified when I went out in search of gifts and a cake. Twenty-six dollars just wasn't going to be enough. Then I noticed a secondhand store on my way home. Feeling utter despair, I pulled into the parking lot and went inside. I walked around the store with Mark with a heavy heart and then I came across an aisle filled with stuffed animals. Some looked like secondhand items but there were a select few items including a 2-foot long clown that looked almost new. I snatched the clown from the shelf and looked at the price tag. \$15! Again, my heart was filled with despair. However, Mark encouraged me to haggle with the clerk for a lower price. I decided that it certainly wouldn't hurt to try. Besides, I was out of options. I grabbed a teddy bear, a dolly, and a clown. The store clerk was an unhappy, overweight woman who looked like she hated the world for dealing her the cards she'd been dealt. It didn't look good. I introduced myself, proudly showed her a recent picture of my daughter and then began explaining about my lack of hours, mowing a lawn and the blood bank. I showed her my \$26. And asked if there was any "wiggly" room. Then I noticed a tear coursing down the clerk's cheek. I had sorely misjudged this woman. Wiping the tear from her cheek, she said that if Mark and I gave her \$10 we could have all three items. Then she recommended that we simply bake a cake for Kriste at home with one of those boxed cake mixes. Uhhh, duh? I was a professional baker and that had never even occurred to me! I thanked the lady and probably freaked her out a bit when I gave her a hug. We raced to the grocery store and bought a can of frosting, a premixed cake in a box, a box of candles, a pack of balloons and a package of streamers.

When my wife awoke Kriste from her afternoon nap, we had transformed our kitchen into a festive birthday party. Besides the gifts that Mark and I had purchased from the three of us, there were also a few gifts from Kriste's grandparents. We let her open those first. Inside the box my mom had sent were a few dresses, the latest "My Little Pony" doll, a jewelry box, and a beautiful teddy bear. Kriste's eyes just sparkled. Then came the box from "grandpa." More clothes and a tea set. Lastly, I placed the three hastily-wrapped secondhand stuffed toys I'd bought. My wife looked at me with eyes that held their own breath. I know Mark and I also felt crummy about our gifts when we saw what the parents had sent.

I placed the gifts in front of my precious three-year-old daughter and told her, almost apologetically, "These are from your mommy, daddy, and Uncle Mark, sweetheart." Her little hands ripped the wrapping paper away and, more to our delight than hers, Kriste let out the sweetest sounding "Ohh!" I have ever heard. She showed some interest in the teddy bear and dolly, but you couldn't have pried that clown out of her

clutches with a jackhammer. It was love at first sight. I looked at my wife and saw the tears streaming down her face as she mouthed the words "Thank You" to me as she watched our daughter fall in love with her toy clown.

We all had cake and ice cream, and a deep appreciation at the healing power of toys. No matter if they're pre-owned or not, Kriste could have cared less.

### A Thousand Words

Don Brown

Although I am the first-born, I am from the favorite child. I am not even the prodigal son; I've not had the courage to go home for years. When I have been welcome in my parent's home in the past, one of my first goals has been to look at my mom's photo albums. I look in them and am able to see a time in my life when I was not burdened by the knowledge that I had disappointed those who loved me.

There is one particular photo that I seem to be obsessed with. I am on my knees in front of the Christmas tree, my face is covered in blood- my nose often bled while I slept and there is blood on my jammies. I sure did love those PJ's, soft and warm, powder blue with snoopy faces all over the place. They had those super-cool footies on them; you know one's that if you get a good

running start, you can slide all the way across the kitchen floor. My hair was quite the mess, but jeepers, what great hair I had. It was beyond golden, it was ethereal, and it was angelic. I love the boy in that picture and miss him terribly.

I am un-wrapping a present, this magnificent robot like thing half as tall and twice as cool as I was. I had fantasized about the adventures we would share for months and now he was here, oh, what fun we would have. He had a little escape pod that came out of his head. He shot rockets from his fists and when the rockets were gone he could shoot his whole fist. He had circular saw blades on his fore-arms and spikes on his boots. Dude, he was bad ass.

I look at the picture, that tiny fragment of time, that click of the shutter. I see that Christmas, that toy, that look of innocence, that sparkle of joy in my eyes, they all combine to embody everything that love and family should be. It reminds me that I was once part of the most wonderful toy ever made, a childhood in a house full of love.

My hair is an ugly shade of brown now. The cool jammies have been replaced by a not

quite as ugly set of prison clothes. The Christmas tree, the wrapping paper, the robot and the box it came in, even the camera that took the picture are all gone now. They lie at the bottom of some landfill. Buried under forty years' worth of bad report cards, un-paid bills, soiled condoms, empty vodka bottles, and over-used hypodermic needles. Much like the boy in that picture.

I did not hold onto my toys. I have no attic full of star wars figures and battered G.I. Joes. Like so many other things in my life, I took for granted the happiness they shared with me. I can't have toys now. I might get some coffee and octopus for Christmas.

Ya see, hope never dies. We can have joy and innocence returned to us. My son's new bride is pregnant; I am going to be a grandfather. If things go well I will be released in time to share that child's first Christmas. Toys can once again bring that sparkle of joy to my eyes, the joy of bringing joy to others. I can hardly wait to see that child's smile as the wrapping comes of his first robot. The realization of dreams comes true. That absolute surety that he is loved. I can be there, I can share that moment and when that moment comes, you can bet your powder blue PJ's I'll be there with my camera in my hands.



Statue of Liberty  
By Jimmy Cole

### First Dates

By James Bauhaus

My first date was on a fine summer afternoon, after school, in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, with Judy. We were the two smartest people in class, so we were instant friends the day we met. We knew we were the smartest two in class because our teacher, Mr. Harper, used our grades to make a game where all of our classmates struggled to reach the top of a list by asking our higher opponent a science question. If he or she could not answer it correctly, we moved up to take their slot. Mr. Harper made the game more interesting by putting the dumbest of our classmates on top. I was put on the very bottom. Judy was put just above me.

I didn't know that we were on a date. We were just talking when class let out, and we continued to laugh and make jokes as we rode our bicycles home. After a while, we pedaled along the street that had a ramshackle old barn deep in a thicket of weeds. Judy mentioned that the place was infested with milk 'snakes.' I'd never heard of this typed of animal, but I was very interested in snakes. Judy stopped, dropped her bike in the ditch and began running through weeds almost as tall as we were, urging me to "hurry up!"

The barn was surprisingly clean: more like an abandoned house on the inside, with hardwood floors. While I stood there, stupidly, taking it all in, Judy smiled intently at me. I smiled back, and then asked, "Where are all the snakes?" Judy quickly lost her smile,

and her interest in me, and snakes, if any. She dashed back to her bike and pedaled away. So did I. We were eight or nine years old, so everywhere we went, we dashed and ran.

It was quite a long time before I figured out that this was my first date. We continued to be good friends at school, but my dad moved our family and I to a house that was not along the way to Judy's home. I saw her much later, at the swimming pool, during a summer vacation. This is the first time that I noticed that she had suddenly become very attractive. I stopped to talk, and we were having a very enjoyable conversation for a while, just like back in science class. Then two of the local dead-end kids of my class, Elbert and some sleazy punk named Glover, came by and spoiled it. They seemed to already be angry with me, for some reason. I'd never liked them, and wasn't going to waste any time trying to find out what their problem was. I told Judy 'bye' and went back to swimming with my friends and family.

It wasn't until much later that I got to talking to Judy again. This was when I'd stopped to visit a football game for a second. Judy was at the concession stand and became interested in my new motorcycle. I gave her a short ride on it. She laughed and hugged me tightly, pretending to be scared, so I wouldn't pop any wheelies. Back in the parking lot, we talked and talked. Then Elbert showed up. He had become fat and uglier as a football player. And he was angry toward me, again, and for a reason that I'd become to suspect. He told me to go away. I told him to eat shit. He charged unexpectedly. He hit me in my face before I knew what was happening. His charge bowled us both over, as we fell backward, knocking over my bike. It made me very angry that he had undoubtedly caused it to get scratched.

Like most fat people, his fighting strategy, if his dull wits even thought of it as a strategy, was to throw his blubber on me, pinning me so he could bash me with both fists, like on TV or most Westerns of that era. The old ground and pound. This technique had probably worked for him countless times before. This time, however, not so much. It was not because of anything I intentionally did. I was caught completely by surprise. I just got extremely lucky, because this punk is the kind of punk who smart, skinny kids like me run away from, if we don't want to get our brains beaten out.

What happened is this: my bike was on its side stand. This put its left handlebar right at crotch level. In his rage, this idiot, Elbert, who was always used to getting his way, snagged his nuts on it. His momentum caused the bike to lever him up and over to the other side, picking him up by his most sensitive parts, before throwing his stupid, howling ass on top of me.

He shrieked like a little girl. His rat pack of big, bad football-chasing playmates perked up and started gawking around for the source of this shriek and the crashing noise of my bike. While these oafs gathered, Elbert rolled off me and my handlebar. He rolled into a ball, moaning while rubbing his crotch. I wanted to kick his head a few times, but that would have made me exactly like the same kind of dogshit as Elbert. Additionally, it was not a good idea to stick around long

enough for the ball chasers to get a clue. I let him get away with hitting me, and scratching my bike.

Elbert continued to roll around in the dirt. The quickest ape dogged me while I picked up my bike and prepared to leave, asking, "What'd you do to him?"

"He did it to himself," I answered. Kicking my bike alive, it pattered deceptively at idle. Before putting my helmet on, I caught Judy's eye with a meaningful look. The ball-chaser, wising up, threw his leg over my front wheel, took a double grip of my handlebars, and told me, "You ain't leaving, sissy: Not till Elbert gets up." Then he noticed that I was not paying him any attention. He followed my gaze, saw Judy giving me the look. An indecisive look, but one that seemed to be edging toward my way of thinking. The ball-chaser managed to read this as a threat. He added, "Oh no, asshole! You sure as hell ain't taking our bitch!"

This careless, callous sentiment put Judy in the proper frame of mind. She was finished with Elbert and this pack of rats. She would leave with me, if I could pull it off. A third ball chaser stood ten feet away with his 'bitch,' interested, but not yet knowing the danger that I was planning. Elbert was on all fours now, but not quite ready to stand. One and a half against one, plus a probably reserve, plus the crowd of gawkers who would get brave. Quick, unremitting violence was required even if I was to escape without Judy. My simple plan came together with the burst of adrenaline that came with the decision to apply maximum force. My hand shook with fear and anticipation. I revved the throttle for a distraction. Putting on my mad-mug, I addressed the ball-chaser straddling my front wheel. "What'd you call my friend?"

The pudgy ball-chaser was happy to play this standard game of verbal intimidation. HE swelled his bulk up over me like a toad on a grasshopper, shoving his spit-flecked lips into my face. "Oh? You want to do something about it? Sissy?"

This gullible imbecile was leaning all over me and my bike, exactly as I wanted. While he focused all of his attention on pouring his terrible, passionate, hatred into my eyes and face, he didn't see me strike him like a cobra. Three of my fingers slammed into his soft, left eye. Simultaneously, my left hand whipped up from my side with my helmet, bashing his head with a loud crack! Then I cocked the bars to the right, guaranteeing that his legs would get tangled in the wheel when I leaped off to the left while kicking my bike over to the right. The reserve ball-chaser gaped in shock, giving me time to step over and give 'bitch'-boy's head two more glancing roundhouses, sloshing his brains enough to put him out of the fight. Elbert noticed the danger, which got his mind off his aching nuts and toward facing a real attack. He managed to crawl up into a three-point stance before I knocked him down and out. For good measure, I chased after 'reserve-boy,' who RAN.

Though this was in the good old days, before everyone had a cell phone and fiercely competed to be the first glory-grabber to call the cops, no one in the crowd seemed to

have any empathy for the aggressors. They watched us roar off together before attending their star players. Judy wrapped around me tightly in the chill, October wind. Before we got to her house, she yelled to me in the darkness, over the engine roar, "Stop! I can't go home like this! Pull over here!"

It was the ramshackle, milk-snake place. The weeds were as thick, but the fence was rusted and down. Turning the lights off and keeping the motor noise to a minimum, we drove up to the door and took some quiet time inside. It was here that I noticed she was crying. If I hadn't still been amped-up from the fight, I might have cried with her. She was still the smartest woman I knew, so full of potential and verve. In was inconceivable that she could have wasted any time with such a mindless pack of sub-humans as Elbert, Glover and others like them. Having no experience in consoling female friends, I just told her, "You needed a change. You made the change. Look forward to it. Make it count. Be happy. You have lots of better friends than they ever were."

Judy sniffled a couple more times into my shoulder. Then she seemed to quickly pull herself together. "What about you? Even if the cops don't get you, the whole team of bulldogs will be after you."

"Maybe they won't remember," I joked. Judy laughed. She asked, "Where did you go?"

"My family moved to Tulsa: I go to Central now, with the thugs. My school's so tough that the sprinkler system is filled mace." This caused her to laugh again, a lot like she used to when we were children.

"Is that where you learned how to fight?"

"I still don't know how to fight," I told her honestly. "It's more like, if it's something important, I can figure out how to win."

Judy had no comment for this. I got the impression that she wanted me to brag, and was disappointed when I had let the opportunity pass. A long moment of silence unfolded while I enjoyed the heat of her body pressed up against mine. My hands fidgeted beneath her coat, along her back. Finally, she said, "You certainly won tonight."

Another long moment dragged by, during which I was unable to think up a proper comment. At long last, Judy brought up that event that I did not want to revisit here. Judy squeezed me a bit tighter, as if for emphasis, and inquired, "You remember this place? From third grade?"

I certainly did remember. It was undoubtedly one of the first instances where her life had taken an abrupt left turn to end up an unwitting groupie of the football numbskulls. This time, I was the precocious one. Judy planned to commit the same mistake. I was the one who brought her here. Much as I would like to let my teenage hormones rage, I loved her enough to try and be strong.

"This place?" I repeated. "Not much, but I remember you embarrassing me in school. You knew the best answers, and debating you was a lost cause. Now you're smarter, prettier than ever, but still stuck in this little nowhere town! You

have so much talent, but so little opportunity. We need to make some plans."

"Like what?"

"Like we make your dad buy you a car. Like I take you to Tulsa next weekend and show you how we city slickers work and play. Maybe I could--"

"My dad doesn't approve--"

"That was then. Now you've got me. Your dad will be impressed if you tell him you want to get a job and earn your own living. All he wants is a little responsibility out of you. You already did that by coming with me."

"We don't get along..." she continued, uncertainly.

"Even my mom..."

She had to believe, or she was lost. Though it terrified me, I found myself telling her, "Let's go talk to them."

"That's not a good idea." (Her dad was the freaking chief of police in third grade. He probably still was.)

"The longer we stay here, the worse an idea it becomes." (In daylight, we could see her parents' home, just 3 houses up the next side street.)

We slipped out, without lights, through the back and circled around. It was like they were waiting for her, and her dad was still the freaking chief of police. He was at the door before I shut off the bike. His first concern was for his daughter. He seemed surprised that I hadn't cut and run.

"Judy?" he said. "You all right? Who's this with you?" Like all good cops, he had a good memory. Though we had never spoken, and he had never seen me except as a child, he was able to dredge up my surname from somewhere. "You're one of the Bauhaus boys, aren't you?" It wasn't a question. He knew.

"This is Jim, daddy. We went to grade school together. He's a good friend. We met at the game tonight."

"Your dad was the butcher at Weddles; a long time ago. Where you at now?"

"We've been in Tulsa since then. I work for a veterinarian, and, uh, I was just telling your daughter about how we need a dog groomer. Somebody who can give poodles their fancy haircuts and cute ribbons." Judy took the leap.

"Yeah, daddy. Jim's going to help me find a job after school or on weekends."

"We didn't have to talk up this idea for long to see that her dad was pleased. Judy's mom appeared at the door and invited me inside. It was late, and I used the excuse of a long drive home to beg off. Her father was doubtful of our plans for next Saturday. He stepped out to see my bike, and gauge how safe it would be for his daughter to ride. He was not impressed. Judy and her mom went inside. Her dad shook my hand like he really meant it. Before letting me go, he made sure that I knew that he knew, and that he was glad that I had taken Elbert's place. "I knew he was a turd, first time I saw him," he growled.

Judy got a car, and a job, but not at my place of work. She went on to college, too, and has a career in academia. She married a guy better than me, and has a small,

prosperous family. She never forgot me, and I still hold dear the memory of our long, first date.

Picture Themes-for those of you who believe a picture is worth a thousand words, here is a chance to play. Below are the previous pictures and a sample of the writings that were submitted on the picture. Just as with the word themes if you want to see the complete packet you must send in a story of your own. Your story in this section can be fact or fiction. At the end of this section are the picture theme prompts for the following cycle. Please consider putting pen to paper and sharing your thoughts with us.

**We also offer picture themes. Below are themes written from the last cycle. At the end of this section we will have a series of new picture prompts for you to ponder. Please consider contributing to this effort. Not only do you get to read all the other submissions when you participate, but you have the pleasure of knowing others are reading and benefiting from reading your thoughts.**



*The Car and its Memories*

Jake Wakefield

I remember the day I was born. I was perfect. I was bright green, shining in the sunlight. I was on a lot for only four days. I man drove me to my new home with a huge smile on his face. He proudly showed to his wife and two children. His wife said I was beautiful. His kids asked if he could take them for a ride. Life with them was wonderful. Then came the day that my transmission broke. I was rolled into this field and forgotten. My back window was smashed out by a kid that said I should be in a junkyard. That was how I felt too. I knew no one cared about me. Earlier today, a young man came pass and stopped. He looked at me. He went up to the house at the end of the field. He came back a little bit later. He told me that I'm going to be beautiful again. He is taking me to my new home later today. Please remember, no matter how bad things are there are people out there that care about you. I know from my life experience.

Jonathan C. Holeman

Passing through the edge of the area once called the Western territories on our way North, Lincoln and I came across a relic in a clearing. The relic, this car (as people had once called them) was used to transport people from place to place at great speeds. It was even told that people once used the great machine to fly across the skies. The problem, as with all humanities great inventions were the global repercussions. The fuel that lead to the great oil wars. The fuel, the gas that ripped the atmosphere asunder in a wave of heat that turned half the world to ash, and the rest into desert wastelands. People were lead back to dwelling in caves, hiding, and warring for water supplies. Time went on and the humanity survived, the world healed, and all that remained of the ancient world were the relics of the decayed and distant past.

Looking at the vehicle I noticed the comfortable design, and Lincoln sniffed and chewed at the seats in a rare display of joy. Could he smell some remnant of the people centuries before who rode down the streets now covered in shrubs, weeds and trees. Lincoln, my companion, a wolf mixed with some sort of unidentifiable dog, never barked. He never complained in his loyalty. He smiled touching his teeth to my hand in happy trustful moments. I named him for a picture I saw in the great books as a child. The picture was of a man with a tall hat and a funny beard, somehow Lincoln the wolf resembled Lincoln the man, slender, bearded and wise.

The sun was slowly dwindling and we set up camp next to the car where we would sleep. Things were as usual, our daily traveling routine. I pondered the car the relic. Breaking off pieces of rusty metal I could use or sell later I noticed a box hidden in front of the cars front seat. There was a book inside. No words adorned the cover, bound in leather, pressed in great condition. Reading a bit, I realized it was the book of Gibberish I learned of as a child. A book that leads people to devastating genocidal wars in ancient times. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son- such words were worthless to survival; yet I knew I could likely sell it to some scholar on down the road.

I awoke deep in the night to Lincoln howling at the sky. When I looked up I saw the colors that filled the air, flowing in circles of beauty. No one knew what the colors were, only that they were, and Lincoln sang to them. I wondered when mankind had forgotten the wonders of nature, of life. Why men moved to fighting for words in books written on the husks of dead trees. I relit the fire, and tossed the book into it with a sigh. I pondered the car, the relics, Lincoln, myself, we were just remnants of the past that would fade into the dust.

*Big Red*

William Hill

This picture reminds me of my first vehicle. No it wasn't a car like the one in the picture, it was a 1975 Dodge

Ram 3/4-ton pickup truck with 44 inch "mudders" on back and six-inch chrome extensions on the exhaust pipe.

It had a big hole in the center of the bed where a previous owner had cut a gooseneck trailer hitch out with a cutting torch instead of taking the tire to unbolt it. It had a matching hole on the floorboard of the cab on the driver's side. It was in perfect position to discard empty soda (or occasional beer) cans. In the winter I would cover it with a piece of plywood and rubber floor mat. Neither of these were the most unusual feature of this truck.

No, the unusual thing about this truck was the fact it came with its own dog. Yep, dog, as in man's best friend. This dog was a cow dog through and through. He had been trained that when someone, anyone, opened the driver's side door he would run around to the back, jump into the bed (there was no tailgate either) and go for a ride.

I was a 16 year old who had just gotten his driver's license and I immediately fell in with this truck. A distant relative owned the used car lot where the truck (and dog) was waiting and a favorable payment plan was agreed on. The only thing was my Dad insisted that the dog not be part of the deal. I climbed into the truck as Dad and my distant cousin held the dog off to the side. I could hear his barking as I drove off without him.

Naturally, being 16 and with a new truck (new to me anyways) I drove to the local department store. In my small hometown this store was called Howards. I went in to find car fresheners and something to hang from the mirror and other little knick-knacks for my truck. This store was almost all the way across town from the car lot and I was only in the store for 20, maybe 30 minutes at most, but when I came out, sure enough, my new living, breathing, truck ornament was laying underneath the truck by the back tire just waiting to go on his new adventure.

For a couple of months this dog went everywhere me and that truck went until my Dad found him a new home, with, presumably another truck to take him on his adventures.



Jerry McCool

I remember growing up in the projects. It was a simple life that seemed uncomplicated to the curious mind of a four-year old child whose mind was always meticulously searching for ways to get into trouble and gain the wrath of Grandma Imogene. Many long days passed as I ran up and down the streets of Shiloh on warm summer days and annoyed Grandma Imogene by continuously running in and out of her screen door to retrieve a cool drink of summer tea or syrupy Kool-Aid. Although she fussed and sometimes locked me out of our plain yellow house, I always knew she loved me. At that time, love was all a four-year-old child needed to survive. Or at least I used to believe. Until one day I found myself locked in a juvenile boot camp out in the Texas desert surrounded by violent inmates and hateful staff. Fifteen and alone, I hardened my heart and stiffened up my upper lip. Many days they ran us like slaves and spat orders into our faces, yet I endured for almost two years strong. That was until I got that earth shattering call. Grandma Imogene was dying. Oh how I cried into the phone as her raspy breath, the breath of a dying woman questioned my behavior. Guilt and pain seeped into my heart as she slipped away. Soon it was over and my caseworker did her best to soothe and comfort my wounds. But the pain would not leave till I fought tooth and nail against any correctional officer who dared to pity my pain. Many I left hurt, battered, bloodied and bruised. Yet what was I to do? Fifteen and I hurt. Grandma Imogene was dying. Then one day at PT, we were aligned in a circle and another cadet told me to look up at the clouds as the sun emerged and shined through. He said, "Your grandmother is gone". I smiled because I knew the pearly gates had opened in heaven for Grandma Imogene. But she wasn't gone. She was still with me.

Love

Daniel Easter

All it was was a simple hug, a closeness and warmth. But, it came from my grandpa. Funny how that simple act still sits in my mind, all these years.

I always loved being with my grandpa. I'd sit and listen to his stories of his life, and complain when it was bedtime because I didn't want to leave him. I'd ask to wear his hat, so I could look like him.

I could always count on him to support me when I was sad. He'd listen to my worries and troubles, giving me advice. I learned to play a domino game called Forty-Two from my grandpa.

My grandpa was the embodiment of love. I miss him so much. He has been gone for twenty-eight years, now.

I hope to share my grandpa's love with others, so they might experience the joy a young boy had with someone he idolized and loved.

My grandpa has been gone a long time, but he still lives in my heart and mind.

Love Remembrance  
Brandon Rushing

I will always  
love you.  
Our souls  
will melt together  
In ancient eternity  
be wed as certain  
truth.  
As time always  
turned.

I will always  
remember you.  
Our butterfly memories  
will forever float  
In this secret  
internal dark cave  
storage.  
As happiness unfaded



Matthew Fox

They're told that the men down here are not allowed on the yard because of their dangerousness and unpredictability, that they put staff and other inmates in imminent risk, that they make tools and other dangerous contraband. They're resourceful, even down here they construct things you couldn't imagine. That they incite other prisoners into recklessness and behavior they normally wouldn't.

The lieutenant leads the law students into the security segregation building, instructing them on the details of the structure. In a tight regulated manner, the lieutenant points out the "necessary" security cameras, reinforced doors, and nearby riot gear.

Most of these students' experience with prisons comes from watching "The Shawshank Redemption" or "The Green Mile." They might as well be in the Congo. Wide-eyed, staring at the steel and concrete enfolding them, the students remain in a close cluster. They're scared and intimidated, and they keep an arms length from the lieutenant. Either they sense the load of crap he carries or they're afraid of catching the smugness that airs around him.

Through one secure door after another, they venture further into the lair of the prison.

Crossing one hallway and waiting for the door to slide open, the lieutenant drones on about security. The students eye his liter of pepper spray strapped to his side, the belt across his waist with pockets that close via button. They wonder if his personality came from a roll-on deodorant. He's stiff, pretentious. He wants them to know this is his element.

Entering the first unit, the students are showed around a circular concrete block, where the control room is located. Nearby are rooms with desks, and a few guards and plain-shirted staff lingering around. They notice a large wall size

board with mug shots and names taped on it. The blank, staring faces scream "dangerous."

The law students are told about classification committees, different threat status and levels of dangerousness. Names and incidents are paraded for the students: he fought him then, and this guy did this...he's been here for this long and why....They're told how inmates that leave their cells for only an hour, rarely two, a day communicate and interact with one another. The lieutenant demonstrates how food is passed, even though the door clears only an inch and there are no windows. Why, if they can do all this, what havoc would they wreck on the yard lies the lieutenant's unspoken conclusion.

Finally, past the offices they come to another heavy steel door that slides open. On each side is a small concrete room. Facing them is a wall of clear-plexi glass and beyond that an open wall. Twisted metal, like a chain-link fence, serves as a patchwork to keep inmates in but still allow fresh air. This is the inmates' yard, for an hour a day.

It makes the student think of tigers and gorillas.

The door in between remains closed and will not be opened. The tour stops here. They stand a yard away from the door, not moving hardly breathing. Beyond lies the cells.

The long hallway is lighted by sporadic fluorescent lights, but the walls are still grey and foreboding. The cells on either sides stand like upright graves, full of fear and the unknown.

The lieutenant explains that the inmates are allowed three showers a week, twenty minutes per person. The control booth opens doors at the behest of the guard working the gallery, he says.

A door slides open in the middle of the hallway. The scrape of sliding metal sounds like a grinder. Only audible are the hushes of controlled breath. Seconds pass and no one leaves the room. One student fixes his eyes near the ceiling, expecting a six-and-a-half foot monster. No one blinks. Another student waits for something to emerge, something to justify the adrenaline and fear pumping inside. The student body stands still in deep-freeze.

What emerges is an old man with a long bushy beard. His body isn't muscular, but very pale with a small gut. He's wearing white boxers and a white t-shirt, carrying a rolled towel out from his legs. Other than the beard, these seem to be the largest thing on him. The other student sees the old man smile warmly as he walks closer, then abruptly turns and grasps a caged door letting it slam behind him as he enters, the sound of water quickly follows.

The shield that seemed to hug the students evaporates, and all the lies and miscalculations vanish with it. The lieutenant seems oblivious as the students stare at him as if awaiting some answer for what they'd just seen. In the seconds it took for the old inmate to walk down the hall, it was long enough to obliterate the months worth of rhetoric pumped into them at school, and by men such as the lieutenant standing unaware nearby.



## Henry's Odyssey

By Bobby Bunderson

I was born in a tiny nondescript village called Bonodi in Central Haiti in 1951. My father left my mother before I was born and life has been very cruel to my mother ever since. Thankfully I am an only child; my mother named me Henry after the English Kings, a purposeful jab at the French to whom my mother utterly despises yet has never clearly defined why.

Every day my time is spent earning money so that my mother and I can eat. I run errands for local businessmen, shine tourist shoes, or peddle crafts my mother makes from weaving strands of cane. Then one day as I was climbing a tree I fell and broke my arm. How could I have been so careless? My heart sank as I entered our shanty and saw the look on my momma's face. Despair. Without my contributions to the family income, hunger was certainly just around the corner. We couldn't afford a doctor to mend my arm and so we depended on a neighbor who had some rudimentary healing skills to set my arm and place it in a splint. To compound this tragedy, I developed a fever and was completely out of my wits for several days. When I awoke I was alone on my bed, the shanty dark, cold and foreboding. I winced as I tried to sit up, forgetting momentarily about my broken arm.

"Mom? Momma!" I yelled as panic began to grip my chest. There was no answer. I had no way of knowing what time it was, only that it was dark outside. Several hours later, I heard shuffling noises outside and an instant later, the front door squeaked open. I could see it was Momma, her face expressionless in the flickering light of the lantern she held. Without a word, she placed the lantern on a small block that served as a table, extinguished the flame and crawled over to her mat in the corner. I wanted to go to her, throw my arms around her, and ask where she'd been but I didn't. Instead I lay back down and fell fast asleep, comforted that Momma was back home. I didn't hear her muffled sobs as she lay there in the cold dark room, sobs that had come to stay in our little home.

The next morning there was a bowl of hot grits and bread beside my bed. My mom was sitting in the doorway looking out at the filth of our neighborhood. After I hungrily wolfed down my food I got up and went to my mother. As I reached out to hug her, I felt her whole body tense up and then she snapped at me.

"Henry, why did you sneak up on me! Let me be boy," she said in a faraway voice I hardly recognized.

This is how my life now played out every day for several months. Then one day my mother comes home and informs me that I'll be leaving for the States next week to live with a distant uncle who had moved to America a decade ago.

"Aren't you coming with me, Momma?" I asked, tears already streaming down my cheeks.

"No boy, maybe later. I can't care for you properly anymore. Your uncle's gonna take you in and help you to become a citizen of the United States. It's better over there in America, Henry. When you're rich, you can send for me, okay?" she said without much conviction. Henry didn't know it, nor would Henry's mom ever tell Henry, but while Henry was sick, desperate for money, she had been laying with men for money. To make things even worse, she had contracted some disease that would someday kill her. Her fate had been sealed, but she wanted more than anything to give her little man Henry the best chance possible to succeed.

The day before Henry was to leave for America, he went to the river he had grown up around. The river was now terribly polluted, garbage littering the shores. Plastic bags of waste floating like icebergs on the green waters. Henry stood on a small hill looking out at the polluted river, his heart saddened that his home had evolved in this way. Henry looked forward to a new beginning. He had heard many wonderful stories about the United States. It was now 1964. He knew that black men in America were in a struggle for their civil liberties but Henry doubted that being a colored Haitian would put him in with that category. Besides, he was only thirteen years old! Henry thought about leaving his mother behind and this caused him considerable consternation. But then he would steel himself and knew that before his eighteenth birthday, he would send for his momma and when she arrived, he would driver her to the new house that Henry will have bought, the kitchen cupboards filled with food, the refrigerator overflowing, and his momma would never have to work again. This made Henry exceedingly happy and so Henry did a handstand, a symbol of leaving the past struggles behind and turning his life upside down for a better future.

Henry arrived in the United States in November of 1964. Henry had been wrong, white America hated him just because of his skin color. But Henry listened closely to the words of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King's words gave Henry hope. The whole civil liberties movement was moving faster than a passenger train; changes were coming. In 1967, Henry became a citizen of the United States and in 1969, at the age of 18, Henry was drafted into the army of the United States to go fight in Vietnam. Henry didn't even know where Vietnam was or why America was at war with them but he decided it was the right thing to do. Henry had gotten news last year that his momma had died of some disease but Henry used her death as motivation to create a life for himself that his momma had often prayed for.

Henry fought in Vietnam. Henry killed plenty of Viet Cong for freedom, but in 1972, Henry didn't feel free. Dr. King had long since been killed and the civil liberties movement had wound down to a standstill. Henry found it difficult to hold onto any job that was worth holding onto. So Henry spent most of his days reading. Henry loved literature. He often read Steinbeck, Hemmingway, Bronte, and Melville. As the decades drove by, Henry's dreams just sort of faded away like the early morning mist. Henry now spent his days begging for money for a bottle or two of wine which he drank with his buddies in his alley.

Several years later, Henry's fate would change forever when one night as he was emptying his bladder in the alley, he noticed an apartment on fire with a small child trapped in the smoke and flames. Henry rescued the little boy and was showered with the city's love and adoration ever since. As he sat now in his recliner, Henry reflected back over his life and smiled because he knew his momma would now rest in peace because her little boy Henry was going to be alright. Henry stood up and did a handstand like the one he had done by the river when he was 13 years old, forty-nine years ago. Henry had made it.

Albert Doggett

I remember the first time I went camping on an island on one of the lakes connected to the pond where I grew up. There's something about being in the woods that's indescribable. I had the same feeling the first time that I hiked up a fairly decent sized mountain in New Hampshire and upstate New York and took in the view from the peak of the mountain.

Seeing the "progression" of the area where I grew up, I can't help but wonder how many generations will have the privilege of experiencing the same feeling that I had over twenty years ago. I believe that the constant need to "modernize" the area steadily decreases the magic that this area once conveyed to me.

I was able to recreate that original charge that I experienced so long ago with a few bits of dried fungus or a tiny square of paper, only to be let down by the harsh sting of reality the next day when I notice all the trash left by previous campers. Or the warning that you should not eat the fish that you catch in the lake due to mercury contamination and other toxins. Then I see a picture of the area over 100 years ago and realize that over 75 percent of the trees have been cut down to make room for restaurants, hotels, and shops.

This is just something that I have witnessed in my small town over the past 25 years. I have not been able to go back there for over 10 years now and it will be another 7 years before I have the chance to see all of the "progress" that has been made there.

I look at the bigger picture and realize that over 80 percent of our rainforests have been clear-cut to make money for lumber. I'm not a radical, but looking at this scenario and realizing that most people see nothing wrong with this brings up the question: Should I join EFL or something?

Unfortunately, with two felonies it just doesn't seem like a good idea. How can people be so blind to something so important?

Thinking about this makes one feel so irrelevant when the question "what can I do about this?" comes up (especially when that individual is in a 6X12 cell). I can only hope that the current Green Movement continues to grow before it's too late. It's one current trend that I am thankful for. Twenty years ago, recycling was only for biologists and hippies. Now it's the norm. Green construction and environmental preservation have become focal points in recent years. More efficient cars and self-sustaining gardens are currently in.

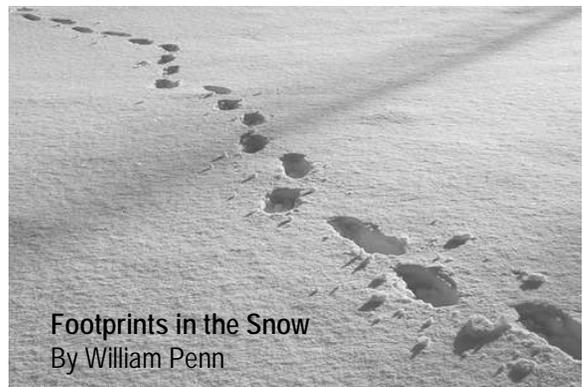
Before I stop babbling, I ask you to come up with your own version of this story and ask yourself, "What can I do about this?"



William Penn Reavis

As above, so below. This is the reflection of ultimate reality. A world that mirrors mind. Consciousness reflecting back upon itself. Infinite sky. Reaching towards the heavens. Piercing the sky as if it were the veil of illusion. Penetrating. Rising above. Reflecting below. Consciousness and unconsciousness merge in between. Blistering with beauty. The majesty of the mountain stands on its own. Complete and total. It lacks nothing. It just is.

This mountain has existed for eons, an artifact of time. A geological wonder, a manifestation of earth. Ageless and timeless, it stands still. A creation of earth and an earth unto itself. Self-contained and yet with an ecology of its own. A monument to existence. Its purpose is clear. As this mountain is reflected in the water below, it's meant for us to reflect above the below.



Footprints in the Snow  
By William Penn

Footprints in the snow represent the spiritual journey. We don't see where the footsteps begin or where they end. This is a journey without beginning or end. It's a journey without distance. There is nowhere to go. The walking simply represents the movement of time. Wherever you go, there you are. There's no place you can go that you are not. Over there becomes here in just a few footsteps. Yet the journey continues.

It's a journey without distance. The seeker is what's sought. Seeking leads to seeking. What is sought is never found. There have been seekers since the beginning of time. Where are the finders? Did they get lost in time? This journey seems endless. Where does it end? It ends where it began? A question in time. Where? Here. Who? You. The footsteps remind me of where I've been. It all began in the beginning and it ends at the end.

End of Discovery? By Reginald McFadden

John Horgan, senior writer for Scientific American, wrote a book called: "The End of Science".

New York's Hudson Valley area, where I was living, was a far cry from my humble beginning in the bad-lands of South Philly, the city of "Brotherly Love", depending on which side of the tracks you were from.

As a boy, I remembered seeing on the black and white TV the famous lunar-walk by the first US astronaut Neil Armstrong, on July 20, 1969, who said after landing on the lunar surface: "One big step for mankind", leaving his footprint for everyone who may follow. This was my first exciting moment of discovery.

So whenever I see footprints in snow, I recall this moment as though it just happened, renewing my wonder of discovery. As a boy, I was always exploring strange and dark forbidden places. If curiosity killed the cat, then I would have killed a thousand cats because I would not stop exploring...

Perhaps this desire was a curse that drives me to test the forbidden limit of "thou shall not..."

I would ask: If I was not meant to make mistakes, how was I to learn the correct path?

So I fell, was disgraced, and got up from my fall, learning why I fell in order to not fall again and again.

I believe history repeats itself in cycles because I never learn the painful lessons of life... Prison cannot change you if you do not want to change. No force can change you against your will except for the force of love. "Love thy neighbor as thyself"

This is the antidote to all my troubles in life. I had DISCOVERED that the cure was not outside of me, but rather inside of me.

So, to all these good souls I had caused so much pain, I am obligated to make some amends for before I leave this physical world.

I share this to you, my fellow inmates, who are seeking answers in everything other than within your hearts.

Do not use external things to justify delaying another moment to this DISCOVERY that can transform you, as it did me, not to hate those who are lost as we are, but to show them the way.

Prisoners have a unique opportunity to show a suffering world what is possible even in prison, among the so-called worst of the worst.

I, for one, by the grace and mercy of that infinite love of the universe, have found/ discovered the source of all happiness that someone coined as altruism.

I realize our selfish egos do not think so, but it is the antithesis of altruism. Everything that is wrong with our world: wars, greed, etc. has its roots in our egotistical selves.

But I must warn you, this bitter pill is hard to swallow for the insincere and doubtful hearted ones, but for those who are sincere, you will witness a transformation as though you were reborn again. Follow my footprints to the true freedom and unconditional love.

By Cesar Hernandez

Jacob loves it when a major snow storm occurs about three times every year. He gets to have about two days where he doesn't have to go to school. He gets to walk in the deep snow that comes up to his ankle. His best friend lives a mile away. Jacob doesn't mind the walk because he knows that when he gets to Mike's house, they'll have a snowball fight all day until the sun goes down. The powdery snow on the ground is perfect for making snowballs. After Jacob and Mike are done, they drink plenty of hot chocolate and warm up indoors. They know the next snowstorm is only a few months away.

Footprints in the Snow By Keith Shawn Ellis

Wow! Stop to look at this photograph of footprints in the snow. This is a meaningful and powerful photograph. "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear not evil. For thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff comfort me." (Psalms 23:4). This photograph holds every form of life known to mankind (life journey). From the ants that are not that strong, as they gather their food in the summer, to the mighty lions that are the strongest among beasts, to you and me, this photograph holds the prayers to endure the unknown journey to say "hold up my going in thy Paths, that my Footsteps slip not." (Psalms 17:5) Even in the coldness of life's many trials and tribulations, the footprints appear to speak of sure footings, not one in a hurry or gripped with fear of being lost in the coldness of life. They conjure up the spirit within to realize I am not alone; I can hear that inner voice saying I love you and I will never leave you no matter what life appears to hand over to you. This photograph is so precious it can unlock and lock doors within one's mind's eye. It encourages me to continue on in faith and not by sight of the lost, due to my many failures along life's paths. I've come to lock this photograph into my mind and will continue on to put one foot in front of the other. I wish to commend the photographer and Gary & Treacy for helping me feel the warmth in the midst of a cold journey. I

pray I will make it through and share the footprints along the way. May God bless us all. Thank you.

Paths By Robert Matice

All paths are the same. They lead somewhere in your life... They are paths going through life or into the good life. In my own life, I could say I have traveled long, long paths but I am not anywhere. My benefactor's question has meaning now. Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it doesn't, it is of no use. Both paths lead somewhere, but one has a heart, the other doesn't. One will make for a joyful journey. As long as you follow it, you are one with it. The other will make you curse your life. One will make you strong, the other will weaken you. Follow the right path in your life to make the best of it.

One Way Out By Dustin Heffner

I've never thought about direction much at all in life it seems until now. I notice that the only direction I have gone is down! Never have I thought of my actions hurting me, or less likely anyone around me. It's hard to do when all you think of on a daily basis is yourself. Others rarely even slip into your peripheral vision.

Now that I'm actually sitting on that Rock everyone always talks about in my type of situation, I notice that I didn't bring any help to my immediate attention on how to get back up. No ladder would help take me out of such a deep hole; no rope would either, because the simple fact is, is that there is absolutely nobody strong enough to pull me up with all my extra "weight".

So what do I do now? I'm obviously at another pivotal moment in my life, and I can either go hard, or go the hell home! I don't have to go hard to stay afloat where I am incarcerated (WVA). I'm in one of the softest prison systems in America (literally). So even when I am not going hard, the staff thinks that I am just because of the simple fact that they have never really seen anyone go hard. Therefore, going hard is not the problem. I don't have to.

The problem is, is I'm so far down that I have to find a way out. Incarceration isn't my problem. I pay my debts in full every time. The problem is I've caused pain! Wounds that I need to mend. I'm definitely no surgeon, and I've caused the pain mostly to my family. I'm not a good father, brother, son, or grandson. Hell, I'm not even a good friend!

So how can I heal the wounds I've created? First, I have to fix myself. That, I believe, will be the hardest part. I take no help to do so from anyone else. That would be cheating! I have to view myself, and actually look this time for the wounds in my soul. I need to prevent myself from being lost down in this well for good because down here, all there is, is pain.

What I've decided to do finally is start whittling away at the mask. Not the one I show others. I don't have one for them; the only mask I present is for myself. Since I know now that for the past twelve years or more, I have been staring at

something that has been well hidden: my true self. So now that I know what has been going on, I can look in the mirror and see who I've become.

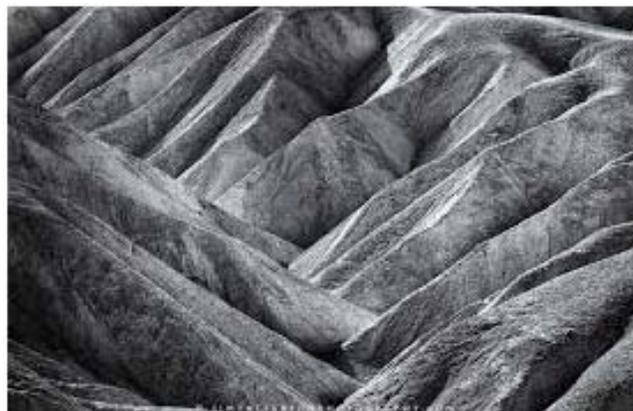
I don't see much to impress myself really! It was pretty much exactly what I expected. I wasn't just at rock bottom; I was surrounded by the shit. So what I've come to understand from my struggles is that you may walk a path for so damn long, you don't realize you've been lost the whole time. You look back and rest for a second while you think of all the pain you've caused on your journey here!

What I understand is that once you look back and find you cannot continue on the path you've created for yourself. There is only one way out, and that is to turn around and face the shadows that you ran from to begin with.

Your actual mission is to stop the pain you cause your children, family, and friends. This is the hardest part of the entire journey! I realized there are two kinds of pain. Pain can destroy and demolish everything it touches. Then there is also pain that can heal and mend everything you have broken. I guess in the end it all comes back to exactly how "hard" you can go.

I've come to realize that getting here was so easy because I saw nothing, but that needle and expected nothing, but that RUSH! Now I know it was never worth it at all because the only rush I feel today is when those needles stab the fuck out of my heart!

New Photos:



Due 8/1/14



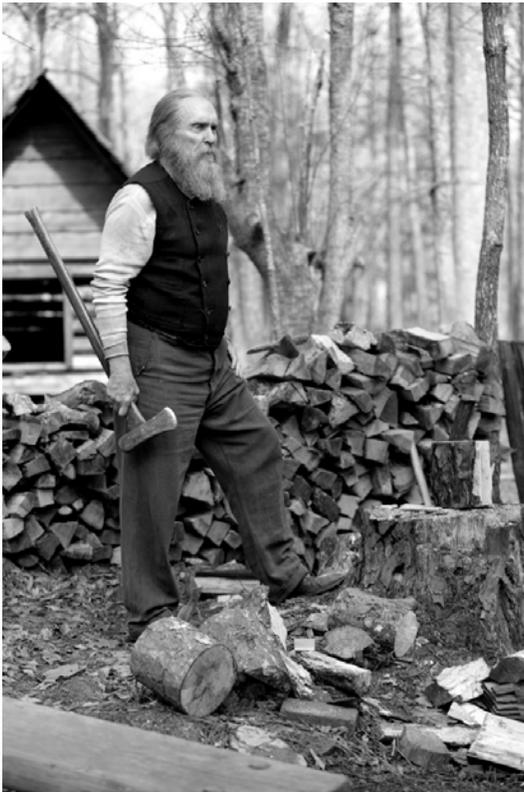
Due 9/1/14



Due 10/1/14



Due 1/1/15



Due 11/1/14



Due 2/1/15



Due 12/1/14



Due 3/1/15

**Final Notes-** My intention is for this program to open up avenues for expression and thought that is not encouraged or developed in your current environment. Many of you are truly wanting to use the time, while you are segregated from free world society, to develop your skills and your ability to think and reason. Being engaged in meaningful activity can cause time and space to disappear around you. Our programs are intended to provide a way to lose the environment surrounding you as you venture inward using art, writing, study or reading to sharpen your focus. With our limited funds we are constrained in what we can do, but it is our hope that your horizons are broadened by our offerings.

I have been thinking of "views" lately. I moved into town from the country a few years ago, and in doing so gave up the grand sweeping vista of hills and valley for the view of a row of houses and a busy street. What we see informs our perspective on the world. When I go into the country these days and notice beautiful views I believe I appreciate them even more due to my current home's location. I know how limited your view can be while locked up, and I encourage you paint to pictures in your mind that are broad and expansive.

View means more than just what you might see. Views can be your outlook on life, political opinions, or your religious and spiritual thoughts. Anything can be part of your view. What I am learning is that the bigger the picture I can hold about my self and the human race the more free I become. Once I was at the edge of the Grand Canyon. It is a majestic sight. It is so large it is close to indescribable. I was impressed with how small it made me feel. Feeling small did not diminish me in anyway and in fact I felt incredibly free. Being so small took the weight of the world off my shoulders. Being small doesn't diminish my experience of anything. I am fully a part of this universe with all of the miraculous abilities to experience the 5 senses and more, but seeing myself in perspective to what appears to be infinite creation helps set me free. I enjoy reading history books, and lately I am reading an assortment of books on really ancient times. Some of the books deal with geologic history and are about the last 1.5 million years and how the glaciers have expanded and contracted over the earth's surface many times in that period. The last series of glaciers covered the area I live in and there were 2000-3000 feet of ice atop this land from about 24,000 to 15,000 years ago. That fact alone is hard for me to digest. When the ice was built up like that 20% of our current oceans were in glacier form. Sea level was 400 feet lower. People have always hugged the coasts for civilization. All that seafood, easy transportation, kelp beds, moderate climate etc. leads people to live near the oceans. Well when the ice began melting you can guess what happened. It took years but sea levels kept rising. Whole cities went underwater. Tales of great floods fill human pre history in all cultures. Noah and the flood story begins to make great sense when you think about all the hundreds of miles of land that went undersea when the glaciers melted. I have seen pictures of cities underwater off the coast of Okinawa [near Japan] Right now there are dire

predictions of what will happen to the east coast of the US if sea level goes up 10 feet in the next century. Can you imagine a 400ft rise.

Looking at the broad sweeps of history, just like viewing the Grand Canyon inspires awe and wonder, and even though I feel small in comparison again this musing on large aspects of life helps set me free. I am hoping that our programs can open you up to these large musings about life and the universe and in doing so help set you free within yourself. I know being locked up is mostly a drag and does not offer much in the way of positive stimulation, but really your experience of life is not different than other humans. Your environment is very constrained, but your minds are free to ponder the great questions of life. I wish I had more to offer than this, but it is the way my mind works to help me cope with all the stresses and strains of life and I hope it can be a tool for you. While your view of nature may be limited, consider even a blade of grass or a ray of sunshine and all that has happened to make those things possible.

Life is certainly easier now that summer has arrived. Upstate NY had a very cold winter. Now I am busy as can be growing vegetables. That is my way of engaging in meaningful activity. If I could figure out a way to make a living as a farmer I would probably go for it. I have a small garden in town as well as a very large one on some country land. Most yards in the city are full of grass and flowers, but I am filling mine with Chinese vegetables, corn, tomatoes, kale, lettuce, beets and peas. I have a giant squash and cucumber plot in the country, and hope this will be a great pickle-making year. I have a lot of garlic coming on as well. I grow way more than my family can eat and will freeze, dry, root cellar and can lots of the produce I harvest for winter eating.

Besides our effort to provide information and education we also want you to know we care. Your life is important, you are part of the human family and we reach out our hand in friendship. All of us make mistakes, and we do the best we can to live our life as it unfolds. Some of the things that happen are due to our nature, some to our environment. Sometimes we have good fortune and sometimes bad luck. This is life, and while it isn't fair it just keeps rolling on. My strategy is to make the best out of what I have in front of me, and I want to help you do the same.

Please send us feedback on the types of low cost programs we could create that would help you in expanding your horizons and keep you engaged in the moment. Our thoughts and best wishes are sent out to you. You are not alone. You, like I are citizens of this universe. You are bigger than this life, yet this life is all we have at the moment and it provides an excellent opportunity for self discovery and awe. I hope to hear from you. I appreciate your feedback on how to make this newsletter and PE more effective instruments for improving the quality of your life.

I wish you well,

Gary

Prisoner Express  
127 Anabel Taylor Hall  
Ithaca, NY 14853

## REGISTRATION FORM

**Please Note:** If you received this newsletter, you are on our mailing list for 2014. This form or a letter should be returned in a timely manner to make sure we receive it before this cycle's packets are sent—to receive books you must send either 8 stamps or \$3.50 to cover the cost of postage. If you don't want to cut up your newsletter, you may copy the sections of the registration form regarding the programs you want to join on a separate piece of paper.

I give the Alternatives Library permission to post my personal profile, writings and artwork on the web using the following guidelines:

- A.  Use my name on my artwork, and my other writings.
- B.  Use my name on my artwork, but not on my other writings.
- C.  Do not use my name on my writings or artwork, but you may use any of my work and post it as anonymous.
- D.  Do not use my name or any of my writings in your program.

**Remember-if we do not here from you within 6 months you will be dropped from the PE active mailing list. Please be sure to write at least once to let us know you want to stay active in PE. If you join any program your membership is automatically activated.**

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

**Expedited Book Mailings** – You must send a \$3.50 or 8 stamps. List types of books you want, and we will make best match with our existing collection of books.

**Poetry Project** – Please send me the next Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology Vol. 12. **I understand that to receive the anthology I have to submit a poem for consideration in the anthology.**

**Two-Dimensional Design**-This is a reprint of Treacy's original art packet. Practicing the exercises in this packet will help you develop as an artist. If you have already received the packet you can redo the assignments and submit them for Treacy's feedback.

**Journal Project** – I will keep a Journal for a year, and share my entries with PE. Please send me a Journal Starter packet.[This does not include us sending a blank journal book. We have trouble sending blank paper into prisons]

**Math Puzzle Book** – Professor Dani will create a packet combining logic fun and puzzles that teach some basic and advanced skills.

**Book Club** – Please send me a copy of **"Devil Dogs and Jarheads"**. I will read the book and answer and return to PE the critical thinking questions sent to me with the book. Limited to 300 participants

**Buddhism History and Practice** – Yes, sign me up for this packet on the origins and modern practices of Buddhism

**Chess Club** – Yes, I want to receive mailings of chess puzzles and how to improve my chess game

**2014 Prisoner Express Newsletter** – I wish to enroll for another year as a member of the Prisoner Express Program.

**You do not need to sign up for the Theme writing program. By submitting your writings and art, you are automatically included on all future mailings regarding those individual projects.**

**NAME: (PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY)**

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**NEWSLETTER**  
Prisoner Express  
Summer 2014

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

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

The Durland Alternatives Library, which funds Prisoner Express, is a project partner of the Center for Transformative Action. Additional Support comes from the Cornell Public Service Center and the Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives

Self Portraits by Anwar Tapia

