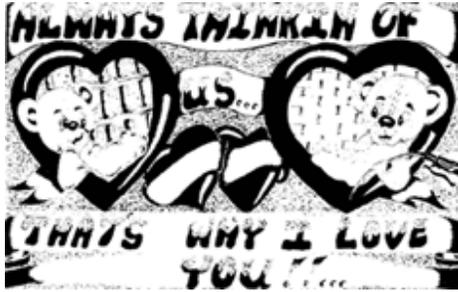


# Prisoner Express News

Spring/Summer 2004



A program of the Durland Alternatives Library, a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics & Social Policy (CRESP); with support from the Cornell University Public Service Center  
*Cover art by John R. Browne*

Hi

I want to catch you up on what is happening with the Prisoner Express program. This newsletter is going to the 1000+ inmates who take part in this program. Some of you have been participating for awhile while others are just getting acquainted with it. We get so many letters asking about services, and it can be a long time before you hear from us. Some of you ask questions, and I will try to answer them in this letter. In the summer we lose most of our helpers, which slows down our ability to provide services to you, especially book mailings. In this letter you will find out all that we are doing, and by looking at your mailing label, you will find out more about your status with our program.

Before I write about Prisoner Express, I'd like to catch you up on my life. I'm always trying to squeeze in gardening time. It has been hard as other responsibilities have been crowding into my everyday life. I have a big garden and am eating all sorts of greens and asparagus. I plant lots of vegetables. My wife takes care of the flowers. I try to have an early garden, so I can harvest lots of cooking greens in the early summer, but I really focus on getting lots of frost hardy plants in later on. If I do it right, I can be harvesting my garden into Dec. and January. My tendency is to go overboard planting the foods I like. I have a huge bed of garlic that I use as medicine. I'm prone to sinus infections, and when they occur, I eat a few cloves of raw garlic every day. Just about the time I'm so repulsed by eating the garlic the infection goes away. I much more enjoy it cooked in food, but for medicine raw seems best. The beauty of garlic is that I can also set aside a portion of the harvest and replant it. I really enjoy saving seeds from plants so I can keep the strain going. It makes it so I'm less dependent on buying seeds. I've got lots of corn, potatoes, chard, onions lettuce, carrots, beets, all sorts of Chinese and Japanese greens, squash, melons, basil, cilantro,

dill, broccoli, cabbage and collards planted. I'm sure I could name a few more things, but you all probably get the point that I like working with the earth. Getting time in the garden helps me maintain my composure in the world, and with my family. If I don't, I walk around feeling like something is missing. When I do, I feel much more complete. Given that I grew up in a city, and never gardened, it's interesting how it is such a large part of my adult life. When I fantasize about my life and livelihood, it's often about how I could make my living growing plants.

We have begun a large addition to our home. I have a contractor working with me and am so glad because problems arise that I would be stumped on. It is so dramatic to bring in the heavy equipment and see how quickly the earth's surface can be changed. In order to create space for the addition, we had to cut down 2 large trees that we sent off to make into lumber. The foundation hole was dug. It filled with water pretty quickly. My land sits upon a series of natural springs. We get our drinking water by gravity from a spring on the hill to our west. Unfortunately, the water is also running under our house. We will figure out a good drainage system. I will be very busy this summer trying to complete this space.

Ithaca, where Cornell University is located, is a great place to experience summer. There are free concerts throughout the summer. Usually there are at least 4 or 5 a week. The downtown has been closed to car traffic for 25 years and is set up as a pedestrian mall called the Commons. It is loaded with upscale shopping and restaurants, but is also a great place for kids to hang out. There is a great little kid playground, and I take my 2 and 5 year old children there once or twice a week. Ithaca also has an excellent and very happening farmers' market. It's right on Cayuga Lake and is a great place to stroll and see produce, crafts and prepared food. Ithaca is a very nice city. The long, cold, dark winters are the only thing that keeps the population down.

In July, I went to a music festival for 4 days. The Grassroots Festival of music and dance has lots of what they call roots music from around the country and the world. There are always some African bands, Native American music, Cajun, Zydeco, blues, country, bluegrass. Often these different types of music fuse and the bands create whole new sounds based on these traditions. I set up a booth in the craft area and spend a lot of time at the festival massaging people. I've been licensed as a massage therapist since 1983. I used to do it exclusively for my livelihood but now I only do it part-time. At the festival I invite 4 or 5 other therapists to work with me. We set up massage tables and chairs and charge \$1 a minute. I have a blast and make good money besides. My kids love the festival, but the 2 little ones take full time attention when they are there. It's a very fun and happening scene and is like a giant 4 day party. The music goes till dawn. There are four stages which can make it hard to choose who to see. The only definite for me was Los Lobos who played Sunday Afternoon. It can be hard to sleep because of all the music late into the night and the wandering lost souls who insist on screaming early in the morning. It is hard to describe all that can go on there in 4 days, but it is big fun. When it is over I take a few days to recover.

So now that I've caught you up on my life, I'd like to tell you more about Prisoner Express. First, please know I read every letter you send. If you don't hear back right away please know it is not about you, or me taking offense at anything you wrote. It is simply about time and money. I try to wait until I have enough information to send a bulk mailing out. Postage and copying are my biggest expenses, and I try to ration out mailings to keep my money from running out. As more people sign up for the program money gets tighter. In the next newsletter I will continue to update you on my quest to make this program sustainable for the many of you who want our services. In the past, when summer came the program was small enough that I could keep up without student help. Now it is too much. Luckily students come back in a few weeks. The only drawback to the program growing so fast is that am unable to personally answer letters as I once did.

Many of you received our last newsletter Winter 2004 and have sent back the forms enrolling in our programs. I have about 300 forms returned. I have a mailing list of 1000. If I don't get the form back I don't know whether the newsletter is getting to you. I can't afford to send newsletters if they are not getting delivered. In this letter there will be another copy of the form. If you haven't

filled it in please do so if you want to get the next newsletter. If you've sent it in, there will be a notation on the mailing label that will let you know what programs you are signed up for. Because we are constantly receiving more of the enrollment forms, you may have sent in the form in the past 4 weeks, but it has not been entered into the computer. If your not sure you can always send the form in again, but most likely we have it and the information will be entered soon.

If you are filling out the form for the first time please write your address on it, and please fill out the part that asks about the limits on the books we send you. Because money is tight I want to be sure your box of books is not returned. Also please check which programs you want to be involved in.

If you've filled out a form your probably wondering why you haven't received more information from me. I will now update you on all the details and my current plans. First as I all ready wrote money is tight, and I'm spending much of my time trying to figure out fundraising. There are lots of good ideas, and they all take time. I look forward to the day that my concern can be more on providing services, than trying to find the money to keep this project going. Please know that I'm committed to doing this. With the growing numbers of prisoners in this program, I am forced to rethink how I can keep this program growing and meeting some of your needs. We are growing, and my slowness in responding to all the new requests reflects these growing pains. We will find the funding, and our program will continue to develop.

We did have a very moving fund raising effort last week. It was especially good. We raised \$800, and between the musical performances given by area artists, we read some of your writings and poems. We had a very moving talk by an inmate, who had done 10 years, regarding how important books were to him while he was doing time. As important as supplying you with books and other creative endeavors is, I also want this program to reach into the community so your voices are heard, and people in the free world become educated about various prison issues. I know it was a successful event because I have a number of new volunteers from among those who attended. I now also have some money to mail out some boxes of books.

### **BOOKS TO PRISONERS**

We've been mailing out about 60 boxes of books a month. It is a drop in the bucket compared to the amount of requests we receive. New requests coming in are probably not going to see books until early winter. We've got a couple

hundred requests to get to. We get to them in the order in which they come. Please know if you have an urgent situation we can sometimes move you up in the cue, but mostly it is about waiting your turn. Besides the new volunteers, this fall I will have a number of student workers which will allow us to send out more boxes a month. Sending books is the most expensive part of the program. We are fortunate in that all books are donated. Most people really want to help, and sympathize with inmates who have no good reading material. The postage cost is the main obstacle.

### **CARD MAKING**

Many inmates have enrolled in the card making program. As many of you know it is difficult to send in card stock. I will be sending in some blank drawing paper. I am going to send the instructions for the project now. I will follow up this with a package of paper. It might take a couple of weeks to get them all mailed out. If you already have paper you can begin now.

Instead of making each sheet into a card, you can send pictures that can be scanned in to the computer, and we can print the image on a card through the computer. If you want to put words on the card, send that in as well and we can put that through the computer as well. I have spoken with a friend who already has a wholesale card business. He said that if he was to sell the cards for us the pictures should be evocative of nature. He also said Celtic themes and goddess themes sell well. These are all just suggestions, please feel free to send in what you are inspired to create. I will use a future issue of Prisoner Express to display your artwork. If you have to fold the paper it will be okay as we will scan it into a computer. He also said the best proportions for card art is 3 to 4. What that means is it should be 3 units wide to 4 units high. A unit can be any size you want, but that proportion scans best for card making. His cards are usually 4.5 inches wide and 6 inches high. We've been told that if we send in written instructions for card making or origami along with the paper it is considered a craft item, and in some prisons it is not allowed. If we send the paper in without instructions for an art project then it would be okay. So if you get a package of paper with little instruction you will know why. I will also pick 12 illustrations to use for a calendar I hope to make to use for fund raising. I look forward to seeing your artwork.

### **COMIC PROJECT**

The comic book project is so exciting to me. Another name for comic books is graphic novels. It's a bit more highbrow, but might help in

marketing the book. I plan to Xerox some pages of comics that show different styles of art work and lettering, and mailing them to those who sign up. Comics can include a long story, or it can be as simple as a picture with a caption. We can do whatever works for you. I hope to mail out the info on this project by the end of the summer. Meanwhile if you have any comic book ideas or artwork you want to send please do so. I just found out about a fellow I know who used to write for the Spiderman Comic. I'm going to send him an email to see if he has any suggestions on how to move this project forward. I'll include his ideas in the comic book project mailing.

### **ORIGAMI**

The origami program has also generated a lot of interest. I have found a number of easy to moderately hard patterns to send. The problems I'm having again refer to the fact that for some institutions I have to send the instructions separately from the paper or it is a contraband craft item. If you have signed up for the program I'll send the instructions before I send the paper. Another problem with the program is that I've been told it is best to use special origami paper. I didn't realize this when I offered the program. I have put out a number of donation requests for origami paper, but so far no one has donated the paper. If I can't get it I will send the thinnest commercial paper I can find. The thing I've learned about origami is that the paper used should be square. If I buy regular paper I will have to find a way to cut it in 6" squares. What I'll probably do is send you paper that you will have to bend and tear into squares. I will send along a sheet with a square measured for reference. I will include some simple origami designs in this newsletter for those of you who want to get started. The main expense to this project beside paper is figuring how to keep copying costs down. If things go slow please know it is more about funding than it is about lack of concern from Prisoner Express and me. I have started thinking of you all as patrons of the Alternatives Library, and I'm trying to create library services to meet your needs. I myself know nothing about origami. Some of you know a lot. Is there anyone reading this who would like to help me develop an origami program that would go from simple to complex. Let me know and we can be in touch. Other wise I'll just keep finding instructions on the internet.

### **JUGGLING**

I'm working on getting information together on how to juggle. I will send beginning information out with this newsletter. It will include info on how to juggle 3 balls in 2 hands and 2 balls

in 1 hand. Juggling is a great way to develop hand eye coordination. It is easy once you know how and there are so many variations and new skills to learn. Just grab some balled up socks or any other item that you can hold in your hand and you are ready to go. If you start with these beginning instructions and want to know more advanced techniques please let me know. I do juggle and can share what I know.

### **JOURNAL PROJECT**

I'm excited about the Journal project. I'm trying to find some organization to donate the 300 journals I need to get started. So far I haven't had any luck, but I'm sure I'll find some notebooks I can send. I wish I had all the money I needed to get started right away, but that is not the case. I want to find a focus for this project. At first I thought I'd get 10 or so of you to keep journals and then send them to me. I see that there are many of you who want to do this, and I realize many of you might not want to send your journal for others to read. You might, then again it might seem to personal. I want the journal project to be about personal growth. It is to be a way to look at life to see where we are and help consciously plan where we are going. Recently I read an article about "biography as healing" It stated that we can work through our traumas and better understand and create our destiny's by writing about what happened to us in life and the choices we made because of what happened. It had this overall spiritual perspective that we have this lifetime and many others to work out our destiny. It wants us to look at where we are now to see if we can figure out the lesson we need to learn in this lifetime. It is certainly no small task to figure out these lifetimes' lessons, but what a gain it could be for anyone who could start seeing the truth about why you are here, and what you are here to learn. I will try to find some articles on biography to send you. It would be something to work on while we wait for the hundreds of blank journals and the funds to send them materialize Please don't hesitate to sign up for this project if your interested as I will find journals.

### **HISTORY PROJECT**

We hope to get together a world history course in the fall. I don't want to create it but rather find someone who is already teaching the subject and get his or her materials. We are based on a university campus, and I believe I need to get in contact with professors to make this happen. In the meanwhile I will send out general history books to those of you who request them. When I went to university I majored in history. It was almost by default. I took the most classes in the

field, as it was the most interesting subject for me. When it came time to graduate I had to meet with an advisor to see that I fulfilled the requirements. He looked over all the coursework I had taken and called my specialization "History from Below". This was because I mostly took classes about groups who had been on the receiving side of oppression. It's a little bit of a twist working with inmates now as you probably fit into both the oppressed and oppressor rolls. One thing is clear to me from reading all your writings. Your confinement is the punishment. There is no call for abusive behavior toward inmates from each other or from your caretakers. It would be good to established honest guidelines for the care and rehabilitation of inmates. This warehousing model is not working well.

The university has an organization called the Public Service Center. I have approached them for support and they want to cosponsor Prisoner Express. I hope their connections will help in getting professors and students involved. I believe a good history class would be of interest to many people. Knowledge of history helps us understand where we are today. Exploring world history explains current events, while exploring our own personal history helps us see how we became the people we are. Knowledge is the first step in helping us change the course we are on as individuals and as a society

### **WEBSITE**

The website is up, but it still needs lots of work. I need to find funds to hire a web programmer to keep the site updated. It takes lots of time to update all the writings you are sending. We are still always trying to match up inmates with pen pals. For some of you this has worked, for others we haven't found a match. If you haven't sent in a personal profile, send one in. It can be around 250 words. We hope to get them listed on the website, but right now we don't have any volunteers who will take that on. We make your profiles available, but we cannot guarantee to find you pen pals. Those of you looking for romance will probably have the hardest time getting responses from the people in the free world who take part in this program.

### **THEME WRITING**

Some of you regularly take part in our theme-writing program. It works like this. I suggest a theme every month. You write whatever comes to mind regarding the subject. Don't think you have to make it perfect, or that it is a big deal and you aren't up for it. Just give it some thought, and write what comes to you. I compile all the writings, and then I will send everyone who submits a

theme a copy of what everyone else wrote on the subject. It's a great way to get mail, and it helps to read the thoughts of other inmates on subjects you might be thinking about. Some of you write that you don't know how to write an essay. Using the word "essay" reminds too many people of school, and all the memories associated with it. Don't worry about the word essay. Just write from your heart, and it will tell your story. Unfortunately I'm a little behind in this program. It again comes down to no volunteers to type your writings into the computer. This is a seasonal thing, and by mid august we should be good to go. I have not sent out the writings to you since the topic "coming clean". I will combine all the entries on "Coming Clean, Letters and Prison Slang into one letter that all contributors will receive in late August. Send us your suggestions on topics that would be helpful to all of you and tap your knowledge of the prison system. This issue will highlight some of the writings you have done on the subject of "Fitting In" and "Simple Pleasures".

#### **FUTURE THEME TOPICS**

AGING due 8/15/04

SMALL VICTORIES due 9/15/04

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION due 10/15/04

ON the EDGE due 11/15/04

RACIAL PROFILING due 12/15/04

#### **FITTING IN**

There were so many evocative submissions on this topic that it was very hard to select the ones I did. I wish I had the resources to print them all.

What is it, really, to consider yourself to be "fitting in"?

The whole concept of "fitting in" seems to have plagued me my whole life. Growing up an "Air Force brat" put me in new situations for most of my childhood. Some kids adapt well to always being the new kid. Others, like myself, stay quiet and to themselves, or at least learn to be, knowing they don't fit in.

Wanting to be like every new person you meet, just to feel acceptance, can lead to trouble in adult life unless you are the kind of person who can adapt well to new situations. If not, drugs and alcohol can gain access to the emptiness perceived by a person who doesn't feel accepted, someone who doesn't deserve to fit in. In many cases, jail time is a result.

Jail is not a place where you want to fit in. You go along to get along. Steer clear of the obvious stumbling blocks, follow the rules that your upbringing ingrained in you and you can get through it.

Fitting in doesn't mean that you have to be just like everyone else at some point. It is the end point of a value system that can lead you down a wrong road or the shining star of self-actualization.

Be yourself and you will be the soul that others aspire to be like.

*-Allen Mayberry*

When I was growing up, I always found it difficult to make friends. There was never a real niche I could fit in comfortably. In school, I didn't care for athletics, so I didn't fit in with the "jocks". At the time, I didn't care for drugs, so that left the "freaks" out. I didn't even fit in with the "outcasts" because they were too weird even for me. I was always more comfortable with my books and daydreams.

Once out of high school, I was fairly lost, so I joined the army since I couldn't afford college. Still trying to fit in, I turned into a party animal because I had noticed that when people were drunk or stoned and said something out of the ordinary, hey, blame it on the "mind altering substances".

Being too undisciplined to make a career out of the military, I came out and did odd jobs until I got caught up in this mess. Naturally, the fitting in process started up again. Being "hard as nails" was fairly easy, but ultimately a person gets tired of being lonely. Then I tried the "super friendly" approach. This had the drawback of making too many friends, most of which were broke. Finally, I had enough. I decided to sit back and watch others to see how they fit in with everyone else.

We have so many types of people in these places. We have a war hero. That was Tet, even though he was born in 1978. We have "super Christians" who are so very holy, especially when the church volunteers are women. We have racists, queers, thugs, snitches, and the popular innocent victims of the criminal justice system.

After watching all these different cliques, I came to the conclusion that I didn't really care to fit in at all. We have been blessed (or cursed) with free will. We can use our free will to either be part of the herd, or a trailblazer. We feel safer with the herd instinct, but the trailblazer has the greater rewards. This does not preclude having friends, of course. The upside to this is that people will become your friend for who you are, not from your contributions to the herd. Stop trying to fit in everywhere and you will find that you have fit in naturally.

*-David Goza*

### Fitting In? Not!

Many times we give up our unique natures in an attempt to be accepted. To succumb to external pressures is to surrender. Diversity of thought, and belief, is worthy of cultivation. In a culture that has developed labeled boxes which each of us is supposed to fit into, we become suspect if we refuse to fit in.

It has been my greatest pleasure to observe my fellow man trying to find a box for me. They first try on the labels. Just recently I was called both an atheist and an anti-Christian. It was another attempt to get a handle on me. God I believe in. Though not the way most do. For me, God is an infinite, divine spirit that flows through the universe. If the cosmos is a body then God is its soul. For those who don't believe in God you should know that God believes in you. That's what makes having friends who are atheists so wonderful. Best of all it makes people wonder. Don't you think its good for Nosey Nellies to use their brains? I do. When they use them on me I love it. They try so hard to figure out where I belong. If they get close I feel it is my duty to change direction just for spite.

Admittedly, the anti-Christian part hurt my feelings a tiny bit. Not enough to notice. Though I do my best to never be anti anything, Christianity is a tempting target. My problem is being surrounded by the Rabid Christian Moral Minority. One said I had no conscience. His opinion means little on this subject because he cheered as bombs fell on Baghdad. Now that is a compassionate fellow. As for me, I wept.

If you hadn't noticed, I'm a prisoner. You would think that would protect me from having to deal with many of the Christian persuasion. Unfortunately you would be wrong. It's hard to rest with all the thumping of Bibles. I'm rather outnumbered. Some thump more softly than others, but they all thump. Mike is my good friend (go figure), he tries to resist the impulse; the urge overwhelms his good intentions and he thumps at times.

Worst of all, though not unexpected, the number of Conservative Republicans is going up. Mike is one of those too. It's absolutely impossible to get the concept of individual freedom through to them on certain subjects. Mike and I have found ways to compromise on most issues. Wish our government would find it so easy. It only took a willingness to see each other's point of view.

My personal view of abortion is that I would never have one. Being a guy I don't have to worry about it. If guys got pregnant abortions would be an inalienable right.

They get pretty upset over the homosexual marriage thing too. Can't see where it's any of their business if they are not homosexual.

If you ever yearn to butt your head against a brick wall, try to explain the difference between the theory of evolution (based in science) and creationism (religious myth) to conservative Christians. They refuse to admit any possibility of evolution and expect us all to accept creationism as fact. Boy, will they be surprised to get to heaven - if they get to heaven - and find God invented evolution.

This leads us back to where we started. As you see I don't fit in. There are Christians all around me, not all as willing to allow me to think for myself as Mike, and I am forced to have dealings with them on a regular basis. Do I feel alienated? Often. That is the price I pay to retain my individuality. Well worth it at any price.

It is better to be alone with yourself, proud of who you are, than to be accepted by those who espouse beliefs you would be ashamed of. My silver lining is that it allows me constant opportunity to hone my ability to defend my views.

As I've told many, I am willing to defend anyone's right to believe as they choose. Contrary to popular opinion, America was not built to accommodate any single belief system but to protect the rights of all Americans to believe, or not, as they choose. My choices are different from most, some might call them eccentric, though precious to me.

In a world where diversity is under constant attack we need more people willing to beat their own drum and set their own rhythm. In the ability to embrace each other's differences is the strength to change the world.

*-Daniel H. Harris*

A social animal, no doubt. From stoning the woolly mammoth to bridging sea channels - we do it as a group or not at all, and the instinct to fit in is as strong and as deep as any part of our nature. Most of those who don't fit in perish. The beauty of today's enlightened society is that it tolerates a wide variety of groups, giving almost everyone a place, a fit, a like-minded circle, whether mainstream or decidedly oddball. There are, however, some oddities that the society refuses to tolerate, and those who carry such unacceptable flaws are destroyed in order to protect the rest of the herd. We are those mad cows, folks, stumbling around our pens, so incompatible with the norm that even our brains, ground up into feed, are taboo, so the media aren't allowed to talk to us and our own families are strongly discouraged from visiting. It's simple

self-preservation, really: no matter how much we would like to romanticize our plight, we aren't fit to live among the rest of the world, and ultimately it makes no difference whether it happened by our conscious choice or because of a combination of unfortunate circumstances, as so many of us plaintively insist. We don't fit in, so we are locked away or slaughtered with a great deal of pomp and righteousness. You wouldn't ask a man out on the mammoth hunt if you thought he was going to bash your head in and take your share of the meat, would you?

But then a curious thing happens. The outcasts are so many that they end up forming a society of their own, and a large one at that. Two million people in the U.S. alone; you could populate a country with that. And the game starts again: the society splits into groups, and those who almost proudly refused to fit in outside end up struggling to find their place behind the wall. We form strata, cliques, gangs, circles - in short, a smaller model of the large society, more radical and obvious in its internal divisions. It's unnatural to be alone anywhere, and in prison it may be quite physically dangerous. Old diseases of the free society resurface, stripped of the veneer of political correctness. The minorities end up being a majority and take their chance to repay for the pain and humiliation of America's shameful history, then inevitably end up in violent power struggles among themselves, the white men band together for protection at first, then end up being simply a part of the prison politics whose purposes are as questionable as those of any society's political movements. Prison guards encourage it: better we fight among ourselves than turn on them, and so the main divisions become permanent. Then come many others. It's in our nature to establish pecking orders, so no matter how despicable the free society may consider all of us, without distinction, we find those we could look down on. We try to kill rats, rapists, child molesters and abusers, we look with disdain at the "lames" because we can't count on them if our group is attacked. Some of us lead, others follow; some strut, covered with muscles and tattoos, while others carry their Bibles as shields and signs of disassociation from the prison society. Most of us try to fit in and just like outside, there are choices of groups that would accept us.

And again, it's a personal choice. Whom and to what degree do you follow? Sure, there are some choices that are objectively impossible whether because of your color or your basic convictions, but others are entirely up to you. I made my choice years ago: I choose to abide by our society's rules but I haven't found a worthy cause to follow, so I make a point of being my own

man. Not solitary outcast, but no one gives me orders either - I do what I think is right. In a word, I stopped trying to fit in. I am who I am, I do what I do, and if people don't like it, they are welcome to voice their objections and deal with the consequences. Sure, it's a bit easier for me to act this way: not too many people want to try to intimidate a 6'4" 222-pound murderer who used to belong to a notorious branch of a foreign military service, but even so ended up fighting a time or two when someone questioned my position. I guess in a way I do fit in, but I'd like to think that I do it on my own terms. I don't feel the need to spend hours with homeboys talking about that market on the corner across from the gas station, or with the other "regs" discussing the internal political currents. They know I will be where and when I'm needed - that's the extent of my fitting in, my role in the communal hunt. The rest of the time, I have my own things to do, and my peace of mind doesn't much depend on interaction with others.

It seems to be a useful skill, considering that this prison's "program" means that I don't see other people for most of the year. I'm sure I'm still a social animal; it's just that I fit into my own skin well enough to avoid the need to fit into any large social unit. It works for me: I won't be building any bridges in this lifetime.

*-Andrew Belej*

You see all the laughter and fun everyone is engaged in and you want to join in, that's only natural. But in order to really fit in you have to be wanted, cared for, and most of all liked by everyone in the crowd. Well I've found out that I don't fit in, especially in this environment, because of my difference in attitude and outlook on life. See all I want is to be happy and loved and to have a really good job so I can take care of the family I dream of having one day, a wife, three or four kids, dogs, and other pets for my children and a nice house with plenty of room for the children to run and play with their pets. I want most of all for all of us to be happy. There are all different kinds of groups and walks of life out there when in order to fit in there should only be one, and in that group everyone, no matter what race, age, or ethnic background should not hate or disrespect one another but get along and be happy. Show the children that they are loved and teach them the value of life and honesty. To me that is what it all means to "Fit In" but that is my opinion and everyone is entitled to their own.

*-David Shearer*

## Fitting In= (Ego + Americans)/Materialism

If looked at objectively, I think "Fitting In" all boils down to the ego. Were it not for ego, our penchant to fit in would no doubt cease to exist. But as the ego is a pronounced part of the human psyche, each of us ought to take steps to reduce its influence in our daily lives. Ultimately, one should strive toward the goal of total self-realization. Unfortunately, most people have neither the time nor the inclination to do so. I was told recently that simply recognizing the ego within oneself is a major step in overcoming its negative effects.

The concept of Fitting In, the desire to be accepted by this or that group, to wear the right clothes, speak the right way, drive the right car, etc. is not *exclusively* an American idiosyncrasy, but it is more prevalent in this country than others. Our culture (if this confluence of nationalities can be said to have a culture) seems to promote the idea of Fitting In with its materialistic obsessions.

"Keeping up with the Jones'" used to be a facetious way of describing people attempting to accumulate the same (or better) material possessions as their neighbors. They wanted to belong, to be accepted, to fit in. In today's world that same saying appears to have become a way of life, a goal that supercedes the more important aspects of home and family. It's almost as if it has supplanted the family itself.

Americans spend more time working more hours to obtain more possessions than, from what I can gather, the people of any other country. Healthy and constructive activities like family outings, family discussions, and general "quality time", have been replaced by this need to have more "things". This process has eroded many of the family values, morals, and ethics that once made this a proud and desirable country to live in. I want to believe that American could once again reach that same level of prestige and honor, but first we Americans will have to undergo a major change in the way we view what's important for our future and not concentrate almost solely on immediate gratification of self.

I realize that I'm getting off of the subject a little. I have a tendency to ramble so much that soon I've lost the intended subject of discussion. Does that mean I wouldn't fit in amongst this or that group? Should I care? Maybe, but then again that would be my ego. The very fact that I even think what I have to say in this article is of any value to those reading it is so incredibly egotistic it isn't even funny! And yet, I still laugh at it.

*-Kenneth J. French*

When I was young I always wanted to fit in. Be like somebody else. Or do the things that they did, which I thought was cool. Just to be part of their group, or to be liked by everybody else. I wasn't fitting in, I was filling in. The day I was born into this world I was fitting in to be part of this world and create my own destination. I'm already cool and part of a group that they call the Children of God. That was one purpose of being created - seek knowledge of God from the cradle to the grave. I'm grown now and no longer want to be like somebody else. I want to be like myself and do things that are right, and not care who likes me cause I'm just fitting in.

*-Henry Stephens*

I have been sitting here trying to figure out how to start this topic of fitting in. I guess you might say that I have been trying to fit in all of my life. I have never felt that I have fit in with any group or setting. Even while I was married, things just didn't mesh like I felt they should. I have always felt isolated, alone as if I was on an island. I guess that by not fitting in and always wanting to; I was finally led to my drug addiction and, in the end, ending up in Administrative Segregation in a Texas prison. Like I said, all of my life I have been trying to fit in, to finally lose this loneliness, this isolation that I felt inside. I started doing drugs at the age of 14. Starting off by smoking pot and, at the age of 30, shooting cocaine, heroin, and meth. I finally ended up in prison at the age of 36. Coming to prison was a real eye opener, a wake-up call to what is important, most important, to me in life. What you will come to realize is that the thing that is most important to you, besides your freedom, is your family. They are #1 above all else. They are your lifelines when you are behind these bars. Especially when you sit in a 5'x9' cell at least 23 hours a day, year after year! Let me tell you how I ended up in an Ad. Seg. I was sent to prison on several different charges to do 10 years of my life for, among other things, being a drug addict. I can't really say if I was scared when I was sent to prison. Maybe I was scared of the unknown? It was my first time in prison and I pray that it is my last. There are so many things that those who have never been to prison don't and can't understand, including the feelings of loneliness, despair, and isolation that you feel when you first come to one of these hellholes. I have always been independent, never needing anyone for anything, but always wanting to fit in. Upon coming to prison you find out real fast that if you don't find a group of people to fit in with, you will be on an island, with no one to watch your back having to fight every day of your life, especially if you are a white man. I have always

carried myself as a man giving respect and expecting it back in the same manner that it was given. Carrying myself as a man and fighting for myself in the county jail is what brought me to the attention of a prison gang that calls itself the Aryan Circle. One of the men I was locked up with was a longtime member of this gang. I got to my first unit in June of '97 where it was mostly black inmates and black guards. Most of the black guards were either CRIPS or Bloods. As you might guess, the blacks had the run of the farm. The rest of us were in last place, especially the whites. The Mexicans stuck together so they didn't have to fight for what was theirs. Most of the whites don't stick together because 90% of them are color scared. If they see a white man being clicked on by another race they get as far away as they can to avoid getting clicked on too. This is the problem with the whites in Texas prisons, they don't want to get involved (unlike myself and others like me); they would rather not get in the middle and, in the end, they themselves end up paying protection. It just so happened that the same Aryan Circle gang member ended up District Captain on the same unit I was on. This is where I got my first taste or, better yet to say, I first heard of A/C. Being the man I am and the way I carry myself as a man, I was approached by this prison gang and given the prospect of becoming a member of said group. I was told lie after lie about what this prison gang was all about. Some of the lies I was told, including what the constitution said, are a long way from what is true and real about the Aryan Circle, and all the rest of the gangs here in prison. I read the constitution and it said that the circle was created in 1985 to protect the weaker whites here in prison from being clicked on, raped, and having their property stolen. Homosexual activity was one of the worst things you could do as a member of this group, but I found out later that it was going on in the group's upper levels!). There was not supposed to be anything worse than betraying a brother or snitching (again, I found out that this was going on in the upper levels too). What a joke this all is and what a fool I was to believe any of the lies I was told without thinking for myself first.

I have honor and I live by a code of honor and respect that most of these guys can't or never will have or understand. There are some really good people in this group that were misled just as I was by the lies we truly believed. I still have much love and respect for some of these men who still believe in the things that A/C was created for. But they, just like I, can't change the nature of the beast anymore than you can teach a pack of wild wolves not to hunt. After becoming a full-fledged member of the A/C, I found out the truth about

what it really is. We were doing the same thing to our people as the other races and gangs were doing! It made me sick to see something I believed in so strongly become a lie right before my eyes. But, still trying to fit in, I went along with the wars we had with other white gangs and all the times tried to educate our people in the circle and tried to help first timers how to survive in the first place. This went on for years, A/C fighting our own race and killing our own people. I could no longer stand what I was involved in. I thought about it long and hard and decided it was time to step away from this group. In '99 we went to war with the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas (ABT) throughout the system (this wasn't the first time). There were people stabbed up and killed on both sides, fortunately none on this unit, as we were all friends with these men! We did fight and beat each other up and even some were stabbed. In late '99 both groups were locked down and stayed locked down, eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, for 8 months before I was confirmed as a gang member and placed in Seg. Where I still sit today. Long before we went to war with ABT, I asked for help in getting out of A/C. I sent letters to STGM (Security Threat Group Management Office) here on the unit and in Huntsville. I even sent a letter to the executive director of TDCJ more than once. No help was forthcoming from any of the TDCJ officials. The only way I found out anything was from an inmate who was on his way to a newly opened program GRAD (Gang Renouncement and Disassociation program). It has been over 3 years now since I stepped away from the mess I was involved in. But yet I am still sitting in Ad. Seg. Waiting to go to the GRAD program. I don't know if any of this makes sense to any of you who are reading it or if it has anything to do with the topic "Fitting In". I guess what I am trying to say in all of this is you don't need to fit in with any group or anything else except your real family in the world. That is what you should be really trying to do and that is what is most important to you. Not this life in a place like this. Get books, study, and learn all that you can while you are locked up, so that you never come back to this place!

*-Name Withheld*

I believe that our society is separated into many social divisions. Each individual seems to gravitate towards other like individuals. I still haven't found where I fit in this life, and at times, I feel like I'm wandering aimlessly along. Fitting in is a hard subject to write about, mainly because I don't know where I fit in. I've made a decision to enjoy life and every aspect of it while I'm searching for where I fit in. In the past, I really

never felt as if I fit in. I got married, moved around, and used drugs as a way to fit in. Still, I was dissatisfied with my life. For many years, I felt like I was just drifting along, going through the motions of living. I didn't feel as if I belonged, no matter whom I was with or what I was doing. Even though the drugs I used gave me the illusion of a place where I could fit in, I was restless. I often wondered if I would always feel this way.

Now, I'm in jail and have been for 6 years. I realize that I can use this time wisely, associating with others who want to have better lives once they're released, or I can make the unwise decision of being around people who still get in trouble. I enjoy being with people who have positive attitudes and a great outlook on life. Until I'm released, these are the people I want to "fit in" with. Once I'm free, my main priority is working on reestablishing relationships with my various family members. My family has always been open and accepting of me along with my many faults. Never have they turned their backs on me. I know that I will have a place to fit in with them. I look forward to building better relationships with them.

I will make new friends, and have a newer and better outlook on life and the future that's before me. My past will always be there, but the future is what I will focus on. I'll find my place to fit in, and this time it will be as a productive individual who enjoys life and being surrounded by others who also enjoy life. I don't know right now where I'll be, but I do know with determination and perseverance I will succeed.

*-Theresa Fowler*

excerpt ..."Fitting In" in prison can be easy with the mask of a racist and a willingness to hurt other people warranted or not. While wearing this mask, you stand to lose part of your soul. But you'll be down for yours and your race, but it is in the mirror you are an unrecognizable shell who sold out to fit in and survive. The philosopher Steiner said, "a handful of might is far greater than a whole bag of right." While this can be a safe modus operandi, the cost is greater than the prize of fitting in, being feared, and commanding respect. Parole doesn't end the cycle. Now one must fit in against even greater odds. With serious consideration to this cycle, one becomes aware how "Fitting In" is as much an oxymoron as jumbo shrimp or an honest politician. Not to mention an RSVP to psychosis.

*-J. Franks*  
E88608

We all have the desire to be loved. We all desire to be accepted. Some of us have gone through great lengths to satisfy the minds of others. Each of us has been conditioned to

conform to the ideals of what is acceptable in our demographic subculture, the societies to which we find our identity. For some of us, it is a prison and the oppression of our true selves. For others, it is eternal bliss.

I believe there have been times where we all have done something or another to gratify the ego of outside forces. The smiling face of a corrupt heart, the deception that it's ok to be the way others perceive themselves. It's kinda like saying "I am not me unless it agrees with you." Each time we give ourselves over, we forsake a small bit of our true selves. After awhile, you don't even know who you are anymore. Then we ask that little voice in our head where all of our friends are, and we learn there are none, there is no loyalty.

It's amazing what we won't do to "fit in" the crowd, to create that artificial womb. The fear that exists in each of our own realities is perpetuated by the judgment of you, by you, but did not originate from you, if it is not you. Those judgments are lies, the calloused beliefs that make you your best victim. The identity of a slave borrowed from pieces of hundreds of people. Origins of their reality are trespassing in the sacred temple of your mind, soul and body.

Fitting in means absolutely the identical equivalent of zero. We did not come into this world from our honorable mothers as the people others want us to be.

There is a saying which is rather common, one that I use often: "You know your own when you see them."

Another is: "tell me who your friends are, and I will tell you who you are."

Death is always around our corner, peering at us as to say we really know nothing, all that we are in this life is a fabrication. I ask myself, "if you die today, does it really matter what others think of you?" Each time my answer is: "it only matters what my loved ones think of me." I've never had to fit in with my family and true friends. They love and accept me for what I am, what I am not, and for what they see in me.

I am not innocent. I have condemned myself and others to the stupidity of attempting to fit in, and everybody loses. Be yourself, exercise your freedom of thought, seek what is true for you, love yourself and others, and you will always know your own when you see them. You do not need the validation of others to exist.

*-Bruce Large III*

The search of life while youthful was so very elusive and aloof. Life's meaning and trying to find the groove to which I might fit in was a missed opportunity. Moving from one group to

another, one lifestyle to another, my personality would change so I would be liked and accepted and able to fit in. Finally I found the love and the group of where I was loved and accepted, it was the drug culture. Finally fitting in with that group lead me to be fitted into the penitentiary.

While in my youth I felt invincible, confident and high most of the time and I might add my skin fit my body. I thought, by error, that I had the world by the tail when in actuality life had me by the neck. As long as I had money, booze, or dope I was readily accepted by my so-called friends. When that was gone, so were the friends and it took me years to notice that because I was always high or on dope or booze. I was caught up in "doing my own thing" while in truth, "my thing was doing me!" After a time I became out of control, and participated in other criminal activity. Eventually law enforcement saw to it that I was fitted in to prison. And justifiably so, I fit into the criminal element.

In prison I found my groove and fitted in the gang, after the first six years of prison I joined to show loyalty and persevere against the violent elements. And I fit in that group for 20 years. That caused security to fit me into Administrative Segregation.

Now at 45 years old I began to look at life in the rearview mirror. I discovered I wasn't fitting in with the mainstream ideas of a life worth living. Because I had finally reached the bottom of the bottom, the lowest of the low coming to Ad. Seg. What I found though is that being fitted in a single cell was the best thing that's ever happened to me. It's where I ask Jesus to fit in my heart and I accepted Him as my Lord and Savior and confessed my sins to Him. I'm no longer a gang member and I'm still in segregation and that's cool by me.

I have finally found the perfect place where I fit in, that being the family of God. I not only fit in, I am loved and accepted and I am fitted into the eternal kingdom of God. Yes, in youth my skin fit but now almost 48 my skin no longer fits but I fit in my skin. And I owe it all to Jesus who has shown me a love so beautiful I cannot turn away. The search is over, I have come to know the Lord and I found the Real Groove. A place to Fit In.

*May God Richly Bless You Too!  
-Silent*

**SIMPLE PLEASURES**--It was not easy to select which writings to share with you all. There were many interesting submissions. If you want to read all the submissions on a topic, all you have to do is send your own writing on the subject. I hope you will join us in participating.

There is a common saying that goes something like this, "You don't know what you're missing until you've lost it". That is especially true for the most part.

The simple pleasures that most people enjoy and take for granted (I'm guilty of the same) suddenly become painfully clear and missing from our lives when we come to prison.

To be able to shower, use the restroom, and take care of other personal matters without being observed and interrupted.

To be able to put on clean clothes without having to worry about what whether we will catch some kind of hungry bug like scabies or staph. To wear clothes that don't smell like they have been stuffed in someone's gym locker for the past few weeks.

To be able to see the sky without having to look through a little slit in the wall and without the rolls of razor wire and fencing. To breathe in clean air and feel the wind and rain on your face.

To see nature going on all around you. The squirrels playing and foraging for food, the wasps building their nests, the birds raising their chicks.

To hear the sound of children laughing and playing in the distance. Seeing other people going about their daily routines.

And most all, to feel the touch of another human being in kindness, to see a friendly smile and hear warm words of love from family and friends. To be secure in the knowledge that you are loved and cared for. To have someone to share the fears and doubts you have, to help chase them away and tell you that everything will be all right.

Some folks just don't know what they're missing until they've lost it all...the simple pleasures.

*-Perry Allen Austin*

Simple Pleasures are the things it seems that we never really think a lot about. It's the little things that go on in our own daily lives such as our eyesight. No our eyes may not show us simple pleasures in everything we see. But the fact that we can see at all is a simple pleasure that I am grateful for. The fact that I can reach out to touch, grab, fill, taste, smell, and move, are all the things that most of us think nothing about until they become a simple pleasure that if something happened to us that we no longer could do any of these things. Also to most of the world-driving down the road and looking around is a pleasure, walking in the country on a lazy day and hearing the wind is a pleasure, riding in a boat, swimming, fishing, and camping seem like simple pleasure to

many people. But if you are locked in a prison these are simple pleasures that were taken for granted and are things that are missed.

*-Norman O'Dell*

Everyone has there own Simple Pleasures. As for me my simple pleasures can go a long way. For being behind bars most simple pleasures are taken away, such as sitting in the woods in the middle of the night and relaxing. Driving a car on an empty highway and burying the speedometer. Working on an engine and playing on the computer.

You don't realize the simple pleasures of life until they're taken away from you and it gets you depressed thinking about it. But it just reminds you that life IS NOT OVER.

*-Donald Coffey*

Being a cook by trade, it's hard not to think of the variety of foods or snacks, which I'm able to fix up.

At the present time I have to settle for a cup of coffee and some cookies, starring out through the bars and listening to someone a few cells down arguing about sports or something else.

After almost a decade of eating prison food, food is what crosses my mind first because to sit here and think of the time wasted instead of being home with ones' family becomes painful. One of my best pleasures was to be wakened by my daughter and dragged into the living room to watch Saturday morning cartoons, then showing her how to make breakfast. This decade has cost me most of my family because what can one discuss. Conversation becomes redundant and family members get to the point of not wanting to give you bad news which goes with every day life. So instead of thinking of the pleasures one gets from shared moments, with a loved one, I focus on the foods I like and the time I spent by myself.

Have you ever sat in a park by yourself and watched the happiness on people's faces as they enjoy a beautiful spring day?

That happiness is contagious, and I used to experience warmth, which stayed with me for the remainder of the days. Sunrises and sunsets are beautiful in pictures, postcards and movies but to have actually been in either the East or West to experience it as I have is a pleasure that never leaves you.

It won't be long now, I'll be able to sit in a park, only after a decade of hardly any sun I won't be sitting under a shady tree, I plan to sit where I can have the sun right on me. I close my eyes and smile at a picture of myself sitting in a park, knowing I will never return to this 5 'by 9' cell,

where one experiences the death of ones' simple pleasures.

*-Reynaldo Sanchez*

Furry balls of fury, tumbling across the sun lit yard, barking an excited welcome. A baby's warmth, cuddled close to my heart, resting contentedly. Walking among the tall pines of my Alabama home: Entering an oak grove, dark and hidden, where only pines should have been. Cool breezes that dance beneath the rustling leaves playing peek-a-boo with the sunbeams. Diving to the depths of a crinkly cold creek on a hot summer day: Rising chilled and breathless to lay in the shadows.

These are but some of the simple pleasures an old convict misses most. Haunted memories take me from my pain; carrying me to a lost past where freedom rings. Mine was a past taken for granted until the gates of prison slammed behind me for the last time. In these ghosts I find strength to continue my struggle, resolve to survive that my memories might live yet awhile, and hope that if ever, by some miracle, I am returned to freedom I hold to it evermore.

These are also the demons of my weakness. The roiling pain of my memories makes incarceration a torment. Looking back and seeing all that has been thrown away, unappreciated until it was lost, brings tears to eyes long tearless.

A time comes when we need to compensate for what is no more. For prisoners who have hope of release their memories can be an incentive to change; that never again will they have to suffer such a loss. Those, like myself, who never expect to be restored to the freedom they took for granted must be vigilant if they are to find new memories to maintain their purpose. Contrary to what most believe of prison life there are moments of sublime joy if you are observant and don't expect too much. Where so much is lost simple pleasures can make time's weight bearable and ease its passage.

Let me share a few of the experiences that have made my time less of a burden to carry. Never is it easy. But, neither is it always terrible. As with most situations in life, it is up to each of us to decide whether we will make lemonade or just suck our lemons and pucker.

Sweeping the sidewalk, as two officers watched and horse played, such a simple pleasure fell in my arms. Officer Louder shoved Ms. Black, harder than he had intended, in my direction. She was falling toward the concrete when by pure reflex I dropped my broom and caught her. There I stood with a lovely lady lying in my arms like a lover, looking deep I my eyes. It

was a beautiful moment until I realized how many rules we were violating and reluctantly set this beauty back on her feet. Undoubtedly she has forgotten. I never shall. She is the only lady I have held in twelve, long years and very well may be the last.

Cell windows have often brought me delightful sights. My transfer to high security Ad-Seg cost me that privilege.

Late one summer night an undeniable scent in the air drew me to look for the culprit. As I scanned the brightly lit prison grounds from the concealment of my darkened cell's window where I witnessed a special threesome gamboling along. Mama Skunk must have weighed fifteen pounds; her glistening coat, fluffed and silken, made her look twice that size. The little stinkers were just balls of fluff. Joy engulfed me as the little ones chase bugs in the grass. For a long time I sat watching them play till finally they were out of sight. Even those long years later they are not out of my mind. Have you ever watched a spider spin a web? It is one of the wonders of nature. That same window provided me with a big, black, fuzzy one, which came to my attention one lonely morning. Unfortunately my cell partner at this time was one with a bully mentality. Not easy to get along with. Seeing me intently watching my window, smiling, he couldn't resist disturbing me. When he asked me what I was watching I foolishly told him. He was indignant, all spiders must die. He reached across me, where I lay on my bunk, intending to kill mine, I told him that if the spider died so would he. He was just a bit upset. Luckily for all of us he made the right decision and left my spider alone. Instead he got moved and the spider made a much better companion. You have to draw a line somewhere. But, I'm glad I didn't have to explain that to a judge and jury. My fellow prisoners would understand; no one else ever could.

The first time I got released from Ad-Seg they put me outside for the night because they didn't have a proper cell for me. That may sound horrid to you; to me it was wonderful. Bats were out and the stars were shining bright against a black velvet sky. Hours I lay and watched the midnight acrobats. If I had gotten angry I would have missed one of those moments of simple pleasure that make memories.

It's rather easy to forget your position with a certain type officer. Mr. Olson is one of those good and friendly types. Whenever he was assigned to work the hall where my crew worked I would promptly volunteer to stay during noon count and let the rest go home early. The work was done and the only reason anyone had to be there was in case of some accidental mess being

made that needed cleaning up. Count could last for hours and it was time spent talking to "Big-O" about hunting, fishing, shooting, and other free world activities. At times we would share a companionable silence. It was one of those quiet times when "Big-O"'s tendency to nap was showing itself. In his company I never felt like a prisoner. For that reason, as we kicked back, I never thought twice about what to do when an oversized, kamikaze mosquito dive-bombed onto his kettle drum size stomach. It was an irresistible situation. With a thump of my hand that mosquito was history. "Big-O" had no way of knowing there was a mosquito. He opened one eye and gave me a quizzical look that said very plainly I had a short time to explain. Worlds wouldn't come, it was too funny, so I reached over where this critter still lay and lifted it up by one wing. With a nod of his head he returned to his nap as if nothing unusual had occurred.

With most officers I'd have been rooting for the mosquito.

These stories, and many more, have been added to my memories. They can never replace the simple pleasures found in freedom. Children, pups, and the warmth of a hug. A soft bed with room to stretch or a walk along a woodland path. There is in every memory a reminder of the simple pleasures lost because I didn't appreciate freedom's worth. Now I know it is the most priceless of treasures. It is probably too late for me to save my squandered fortune. Is it too late for you? Hopefully not.

*-Daniel H. Harris*

A simple term like "simple pleasures" could be a hard term to define given our alternate point of view. To someone in a "normal" situation in life, simple pleasures could be the time spent with your child, of watching him or her grow into their own lives—or the love you see in your mother's eyes—or sharing the warmth of your spouse as you curl up together to go to sleep—a good meal—a laugh shared with friends—all simple, all filled with pleasure...all easily taken for granted by those who are lucky enough to experience them on a daily basis.

Take a little advice from an idiot who's learned the hard way—instead of overlooking the small things we enjoy in life as insignificant...accept them as the gifts that they are. Savor them—for without them, you may still be alive, (another debatable point, to be sure) but you're far from living.

*-Martin A. Webber*

Being locked up for going on seventeen years now has given me a whole new perspective on

what should matter most in my life. Things like money, sex, and all the accompanying “toys” that symbolize status in our myriad subcultures still have meaning, of course, but they pale to almost insignificance when viewed through the lens of empathetic hindsight. I missed out on the things of fond memory that so many take for granted, such as the high school experience, marriage, or watching my little one grow up from her not-so-terrible-twos into a teenage drama queen. And so in response I’ve taken refuge in what are called the simple things: each day’s sunrise seen through my cell’s window is another day of life; each smile given to me by female prison staff reaffirms my worth as a man and strokes my ego; books and magazines feed my imagination; a letter from “home” reassures me that a special place and a special person still awaits me “out there,” the list goes on and on, but each item on that list represents an entirely new world of possibilities to explore in mind, heart, and spirit. These things serve to strengthen me and help hold the wolf of insanity and depression at bay. Without them, there would be no reason to go on.

*-Keith Merritt*

“Simple Pleasures” - that’s a mouthful... how many people outside of jail even know what a simple pleasure is?

‘Cause once the handcuffs lock, you can’t flip channels on the remote... watching a TV program from the actual beginning... or even being able to choose your own menu...

Dudes have been known to fight their own cellmates to the death over issues of privacy in the cell... Many a thing that none of us even think about in the world being overbearingly large... cookies, chips, sodas, candy... It’s not everyday that I can even use the restroom without at least my cellie’s presence...

Here everything is structured 24-7 inside and out, so you might not be able to enjoy a hot and then cold shower after a game of ball... your simple pleasures change from a late night creep up to the “House of Pies” to dunking “Best Maid Cookies” in some low grade hot chocolate... hearing your name at mail call, don’t matter who its from... really and truly, once those handcuffs lock around your wrist there are no more simple pleasures as we’ll tend to try to find the pleasure in every act and action... private to public... even to the extreme of a lost fight... I don’t believe I would have sat still long enough in the world to enjoy a game of scrabble or learn to play Triangle Dominoes... laying back with a good book as the radio plays some mellow songs is my simple pleasure.

*-Calvin Carter*

I am a 24-year-old lifer, convicted of capital murder, sentenced to a life of confinement and cell therapy. I just recently realized reflecting on simple pleasures while appreciating the self-same blessings are a part of the much needed, self-prescribed therapy.

In the past, my free world access was, of course, less limited. I had many open opportunities and choices were innumerable. I could hop in a bus and go the distance I chose and could afford. The telephone in the living room was in close proximity to the TV’s remote, and either was as common to use as this pen I now write with.

Simplicity was taken for boredom mostly. “I have a key to a door.” So what? “I have the choice to walk to the store.” And? To every plain and common privilege you might have mentioned, I would’ve expressed some apathy.

As I write I sit at a desk of metal, painted plainly, while in the corner of my mind is the bizarre novelty of a nice, varnished desk. It, being completely inaccessible to me is instantly illuminated like a shrine in my mind. There it is, in all of its oak-wooded glory afloat in my wishful thinking along with the remote, house keys, phone, porcelain cups, carpet, doorknobs, ad infinitum, ad nauseum...

So what was once disregarded seems to extol itself out of my reach. I know that it is absurd and the only praise of an object possible to be given is within myself. This is why I choose not to give in to my mind’s process of turning simple things inaccessible, into shrines to be worshipped into depression.

Now I’m learning to be appreciative of simplicity and not apathetic like before. I can challenge my impulse to give in to laziness with every crevice of the pots I wash daily at my kitchen job.

I can challenge the impulse to perpetuate childish insults by stifling my pride and ego, controlling the situation, and being a mature adult in every aspect of social interactions from dayroom to visitation.

In all of those inner challenges I can simply derive pleasure and satisfaction from my self-responsibility and integrity. I believe the simplest pleasures begin within and sometimes require major change, adamant determination, and serious introspection.

*-Devlin Diles*

### Simple pleasures

Have you ever wondered what it was like?  
To crawl into a warm soft bed every night  
Feeling the warm gentle caress of your covers  
Softer than the forgotten touch of past lovers  
As you snuggle deeper in your bed  
The softness of a pillow under your head  
You let out a long contentful sigh  
Thinking how the days just seem to fly on by  
Shadows slowly creep across your room  
Your eyes grow heavy far too soon  
Who would have ever thought that your buried  
treasure

Was right here in life's simple pleasures...

*-Timothy Baker*

Well since I lost most ability to call my own shots on my life, I can no longer look at any type of pleasure simply. The simple pleasure you got from looking at a woman and being able to approach her. Man, that is one of the most painful things to have to and shut off. Your sex drive at 19, please, you will do better telling the sun to set in the east. To be able to get up and shower when you want to. I have been in bondage for 10 ½ years and the simple things that I abused in my everyday life have come to reveal to me what's real in life. How I used to love going outside and looking at trees and smelling the air after it rains. I have not seen a tree. I don't even want to think about food. I have been to juvenile many times and starved, so I knew adult prison was not going to be any better. Yet I threw caution to the wind and became a criminal. Just to think about the food should keep people out because being able to choose and cook your own: nothing can beat that. The simple pleasure a man gets from loving the one that birthed me, the only true lady that you will gladly move mountains or die for. My mama is my first and true love. The love I took for granted, the simple pleasure I get from just seeing her smile or fighting mad. Now that she is growing old I am not there for her. Any child that's worth their weight in salt is honor-bound to care for mama in her late years or sooner if you can.

I want readers to understand something: think about the simple things you take for granted, before you do something to lose them. Think about the way your life would be without them. I see the simple is what prepares us for the bigger and better. Well, this will do for my simple pleasures, so I will close until the next episode.

*-Gregory Turner*

What greater joy can a person experience? Simple pleasures conjure up so many and myriad thoughts for me! Some, we all

share due to common humanity, some due to our individually.

The first simple pleasure that comes to mind is a baby's smile. It can and does melt the hardest heart! Watching sunrises and sunsets, sleeping under the cover of stars on the mantle of the earth, a job well done...

This list is endless and full of possibilities, but the hustle and bustle of modern life hides them from us as we rush hither and thither, I say slow down, reach out, and grasp what eludes so many of us.

The second simple pleasure that comes to mind is...can you fill in this spot? Need help? A Life well lived, hot oatmeal on a freezing cold morning, the once in a lifetime dog who was your friend and companion. Being in love and making love (Whoops! That might not be a simple pleasure at times!)

The number of simple pleasures is finite, so I won't number a third one, but to know they exist, and come in infinite forms should show each and every one of us how lucky we are. Over and out.

*-Ricky Williamson*

We live in a fast-paced society that calls for us to keep up. We're constantly changing the way we live and how we get around. Talking on the phone is a fascinating thing nowadays. You can be in the middle of a gun fight and get a phone call. This is the age of technology. Organizers fit in your hand; computers are the size of notebooks. When was the last time your brain did some math problems or checked a blueprint to make sure the specs were right? Better yet, when was the last time you heard the sounds of nature? Sometimes we take life for granted and don't realize what we've got until we lose it. To be able to see, walk, talk, and to feel the morning sun on your face...these are simple pleasures we sometimes take for granted. There are those among us that live a difficult life without being able to see, walk or talk. We even take freedom for granted. I should know about that one. I give my freedom up for nothing, now I'm thirteen years of a twenty-five year sentence. But we're talking about simple pleasures here. I wonder if all the technology has made our lives easier. Because in here things are basic. You have to put in some work to get some results. You have to maintain your health in order to handle any given duty. The next time you're with your wife or husband give them a hug and hold them for a while because that is a simple pleasure. And one that should be greatly appreciated by the one you love.

*-Anonymous?*

Let me start this with an excerpt from Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860, German philosopher), "The Wisdom of Life":

"I observe that the fundamental differences in human lot may be reduced to three distinct classes:

(1) What a man is: that is to say, personality, in the wildest sense of the word; under which are included health, strength, beauty, temperament, moral character, intelligence and education.

(2) What a man has: that is, property and possessions of every kind

(3) How a man stands in the estimation of others...

The differences which come under the first head are those which Nature herself has set between man and man; and from this fact alone we may at once infer that they influence the happiness of mankind in a much more vital and radical way than those contained under the two following heads, which are merely the effect of human arrangements. Compared with GENUINE PERSONAL ADVANTAGES, such as a great mind or a great heart, all the privileges of rank or birth, even of royal birth, are but as kinds on the stage to kings in real life. The same things was said long ago by Metrodorus, the earliest disciple of Epicurus, who wrote as the title of one of his chapters, THE HAPPINESS WE RECEIVE FROM OURSELVES IS GREATER THAN THAT WHICH WE OBTAIN FROM OUR SURROUNDINGS. And it is an obvious fact, which cannot be called in question, that the principle element in a man's well-being, -indeed, in the whole tenor of his existence, --is what he is made of, his inner constitution."

Agreeing with the above premise, even though Mr. Schopenhauer was himself a pessimist, I clearly see that some of my most pleasurable moments—considering that I'm in prison—are achieved while all alone and just contemplating Nature as she reveals herself to me in ways that I've never taken the time to notice before. For I was (and still am) an adventurous rascal and took for granted the world (stage) that is every bit as vital to me as the air I breathe. For now that I'm forced to sit still for years (I've been in the same 5'x9' cell for two years now) I do not take Nature for granted any more. I respect her in all her subtlety, from the meager sunlight that enters my cell to the water that is eventually supplied to me. In all these simple pleasures most still take them for granted although let one be absent for a short time and man do they go cryin'.

Now I've come to realize just who "I" really am and what my life means to me. I've been

blessed with a good healthy body, though my mind was somewhat damaged at a young age from drugs and alcohol, it has finally (I think) started to function fairly decent, I'm also discovering that I have some talent. I was always conscious of my excellent coordination, but I never had the patience to sit still and draw. It was beyond my emotional level until I came to prison. This to me is a way to appreciate a rather bad experience in the light most favorable to my future, eh? I'm stuck here for life, so I might as well make the best of it. I show a tendency here to dwell on my abilities to be productive, at least from a prisoner's perspective. I've come to the conclusion that "I" must do this for myself, it's my way of self-determination. Though, I fully recognize and thoroughly appreciate opportunities such as what Gary, and other such programs, offers to us "lifers" in prison.

But as Schopenhauer explained, these "are just merely the effect of human arrangements." Nevertheless, they are simple pleasures, at least for me. And, to show my appreciation, I will participate in the projects offered. No matter how small it is, someone may just derive a simple pleasure from reading it, at least that's my hope.

However, to get a little philosophical here, I want to comment on the perception of happiness. We "feel" happy about something that we have come to understand, otherwise if there's no understanding of that which could have us feeling happy then we would in no sense be happy. Without, however, the knowledge or understanding of that which could make us happy there would be absolutely no feeling of happiness. All this to say that, by coming to a true understanding of our self (the ancient Greeks had an inscription over the temple of Delphi, "Know yourself") do we obtain the ability to connect with our inner-self and can then guide ourselves to "simple pleasures" that would otherwise be lost in the hurly-burly of the prison environment.

For me, I now can find the simplest pleasure from just about anything. But I must be careful not to overdo it (the Greeks also had another inscription over the temple of Delphi, "Nothing in excess"), because me "keepers" might begin to think I'm a little too funny, know what I mean? Moderation (sophrosyne) was the basic and most characteristic Greek virtue. I'm not ready for the funny farm, nor am I, unlike Socrates, ready for my "elixir" of thiorazine, just yet. Society already labels me an obvious defective.

Schopenhauer mentioned that Metrodorus was the earliest disciple of Epicurus. Epicurus of Samos (342-270B.C.), in which the school of Epicureanism was founded, and his followers

adopted pessimism, they claimed that the best life has to offer is the avoidance of pain. They also proposed a hedonistic attitude, according to which happiness consists of pleasure; true pleasure is the achievement, through great moderation, of serenity of mind and heart. I believe this introduces some ancient thoughts (or philosophy) on the matter of simple pleasures.

The simple pleasures that I'm experiencing in my quest for truth and knowledge, is that I'm free to devote my full energies searching for truth in all its hideaways. By being in prison, I'm allowed the convenience of leisure and can therefore forego the pursuit of money, power, women, family and other personally oriented values. Not that, on a small scale, these aren't obtainable or even somewhat pursued but they are for the most part put aside. I'm writing from the perspective of an ad-seg. 'or (segregation). So situationally, I'm naturally able to focus more on obtaining a complete awareness of reality that I never before took the time to do, and with that awareness a newfound courage within myself of my abilities to be a worthwhile person - not the "defective" that I once even viewed myself as.

The opportunity to present this essay is another instance of which I can testify to, that has me "simple pleased". A precept from a contemporary fellow prisoner, David Lane, goes thusly: "One measure of a man is his cheerfulness in adversity." I truly believe that if a person really wishes to be happy -no matter what--then they will find a way to make it so. At least this philosophy works for me. And who knows, it may work for you too. Remember no one can take your spirit unless first you give it up. Stay strong and grow.

*Mike "Hoss" Mincey*

### ONGOING ESSAY TOPICS

Besides the monthly theme writing program we are always asking for writings on 2 subjects.

- 1. A LETTER YOU WOULD WRITE TO A YOUNG PERSON OR SIBLING GIVING YOUR BEST ADVICE.**
- 2. WHAT QUALITIES MAKE A DECENT PRISON GUARD?** We will try to compile all of your writings to produce a pamphlet that we can send back to you and to the officials at correctional facilities. **YOU ARE THE EXPERTS IN WHAT MAKES AN EFFECTIVE PRISON GUARD.** A number of you have already sent in essays on this topic. We have sent them on to a magazine that is interested in excerpting sections of what you have written. I'm not sure what they will be doing, and will let you know when I have found out. I must say that I was very impressed by the

essays, and very proud to send your writing to a major literary magazine.

Please take the time to write legibly. Many of you have much to say, but when you rush the letter it can be difficult or impossible to read. There have been a number of times I've asked individuals to write a little slower. I thought they were rambling and incoherent writers, but when they took the time to write legibly I found they were bright people with something to say.

### RESOURCE INFORMATION

Here are some addresses that might be worth contacting:

1. Prison Library Project  
915-C W. Foothill Blvd  
PMB 128  
Claremont CA 91711

They send books to inmates and have a tremendous resource list covering many topics. If you only have 1 stamp this is the resource guide to get.

- 2 Human Kindness Foundation  
PO BOX 61619  
Durham, NC 27715

They provide free spiritual books on Buddhism and a great newsletter as well.

3. Folio Newsletter [for those interested in Wicca and Paganism]

PO BOX 3155  
East Hampton, NY 11937-0397  
Request a "free to inmates" copy of their newsletter

4. Association for Research and Enlightenment  
Prison Outreach Program  
215 - 67<sup>th</sup> ST  
Virginia Beach, VA

Free books on spiritual growth based on the prophecies of Edgar Cayce.

5. The Voice of the People  
Lady Hawke  
PO BOX 215  
Kingston, AR 72742

Newsletter for Native American Pathwalkers for and by Native Americans in Stone Forts

6. Larson Publications Dept. IT, 4936  
Rte 414  
Burdett, NY 14818

They will send a free book, What is Karma, by Paul Brunton

I will try to have a few good resource tips with each issue of Prisoner Express. If you know of any resources you think would be helpful to your fellow inmates please send them my way, and I will spread the word.

A few final thoughts from me. Please understand if you don't get a personal reply from me. I just don't have the funds to maintain very much 1 to 1 correspondence. It will take awhile for most of you to receive books, but you have been entered on the list and your time will come. So many of you ask for dictionaries, and I'm sad to say we send them out as soon as we get them. I'll try to find a free source for dictionaries, but I can't say when that will happen. It enriches my life to hear about you and your life, and I'm thankful to you who write and share your stories with me. My intent in organizing this project is to bring a sense of community and belonging to all of us who participate in it. If you have any suggestions on how we can continue to build a supportive community among the participants of Prisoner Express let me know. While our lives can seem long and our hardships great, I think in time it will be revealed that this is just but a blink of an eye, and that what is really going on in our lives may be different than what we are used to seeing and believing. I'm glad to be on this journey with you. I hope you understand that we maintain this program with little resources. We are doing what we can and I hope our efforts are of help to you. We are getting more resources, but the volume of requests has grown faster than our increase in resources. Please keep writing and sharing your thoughts on life. As usual I have much more to share, but am limiting myself to a certain number of pages due to printing and mailing costs. Please keep writing and remember to send in your release form if you wish to keep receiving Prisoner Express or take part in our programs.

The pages following are instructions for juggling and origami. I was able to find them on the internet. I hope the instructions are clear enough for those of you who are interested. Please let me know if you are able to follow the instructions to create the various paper folding objects. Please remember that the paper needs to be squared for origami.

The Juggling instruction is for 3 objects. You can also practice 2 objects in 1 hand. To do this throw the first object 3 or 4 feet straight up. When it reaches the top of its' flight throw up the 2<sup>nd</sup> object the same way. Catch the first object and toss it back up. Keep doing this until you can keep both objects going. You will find that it just gets easier as you practice. After you can do this with your dominant hand, then practice 2 objects in one hand using your non-dominant hand. You can develop all sorts of patterns in how you throw the objects up. I can throw them up in circles, or I throw every other toss behind my back. I can catch the objects by using my hand as a claw rather than catching objects in my upturned palm. Mastering 2 balls in one hand and being able to do it with either hand leads you immediately into juggling 4 items in 2 hands. If you want further instruction in that or other juggling techniques, let me know and I'll be looking on the internet for more easily copied instruction. Good luck and have some fun.

As far as the themed essays please don't let being late on the deadline keep you from submitting your writing. I know the September 15<sup>th</sup> deadline for "**Small Victories**" may be hard to meet given how long it has taken to get the newsletter out.

Also I'm adding another theme "**My Favorite Place**" due on 1/15/05. this can be an actual place you've gone or a place you can go to in your mind. I thank you all for taking part in this program and for all I am learning in reading your words.

Shine on,  
Gary

# The Instant Jugglers' Manual

These instructions will teach you exercises so you can juggle 3 balls. The first few exercises are not complete juggling patterns, but are exercises that will teach you to juggle.

## One Ball Exercise

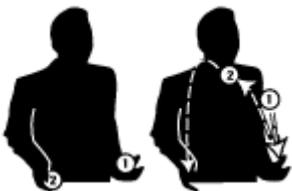


Start with one ball. Throw the ball in an arc from hand to hand about eye level. The pattern will be an arc, not a circle.

## Two Ball Exercise



Start with one ball in each hand. First toss the ball in your right hand (1) in the arc to about eye level to your left hand. When this ball (1) reaches the highest point in it's arc . . .



Throw ball (2) in an arc from your left hand to your right. Catch (1) in your left hand, Then catch (2) in your right hand. Stop.



Do this same exercise, except start with your left hand instead of your right. Practice until you can do this smoothly.



Common mistakes include throwing two balls in a circle, or throwing both balls at the same time.

## Juggling 3 Balls



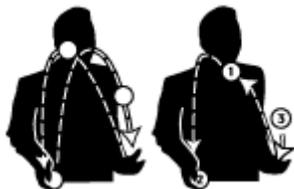
Start with 2 balls in one hand (1&3) (in this case the right hand, but if you are a lefty, use your left hand) and one ball (2) in the other. Start by throwing the ball in the front of your right hand in an arc to your left hand.



When ball (1) reaches its highest point, throw the ball in your left hand (2) in an arc to your right hand. Catch (1) in your left hand. This is like the two ball exercise. When the ball thrown to your right hand reaches its height . . .



Throw the ball from your right hand (3) in an arc to your left hand. Catch (2) in your right hand. This move can be difficult. It is often helpful to roll the ball (3) in your right hand to the front of your hand with a slight downward motion of the hand before you throw it.



When that ball (3) reaches its highest point, throw the ball in your left hand (1) in an arc to your right hand. Catch (3) in your left hand. And so on . . .

### **I move forward as I juggle.**

This is a common problem. Stand in front of a wall, or a bed to keep you from moving forward.

### **I can't throw ball number (3), I just catch ball number (2).**

Concentrate on throwing ball number (3). Do not even try to catch ball (2).

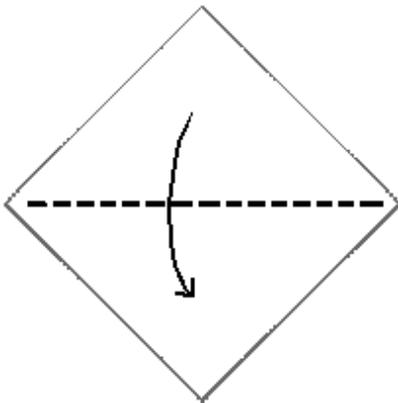
### **The balls keep hitting/there isn't time for to make the throws.**

Concentrate on making your throws an even height at eye level.

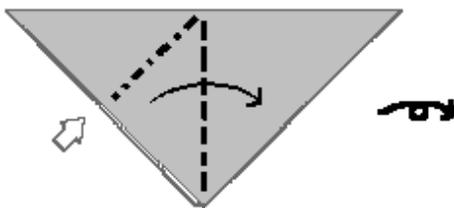
# Origami

## Preliminary Base

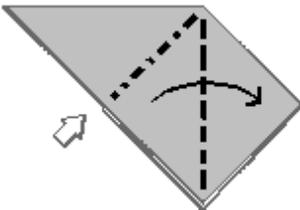
Here you are gonna learn how to fold the Preliminary Base. Many models use this base as a starting point.



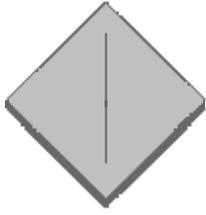
1. Start with a square sheet of paper and **valley fold** it in halves.



2. Precrease and **squash fold**. Turn model over side to side.

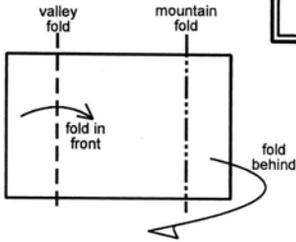
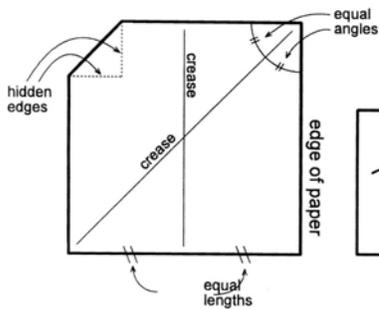


3. Precrease and **squash fold**.

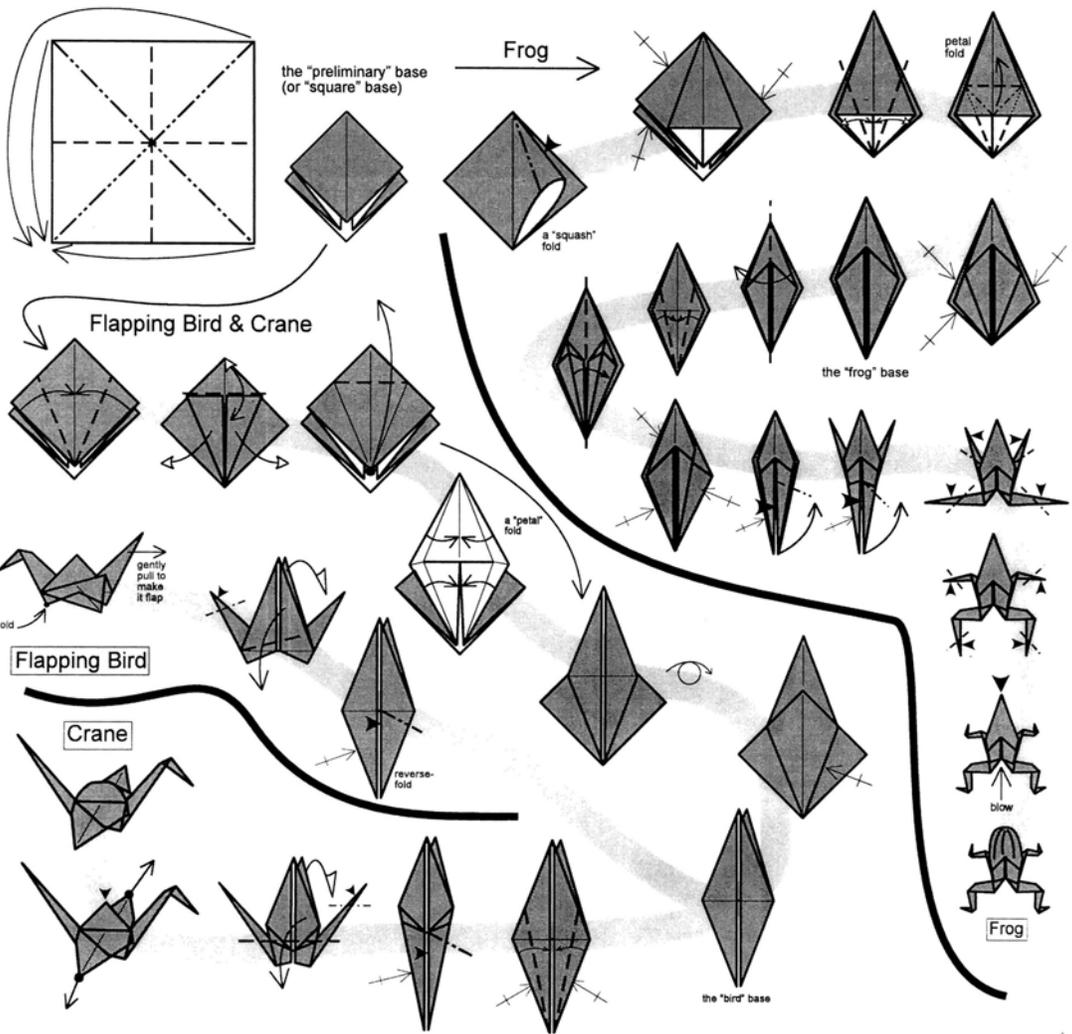
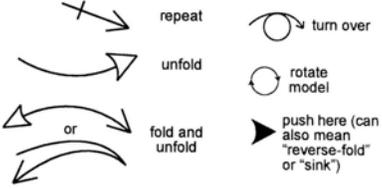


4. The finished Preliminary Base

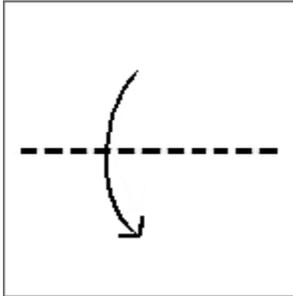
# ORIGAMI SYMBOLS



your info here



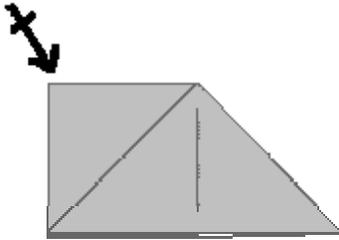
## Water Container Base



1. Start with a square sheet of paper and **valley fold** it in halves.



2. Precrease and **squash fold**.



3. Repeat step 2 on the other side.



4. The finished Water Container Base.

With the Water Container Base you can fold the following models:

- **Cube (Water Container)**
- **Fish**
- **Flower**

