

# Prisoner Express Newsletter

## Summer 2012

Welcome to the summer issue of Prisoner Express News. The purpose of this newsletter is to share with you all the new and exciting projects we have to offer this cycle, as well as share some of the prose, poetry, and art we have received from members of the PE program. I have noticed a lot of new requests for service these past few weeks and believe that the PE program has been included in a number of prison resource guides. I am always glad to have new folks find out about and join our program, and at the same time, I have no idea where the funds will come from to keep this all going. To date this program has been going on for 11 years and I have never really known where the funding will come from, so this feeling is nothing new.

For those of you who are new to the program I'd like to give a short history as well as a present update so you understand what we are trying to do and what resources we have to share with you. PE is a project of the Durland Alternatives Library. My name is Gary and I work in the library. Eleven years ago I received a letter from Danny Harris asking for books. Danny is an excellent writer, and even though the library never sent books to prisoners, I was moved by his eloquence and sent him some books. He clearly let me know how that small act meant a great deal to him. His words were inspiring, and I started a book mailing program from a small basement room of the library. As the number of requests grew it became hard to keep the personal contact with individuals, yet I did not want to limit who could participate in the program. We began a theme writing project. I would suggest a topic and if you wrote something on the subject I would mail a copy of everyone's writing to all the participants.

The writing that was sent in was so interesting, that I began selecting a few essays from each topic and created a newsletter like the one you are reading today. The first newsletter came out about 7 years ago and I try to send one out two times per year. I cannot individually answer 99% of the letters sent to the program, so the newsletter is the best way for me to answer some general questions and update you on the state of the PE programs and what we are up to. I will share a little about myself as I always appreciate knowing something about you. Many of you who have been with the program for a while know quite a bit about me already, but given all the new requests we have received these past few months, please bear with me. I am assistant director of a small library on the Cornell University campus. The Alternatives Library collects material from independent publishers as well as other material that provides an alternative perspective on current social issues. As you can imagine, we have some interesting material about prison issues. We collect in a variety of areas: spirituality, health, agriculture, philosophy, psychology, race, gender, community, politics, and home and technology. The library also provides material to underserved populations and the prison outreach project

that I coordinate is one way we do that. I am fortunate in finding students and community members who help me keep this project going.

With the volume of mail received and all the programs we are coordinating, I'd drown in an ocean of letters if I did not have help processing them and keeping track of which programs you want to join. This summer I have two students, Roy and Katie, who will be helping me with the details of the program.

Besides my library work, I spend a lot of time in the garden. I enjoy growing my own food, and am adjusting to the fact that I have moved from the country and lots of land, woods, and waterfalls to a house in town last year. We did it so my children could attend better schools, and I have 8 more years in town before I can get back out to the country, though by then who knows what I'll really want. A friend has a large garden in the country and he is letting me plant vegetables on his property. It is not as much fun as stepping out the door and being in your garden, but it is certainly better than no garden at all.

I am a massage therapist and have been practicing massage for the past 29 years. I was not doing as much with it in recent years, but in the last year I have been actively trying to build up a private practice and recently I began offering classes for couples wanting to learn how to massage one another. These classes have gone well so far, and I am hoping this can be a regular endeavor for me. I will be sharing more about massage later in this newsletter.

**At the end of the newsletter will be a sign-up sheet that you can fill out if you want to participate in one or more of our programs. Please keep in mind that we mail all our programs out by bulk mail. That means we have to wait until we have 200 requests for a program before it can be mailed.** By using bulk rates we can stretch our funds 3 to 8 times what regular postage is. We can mail this newsletter for less than 25 cents when it might cost \$1.50 if we used first class mail. **If you miss the mailing of a program you may need to wait until the next program cycle to receive material from us. I am expecting to begin mailing out the programs listed in this newsletter in late summer through early fall so you have time to get your requests mailed, but please understand that you should not take too long.**

We are still processing all of the responses to the Homer and Langley book club from last cycle. Most of you really enjoyed the book, and Matt, a volunteer, is reading through all your answers to create a compilation document of the most interesting responses participants sent to us. We will not be offering a special book club selection this cycle, but I expect to have at least 500 copies of a book we can all read together to offer in the next newsletter. Getting the books is the easy part, but finding the funds to mail them is a continual challenge

Many of you hear about this program secondhand, through either a resource guide, finding one of our mailings lying about, or through friends. What you are expecting us to do may not be exactly what we are able to do at the moment. Reading through the following program listings will let you know what we hope to do in the next program cycle. Each cycle lasts about 6 months so we are hoping to send our next newsletter in December 2012.

### BOOK MAILING

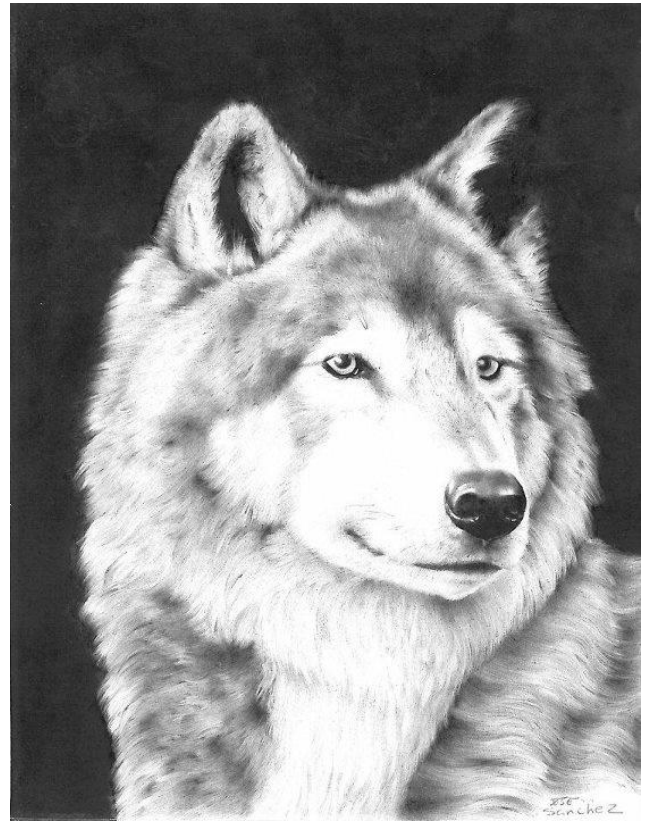
Most requests we receive are for book mailings. Unfortunately this is also the most expensive project we have. All the books we have are donated, I have a garage full of boxes of books, and the book room under the library is stuffed with books. Students read your individual requests and make the best match they can using the books we have. Last year we fell way behind in our book mailings. At our peak we were mailing 200 packages a month but the postage cost of \$3.50 per package ate up all the funds we were able to collect. In order to continue our other less expensive programming we have modified our book mailing program. I am slowly trying to catch up on all the requests that have accumulated and am focused on that task. **I am not recording the new requests for individual book packages. When we once again have the funds to send books for free to individuals I will let you know through the newsletter. It would take \$2500 to cover the postage on the book requests we currently have from 2011,** and that is besides all the funds needed for our other programs. **We do have a program to help us send books during this time. It is called the EXPEDITED BOOK PROGRAM.** To participate, you must send us 8 stamps or a check for \$3.50. We use those funds to pay for the postage cost of mailing you books. Include with the stamps a list of the types of books you like as well as the restrictions your prison has on the number and kinds of books you can receive. Our hope is that you will share these books, if you are allowed, with others who do not have the resources to send stamps. If you want to participate in the expedited book program you can also have a relative or friend contact the library to pay for your book package. Our hope is to one day be able to send everyone books regardless of their ability to pay, but right now our reality makes it necessary to raise the postage funds from those who will be receiving the books.

### POETRY PROJECT

We recently mailed Poetry Anthology V8 out to all who had submitted poems for consideration. We will be collecting poems for Volume 9 through the summer and then start putting it together in the fall. Please do not assume your poems are not well-written or “good” if you are not chosen. We receive 1000’s of poems for each volume, and volunteers read through and pick the ones that speak to them. You know the expression “one man’s meat is another man’s poison.” I would imagine that is especially true in people’s appreciation of poetry. It is so subjective, and the students choosing are not any kind of expert. Their instruction is simply to choose poems that touch them.

Congratulations to those who have been included

in the publication as you know your poem moved and inspired the people who chose it. The students are given a limited amount of pages for each anthology [Dang those printing costs], and it is not easy for them to choose. The good news is that every 6 months we print a new anthology so keep on sending your poetry. Our hope in printing these anthologies, as well as putting them online, is for folks in the free world to see your words and understand your humanity. You do not have to focus on prison life in your poems but are encouraged to write about whatever is dear to you. We are all more than our surroundings, though indeed our environment does shape the way we see and experience life. Here are a few poems chosen for inclusion in the newsletter. Our hope is to inspire you to participate in one or more of our writing programs.



By Jose Sanchez

#### Night Swirl by R. Fuentes

Through the night  
I drink clarity  
from the river of dreams,  
where sleepless butterflies  
roam themselves free  
without blinking;  
honing the invisible blade  
of reflections knife  
teasing shadows  
of awaiting tomorrows  
until dawn arrives itself  
in a clamor of elements  
and a universe of emotions;

releasing the language  
of morning across  
my tongue and ears,  
walking me towards reality  
and away from arms  
of vanishing night.

**The Distance Between Now and Then by David Schwarz**

It was a dull day just like it is out now.  
My head was gone; I, imagine, in the clouds.  
I spoke a song because my singing is a bleakful sound.  
The torn skies had run aground.  
  
Misfortunes reigned up from down below.  
My fingers touch was of something cold.  
I waited forever, and paid the toll.  
But the moment is gone that time had stole.  
So farewell and goodbye to all my old friends.  
  
It's time for me to go away once again.  
But remember, the only thing that separates us in the end...  
Is the Distance Between Now and Then.

**Echoes in the Night by Brett Bing**

Stars are lonely, moon is bright, listen to the solemn echo  
of the voices...in the night.  
Visions passing, heading south. Dixieland may hear the  
news  
and not know what it's all about.  
I heard the news of far off wars, where my brothers had to  
die.  
And what of nations known to be blowing aircraft from the  
sky?  
I turn the channel just in time to see a body on the street.  
It seems that someone killed himself in a suicidal feat.  
And as I listen closer now, I wonder to myself  
  
Is the man that jumped from there better off than we?  
Why did he not stay around, what did he not want to see?  
and if he had the chance again I wonder what he'd do...  
I haven't got the answer now, at least not from me to you.  
And as I get up from my chair, I head out towards the  
porch.  
  
The orbiter's in flight again, many miles in the sky...  
They've lost a satellite or two, couldn't find the reasons  
why,  
I wonder was it sabotage or just an act of God?  
I find the destiny of man has never been for peace.  
And looking towards the sunset sky, chilling thoughts come  
to mind.  
  
Nuclear destruction's near, who will push the button first...  
If I do not find my guide, that would be the very worst.  
Yet knowing that he's there for me has helped me come  
along.

He's led me serenity...through peace of mind in song  
and as I lie awake tonight I find no need to run

Stars are lonely, moon is bright...  
Listen to the solemn echo of the voices, in the night!

**The Beacon by Dwayne Waterman**

When dragons grow too mighty  
to slay with pen or sword.  
I grow so weary of this battle  
and distant storms I walk toward.  
When all around is madness  
and there's no safe port in view,  
how I long to turn my path homeward  
just to sit...awhile...with you.  
When life becomes as barren  
and as cold as winter skies.  
A beacon floods this darkness  
from your delicate, sapphire-eyes.  
In vain you've searched for honor,  
and in vain you've searched for truth.  
These things I can give you  
if you'll allow my love to show you proof.

**Ten Haiku On Freedom by E.J. Hestenberg**

Steel doors, buzzed open  
The large herd moving as one:  
Meal-time in prison  
  
Look above the fence  
Above the walls to the sky  
Feel freedom's warm bliss!  
  
Your number and bunk  
Count-time clarifies the scene  
Names aren't welcome here  
  
Freedom isn't free  
Well...neither is oppression  
Both paid with a life  
  
So...what's prison like?  
The hard truth its own horror:  
One long, endless line  
  
"Buy one get one free"  
For everything except this-  
Here there's no discount  
  
Sorry for your crime?  
They all ask it so glibly...  
Answers meaningless  
  
At least smiles are free  
True...but in this sad, dark place  
Worth a million bucks!

They say: "NO LOVE HERE!"

That it's most unnatural-  
Still...your touch heals me

"The land of the free..."

The words blind with bitter tears-  
And yet...I have hope!

**I Could Be by Johnnie P. Brooks**

I could be the sun  
You could be a flower  
I could make you bloom  
Within the next hour

I could be the clouds  
You could be the rain  
Together we could drown  
One another's pain

I could be a star  
You could be its light  
Together we could shine  
With never a lonely night

I could be a tree  
You could be a branch  
When the wind blows  
It's music so we dance

I could be the hugs  
You could be the kisses  
Together we determine  
All that we've been missin'

I could be the head  
You could be the brains  
Together we'll phantom out  
What others can't explain

I could be the paper  
You could be the pen  
Together we write a poem  
To a very special friend

I could be the hand  
You could be the fingers  
Together we defeat  
All the hate that lingers

I could be the glass  
You could be the wine  
Eventually together  
We will spend some time

I could be the push  
You could be the shove  
Just a pair of lovers  
Really just in love

**ART PROJECT/ART SHOW**

Since our last newsletter we held our 5<sup>th</sup> annual Prisoner Express Art Show. Treacy who is currently coordinating our art project, helped the students curate the show, and it has never looked better. We had over 100 art pieces on display for the month of March. We are collecting artwork for our next show and I hope you will consider sharing your work. Showing your artwork to the general community reinforces you as a person rather than a statistic. Understanding the humanity of folks in prison is one step towards getting people to rethink how we deal with rehabilitation in our society. Your art on display has the powerful ability to challenge many common and false assumptions about who prisoners are. Many of you received the art instruction packet, **DRAWING FROM LIFE** created by Treacy in our last program cycle. Below in *italics* is a note to you from her.

*The summer is approaching and I have lots of work in my studio. I have several shows at different galleries in the approaching year. If you are interested, I will give you an idea of what I am working on, how things are progressing, and maybe, you can give me feedback. I am working on a particular show in Boston for January on the relationship of CREATURE and LANDSCAPE. This show is inspired by the following poem by Rainer Marie Rilke:*

***"This is the creature there has never been.***  
*They never knew it, and yet, none the less,*  
*they loved the way it moved, its suppleness,*  
*its neck, its very gaze, mild and serene.*

***Not there, because they loved it, it behaved***  
***as though it were. They always left some space.***  
***And in that clear unpeopled space they saved,***  
***it lightly reared its head, with scarce a trace***

***of not being there. They fed it, not with corn,***  
***but only with the possibility***  
***of being. And that was able to confer***

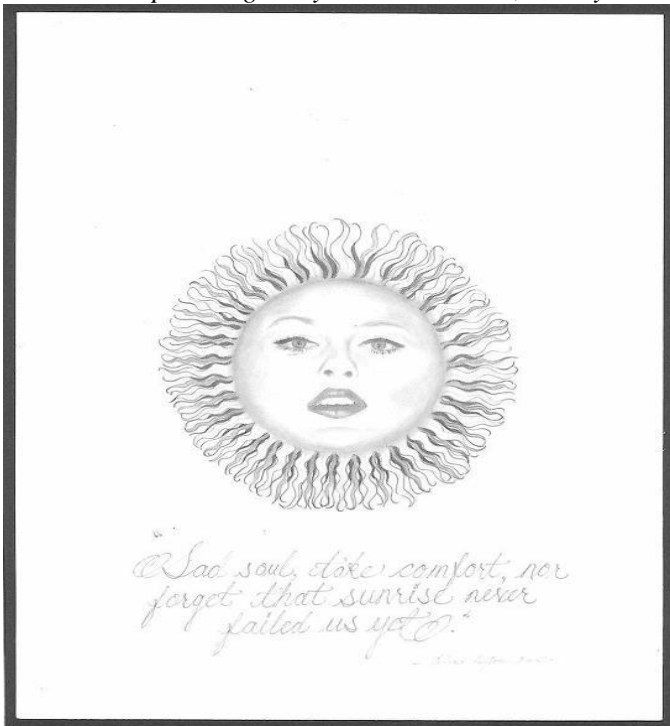
*such strength, its brow put forth a horn. One horn.*  
*Whitely it stole up to a maid - to be*  
*within the silver mirror and in her."*

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(I put in bold, the parts of the poem that are most meaningful to me; "Creature" and the "possibility of being" refers to all of us and to the fact that we do not have to defend our "possibility of being".)

**BUT** in the meantime, I am interested in how the assignments from the curriculum are progressing. While we cannot refer to "cells" as "studios," you must think of the space you occupy as a studio if you are to do any kind of artwork.

While I am happy to have any art sent to me for review, I will give priority to the work of the assignments from the DRAW FROM LIFE curriculum that you send to me. Some of you already received letters from me giving you feedback on the assignment work from the DRAW FROM LIFE curriculum that you sent to me. In addition, I

have sent to those individuals who have turned in assignments, photocopies of drawings and paintings that I thought might help them in their artistic development. I have asked several professional artists to join me in the review of these assignments. I plan to publish (with the artist's permission) some of the homework in the next art curriculum. If you have additional work that you have drawn **from life**, (as directed by Bridget's 30-Minutes-A-Day Club) please send this. I may have this work (with your permission) posted on the webpage of **An Open Window** (which is my project in the Center For Transformative Action at Cornell - much like Prisoner's Express - but is devoted exclusively to art in confined places.) Keep drawing the world around, the light, the shadow, form, and color. **It is through these visible things that we see the invisible.** Keep looking and you will see. Best, Treacy



By Celia Layton Thaxter

## CHESS CLUB

Alex will be putting together a new series of lessons on how to improve your chess game. The basic format is to recreate some great games from the past, provide some chess puzzles, and include a short lesson on a facet of the chess game. Please feel free to join this program. In our last mailing we also included a beginner's packet. The next packet will be for folks who already know the basic moves and it will hopefully provide you with insights that will help you take your game to a new level.

## MASSAGE INSTRUCTION

As I wrote in the intro, I have been focused on teaching couples massage. I am trying to figure the best way to share some of that material with you. I am unsure how willing or how able some of you are to touch one another. Some of the course work will focus on the benefits of therapeutic touch. Many of us are never touched unless it is some aspect of sexuality. I believe this lack of contact

fosters much of the alienation many of us experience in popular culture. There is so much we can do for one another through touch that has no sexual component. Massage can be soothing, nurturing, stress-reducing and pain-relieving. That is what I am able to do with massage.

I am particularly good at helping people in pain through a deeper type of massage called trigger point therapy. I will create a packet of information that will help you with some self-massage techniques where you can work on your neck and feet as well as include some techniques for working on friends with lower back pain, headaches, and stiff necks. Please sign up for this if you are interested and I will do my best to convey the information to you. It is easy for me to explain it in conversation where I can also demonstrate what I mean, and I know it will be a challenge to explain these massage techniques in print, but I want to try. So if you want a lesson in foot reflexology, neck and shoulder massage, and lower back pain relief and you are willing to touch others, I can get you started. Touch is healing and you can be an agent for that process. It just takes focused attention and a bit of pressure.

## GENDER ROLES THROUGH HISTORY

Friends, I have an interesting topic for you to consider studying this cycle. It concerns gender and how society creates roles for men and women. Samantha, a student volunteer for PE, has been studying gender issues for some time and wants to share some of what she has learned with all of you, with the point of having us all examine our belief systems. The experience of life for me is about opening up to new possibilities and new ways of seeing the world. I invite you to read Samantha's intro statement [*italicized below*] and see if you would be interested in being a part of the group examining gender roles and society. I think this study goes well with the massage unit as massage will involve new ways to touch and this unit examines new ways to think. Our goal is to provide information that encourages you to lead an examined life so you understand where you are coming from with your beliefs.

*What does it mean to be a man? Present day biology will tell you that, simply put, it means having the XY chromosome in your genome. If this is true, then how did the ancient Greeks, Mesopotamians, and Egyptians define the male? They did not understand the concept of the chromosome and yet they all possessed male/female differentiation. What then, did they use as a guideline for gender characterization? Fertility? Size? Genitalia? Did they define a person's gender based on their sexual desires or the pitch of their voice? Regardless of how they chose to define gender, one thing is made clear through the examination of all of these civilizations: society gives us roles based on our sex. Everything that we do, from the way that we talk to the occupations we choose, can be linked to our genders. With gender influencing each individual's actions, I pose this question: what if we got it wrong? What if what we associate as being either male or female is too restrictive? Case in point: Olympic runner Caster Semenya. After winning the African Junior*

*Championship in 2009, the International Association of Athletics Federations conducted an investigation examining Semenya's gender. Because she possessed high testosterone levels, Semenya was banned from competing in the women's competition and put through years of embarrassment, testing, and gender inquiry. Scientists could not label her, society could not categorize her, and yet here she was. Caster Semenya is, and yet we cannot identify her. Why is that? By examining the use of gender roles across cultures both past and present, using cases like Caster Semenya's, I plan on discussing the evolution of gender to the present day.*

## JOURNAL PROJECT

Welcome to the Journal Project! For those of you new to this facet of Prisoner Express, let me explain – the Journal Project is a chance for you to put your thoughts on paper, to reflect, to experiment, to remember, or simply to write. This is a place where your writing will be read, where you will be helped along, and where your work will have a safe place to come together. Over the years we've been honored to receive a great number of journals, and we are continually impressed by your reflections and your honesty. This summer we've decided to steer the project in a new direction. The first (and most important!) part of the project remains the same: you continue to write your entries and send them to us at the Alternatives Library. Then we place your writing in a folder with your name on it, so that your journal gradually grows and grows.

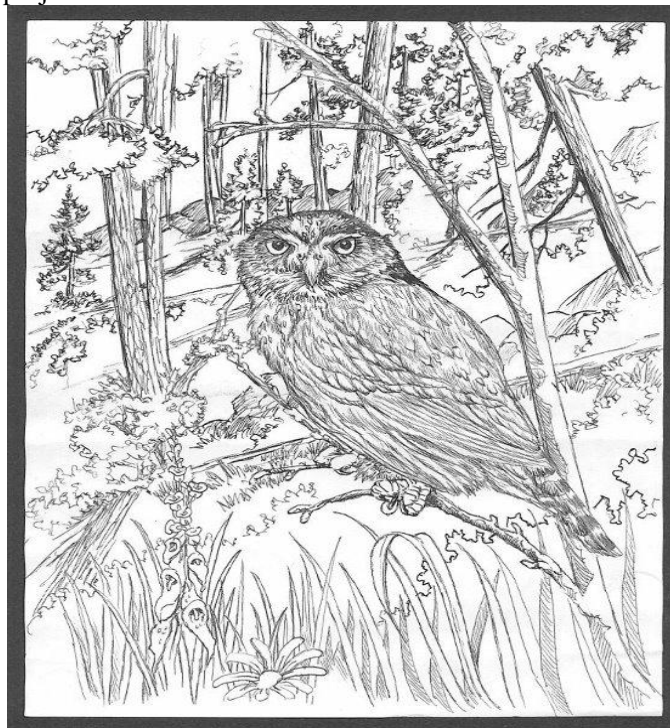
In the past, we have chosen a number of journals to be typed in their entirety, and those journals are posted online. This structure hasn't allowed us to expand from more than a dozen or so published journals. But we want more of your writing to be read. When our website is fully up and running, we are going to start posting online selections from the entries you send in. We will also feature a journal each month by posting a full month's worth of entries from that journal. We'll let you know at that time if your journal is featured. We make these changes in the hopes that there will be more frequent publication from a greater variety of authors, and also so that readers can experience more of the possibility of the genre. And hopefully, by moving away from publishing entire journals, we can preserve the idea of the journal as sometimes private and intimate. If there are any writers out there who would like their journals to be collected and read by us – but not published – feel free to mark passages or the entire journal as private.

We're excited about transforming this project with you. A journal is what you make it, and can be written about anything under the sun. Whether you've sent entries to us for years, or whether you've never tried writing a journal before, we hope that you join us! Sincerely, Sophie

If you wish to join the Journal Project sign up for it and we will send a starter instruction packet. If you do not want to wait for the packet you can begin by reflecting on your life, past or present, and sending your thoughts to us.

## ROOTS OF AMERICAN MUSIC

Hi, I'm Royce and I'm new here at Prisoner Express. Gary tells me how important music can be to all of you for getting through your time. There are so many types of music that you may listen to that seem very different – folk, blues, jazz, rock, rap, hip-hop, etc. – but they all have common roots – roots in African, Native American, and European rhythms. We're going to create a packet about American music looking at its common roots and talk about different performers, instruments, and its effect on the audience. We will also pay special attention to how prisons have been important to the development of American music as a place where many famous musicians wrote their music and shared their ideas with each other. The packet will include some songs written while in prison and will give you opportunities to analyze them, write your own, or reflect on your experiences with music. This packet is meant to help both musicians and listeners write and reflect about different kinds of music and relate it to their personal experiences and also to gain a better understanding of where your favorite music comes from, and how it came to be the way it is. Sign up if you wish to participate in this project.



By Jeff Harnden

## THEME ESSAYS/WRITING PROJECTS

Before I get started on the regular theme topic writing program, I have a note from Sam, who is hoping to fill a void we have in the program. We ask you for specific writings on topics we set, but many of you have other stories to tell. Sam is willing to read them and help you develop your writing voice. Below is her statement. If you want to submit some writing for Sam to review, be sure to mark your envelope "Attn: SAM."

*Hello everyone. I'm Sam, a volunteer at PE. As you may know, we provide many programs for writers to send*

*their material to us to be published and shared with people both inside and outside of prison. Our services to writers are limited because we do not have the people power to run the programs it would take to meet all of your needs. Over the course of the past few months, I've identified a need for services to writers who produce miscellaneous essays and fiction, two types of writing we usually cannot publish unless they fall under the journal program or the picture prompt program, for example. I have seen so much incredible work come in from prisoners who send their work to us because they think we might find value in it. I am no longer going to let this work get buried away. I'm going to type it up and post in on our website so it can be shared, even if it does not fit into a distinctive category.*

*The writing you send must be either fictional (short story, flash fiction, an act from a play, or an excerpt from a novel or longer short story) or non-fictional (essay or memoir). Please try to keep it to a reasonable page length, but I will not limit you until it comes time to type it. I will use my best judgment to cut the piece down where I see fit. The material you send can be new or something you've had tucked away for just this occasion. I graduated with a degree in Creative Writing and have done professional editing so I'm confident I can polish your pieces without stripping them of their individual styles. I will honor any requests to refrain from editing but please be aware that this may impact my choice in what material to publish for you. On this note, I cannot publish everything I receive as I will have limited time working a full-time job out of the area, but I will try my best to post one to three pieces of writing per week once Gary forwards them to me from the office. If you do send me your material, please let me know if I can include your contact information on the website with your piece. I look forward to reading your work! Sam*

The heart of the Prisoner Express program is the writing you share with us. Whether it is the journal, poetry, or theme project, your writing can inspire. Writing gives you a forum for sharing and processing your experiences. Some folks let their thoughts rattle around in their brain and do not share them with others. They think they are the only ones suffering with the feelings they are experiencing. When you share your thoughts, your writing resonates with others who realize they are not alone in their feelings. Sometimes that can be liberating. Your writing contributions touch and inspire others, both by your content and by the fact that you have written. I know a number of folks in this program read essays for a while and then it dawns on them: "hey, I can share my writing too." Yes you can! The reward for sending in writing on one of our theme topics or pictures is that you will get the whole packet of writing generated on that theme by the other participants. In this newsletter, I reprint a selected writings from some of our previous themes. If you send writing on one of our future themes you will receive a complete packet on that theme. Space and money prohibit me from reprinting all of the writings I receive in this newsletter, but everyone's work is published in the bi-monthly packets. I usually send it out every 2 months and given there are 2 topics per

month (one word cue and one picture cue), you usually get four theme topics with each mailing. What A GREAT INVESTMENT OF YOUR TIME IF YOU LIKE TO READ. One story written by you can turn into 80 or more for you to read. By participating in this project you create wealth as measured by the amount of new original reading material we will send you.. There is no need to sign up for this program. I will list the upcoming themes and your responsibility is to send the writings on the theme or picture sometime before the due date. If you are a week or two delayed in finishing the writing, send it when you can as we are often working on getting the essays typed and ready to mail to you for a few weeks after the deadline.

Though most of you do not need this warning, I want to share it with everybody. Please do not use these essay topics to spout off generic hatred against any race, religion, gender, etc. If you have a gripe with an individual[s] and want to write about it please do, but if your story is about how dumb, disgusting and stupid any particular group of people is, save the venting for someone else. I will not print stories that just generate more generalized hatred. If you indeed have a story about how an individual abused you or did some other mean action and you want to write about a specific circumstance, that is acceptable. I hope the distinction is clear. I do not want to create a forum for hatred.

Some of you are more comfortable responding to word cues and others of you like the picture cues to get the writing flowing. You can write on any and every topic. You can send multiple selections for a topic as well. Please send suggestions for the cues you might like to see offered. Below are upcoming word cues and after the printed essays are the picture cues.

## **UPCOMING THEME WRITINGS TOPICS**

**Forget About It – Due July 15, 2012**

**Barter/Trading – Due August 1, 2012**

**Acts of Kindness – Due September 1, 2012**

**Confessions – Due October 1, 2012**

**Good Advice – Due November 1, 2012**

**Running Away – Due December 1, 2012**

**Temptation – Due January 1, 2013**

**Heat – Due February 1, 2013**

## **Great Expectations**

**By: Walter Myers Rice**

I take a look mentally at the time that I lost and the time that my freedom will be restored.

Today; I decided to take a more extensive look at the day that I've been expecting, a day that I have inherited; my release day.

This day will be far beyond any other day. This will be a day that I've been waiting for; for 4 years.

This will be the day that I'm restored to family and friends. On this day "no more lock doors" a day of great expectations.

## **That Question By: Anthony Kershaw**

"Well, what did you expect?" it was a simple question with a complicated answer.



I expected to be a New York Times bestselling author by now. I expected to be financially secure. I expected her to understand. I expected to catch that bus this morning. I expected to catch that Eric Clapton concert last month. I expected to catch the flu. I expected to know what I wanted out of life. I expected life to know what I wanted. I expected some sympathy, some respect, and some thanks. I expected a little courtesy. I expected a bonus. I expected a tip. I expected to squeeze in a nap today. I expected to die before I turned 20. I expected to live to be old. I expected to stay sober. I expected a fair shake. I expected to laugh and to cry. I expected to sweat and to bleed. I expected to impress her. I expected to have children with her. I expected to make her smile. I expected to make her love me. I expected to take her out to dinner. I expected to take her home to meet my parents. I expected to make love to her while a gentle summer breeze rustled through the curtains. I expected to screw her in the backseat of my car. I expected a sign. I expected a spiritual awakening. I expected a moment of clarity. I expected the Truth, with a capital "T." I expected lies. I expected betrayal. I expected people to make sense. I expected life to be fair. I expected the world to be flat. I expected justice. I expected revenge. I expected love and happiness. I expected sorrow and rain. I expected soaring temperatures. I expected low pressure. I expected snow, and wildfires, and hurricane-grade winds. I expected earthquakes, solar eclipses, volcanic eruptions, and tornadoes. I expected war. I expected disease. I expected famine. I expected death. I expected all the violent video games I played and satanic music I listened to as a teen to turn me into a maniacal, sociopathic serial killer. I expected to snort whiskey and drink cocaine. I expected to get my kicks on Route 66. I expected to revisit highway 61. I expected the summer of '69. I expected the road to go on forever and the party to never end. I expected to get closer to fine. I expected a purple haze. I expected the end of the line. I expected to go down to the crossroads. I expected to go one toke over the line. I expected to check out, but to never leave. I expected mother Mary to come to me and whisper words of wisdom. I expected the force to be with me. I expected to say "hello" to your little friend. I expected a Royale with cheese. I expected Wally World to be open. I expected an angel to get his wings. I expected Rosebud to be a sled. I expected Molly Ringwood to get a happy ending. I expected Mel Gibson to preach. I expected Vivien Leigh to cry. I expected shame. I expected fame. I expected to discover what's in a name. I expected to discover which came first - the chicken or the egg. I expected to discover if a bear shits in the woods. I expected the sun to rise. I expected the mother ship to land. I expected sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. I expected romance. I expected to dance with her in the rain. I expected to kiss her under the stars. I expected my grandfather to live forever. I expected gas prices to fall. I expected cars to fly. I expected my own robot. I expected my own jetpack. I expected to ring in the new. I expected to forget the past. I expected to live in the present. I expected to provide for the future. I expected to lose a few pounds. I expected to cut myself shaving. I expected a refund for the dead parrot. I

expected spam. I expected Camelot. I expected a flesh wound. I expected to find the fish. I expected to always look on the bright side of life. I expected to be a lumberjack. I expected to be a farmer, a CEO, a lawyer, a soldier, a banker, an astronaut, an artist, a surgeon, or a pilot. I expected to be a construction worker, a cop, a biker, a cowboy, or an Indian. I expected to grow up. I expected to drive a nice car, to live in a nice house, and to have money in the bank. I expected to stay young forever. I expected to go to never-never land. I expected Santa Claus to be real. I expected to win. I expected to fall down. I expected to pick myself back up. I expected to walk tall and proud. I expected to be flexible. I expected to always stay the same, no matter how much the world around me changed. I expected to evolve. I expected to revolve. I expected to dissolve. The one thing I didn't expect was that question.

"I don't know," I said.

**By: Steven L. Smith**

I came to prison at the age of 30, married for nine years and father of two young boys. My path to this place included the dark tunnels of schizophrenia, aggravated by the use of drugs and alcohol, and prison was the result of a crime in which I was too messed up to remember. My most vivid memories of the three years before my arrest are of the stress and frustration, along with the realization that I'd long lost the ability to be happy with anything or anyone. They really don't TREAT you for mental illness in Texas prison as much as they SEDATE you. For over seven years, I was so heavily sedated that I felt and cared for nothing. Divorce. Family losses. Twenty year sentence. Hurting an innocent person.

I felt nothing from March 2002 through December 2008.

How does a man with more psychiatric history than criminal history reach inside to find the man lost twenty years ago?

God will help you win the lottery, but you have to meet Him halfway and buy a ticket.

Even seeing the world through the fog of antipsychotics couldn't kill my desire for life indefinitely. I didn't fully realize how pointless my existence had become until going to the unit chapel to watch a movie in early 2008. Everyone around me was crying their eyes out over what they were seeing in the movie. Grown men, weeping. It was obviously an emotional moment that I couldn't understand or appreciate. I sat, dry eyed, feeling my first emotion in almost seven years.

**JEALOUSY and ENVY.**

Psychiatrists will change your medications. They'll change dosages, and even the times in which you take them. Try to get that doctor to tell you about GOD, or about developing good coping skills, or even your role in the GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS if you're reading this through the drug-addled fog I described earlier, has your doctor asked you if you wish to LIVE or merely EXIST?

Getting off those medications was like buying my lottery ticket. It wasn't easy. I missed a lot of sleep. I lost and



gained weight like Oprah. There was terror and confusion as emotions and reality flooded in. I was locked up. My favorite relatives had died. My wife and children were gone. I felt like crap.

IT WAS BEAUTIFUL.

At least I was feeling again, and ANYTHING WAS BETTER THAN NOTHING. I can feel remorse for my crime now, and I can heal. The remorse is genuine and heartfelt. It's legitimate. I can grieve for my lost family members. I can miss my children, now men. I can feel regret for the way things turned out with my wife, and forgive myself and move on, too.

And I don't have to feel lonely.

After a decade of marriage was matched by a decade of prison, I'd thought being a husband or father again would be impossible. I've never been so glad to be wrong. A good friend came back into my life. We've crossed paths twice now, in the worst of circumstances. My good friend is now my best friend, my girlfriend. Her ten year-old daughter calls me "Dad", and their combined beauty just blows me away. My girl has never had a husband, her sweet child lost her father, and the thoughts of all our possibilities fills me with wonder and great expectations.

Being in love at 40 is the same as when you're 21. Even better. It takes your breath away.

## **Roots**

**By: Henry Haro**

It is funny how the mind works. Looking at the theme for the month "Roots" the image that comes to mind is how the book and movie ROOTS affected a generation of African-Americans, and did have an impact on people in general. The theme in particular brings to memory the emotional impact it had on the youngsters of the Black Karate Federation (BKF) founded by Mr. Sanders (Ernie Sanders I believe). What makes this memory so poignant is the ruckus it caused at martial art tournaments. You could say that the BKF were a little more emotionally invested than usual.

Knowing the roots of your people does give you a sense of culture and tradition. Every culture has a uniqueness to it that brings with it a distinct personality which in itself is a wonderful contribution to the world. The importance of culture cannot be understated ... it gives people a sense of a broader identity. This can prove very empowering especially when taking the virtue of your culture and tradition and assimilating it into your values. And as much as it may seem that people automatically bind culture and tradition with their values, it's not always the case. People do identify with their culture in most respects, but it's not always the case that people always live it.

Knowing your ancestral roots is enlightening. Living the reality of your locational roots is empowering.

What I mean by this is that knowing your ancestral roots brings a recognition of who you are genetically; a respect for the culture you come from; and the acknowledgement of all the great and not-so-great qualities of your lineage - but more so the adversity and hardship

your ancestors endured that made it possible for you to experience the essence of this culture.

What I mean about locational roots is recognizing that wherever you reside is part of your roots because your roots are internal and not solely based on an external location. So wherever you are your roots are too. Embrace and fully accept that your roots are innate within the nature of who you are as a human being. Simply put, know your culture and embrace it and honor it... but do not let it define you lest you confine yourself to the history rather than living the wisdom of the culture which naturally urges you to explore your potential and discover the magic of life.

The essence of who you are and the reality of life is greater than any "one" culture.

Culture instills in one the knowledge and wisdom of the ages. It is up to each person to advance this knowledge and wisdom. The idea of culture is to give one's life substance ... it's the "root" of people's strength and integrity. But as it is with all manners of learning, the root (knowledge, wisdom, strength, and integrity) of one's culture must be nurtured if it's to grow and bear fruit.

From the seed of the culture rises the root. The root branches out and buries itself deeper and deeper into the earth where it establishes a strong foundation to grow from. This is analogous to the seed of the culture existing at your cores, and the root is the branches of knowledge and wisdom of your ancestral lineage.

Culture in and of itself provides the basic root, but it's up to each person to nurture, cultivate, and discover the depths of what lies at the root. The essential quality of what comes from the root is determined by the utilization of your potential and the realization that the location of your birth and your upbringing presents you with the needed adversity to discover the essence of who you really are - your authentic self.

For some reason the road to self-discovery can be filled with strife and hardship, yet with time one can (with longing and disillusionment) come to discern that the wisdom to overcome the ignorance that bound one to such strife and hardship, was always present within the root of one's essence.

You shouldn't dwell so much on the history of your roots to the point where it hinders you from approaching your life and future with acceptance and open-mindedness.

All of us can find fault and oppression within the history of our roots. However, dwelling on those aspects too much may only prevent us from moving forward. The lessons learned bear insight into what we need to do going forward.

The idea is to use the root instilled in you by your culture as a springboard to discover the fullness of who you are and to share what you have discovered to enrich the lives of others.

Your ROOTS are an empowering ancestral attribute; Honor this and live it proud - Yet humbled by the NOBILITY of it.

## **Weed By: Jackey Sollars**

My roots stem from the Trail of Tears, a hardship a thousand times worse than any ever experienced by anyone in this county. For many an Okie, their past took drastic turn of events along that trail. It was the time when America stripped a people of citizenship and their land, forced them across half the continent by bureaucratic carpetbaggers. The men were often murdered along the way and women raped. THIS is where much of the Indian nation came into being. When an Indian maiden was raped and impregnated, she became a dirty-nose or a less than human being. The half-breed offspring were often tossed out to be eaten by the wolves. Forget the glamor of Tinsel Town. Few white, black or anything were allowed to have a life with the American Indian period. So when someone was allowed to have a wife of the Nation, it was considered a great honor. Sadly, most of those children conceived along the Trail of Tears were my tribal ancestors. The good ole United States soldier with all of his honor usually raped these maidens since there was no punishment for it. The child, like many others became an off shoot within the new Indian Nation. They were outcasts, rednecks, (in the true definitive) and hillbillies.

I do not know for sure if this is the actual root of my own family weed. I say weed, because that is exactly what we were. We were unwanted people in a land of unwanted people. Such people have been denied even the basic necessities that the American Indian has come to know. This is because we are white, sometimes we are black. It really didn't matter because we were in every aspect an unwanted group. Being denied the basic tribal rights and property meant that these people had to find other ways to make a living, and they had to find their own land to make money on. Thus began the roots of the hillbilly and rednecks of Oklahoma.

The Oklahoma hillbilly is in fact probably one of the most noble and open minded of Americans, even more so than the liberal minded in New York. Their perspective on life began when each of these disenfranchised maidens and their children had to make a way for their own life. They were seldom allowed to live within a certain distance of the tribal centers or camps which left them fending for themselves in the wildest of the wild. The Okie brand of hillbilly became king of his surroundings. They grew into stable social structures. They lived the philosophy of people helping people, because in those early days, that is exactly what it took to survive. Such a social mind still exists among many Oklahoma social circles not influenced by the larger cities. It is in this that I claim my roots as a hillbilly.

In the years following the Trail, many of the hillbillies had to take the road and find work. They began to join the disenfranchised African-Mexican immigrant; all followed the planting, weeding and harvest seasons of the agricultural belt between Missouri and California. Route 66 had a more personal intimate meaning to Okies. It was often the very trail they took to get from one planting and harvest to the next. It was on Route 66 that the Gypsy Blood found in so many Okies was founded. For in the

“redneck” days, days the hillbillies worked side by side with blacks, the work was long and tedious. It was often hot, scorching their necks to a glowing red as they stooped all day long to pick cotton, fruits or vegetables. They were all too often paid less than their Black coworkers that traveled with them.

My mother was raised in just such a fashion. I have no idea how she met the hard-hearted drunken Blackfoot Indian that is supposed to be my father. Somewhere along the way they came into contact and formed a bond that should have never been. My mother being of the Cherokee lineage was not a good match. Still, they met and married and five children later I popped out. I was as much of an outcast then as I am now among my so-called siblings. I am told by my sister that I am of an incestuous relationship. That was why my Blackfoot father wanted to kill me so often. It also explains my greater mental strength. But I digress. My mother was raised by a Gypsy, traveling the highways and dirt roads to catch the next crop. They lived on the side of the road. My grandfather slept in the front seat of a Model T. My grandmother and aunts along with my mom slept in the back of the Model T. My nine uncles slept under it so they didn't get run over. They traveled eight to ten months out of every year making less than enough to survive. They supplemented their dietary needs by picking extra fruit, vegetables and wheat from the farmed they worked for. They cooked on the side of the road. They took baths in creeks, rivers or the old bird bath. It didn't much matter back then because a redneck was expected to be the lowliest of society, even less a people than the Blacks. Such a lifestyle becomes an environment that affects the individual for the rest of their life. My mother had the Gypsy blood just as my uncles and just about half of all Okies.

I can retrace my roots to just a few fragmented memories of what seems to have been a lifetime ago. There was my beginning; mom was preparing breakfast for dad. I started making a fuss so they cleaned off the kitchen table. Grandpa went and got the midwife while grandma heated the water. Dad went and washed up then made a trip to the outhouse. In half an hour I was in this world, despite my second thoughts and desire to return from hence I came. While mom breast fed me, grandma washed the kitchen table off and finished the breakfast. Dad ate and went on about business as usual. Dad was never affectionate with me. There were a few times when he wasn't drinking that he tried or at least acted like he cared. But those times were so few that the mere thought that they were real in fact, questionable.

My so called dad was a mean drunk. Not just a mean drunk, but a sadistically happy mean drunk. He also had a pure hatred towards me. This is not questionable. When he got drunk, he often returned in the early morning hours looking for me, for one reason, to get the little freak out of this world. So my roots stem to the fact that I was probably a freaking mistake of questionable conception. Mom fought like a tigress to protect me. Sometimes the fight went into the early morning hours when it grew near time to begin the day. Luckily mom would help him pass out and then

quickly rush about getting my siblings up and off to school. Dad usually woke up around nine or ten, eat, drink a gallon of raw coffee and go climb into the tractor. The roots of my rearing were on a sharecropper's farm just east of Tahoka Texas, just above the Post on the Caprock that began the great geologic formation called the Llano Estacado. Sadly there was little of this farm that could be shared with anyone. It was a demeaning lifestyle. Once again we were cast down to the level of a basic redneck, forced to not only chop and pick cotton on the farm dad worked, but also on other farms around us. Such a lifestyle left little for a man to grasp as far as pride. Dad dumped us and hauled ass for parts unknown. Mom, having the Gypsy blood had him move us a bunch between Post and the farm; we even went as far as Durant Oklahoma. Somehow though, we always seem to manage to end up back on that sand trap of a farm. I guess that was why dad caught the wind and drifted. He was just tired of trying to make a living on a West Texas dry land farm between some redheaded Cherokee woman's wild whims of travel. After he abandoned us, it seemed as if my brothers were left to mine the farm while mom worked in a café in Tahoka. That began my earlier memories and it is from this time that most of my roots sink. They are shallow if even existent.

Sometime around age five or six, my stepdad steeped into the picture. He was an ex sodbuster turned oilman. His job was working a patch of oil wells for Emerada Hess in Brownfield. It was a good job. Sadly, such a job couldn't tie the wings down on my mom's rambling spirit. We soon moved from the farm into Brownfield and then south to the big oil field dubbed the Permian Basin. Although we would claim that part of Texas as home for most of my young life, my stepdad soon discovered the Gypsy blood. By the time I reached third grade, I was one grade below average because we never stopped long enough for me to finish a semester, much less a school year. Somewhere around the fourth grade we decided to settle in a town called Andrews. It was there that I finally had some resemblance of a life. Although still considered an outcast by the local kids, meaning I had no friends at all, at least I was able to have the same teacher for a whole year. Then came the second and third years. It seemed as if we had found the right town. We just couldn't find the right house. My siblings burned off to live with my so called dad in Farmington New Mexico where he had established himself as quite the business man. I can't blame my siblings. It wasn't like West Texas had a lot to offer to anyone.

Somewhere along the multitude of houses and ranchettes we owned I finally made one friend. It was this friend that helped me come to grips with who and what I was. Most people have a hard time trying to grasp the idea that their existence is purely insignificant. Most people have a purpose to this life, others don't. I believe prison houses a lot of people who have no universal purpose to life. And like wise, I believe there exist quite a few in this stone fortress that do. But it is within each of us to seek out whether we are of one of the two. At fourteen I was greeted by a young fella that would forever change my life. He wasn't to just be a friend, but before his untimely death, he

would almost be a true brother. Pete Cotton Hughie was alone in the world as I was; only I had a family. Pete's folks were killed in a car wreck. They say opposites attract, but that's a lie. Those of a feather will flock together. Pete was an eagle in my opinion. And it was his impression upon me that made me an eagle myself.

Pete introduced me to the real west. Not the overly romanticized west of Tinsel Town, but the "help your neighbor," "bite the bullet," "lone wolf cowboy." I won't go into much detail, after all I have already written a book about Pete and myself as part of a healing experiment a college professor dared me to try. Sometimes our roots aren't that deep. And sometimes we don't have a lot of roots to grasp at the earth with. But if we are to exit and survive in this world without a purpose, we must become resilient as a weed. Pete taught me to be a weed by giving me a stem of hope and connection with a way of life that has also gone the way of the wind.

At age fifteen, I became a cowboy at heart. Not the fancy Stetson, hip-hugging straight legged wrangler wearing Howdy Doodie. As an Okie, I was blessed through the roots of my being with something so uncommon that just having it gives me a purpose to live. That blessing is common sense. Everyone has a right to live. They have a right to make whatever life they have better than the life that gave them life. All too often we tend to let our roots excuse our lack of understanding and ambition. I've been called a redneck in the negative connotation by Blacks, not because of my personality but because I am first and foremost a country boy and hillbilly. Blacks seem to think country boys and hillbillies were the root of their ancestors' problem. I quickly let them know my roots had nothing to do with their roots. I'm a weed, my roots are shallow and without foundation. White boys like to call me a black sympathizer because I don't hold their point of view. Then there is the homophobic who can't understand why I get along with homosexuals. The beauty of being a weed is that my existence isn't meant to change the world. It's just to exist, to observe, to be for a bit before withering away. I often wonder why life has left me without a family without friends, without a future. I don't know, when you don't have any roots it just makes it easier to let go and move into some other dimension. Guess I do have some of that Gypsy Blood in me after all. But for now, I'm just a weed. And most of the people I know just love a little weed!

## **Call of the Wild**

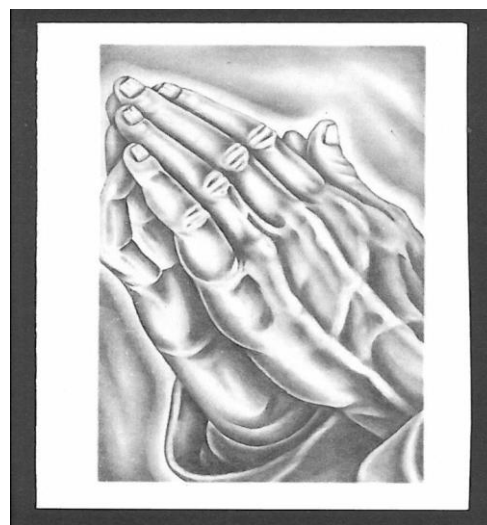
**By: Tommy Sanders**

The day after Saint Patrick's Day a few years ago, a Mrs. Foxworth (a divorced woman) received a call from her adult son. He was very excited, and kept verbally repeating, "Momma, Momma, you got to come over after work, and see my leprechaun." As Mrs. Foxworth thought about it, she was reminded of the trying years she had with her Down syndrome baby. The boy had been a challenge to raise alone. When he was born, the doctors diagnosed him

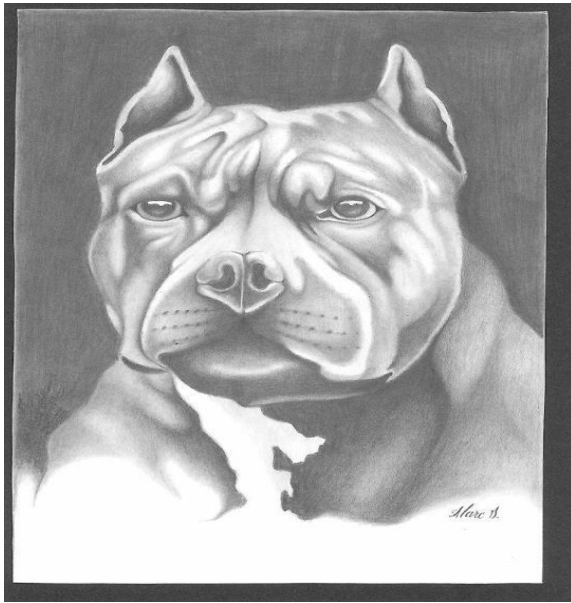
as a Down syndrome baby. Her husband immediately set in on her, adopt the child out. She refused, and the divide became so severe between them that her husband finally filed for divorce. That had been over twenty years ago. Mrs. Foxworth never changed her name back to her maiden name. She simply continued her life alone with her son. She worked a job, took all the child support the Court would award, and homeschooled her boy. Once he reached adulthood, she went to work trying to get him under the assisted living program. As she held the phone in her hand, she thought of the joy her son Todd expressed the day the assisted-living nurses helped him move into his own apartment. She could remember him jumping up and down, waving his arms, so excited he could not get a sensible syllable out. It brought tears to her eyes to think her disabled son was finally on his own, tears of joy. He was a man now. Though his childhood innocence remained, he stood 6'2", and weighed 220. Just a baby to his mother. Suddenly snapped back to reality with the sound of, "Momma, you just got to see him, I got my very own leprechaun." She responded, "Son, not today, but I will be by tomorrow after work, I promise." With that, the son hung up the phone. As Mrs. Foxworth drove home she thought of her son, Todd, and the fact that the assisted-living nurses made her life so much easier. They would show up each day at Todd's apartment, and take care of whatever needed doing. They made the bed, did the dishes, and occasionally would decorate the place for the special holidays. Mrs. Foxworth knew Saint Patrick's Day was on March 17<sup>th</sup>, which was today. She expected one of the nurses had placed a cardboard leprechaun in her son's apartment, and that was what he was so excited about. Her sleep was sweet that night.

The next day, work was uneventful, and close to quitting time, she got a phone call once again there was not even a hello to start the conversation. Words were pouring out of the receiver before she got it to her ear, "Momma, Momma, are you gonna come by and see my leprechaun?" "Yes Son, I am on the way." With that, the phone went dead, no goodbye or anything. She drove over to the apartment and knocked on the door. The door was opened by her boy, and he stepped aside to let her in. As her eyes adjusted to the light, she searched the room for a leprechaun, and saw none. She asked, "Todd, where is the leprechaun?" He quickly ran to the closet and opened the door standing aside, stating, "He's in here Momma." Mrs. Foxworth went to the door of the closet and peered in, she saw a little man struggling to sit up, who was bound with duct tape, and dressed in a little green suit. Mrs. Foxworth turned to her son, "Todd, how long have you had this man in the closet?" Todd answered, "Since yesterday Momma. I couldn't let my leprechaun get away before you saw him." Mrs. Foxworth knelt down and began to undo the bonds from the man's body. As she did, she talked, "Listen, I have no idea how you came to be in this situation but I can assure you, my son meant you no harm. Please understand he has Down syndrome, and that stops him from being able to reason the way other people do. He thinks you were a leprechaun because of your clothes, and your height. Where

did he find you at?" With that, she pulled the last piece of tape off of him, and he immediately started talking. "Ma'am I am glad you came along. I had no idea what was going to happen to me. I came to this door as a witness, to share my faith. I am a Jehovah Witness. But thought it would be a good idea to dress up in green since it was Saint Patrick's Day. Me being a midget, it was easy to dress up as a leprechaun. When I knocked on this door, that man over there answered and immediately reached down and picked me up. He brought me in here, and tied me up with duct tape. All the while in childhood glee, saying things like, 'I got my very own leprechaun, a real live leprechaun. Wait 'til Momma sees this.' I tried to talk and explain, but he taped my mouth, hands, and feet, and then threw me in the closet." Mrs. Foxworth cut in, "I am so sorry. Will you please forgive Todd? Todd, come over here and tell the man you are sorry." Todd slowly walked over, with his shoulders stooped and tears running down his face. He stuttered, "Mmmrr. I aaamm sssooo so soory. I I reallllyyy tttthoughtttt you waaaassss a leppreechaaun." The midget started to cry also when he realized the mental challenge the boy had. He walked over to Todd, and held his arms, out and up. Todd bent down, and picked him up. With that, the midget took both of Todd's cheeks in his hands, and looked him in the eyes, he said, "Todd, I forgive you. Now can I please go home?" With that, Todd let loose with a big joyful laugh, "Momma, Momma, did you hear that? He asked me if he can go home. No one ever asked me if they could go home before." "Yes you ccann ggooo home."



**Jay Martin**



By Marc Delgado

**By: James Bauhaus**

The captive drape themselves on the bars in the front of their cages, as if trying to get as far away as possible from the person who smells alien, not like family, and who does not use enough of the artificial perfumes and odorants that they are programmed to like. The captives also cling to the bars in order to try and listen for something that will drag their sensory organs away from the ogre at the back of the cage that snores, grunts, wheezes, farts, belches and makes irritating gobbling noises when he eats and slurps his meals and snacks. The captives suffer both sensory overload, and sensory deprivation. Every annoyance is amplified; every pleasant stimulus diminished by the surrounding, cloying misery. Captives pressed against the bars strain to hear any noise coming from the big cage, and strain to see any movement or mere flashing change of light. The smallest difference is enough to instantly attract the captive's attention, but the cages are cunningly arranged so that they face an emptiness of tables, vacant chairs and a dead communal TV. If a captive could see into another captive's cage, he would only see darkness, as captives abhor light inside their cages. If their cage sports a slit-window, they paper it over until it is black, and the inside fluorescent lights are almost never used, else someone might see inside, observe how they live.

The big cage is wild. Anything can happen; lards, dominoes, TV, the whole ball of wax. But not today. The captives are disappointed, because the kop just got on the bullhorn that they use when they want to really, especially torture us. It begins with a noisemaker, to get our attention. It's a high pitched shriek, like raking fingernails over a chalkboard, highly amplified. It is so extremely annoying that it would make statues move away. It makes us want to root out our eardrums with a pencil. The kop tries to make us commit suicide with a good 30 to 45 second blast. (Sometimes, when the kops are feeling particularly sadistic, they just leave it on for a few minutes.) We assume that

they can't hear our screams of agony, since they have no effect on how long the megaphone noisemaker torture lasts. Finally, the kop shouts into the megaphone, on top of the noisemaker, and declares that no one will be permitted into the big cage. Since most of his bellowing is too scratchy and full of static and echoes to understand but two words out of five, he repeats himself, verbatim, several times. When he finally quits bleating and turns off his noisemaker, the captives shout around to each other, comparing notes, trying to piece together what the kop said. The consensus is that "no one gets out" and "no reason was given."

So, we're all juked, today, and possibly indefinitely, for no discernible reason. Yet the wilds of the big cage continue to call. Bed sheets are torn into strips, these strips tied into ropes, these ropes tied to books, and these books thrown out violently. The goal is to wrap the rope around a table leg and drag it over, or to knock down the board game on top of the table and fish it within reach. This rodeo of lassoing things from the wild occurs at high speed, from several directions, books flying everywhere, because it is a competition, sixty-five captives trying to get one of only three possible items; a monopoly game, a chess set or a bag of dominoes.

Twice, a kop, watching from the darkness of his shadow-filled habitat, climbs down from his perch, enters the big cage and begins chopping the books off the ropes with his penknife. He has to sneak in quickly to snag them before his victims reel them in. At the end of his shift, he returns and makes the games inaccessible by any means. Also, he keeps the books he has stolen.

Yet the call of the wild continues...

## **Awakening**

**By: Michael Jerome McKinney**

Nice topic, The Awakening, I really do like the thought of this topic. And many things within my inner self have been awakening in the last few months. My inner self has come alive like never before. Like one of the best awakenings that has ever happened to me in my whole entire life. My brother got out of prison in August 2011. And he has been telling me for years to humble myself. And I know it was a good reason and good meaning behind what he was telling me to do. But that side of me had not yet awakened enough to humble myself. But I wanted to humble myself so bad. But it was not an easy process. But for many years I have striven many times to be humble and stay humble. But I could never stay that way. But now when God blessed my brother Sedrick, out of prison, he wrote me and said 'Big Brother Michael, all I want you to do is humble yourself, just stay humble while I work on getting you out of prison.' And now like never before that humble spirit has come alive in me. And the humbleness has really awakened in my life. Everything has started to be awakening in me. My mind has been awakened like never before. My consciousness has been awakened like never before. My insight has been awakened like never before. That inner teacher within me has been awakened like never before. I am learning more and more. And at the same time I have also been studying a course in the Siddha yoga meditation

teaching, called in search of the self. And since I have been studying this course it also has been another form of awakening in me. And it has really been a very enjoying feeling. And an enjoying experience. How I can see myself in every one. How I can now see the whole world as one. The awakening to know all this is awesome.

**By: Gilbert M Davila**

An awakening is what I felt when I was baptized on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January 2012. For a former Satanist, my baptism was a giant step I never imagined I'd take. Even the guys who've gotten to know me over the last three years were stunned by my acceptance of Christ as my Lord and Savior (on December 9, to be exact). Although they may not admit it, I'm certain they're anticipating my fall. I can't blame them either. They've lived with me for several years now. They see all the satanic-themed tattoos that mar the back of my head and the rest of my body, reflecting a life I once lived. Tattoos that include the word "godless" splayed across my back. They've listened to my blasphemous rants renouncing Christianity and all it entails. And they know of my lawsuit in 2006 against TDCJ that ultimately changed the policy so that satanic medallions would be available for purchase through all units' commissary. I was very vocal in my satanic stance. So no, I can't blame them.

What I can do, by the grace of God, is let my actions be a testament to the miracle that God worked in me. I can let my actions be a reflection of my sincerity and desire to do God's will. I can be as vocal in the name of God as I was in the name of Satan. I've failed once before. I refuse to fail again.

In my 40 years of life, I have done nothing but fail. I've failed as a father, husband, son, brother, and friend. I've hurt so many people that I never thought I deserved to be forgiven. I've taken lives and received a capital life sentence for it. I have no complaint. But I'm tired of failing. I do not seek parole, pity or anything other than peace, happiness, and forgiveness. I want to feel the happiness that I've witnessed in the faces of those that do God's will. I want to be sure that one day my family and I will be together again. And it's only through Christ that I can attain those things. Only through Christ and happiness, and most importantly, life ever-lasting ... It is to God and God only that I give all the glory and praise for this spiritual awakening.

I leave you, my brothers and sisters with this scripture from 2 Timothy 1:8-9:

"So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, who has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace."

**By: James Murphy**

I got too late. Late, like when the bills were all piled up and the money's all gone and you just keep telling yourself you'll get it figured out ... something will break and you'll get the money up to get the bill paid. All of the sudden the heavy curtain of reality drops on the stage you've been acting on and as you open the door and hit the

light switch, nothing happens, the lights are out, the power shut off. The bill didn't get paid. It got too late.

I drove around with an expired driver's license. No problem getting it renewed, it wasn't suspended or revoked, simply expired. I just needed to go down to the DMV and take care of business. I just kept putting it off, never even thinking about it until I'd get that panic in the pit of the stomach when I would look into the rear view and see a cop behind me. Eventually that cop pulled me over. Things, as usual, got worse from there. I let it get too late.

There's plenty of times that it wasn't doing something horribly wrong that brought the stinking curtain down, a lot of the time it was just putting off what was right.

Pretty minor stuff, I know, lazy dumb stuff maybe, but there's a pattern taking shape – and it's not a good one. It's more like a complete lack of responsibility. I've tossed it and turned it all around my head, and that's what it is, I'm afraid, irresponsibility. I suppose I really knew this for quite some time, just didn't want to admit it. I'm sure I even planned on straightening it out one day, but as I see now, it got too late.

I could go on for pages and pages with a lifetime's worth of stories involving my irresponsibility, and what it has cost me.

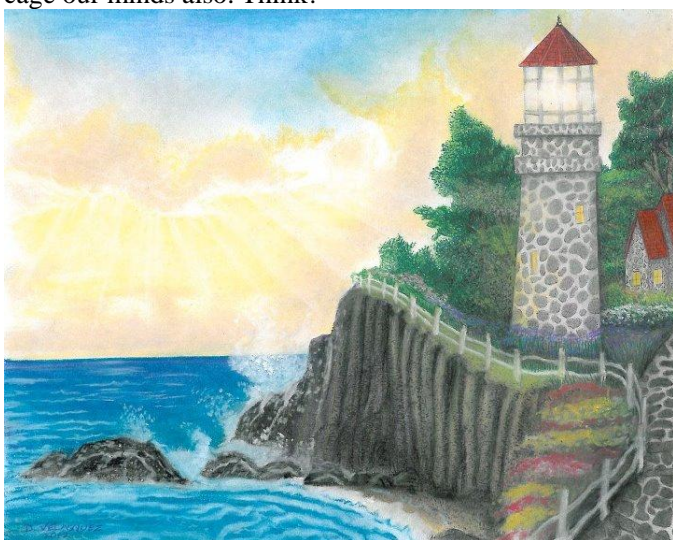
Instead, I encourage you all to look at yourselves as objectively and honestly as possible, which won't come easy at first, and learn as much as you can from the past history of your life. Do it now, especially if you think you can put it off, wait, and do it later. Do it now, don't let it get too late. Hold yourself responsible for yourself right now, because as I sit in my prison cell, for the rest of my life, I can promise you one thing. Someday, some time, you will have an awakening. Don't wait to have it too late, from the wrong side of the prison wall.

**Extreme Thinking By: Sean Michael Church**

I've come to realize a few things while being incarcerated in more ways than one. The human mind is a vicious thing. Multiple situations arise on a daily basis in prison, yet the average response is to kill. It amazes me how much a person's mind can regress when put into a caged environment. It's like high school, only with weapons. Lots of drama and lots of different groups vying to be the best, when confronted with a situation, instead of trying to find the best solution for everyone, usually the verdict is assault with a weapon. "This is not a democracy" they say, "It's a dictatorship". Well, if that's the case, then why not pick the best man for the job instead of playing high school games of favoritism? It would appear to me that if the best man got the job to enforce the rules, then more people would be able to go home on time. The courts of today's society are not as lenient as they used to be. Life is like baseball for us convicts, three strikes and you're out; which means that you can only catch two to stay in the game. Now, tell me why this is a dictatorship again? Do the people who have a parole date be made to suffer because someone who no longer cares about his existence because he's doing life or a lot of time makes a bad decision? Are we are own men? Apparently not. The California prison



system is one of the most gang related institutions in the good ol' US of A. Not only that, but because of our constant preying on our own people and other groups, our population has gotten extremely overcrowded. We do this to ourselves. While the cops laugh at us, we continue to do their dirty work. Cops bet each other to see who will win between two different fractions in mortal combat. We're too busy killing each other to realize that we are nothing but puppets on a string. We are too caught up in the definition of prison life; that we fail to conscientiously recognize what is truly happening to us. I for one have been a willing participant in this non thinking cause of self-destruction. So I know firsthand how stupid it is. Until we all start thinking about our well-being first, the cycle will continue and idiot Leaders will continue to condemn people to a constant state of imprisonment in more ways than one. We may be in prison, but that doesn't mean that we have to cage our minds also. Think!



By David Velasquez

## **Pride and Prejudice**

**By: Steven L. Smith**

God, you people pick your targets...

WHITE PRIDE, BLACK PRIDE, BROWN PRIDE, YELLOW PRIDE, no pride at all.

Have you ever found it strange that the different races in prison claim to group themselves together in the name of unity and/or preservation, yet mostly seem to target weaker members or those they outnumber? How can you form gangs to "protect" your races, only to assault and disassociate the ones TOO WEAK or TOO SCARED to defend themselves?

"Why did you beat that guy up?"

"Shit, someone called him out and he was too scared to fight..."

I've seen predatorial nature in all its forms in Texas prison. You hear the term "predator" in here, and automatically think of two things: 1) Sex offenders. 2) That cool Arnold Schwarzenegger movie. I know. I used to do it too.

How many fights do you see in prison where two real badasses are "GETTIN' DOWN FOR THEIRS?" It's

really rare, ain't it? It's usually more like: 1) Four on one. 2) Strong vs. weak. 3) Pseudo-aggressive against wrong place, wrong time.

You rarely hear, "Man, why did he hit that crippled guy?" or "Did he know that guy can't fight?"

I know; I used to do it too. And I'm ashamed of myself.

If you form a group or gang to solve a problem in prison, why not endeavor to NOT be the cause of more problems? We're all so worried about what the next man thinks in here, so eager to prove we're REAL men.

Real men are fathers to their children. They're in hospital rooms comforting dying loved ones. When they "take care of some business," the "money" isn't a bag of corn chips or Snicker's Bar.

There are no real men in prison.

Only grown children full of pride and prejudice.

## **There Is Only One Superior Race By: Robert L. Hambrick**

They call themselves RACISTS, or SEPARATISTS; but all they are really ... is prejudiced assholes. I'm talking about the various prison gangs, i.e. AB, Mandingo Warriors, Aryan Circle, Gangster Disciples, etc...

Now if they were true racists --- actually believing that their own kind was superior to all others, and they lived by that belief --- then people would have to make allowances for an honest belief. For, right or wrong, everyone is entitled to their own belief.

But it is NOT a belief and these inmates are NOT living by what they claim. Example: an AB member says he believes the black race is inferior, and he separates himself from them. But let a fine black female come on T.V. or walk onto the pod... and he's standing in his cell door peeping with his pecker in his hand. Or let a good-looking white woman officer walk into the dayroom... and all of a sudden, all those down-hard black power brothers got their eyes popping and their tongues hanging out, stumbling over each other to try and get next to her and put their jive-ass rap down.

If they were true racists, females of another color would not be attractive to them. But these guys ARE NOT racists they are simply prejudiced against men of another color.

In the early 1990's on the Michaels Unit, racial tensions were running high. I was ostracized by many white fellows because I refused to join one of their gangs. One day, I decided to make a statement. I rolled up a fat cigarette, (we used to be able to smoke in Texas,) and made a strong mug of coffee. Then I went to the cell of Mr. Malone, and old black man I was friendly with and I told him my plan. He was all for it. So he and I walked up to the front table in the dayroom --- where everyone could see us --- and we shared that cigarette and coffee. We did not even pay attention to which side of the cup we sipped from, we just sat there talking and sharing.

Now I know better than to smoke and drink behind someone, and I did not like doing it here. But I had a point to make and MR. Malone felt as I did. The whites and



blacks could not believe what they were seeing. People from other dayrooms were coming over to look, point, and whisper.

The next day at work, I was approached many, many times by guys who had heard about the incident but did not believe it. Mr. Malone told me later that he too, was questioned about it all through the day. These encounters gave me the opportunity to “check” each guy on his own prejudice, and preach the fact that there is only one race --- not many. The Bible states plainly that there is one flesh for birds another flesh for fishes, a different flesh for beasts, and... ONE FLESH FOR MEN. (I Cor. 15:39)

Now I do not know if my little show actually made a difference on Michaels Unit or not. But it was talked about for weeks; and many, many people heard why we had done it. If it did not change any hearts, at least maybe it got some to “think” about it. Hate... is wrong!

Races do not exist. They are made up thing, used by governments to categorize and separate. There is only one superior race... THE HUMAN RACE! The sooner you grow up and figure it out, the better.—Peace

## **Brave New World**

### **“Cows Go Moo!” By: Dave Gordon**

One cow went moo!  
Then three more mooed too;  
Until the land filled  
With the sounds of their moos.

From dusk until dawn  
These moos they went on  
Til cows 'round the world  
Heard their sad mooing song

Each moo had its meaning  
A statement of fact  
With logic and reason  
with nothing held back

These cows bravely stood  
As they mooed from the grass  
With moos that in English  
said, “World kiss our ass!”

“We've given our milk  
our flesh and our young  
And now we've just learned  
what we've done we've done wrong?”

“We've heard there is something  
more valuable than grass  
We've heard that its green  
and it's called cold hard cash”

“So if you want milk  
or flesh from our bones  
You must listen to us  
As we make our wants known”

“You've treated us badly  
and you've paid us with hay  
But from here on out

It is cash you must pay”

“Equal in measure  
this cash bound in bales  
dropped off in our barns  
as we cows wag our tails.”

With bales rising high  
the cows threw a bash  
then one cow mooed out,  
“What'll we do with this cash?”

A wrinkled old cow  
with a wrinkled old moo  
cleared her throat kind of loud  
and said, “Here's what I'd do!”

“I'd buy back my calves  
from that slaughterhouse there  
And purchase a meadow  
for my calves to graze there.”

The cows looked so sad  
as they heard what she said  
For they knew in their hearts  
That their calves were all dead

A moo sounded out  
from a cow on a hill  
“I say we buy guns  
and some bombs that will kill!

“Those murdering butchers  
They deserve nothing more!  
So let's use all this cash  
to declare us a war!”

The cows were soon armed  
in green outfits they wore  
with guns and grenades  
they did march off to war

The fighting was fierce  
as the beasts of war fell  
Sending all of their enemies  
to an eternal hell

When the battle was over  
Their world was destroyed  
The cows that came home  
found themselves unemployed

The battle they fought  
and the blood they did shed  
Proved all done for naught  
since their whole world was dead

The cows that remained  
Looked at all the burned grass  
“Perhaps we were wrong  
to say “world kiss our ass?”

Great lessons were learned  
by this spilling of blood  
As the cows wandered home  
in the slick slimy mud

They promised a truce  
with a new flag unfurled  
Announcing the arrival  
of their own Brave New World

In spite of their past  
as their tiny herds grew  
Some cows still went "Moo!"  
...Because that's what cows do.

**By: Rene Joe De La Rosa**

I'm stepping into a Brave New World, believe it or not. I've done it once or twice before. The first time was when I became an adult in the eyes of society. Graduation. I was more liable for my actions. My parents couldn't really shelter me. That was a big slip into a Big World. All mistakes were mine, mine alone. It was wonderful, it was frightening. That is just being 100% honest. Sure, all kids look forward to Graduation because it's freedom. No more teachers. No more books. No more dirty looks. Now only Mom and Dad and the law have control. Why though is it a Brave World? So much responsibility, so many choices, so many paths of life to take. Your parents groom you from day one to that day. The day you leave the proverbial "nest". If you're reading this, you'll understand.

Now it's time for me to lose you because 90% of anyone reading this will not understand this next part. Hopefully, I can make readers step out of their "world" and experience the "new world" I went to.

New for me. Misunderstood and feared by society for the most part. That Brave New World I slipped into after Graduation. Well, about three years later, I stepped into another one due to the wrong choices, the paths of life people should avoid. I was responsible, I was liable and now held accountable for my mistakes. I went from the "free world" to prison. Prison is a small world, believe me when I say that. A Brave New World? I don't know about brave, and pretty sure it's not "new" but it was a new world for me and at twenty years old, all I could be was brave. I mistook being brave for being stupid. I was stupid. I have a disciplinary file about three inches thick! Nothing petty either. Fights, assaults (there is a difference), riots, gang activity... I thought I had to do all of this to show that I was "down," "hardcore," "brave". Silly as I was. Prison was scary then. My unit was known for stabbing and I witnessed my first three weeks after arriving. Brave New World? I know in my heart I'd have to be brave to survive and keep my sanity. As I said, I misunderstood "brave". I went through a lot and honestly, I lost a lot of myself. My actions didn't surprise me because violence was a part of me, but looking back, my reasoning does. I was trying to be brave because I was alone and lonely. I was ready to give into despair at one point in time. Two life sentences, consecutive. One on top of the other. Make parole on one, start the next. Thirty calendar years for parole, just to come up. I'm looking at sixty calendar years minimum. I will die here. Be buried in a field surrounded by strangers, without family to see me off. Wrap your mind around all that. Mix in the fact that my family doesn't write, visit, or anything.

They love me, I know, but sometimes I feel dead already. So I made myself "hard." I perverted the word, the meaning of "brave," because I had to. I understood my situation perfectly as soon as the judge's gavel came down. I was leaving one "world," going to another one. One that was scary as hell. The one I was going to die in. Alone. I understood I had to be brave. I was brave enough to make my decision. I had to be brave enough to face all my consequences. I had to be brave to myself so despair, loneliness and depression didn't take solid root and make me "spin that rope" that where I could take myself out. I walked into this world, this small dangerous world for ten years.

I became a Christian a year ago. It's not a popular decision among inmates to make. We're made fun of, ridiculed, laughed at. Guys try to poke holes in our faith and in our Bible scripture. Fools wait for a Christian to mess up so they say, "Yeah you faking" or so they can accuse a Christian of using the Bible to hide behind and have a reason to beat the Christian up. A dry reason to "check" them. I've got homeboys, 'cause I'm still a "homeboy," who laugh at me and call me fake. They don't understand. I am doing my best and succeeding. I sin, but we all sin. This is me. I love my Lord, my Savior. I went to Church in the world even though I was bad, so why wouldn't I go in prison? Before it was because it was uncool to be a Christian, but now... I am brave enough to confess to all I am a Christian, and take what comes with it. I am brave enough to face the two life sentences and the fact I'll die alone because I've got Jesus. He's my family and He'll take me home. I can in this "world" without having to be stupid. I won't lie, the majority of it is because of my past. Guys without a "history" like myself are respected and left alone. I'm not saying we're big badasses, we've just done our share of making prison live up to its reputation. That is not a good thing, for clarification. The last part of the definition of brave is what means the most to me because I realized that for ten years I hated my life. I hated being in prison. Jesus Christ has helped me change that. Having him in my life, I love my life. I wouldn't trade with anybody. Because of the Lord, I can face a new day with a smile and a song.

I still get lonely, I still get sad. I still get angry, but not too bad. Being a Christian in prison forced me from a small world, to an even smaller one. My smaller one though, that's my Brave New World. That's the world where I'll find my eternal happiness. My Brave New World is where I'll find Paradise. I can only hope that this and the way I live now will continue to help me be brave. Brave enough to try and lead other guys to this world of Christianity too. The Brave New World.

## **Crime and Punishment**

### **Karma Comeuppance By: Lonnie Perkins**

When I think about "crime and punishment" I can't help but equate it to "Karma comeuppance"! Why? Because I can do the math on myself and those I've known for nearly 35 years. Some have gotten away with a lot of

wrong-doing over the years, leaving others to marvel at “how lucky they’ve been,” as we more often have gotten caught up in the web of punishment or go to the funeral of a friend who’s fate dictated that they be removed from the game of life completely.

But for every time that I’ve been forced to face “judgment of just—them” (not just—us) for one thing or another, I’ve gotten a perverse sense of “winning” while losing (my freedom) because of all the things that I’ve gotten away with that were four times as serious as what I tripped and fell on (got locked up for), “or did I really get away with anything?”

Could it be that a form of Karma from a past good deed was simply affording me the opportunity to “start over” by side-lining me for a brief respite before I re-entered the “game of life”?

On the other hand, those who’ve gotten away with a lot more than anyone for years, finally get caught up in something, that seems small, yet they get the book thrown at them, leaving us all to shake our heads and echo the same old story “I guess all the dirt he got away with finally caught up to him!”

But was it probably simply “Karma-deferred”; so I often ask myself, “do we ever truly get away with doing wrong,” or does karma-comeuppance follow us around like a shadow, logging all our deeds in life, so that eventually “that which went around, comes back around to bite us in the ass (or even bless us)?

I’ve always said that “God blesses children and fools” because neither has an understanding of “right or wrong”! But once we understand, we’re accountable for our actions; so karma comeuppance is the proverbial “live by the sword, die by the sword”!

As an adult I’ve made conscious efforts to balance my bad deeds with good ones as a way of paying homage to fate, but unfortunately more of what I sent around over the years came back to holler at me in the worst way, so I take it in stride, recognizing that although I don’t deserve it in this case, I remember the ones I thought I got away with, proving once again that “payback’s a mofol”

Knowing my heart of hearts, I take solace in knowing that I put some good things in the karma log book, so I’m due for something nice when I least expect it..

### **Bitten Bars By: Robert L. Hambrick**

“Vengeance!” they cried.

But is not Justice...

Supposed to be tempered with mercy?

“Vengeance! Away with him,” the command was issued,

No mercy forthcoming;

And I, led to the shadows, condemned.

The error was mine...

Obeys the lure of selfishness,

But I took no life.

Why then should mine be required, given to the

Unforgiving concrete and steel, while those with

gold

Ruthlessly... systematically... endlessly

Crush the heads of the helpless innocent?  
Yet I, they call criminal?

But what right have I,

I, who has broken the law,

To speak truth?

My violence and anger... tamed by self-loathing;

All I can do is bite the bars

And silently scream my anguish to the unhearing  
walls

While the world completely forgets.

Yet, how much punishment is required... all?

All that can be drained from my veins?

That does not seem right.

I’d gladly serve all that was due, if a fair sentence were  
given,

But I am told no redemption is allowed,

I must suffer ceaselessly,

Until the worms come to recycle me.

Judged worthy of death, yet denied death swiftly,

My life leaks drop by painful drop through the  
years:

The needle... would be more humane.

Would that I could, raise the final blade

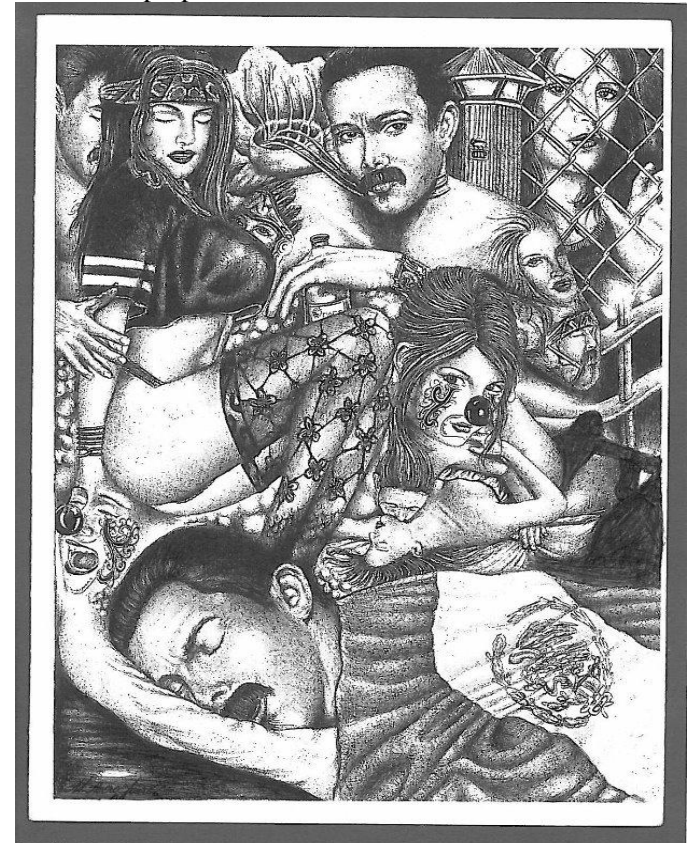
And free my shattered spirit!

But for some reason, I cannot allow it myself.

Cowardice?

So I bite the bars... and exist in the shame

Of purposeless waste.



**Sergio Beltran**

**The Eternal Disposition of the Immortal Soul of Chester W. Nicklerinser**  
**By: Anthony Kershaw**

The Lord God Almighty sits, sat, will sit (for he is, being, well, you know, the omnipotent God, completely free from the constraints and limitations of time and space) regally upon a throne of solid gold behind an enormous bench of solid marble and stares, stared, will stare out at all those assembled in the courtroom.

He bangs, banged, will bang his gavel (which was made of ivory- the original silver mallet had been abandoned, because of its unique sonic qualities, in 1946. That was the year 'It's A Wonderful Life' was released, proclaiming that every time a bell rings, an angel gets its wings. That sentimental rhyme, combined with the unfortunate proclamation of God, Jr., commonly known to humanity as Jesus Horatio Christ, that whatever man bound on Earth was also bound in Heaven, meant that with the slightest tinkle, clank, or chime, another set of wings *had* to be issued. The very real and obvious problem with this- was that contrary to popular belief, there were not an unlimited number of angels, and the ones that did exist already had wings. So, with every doorbell, telephone call, and wind chime in the breeze, a new set of wings had to be issued to an angel who already *had* wings. So now there where, quite literally, billions of very silly- looking angels with wings- some normal size, some very, very tiny- sprouting from every inch of their bodies. Apart from being aesthetically unpleasant, this created some vexing maneuverability issues for the glorious beings, who all-too-often ended up flying around in circles.)

"Order", says, said, will say God. "Bailiff, call the next case". The archangel Gabriel stumbled forward, tripping awkwardly over the tiny feathered appendages protruding from between each of his toes, and announced, "Case 16,349,216,844,992,816,420,331,002 –B, status hearing on the eternal soul of one Chester W. Nicklerinser, London, England, Earth, and Milky Way."

"Proceed", God said, says, will say in his most officious tone (which, believe me, is quite officious).

"My Father, Who Art in Heaven," Jesus began.

Satan rolled his eyes. "Objection!"

"I haven't even started yet."

"Isn't it just a *tad* bit inappropriate to address the judge as 'Father', Horatio?"

Jesus stamped his foot petulantly. "Don't call me Horatio! I *hate* that name. I can't believe my mother saddled me with such a dopey middle name. Bloody Mary."

"Enough", God says, said, will say. "Just get on with it."

"Not until you tell Lucifer not to call me Horatio."

"Satan?"

"Fine. Sorry, *Jesus*. Jesus."

"Don't take my name in vain."

"What're you gonna do? Send me to h-e-double-hockey-sticks? Get a life."

"Dad!"

"Enough, I said, say, will say!" Bellows, bellowed, will bellow God as he bangs, banged, will bang his gavel again.

"State your case, My Son with Whom I Am Well Pleased."

"Give me a break," muttered Satan.

Jesus cleared his throat, clasped his hands behind his back, and began to pace back and forth across the courtroom, casting measured glances at the trembling human seated on the Judgment Chair. "This," he said pointing to the man and stating the one fact that was obvious to everyone in the room, "is Mr. Chester Nicklerinser, formerly of London, England, planet Earth, in the Milky Way."

"It is gonna be a long day," grumbled the Devil.

"Before being run down by a cement truck crashing through his living room wall--"

"Is that what happened?" blurted Chester. "I had no idea. See, I was watching the World Cup. England versus Germany. England was up 3-1, as it should be, shouldn't it, when suddenly I heard this terrific crash. Well, I blinked, didn't I? And all at once I found myself at them big shiny gates out front, and Saint Peter, a fine bloke he is, if a bit chatty, well he talked to me for a bit, quite a while, really, then let me in here. I'd been feeling a bit confused, you see. I had no recollection of cement truck, but I suppose it makes sense, in a way. I mean, apart from why the bleeding thing was driving through my living room. You know?"

"Oh, do shut up," Lucifer said with a weary sigh.

"Look, God, here's the story. Good ol' Chester is a pretty boring fellow, as most Earthly accountants are. Unfortunately, that isn't much of a sin. I suppose that's why you get to keep all the preachers, eh? Anyway, he was a fairly faithful attendee of the religious institution of his choice, which I think we can all agree is a point in my favor."

God nods, nodded, will nod.

"Also", continued the Lord of Darkness," he often worked overtime, occasionally coming in the office on Sundays. More than once, when asked by his girlfriend Ms. Pretentia Mudfloss, if particular outfits made her bottom look big, he told her no, when in fact, said outfit did make her bottom appear on the plump side. And need I even mention the sorts of imaginings Chester had about her, though they weren't married?"

God tuts, tutted, will tut.

"That's as may be," Jesus said. "But this one time, he found a fiver lying on the pavement and instead of pocketing it, he gave it to a bum on the corner, so he's a nice guy. I say he should be a goat. Or is it a sheep? I can never remember which."

"For the record, God, that bum used the fiver to buy a knife with which he kidnapped, tortured, and murdered a dozen people, including Mrs. Tinkle Gurglesnout, humanitarian, homemaker, and mother of 12."

"Oh my God", said Chester.

"Oh my Me", says, said, will say God.

"Yeah", said Beelzebub.

"Um", said Jesus. "It's not like he knew the bum was crazy. Right, Chester?"

"No, right, of course I didn't!"

"Can we hurry this along?" asked the Arch demon, checking his watch. "I have a 3 o'clock tea time with Robert Johnson and John Lennon."

"It's no fair", whined Jesus. "How did you did you end up with all the best musicians anyway?"

"I got them to sell their souls for limitless talent, of course. How else do you think a mere mortal could get that good? Too bad John Denver never signed. At least you got him."

"Don't remind me."

"Okay, I'm sure we are all very busy," God proclaims, proclaimed, will proclaim. "I hereby sentence Chester W. Nicklerinser to an eternity in Hell for the sins of religious zealously, working on the Sabbath, lying, aiding and abetting – however unwittingly- the murder of a mother of 12, and having impure thoughts about Ms. Pretentia. However, in light of his many and varied contributions to the betterment of humanity, via his generosity toward bums, or at least, toward a bum, he will be appointed to the post of Hell's Accountant until such a time as I decide to appoint someone else, and will thereby be bestowed with all the rights, privileges, perks, and fun stuff the title includes."

"But, God," Satan said. "I really don't need an accountant down there, and what's more, I don't want one."

"Too bad," God says, said, will say. "It's Hell. It's not supposed to be fun, for Christ sake."

"Hey!" cried Jesus.

"Oh, sorry. Forgot you were there. Case closed." Then with a final rap of the gavel, God, stands, stood, will stand, and leaves, left, will leave the courtroom.

"So," said Jesus, turning to the Prince of Darkness.

"Do you need a fourth for your tea time?"

"Err, no."

"Bugger."

Poor Chester, feeling utterly befuddled, wondered silently what was in store for him as Hell's Accountant.

## PICTURE THEMES

Here are some samples of the writing sent in for pictures posted in previous newsletters. At the end of this section are new pictures that we hope will inspire you to write down the thoughts or stories they inspire.



## The Road to Nowhere By: Jose "Angel" Ybarra

"Hello? Hello!? Is there anyone out there!? Please God let this be a bad dream. Where is everyone? Where's my homeboy? Wasn't I at Mike's house with my cousin and a few friends? We were partying, having a good time, getting 'high as a kite'. Where is everybody?! What the hell is this damn door doing out here in the middle of nowhere? Is this some kind of sick joke? Ok guys... ya'll got me... you can come out from hiding now... Come on guys... this is not funny! I'm serious! Ya'll stop playing around! Man! This does not look good. Hello!? Mike!? Where are you guys? Can anybody hear me!? Momma?... Oh God, where are you!?... Ok... let me think for a second. There has to be a perfectly good explanation for all of this? Think! What was the last thing I remember doing? ...Hmm... I was chilling with my cousin and some friends getting high at Mike's house. It's something I do almost every day. We started drinking last night watching the game on T.V. Then one of the homeboys pulled out some of that good ol' exotic hydroponic marijuana and we started blazing out of the four hitter hookah. Man that was some good smoke! What happened next? ...Oh yeah, I remember... My cousin pulled out a stash of some potent "fish scale" cocaine. That stuff looked pearl white! Ooh wee! Man! I felt like a rocket blasting off after a small line of that dope! I can't believe a line of this dope got me so high! It was only one small bump and I felt like I was high enough to touch the stars! I remember my cell phone kept on vibrating in my pocket. Every time I checked the caller ID on the phone, it read "Mom Calling". I wasn't trying to answer her call. She'd just start bugging and asking stupid questions like, "Where are you, honey? Who are you with? What are you doing?" She can be a major "buzz kill" at times. Instead of answering, I just sent her calls to my voice mail. She always leaves messages. Anyways, back to last night. Oh yeah, I remember Mike called some chicks to swing by the house to hangout and party with us. Thirty minutes later, there was a knock at the front door. Four of the hottest chicks I'd ever seen walked in. Mike told me they were strippers he met and that they would do anything just to get high. One of the girls saw that I had a mirror on my lap with a mountain of snow, a razor, and a rolled up dollar bill. Her eyes opened wide as half dollar coins as she came towards me. She was swaying those luscious hips while running her manicured "Ruby Red" finger nails through her bleach blond hair. She was licking her glossy fire engine red lips. She said, "Hey baby boy, ya got something for me?" The clothes she was wearing could hardly contain her busty body that was begging to be unshackled. I felt like I was in a trance! I told her, "Come sit next to Daddy and I'll give you a fat line of this 'nose candy'." In no time, the party started getting wild! We were all dancing and drinking, blazing and sniffing. All of a sudden, one of the strippers said, "Hey guys, have ya'll ever tried 'Banging the dope'?" Puzzled, I asked, "What's that?" She opened her little travel sized makeup bag she was holding and pulled out a few syringes. My phone started to buzz in my pocket again. I reached in my pocket and pulled it out just enough to see the screen. I checked who was calling. It was

mom again. I sent her to my voice mail again. A few seconds later, she left another message. Man, why didn't she just leave me alone? I'm grown! I don't need to check in and report to her like she's some kind of parole officer or something! Jesus! Anyways, like I was saying... the stripper pulled out a few syringes and asked me if I wanted to "bang a shot of dope". I told her, "Sure...why not? I've never done it so you'll have to show me how it's done." She said, "Ok. You're going to love it this way...it's such a wild rush!" She poured some cocaine on a tea spoon, added some water and a filter from a cigarette. She pulled the back end of the syringe while the tip of the needle sucked up the dope from the spoon and started to fill the tube. I watched as she tied a headband she had around her upper arm. She tapped her pointer and middle fingers on the fold of her arm. I saw her veins start to rise. She eased the needle slowly into the swollen vein until a splash of blood shot into the syringe. Then she coasted the dope smooth into her arm. She pulled the headband off of her upper arm, took a deep breath, coughed... then I watched her wallow in the surge of "Riding the White Lightning". I saw that she was high as hell and I wanted to be on her level. I reached for one of the unused syringes. I poured me a big ass lump of dope on the spoon, put water and a filter the same way I saw her do it. I drew back a whole lot of dope! I wanted to get higher than her to show her "I could hang". I tied the headband she used to my upper arm, tapped my arm at the fold, and pumped my fist to prime up one of my main veins for the "Touchdown Spike". I was centimeters from contact... when suddenly; a buzz went off in my pocket once again! Man! Who is it now!? I took a gander and when I saw who it was, I got furious! It was mom again! This time I pulled my phone out of my pocket and answered it. I yelled, "What!? Don't you get it, mom!? I don't want to talk to you right now! I am grown and I don't need you trying to run my life! I don't know what time I'll be home, so don't wait up for me! Ok!?" I hung up before she could get a single word out. I put the phone down beside me and got back to "The point at hand". I stabilized the needle and pushed it slowly into my vein. I was waiting for the red splash to shoot into the syringe so I could "blast off". The phone buzzed again! "Damn! It was mom again! Fuck it! Let it keep buzzing!" I pushed the full tube of dope into my arm. Almost instantly, my ears started ringing! "Oh God! Something's not right!" I fell to the floor with my hands clinched tight over my chest. I reached for my cell phone to call for help. I was so fucked up that I couldn't see which buttons I was pushing. I wound up pushing the button that leads me straight to my voice mail. As I lay on the floor, I could hear my messages start to play. It started by saying, "You have three new messages. First message." "Hi son, this is your mother. I'm just calling to tell you I love you and to be careful tonight wherever you go. Call me back soon, ok?... Bye bye honey." "End of message... message number two." "Hey son, it's your mother again. Why haven't you called me back yet? Are you ok? I'm starting to worry. Call me back when you get this message. Ok, son... I love you, bye." "End of message. Message number three." "Ok son, this is not funny. Where are you?

Why haven't you called me back yet? I wanted to talk to you because I know how you like to get high with your friends and stuff. I just now got off the phone with your Aunt. She asked where you were at. I told her I didn't know. She told me to find you and tell you that if you are going to be partying tonight with your friends to be careful. She said she was watching the news today and lots of people have overdosed on some high grade cocaine that has been going around our neighborhood. Son, I need you to call me as soon as you get this message. Let me know you're ok honey, alright? I love you Sweetie... bye." "End of messages." Damn... that's the last memory I recall. I should've listened to Momma... she always told me that drugs would lead me to... "The Road to Nowhere"... Momma was right.

### **White Horses By: Dave Gordon**

Sitting on the tailgate of his old pick-up truck, Grandpa closed his eyes tightly and said, "Can you hear them?" "Hear what Grandpa?" I was eleven years old with an imagination that was sparked to life by Grandpa's many odd comments.

Pointing to a conspicuous cattle gate behind our Montana home he said, "The hooves of the white horses." He sat quietly, listening intently to something I couldn't hear, and then he slowly opened his eyes as a knowing smile carved itself into his wrinkled face.

It wasn't the first time Grandpa had mentioned these mysterious white horses, he often spoke of their wisdom, their hunger, and their much-anticipated arrival. At eleven years of age, I wasn't too keen on invisible horses dropping by, but Grandpa reassured me that one day these horses were sure to arrive and somehow, all of us would be glad to see them.

Grandpa and I had finished our chores early one frosty morning. We ate breakfast, and since it was a Saturday, I slipped back to my bed to get some more sleep. I dreamed about Grandpa's white horses, only these horses had wings and flaming hooves. I saw an entire herd of these strong stallions trampling furiously through clouds with their manes blowing long behind them. It was when one of these fearsome creatures turned towards me that I saw upon his back a rider who had a wild look on his face. The sight frightened me so much that I awoke from my dream sweating and out of breath.

Remembering the conspicuous cattle gate behind our home, and how Grandpa had said the sounds he heard came from beyond it, I looked out my window only to quiet my over active imagination. I saw in the morning haze the silhouette of my Grandpa standing only a few feet from the gate- as though he were waiting for the white horses to arrive. I watched him silently for quite a while and then retired back to my bed.

I hadn't but barely closed my eyes when the thunderous sounds of hooves filled my room. I jumped out of bed and returned to my window. The gate was swinging on its hinges and Grandpa was gone.

I ran downstairs, and out the backdoor, yelling to my grandpa the exciting news that I had finally heard his white

horses. I know that he heard me because I heard laughter fading with the sounds of those thunderous hooves. I stood where Grandpa had stood only moments before watching the now silent gate, hoping to hear or see anything that could serve as a clue to what had just happened.

Behind me I heard the wail of an ambulance. My father and mother, holding each other, had stepped out into the front yard to meet the ambulance. I felt numb all over as I walked back to where they stood.

My father inhaled deeply and said, "Son, your Grandpa has gone away."

I replied, "Yes, I know he did! He left with the white horses."

My parents said all of my grandpa's talk about those white horses was caused by his old age senility, but I knew better, I knew those horses were real because I heard them.

The men in the ambulance told me to stay outside as they went in to look for Grandpa, I told them he wasn't there, but they went in anyway.

About twenty minutes later, they rolled a gurney out with a body wrapped in a vinyl bag. I thought it was a horrible trick so I demanded to see who was in the body bag, my dad said something to the other men and one of them unzipped the bag.

A little boy's life is like a garment that is woven together out of a single thread of yarn, little snags are what shape its character, but a pull on the end where the weaver is weaving will cause his whole life to come unraveled. When I saw my grandpa's pale dead face, I lost who I was.

The funeral was a quiet affair. A lady sang a couple of songs and a preacher preached a sermon. It all seemed so empty, so devoid of whom Grandpa truly was, so I left and began the long, lonely walk back home.

It was dark when I arrived back home; Grandpa's old pickup truck seemed to call out to me like an understanding friend. The door squeaked out a painful hello as I climbed in. On the seat I found a white envelope that had my name on it, Grandpa had left me a note!

"I do believe you are the only one who believes I can truly hear those white horses. I feel as though they will be coming for me soon, so I want you to know who they are and why they are coming."

My grandpa told me about how God sends white horses to carry home his loved ones. Some folks can hear them, others can't. He read me an old Kipling poem that said: "a far, off-shore ad single, some stallion, rearing swift, neighs hungry for a new fodder, and calls us to the drift; then down the cloven ridges- a million hooves unshed- break forth the mad white horses to seek their meat from God!"

Grandpa's letter closed with instructions for me to live a long and happy life. He then said when I get old; I too will hear those million hooves thundering in the distance. At that time, he said, I should keep a close eye on that conspicuous cattle gate. For it was though there that he watched his own Grandpa leave so many years before-

"Trust ye the curdled hollows-  
Trust ye the neighing wind-  
Trust ye the moaning ground swell-

Our heads are close behind!  
To bray your foeman's armies-  
To chill and snap his sword-  
Trust ye the wild white horses,  
The horses of the Lord!"

It's later now, years have flown by and in so many trying times of my life, I have listened as God's herd of wild white horses came to rescue me out of troubles of all kinds.

I am old now. So old that I have my own granddaughter who looks at me strange when I speak of those wonderful white horses. As I sit by this lonely conspicuous gate, I know these horses are coming. I've written this letter for her- so she will know where I've gone. As I look back to her bedroom window, I wonder if she will hear the thunder, the hoof-beats, and my laughter as I head out into eternity...

Quoted portions of Rudyard Kipling's poem "White Horses."



#### **Source of Joy By: Dustin Albert**

Smiling is a form of essential warmth through the spirit, mind and heart. Our feelings tend to share a mutual happiness created by the beauty that casts upon our faces. It shows who we are, where we come from. It matters where we're going and what kind of tools we use for success the spirit we carry amongst our soul generates the love we intend to share with others by the true meaning in one's heart. Strangers stand in all positions towards life, glowing radiant beams dwell within those that surround us with a pure innocence of love. Who says the strangers in life can't place joy inside our hearts. In nature's ability through humanity crosses a loving joy, cherished and found, passed on by generations in a simple smile. These small sentiments can make huge differences in hearts being crushed with the harsh realities of everyday life no one said, you have to live with frowns on a daily basis behind the sorrows that complete misery. You can turn misery into the beauty of a smile in 2.2 seconds. Determination lives through a breath drawn from an inspiring, devoted happiness that will never die inside you. I am sometimes inspired by the colors of smiles that shine across the lands. When love is reigned within the hearts, smiles drive our suffering and pains away



forever through this golden inspiration I am determined to love more. The older I get the more I sense the most important thing in life is to love others that love cannot be harsh or fast or ritual. The strength vital to life must be born of joy. This includes the beauty inside a smiling face!

**By: Edward Cotton**

Have you ever been so cold until your hands felt numb? Have you ever been so cold until your toes felt like ice? Have you ever been so cold and could not move? I still remember the coldest day of my life. Nothing I had ever done in life prepared me for that day.

There I was on the fifth ave. everyone liked to hang out on the fifth but that day, I was talking to the girl that I loved since I was five. Her smile always did something to me.

It was so cold that 22nd of December. The trees looked as if they were crying. I did not want to leave the warmth of my room, but Trica told me she needed to talk with me.

I hurried to meet her. We always met at the Blackstone Theater. That was the place where we went to laugh, cry and watch the latest movies together. One day we spent the entire day there. We were like two kids overwhelmed with movies.

Some days Trica paid for everything. This was the place where we went to escape from life's fights, dogs, gunshots and family arguments sometimes we did not watch the movies. We just sat there and held hands like intimate couples.

So why was Trica asking to meet at this hour of the day? Three days before Santa makes his run. We had already traded Christmas expectations. I checked the movie schedule and there was none for two hours. Strange. "It's cold out there." I thought. "And Trica needed me."

Off to meet her I hurried. The winds were howling some crazy language. Weather like this made me cry. And crying I did. My hands were terribly cold hidden between brown furry gloves that were serving my hands small justice.

I was so happy to reach Blackstone Theater. I wanted to ask Trica was she crazy for calling me out in this weather. But we had made a bond that whenever one of us needed another we would be there.

When Trica saw me, she ran and hugged me for the longest. She smelled like white diamond perfume. Boy did she smell great. Her smile was warm and sunny. I held her face in my hands until she said that my gloves were cold. She threw her arms between my coat and around my back while standing there holding me.

How could friends be so close? I do not know how. But we had been friends since we were five and running around with snotty noses. Our parents used to say we were inseparable. In many ways I felt like she was the part of me that always felt missing. Only when we were together did I feel complete. We could talk about anything for hours. Sometimes we would just look at each other and smile. She would often touch my face and say you have nice skin too. Many girlfriends had abandoned me because they saw us holding hands. When it was known that Trica was not my

sister, I was left broken hearted and somewhat alone. Only Trica comforted me with those pretty evenly teeth.

But the 22nd day of December Trica held me so tight and the winds sliced and slapped me so hard. I finally said to her "don't you think it's kind of cold out here."

Trica pulled away from me and laughed. She never changed. Gosh I love her so much did I say love? Yes, I said love, but I do not mean in a romantic tone, but a divine love that two kids share. It is a love that makes you whole and cold. Boy was I cold. My toes had lost the life to move.

"I have something to share with you," Trica said while still holding me.

"OK but let's stand with our backs to the Wall."

Trica liked being by the wall. She could now hide herself between my coat. Trica looked me in the eyes. Our souls were connected - heart to heart.

I wanted her to hurry up and tell me whatever made her think she could not wait. It was too cold to be out chatting but I was warmer now with my back to the wall and Trica's body hugging me.

"I have cancer."

It sounded like one of these winds swept down and slapped me. While the sun re awoke me. I wanted to ask her what she said, but I could not. I knew I had heard every word just like I had counted all of her teeth; just like I knew where her birth mark was on her right butt cheek; just like I knew she was still smiling and staring at me. The only thing I could not do was enfold my coat around her.

How could someone you love so much hurt you so bad? It felt like that moment when she told me about some guy she liked - I felt robbed how could she abandon me for him? I was happy for her, but I loved her more. She said I was too jealous, but she acted like wise when I told her about Camia. For two days I sat and cuddled her. She could not believe that I was giving someone else our time.

And the day that Camia saw me wiping ice cream from Trica's mouth. Camia said that she had had enough. So where did I go? I returned to the only person who understood me. Trica. My friend.

When Trica told me that she had cancer, my heart cried. My fingers and toes decided to stop being cold. I just held her close to me. The winds kept blowing, but those elements did not matter anymore. I did not want to leave; I wanted to be wherever Trica wanted me to be - standing in the cold admiring her beautiful smile.

That night I could not sleep. Trica was the only thing my mind wanted to think about. I did not understand any of this. She was all I ever had. I wanted to pray but knew nothing about praying, how to start, what to say or how to end. My mom knew something terribly was bothering me. I had never missed one of her spaghetti dinners.

Mom found me in the room and consoled me. After disclosing my pain to her, my mother sat silently with me for the longest. I thought that something was wrong with her now.

Later that night my mother gave me a picture. At first I was not bothered by the picture it was my mother's crying that bothered me, what was I supposed to do with a picture with two babies? The more I looked at the picture the more

I understood those babies were happy lying next to each other holding hands. I smiled while thinking of Trica.

I lied the picture down on my bed only to notice some writing on the back. The words seemed so familiar yet so strange.

Unbelievable.  
Unfreaking Real  
What!  
Seriously.  
Can't Be.

Trica and Marcus Gram Born 8/6/75.

I almost shitted on myself. I ran to get mom; but there was no need to ask, inquire or speak.

Mom's tears were telling the story.

Out in the cold I ran, I had to see Trica. I was not cold any longer.

There she was. With that beautiful smile and lovely face. Gosh. I love that girl.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

I tried to tell her. I did. But no words would run out of my mouth.

At first Trica laughed, but when she looked in my eyes. She knew there was no room for laughter. I took the picture and placed it in her had. She looked at it then at me. I did not have to tell her the story; I did not have to sing to her the song; we both knew the lyrics since we were born.

Trica put her face next to mine. The wind was blowing the furs on her hood. My Gosh I love her. I have always loved my sister even when I knew her as a friend...



### **Temporal Seasons By: James Murphy**

While in a state of funk and self-loathing an icy breath of wind slapped me in the face. My eyes centered on the glacially entombed branches of the frozen tree ahead of me, and for reasons unknown a question arose. Why is it that I spend so much time comparing my insides to other people's outsides? As the cold wind died down my ponderings accelerated. This tree had something to share, if I would but pay attention.

The tree was in its season of un-giving. Its season of nakedness. It shed all its colorful trappings and attractions...or distractions. It's in its season of cold, of death that brings life. Is the tree still loved in this season? It is, I decided. It's just as alive and still must be protected and cared for. This season prepares the way for the others that follow. Without the trees season of un-giving, it would have nothing to give later.

My senses seemed to sharpen in the crisp air and as I paid attention, the frozen tree continued to share its natural wisdom with me.

Although not seen in this season of rest and recovery, the tree's colorful verdure, its fragrant blossoms, and of course its sweet fruit are all well known. I don't have to see it now to know of the tree's potential. I know nature. I know how nature works and of the seasons of nature, and of the tree. If I didn't recognize this, all I might see in the tree right now is cord wood for my stove.

The quiet and still season. Presumably not the tree's best-liked season, it would surely rather be showing its bright colors and luscious fruit, but it doesn't work that way. There's a reason to shine. Knowing that, the tree is treated the same both barren and bountiful. There's a pattern to nature's seasons, there's a pattern to life.

If I pay attention to the seasons of nature, to the seasons of the tree, I should notice my own seasons, life's seasons. Instead of fighting my seasons I should embrace them, knowing that it's all part of the process of growing, of flourishing.

The life in the tree, in the most basic of physical ways, and the life in me are similar. It's at that very basic level of life where I can find my lessons, my lessons from nature. From the seasons that outsmart my intellect.

Sometimes my days are seasons in themselves. I used to think of such things as a hindrance, but it's only a hindrance if I let intelligence get in the way instead of paying attention to nature's patterns. Then again, maybe that very act of paying attention is the true intelligence that breeds wisdom.

A crack appeared in the turbulent gray clouds above me and a shaft of bright sunshine warmed the side of my face. A single drop of moisture fell, like a solitary teardrop from the icy limb of the tree.

The crack closed as quickly as it came, leaving the hope of its promise, the angry clouds increased, yet my face remained warmed. The seasons would soon be changing again. Fresh starts, fresh beginnings, fresh life.

### **By: Ed Wrench**

I remember back in the 90s I was at Park Springs Apts in Spring City PA 19475. I was 19 years old at the time; it was a very cold day outside. I was dressed in just fire pants and a fire jacket and fire boots. I was no fireman; I found the fire stuff in the trash can on the Spring City Elm school grounds. I got them washed for me by Gail Smale also of Park Springs Apts #405, I'm #411. It was starting to get real cloudy outside. The temp outside was I 20 or below. I was starting to shiver, that meant that my body was trying to get warm. I went in at noon to get my gear ready. It was starting to snow, by 11 PM it was snowing real hard. I could not see my hands anymore. My breath I could see now. By the next day it was about 4 inches so I started to shovel. My dad asked me if I would like some coffee, I said yes. He got the cups down, my dad got the PA State Police cup. He was a police officer for the East Vincent police Dept for 5 years 1980 to 1984. Then I sat down and started to drink the coffee and eat the snack my dad gave me. By

Tuesday we had about 14 inches on the ground, I was out in full force working hard. Louie the maintenance person for the apts asked me if I could help out. I said yes. My shovel broke. It was plastic, so I got a metal one that was real big. It was just real rusted; I found it at the farm house on 724 Spring City, PA. I'm glad that I had this shovel; it worked real well for me, the right size too. By the end of it all FYW News Radio 1060 told us that we had about 50 inches in the Philly area. You don't mess with Mother Nature. She's the BOSS. I was going to make a slush cone, we had so much snow, and this is a true story. I hope you stay tuned for the next snow; I will not be able to shovel the snow for a long time. I hope it does not snow like that for a long time, 50 inches can you believe it? I know I'm wondering if next time it will not stop at all. Good luck

### **Snow Convict By: Robert L. Hambrick**

Born and raised on the Texas gulf-coast, we did not see too much snow. The same warm gulf-stream which draws hurricanes in from the Atlantic during the summer and fall months, acts to keep winters fairly mild on the coast. I remember a big snow in 1963, and in both '70 and '72 we got a pretty good dusting; but it was usually only enough icy snow to make a muddy slush, not the pristine white blankets of snow-covered meadows I'd seen in movies and on postcards. Again in 1988, we had 3-4 inches drop between the Beaumont-Houston areas, and that was the most snow I had ever seen. But in 2003, I got a new experience.

I was on the Ramsey One prison unit 35 miles south of Houston. My job was "fire watch," out at the Ramsey furniture factory. Because of all the wood out there, they had to keep an inmate out at the factory at all times to make rounds and ensure no fires broke out from electrical shorts or whatever. We firewatchers were basically night-watchmen; it was the best job assignment in prison I ever had. Working the late-night shift, all I had to do was call-in to the central picket every 30 minutes so they'd know that I hadn't taken an unauthorized vacation over the fence. Once an hour I walked the factory from department to department alert for flame or smoke. At count-times, I had to walk to the back door of the main building and shine my flashlight at the searcher's desk officers to show them I was still alive and on the premises.

It was Christmas Eve, and I had just started my shift when it started to snow lightly. I thought to myself, "Here I am, 47 years old, and I have never had a white Christmas; wouldn't it be nice if this little flurry actually turned into a really good snow?" As I continued to make my rounds each hour, I'd step outside to check the fluffy white stuff. To my great delight, it was not simply melting as it touched the ground, it was accumulating very well. Toward mid-night, great fat flakes were falling so hard I could barely see 20 feet away.

The radio confirmed that this was a bonafide snowstorm, indeed a freak occurrence for south-east Texas. By 2 AM, we had seven inches of beautiful unadulterated pure snow completely covering the ground. Before I got off work at 5:30, I had built out on the parking lot, a massive

six foot tall "snow convict," decked out in top hat and muffler from materials I'd found inside the factory. The snow was all gone two days later. But I had finally done something I had always wanted to do: build a snowman, and experience a real white Christmas. With the Agg. 99 I'm doing, I am certain those firsts, will be my only!



### **The Pier By: Margaret Ryan**

A few years ago, I sat on a pier much like the one in your photo. I sat there after a 5 mile walk to watch the sun rise. To collect my thought and seek answers from the mess I had made of my life.

The bay was smooth as glass. A huge red ball slowly showed itself as a large ship passed before its glow. Peace was all around me, I was given the luxury of clean thinking as I sat on that pier.

I questioned all I thought I knew. The recent divorce wounded my spirit more than I could admit. It was him whom I had held on to for truth for over twenty years; he was my rock, my foundation. He was my soul mate, or so I believed.

As I sat on that pier, I sought answers from who made the sea and sun. I had learned a few short years earlier that all I believed about God and truth were lies and half-truths. Not even Christmas was truth; I felt the pain of desperation deep within my soul. I could not believe in my God, now my man had also dumped me like last week's trash.

My desire to run away and seek meaning was strong and powerful. There were no reasons left for me to stay and watch the end of a life built on lies. The love was now pain, the trust was long gone. I was not even left with a God I could trust enough to cry out to. All was gone, death looked inviting.

I spoke out of my fear and anger that day as I sat on the pier. I questioned all the answers of my life. All the "whys." Why have you left me? I demanded to know. Why have you lied to me all these years just to reject me and leave me alone with no ways or means? How can love destroy another's soul and will to carry on? I questioned myself and how I had done. Never expecting the answer to come, I spoke on. I let out all the questions I had about why the lies of religion and how could I ever trust again. My tears fell into the sea as I questioned.

### **“The Spot” By: James Murphy**

I'd walk out there and fish, sometimes all night long. I had been coming to the spot all my life, ever since I was a little kid. The first time was right after I had gotten in trouble at school and my dad had bought me one of those rod and reel combos, you know the kind, blue one piece fiberglass rod with a Zebco closed face spinning reel. I caught a few fishes the first time, blue gill. Not very big, but they had a lot of fight in them and were a lot of fun to catch.

Later in life, I went to that spot almost every night, fishing with a buddy of mine, I liked the fishing of course, but it was the spot mostly. I had a connection to that spot; it felt like mine, I felt like everything was always okay there. There was never trouble; it was where I went when it seemed there was trouble everywhere else.

There were times when I had no place to go. I would end up at the spot, most of the time not even having my fishing gear with me, fishing wasn't the object, but a peaceful place that felt comfortable was.

Money problems, women problems, family problems, you name it, when they hit that's where I usually found myself ending up at. Plenty of times I didn't start out to go there, but found myself there, and was usually glad for it.

From my circumstance, the troubles and problems are much different. Some have gone away, and others are permanent and part of my very being. One thing hasn't changed. I know I've left some of myself at the spot, but just the same, I've got some of the spot with me.

I can stretch out on my prison mattress and close my eyes and dream. Dreaming is free and no one can take it away from me. My prison mattress becomes my magic carpet and takes me to where everything's okay, to where I feel at home...to my spot.

### **By: Zachary Newman**

My bare feet slapping on the salty wet sand, each tiny granule transferring its cosmic energy into the soles of my feet, and throughout my body. The constantly shifting surface of the shore slides back and forth through the foam. And as the waves recede back into the ocean, pulling the glassy sand, and with anticipation and curiosity swiftly following, I push my kayak far enough to climb in without bottoming out.

A few strokes of the double sided oar, and I find myself being carried by the insistent current, ancient and eternal. The subtle yet roaring hum, drowning out all thoughts of landlocked society is a welcoming change. The rise and fall of the unending waves soothes and settles the equilibrium, as I become aware of the sky and how the sun blasts holes through the ever-thickening clouds.

Fingers of light reaching down to touch the cresting azure green, caressing the white from each fleck of foam, if only for a second. Sunlight penetrates into the depths of the ocean, reflecting off of the scales of the surface school of fish. Tiny pinpoints of each scale, becoming a giant shining beacon, huge schools moving to the pulse of secret rhythms, unknown to those without gills.

The ever present smell of the salty sea, with its undertones of decaying life, both plant and animal, seems to have an effect of transporting me back in time, to another life; where the sea was king, and the moon his queen. And if you were not in tune with the ebb and flow, the push and pull, you were soon to become victim to the elemental-planetary cycles. A time where predatory behemoths patrolled the depths, the likes of which make the biggest, fastest, most voracious sharks look like guppies by comparison.

I pretend for a moment that I'm adrift, with no idea of where the shore may be, nor is there any desire within to be re-acquainted so soon with the populated world. I'm content with floating, taking in all that surrounds me, a 360

• horizon, an endless sky, the huge arcing path the sun is pulled along, followed by the cold shine of the moon, the shifting of the tides, and the stars. The stars like a million upon a million tiny pin-pricks in the black velvet surface of the atmosphere. A shiny sequined evening gown draped over the enticing curves of the galaxy, reflecting back to the earth, the shine and heat of all the hot rocks swirling and traversing the vastness of it all.



### **Global Master Piece By: Douglas G. Dayne III**

The crowded event was full of unbridled energy. The militant Art forces, Double X, were holding their biggest gathering since the assault on the remnants of the Great Wall. At the podium, staring intensely out in to the crowd, fist raised for visual emphasis, the lender and founder of Double X was commandeering the future of the group.

Double X had started humble as a grass roots movement. Initially artists would meet at the site in East Berlin and share political thoughts and art tips. Gradually it grew - and grew to become a full-fledged militant outfit. Only it was not guns and missiles that concerned the members of Double X. More spray paint than gunfire. More acrylics than bullets.

Calling himself the Great Picasso, Mare Von Hesslen, rose from a casual graffiti artist, to the leader of the most powerful Art group in the World. Double X promoted public art to such an extreme; they had become labeled as a terrorist group by the leaders in Geneva. It became

common to turn your T.V. on - like now - and to be tuned in to a pirate (hacked) broadcast of a Double X demonstration. More known for mass aerosol assaults on famous buildings, artifacts and various subways around the planet the Double X were beginning to build a reputation for computer crimes.

Picasso adopted the disguise of Adolf Hitler. He never explained his reason for this - besides the obvious - to disguise his true appearance. Many rumors spread as to Picasso's true intentions. It was said that all broadcasts and propaganda from the Double X was filled with subliminal messages; hence the reason for such the large number of Double X members and followers. We've yet to see the full strength and extent of Double X - stay tuned, this is just the beginning.

### **Death to Hatred By: Robert L. Hambrick**

In the sixties and 70's, there was a distinct reduction in hatred between the races. It was all about peace and love; people of all colors came together, rejecting the long-standing prejudices on each side. Everyone was wearing bell-bottoms and psychedelic polyester, sharing doobies, and dancing to the greatest music ever created. Inter-racial marriages began to increase, creating some of the most beautiful people ever born. A white girl married O.J.; Diana Ross married a white man, Michael Jackson BECAME a white girl, etc. Schools and society became integrated, and the hate ... was dying.

But then, things began to devolve in the mid - 80's. Satan's evil influence crept back in, and somehow ... color became an issue again. Hate rose up, and demanded separation from the brotherhood which had been so hard-won. Where peace had reigned, now Gangster Rap and White supremacists began preaching their poisons. Instead of coming together in love, the younger generation was taught to stay apart. Hate mongers like David Duke and Louis Farrakhan told lies ... lies ... lies, to brainwash and confuse those who didn't know their own history. Make no mistake, nation of Islam is nothing but a KKK for blacks; they both teach the exact same hate.

How long people? How long will you continue to let others dictate how you should feel, how you should act, who you should be around? can't you think for yourself? Yes, there were terrible wrongs in the past, but that was... the past! I wasn't there, and neither were you. Good people saw the evil and stood up and said, "No more!" Honest Abe and Rev. King gave their lives, (as did many others,) so that we could hold hands and battle the lies of our being different somehow. GET THIS PEOPLE ... THERE IS ONLY ONE RACE ... HUMAN!

“... There is one kind of flesh for beasts,  
another flesh for fishes,

And another of birds, and ... ONE FLESH  
OF MEN.” I Cor. 15:39

Don't you feel it, in your own heart? Don't you feel how wrong it is when you hear those prejudiced words, those out-of-date stereotypes? How long will you continue to allow hate to grow?

Until good people again speak up, and demand a stop to all the hate teaching, it will just get worse and worse; the next generation will grow up not knowing any better.

When I hear white guys talking like they shouldn't about Hispanics or black or others --- I check them. I tell them they are small-minded crash-dummies to let someone else dictate their attitude. When I hear young black men call each other N\_\_A, I check them. “Hey, don't you know what your great-grandpa had to go through to NOT be called that?”

Look how long it took for black folks to finally get some respect; look how long it took for most white folks to respect themselves enough to admit they had been wrong! Do you want those things to be destroyed now by the new wave of hatred?

According to the Mayan calendar, the age of Pisces comes to an end on Dec. 21, 2012, and the Age of Aquarius begins. [No ... it's got nothing to do with the end of the world, pole shifts, destruction, or alien invasion; stop listening to that coast to coast nonsense.] What this means simply is that our solar system has completed another round of traveling through our galaxy. Just as Earth travels around our Sun, our solar system travels around the center of our galaxy. We are just reaching the same position we were in 26,000 years ago. That is ALL the Mayan date stands for. In another 26,000 years, we will have gone around the galaxy yet again, and the Age of Capricorn will begin.

The music group The Fifth Dimension sang a song titled, The Age of Aquarius, where they expressed their hope that peace and love would rule mankind. They sang of “Harmony and understanding, the mind's true liberation, let the sunshine.” May it be so.

The hate must stop! You ... must speak out. You cannot keep quiet and just call it our modern culture; it will destroy us.

It has to start with you; check yourself, when you catch yourself having those prejudiced thoughts. Then stand up against others you hear speaking hate. It has to start with YOU, ME, and everybody ... refusing to let the haters do all the talking, call all the shots.

So speak up, people! Kill the hate, for the sake of love. Peace





**“Looking In Where I Look Out” By: James Murphy**

What do you see when you look in the window I look out of? I’m curious if it would make a difference what you saw looking in if you knew what I saw looking out.

I wonder if after looking in you would ever come back and look again. I would understand if you didn’t. I don’t look out much more anymore. I remember what’s out there. I miss what’s out there.

Your curiosity might bring you to look in where I look out, but I don’t think it would take long before you had your fill. Not because of all the suffering and torment you’d see, no, nothing that romanticized. Boredom. An incredible amount of boredom is what you’d see.

Don’t misunderstand; I’ve been on “exciting yards.” Yards where violence was the norm, not the exception...But even those whacked out, crazy yards are mostly nothing but boredom also. Boredom punctuated with fifteen minutes of “excitement,” which leads to extended periods of more boredom.

The prison life you see on television and in the movies isn’t the prison life you’re looking at if you look in where I look out. Don’t let that stop you from looking through. Just try and be mindful of what you’re looking at and try not to bring preconceived notions or expectations with you.

The pain, suffering, and torment are here, it’s just not as obvious as you might have expected it to be. Most times it’s very well hidden and disguised. It creeps to the surface and out into the open at times, but you might not recognize it. It manifests itself in different, often subtle ways on this side of the window glass.

If you look in where I look out what you’ll see are souls struggling to find some shred of normality in a very non-normal world and existence. You’ll be looking at a comic book animation. Sometimes I sit back and turn the pages of the comic book, other times the pages turn me, as I’m trapped inside, just another comic book character.

I wonder if you can see that; if you can tell the villains from the superheroes, from the innocent bystanders, from the victims. I wonder if you notice all the plots and subplots taking place. It’s not really interesting enough to hold your attention for too long.

If I notice you looking in I’ll ask you these things, and share my world with you, as much as you care to know. I can help you understand a little bit of what you see, help you understand me. That’s probably not why you were looking in, but it might be why you come back and look again, if you do. If you don’t come back, I can understand.

When you see me looking out that window where you look in, and I know you do, I wonder why you don’t ask me what I see. I think I know, or I have my own ideas anyway, but I’ll try to get rid of them, in the hopes that you may ask. My answers might surprise you. They might be more like your answers as to what you see looking in than you realize.

**WRITE YOUR OWN STORIES**

Below this text is a series of pictures, each with their own due dates. Perhaps the pictures remind you of an incident in your own life you would like to recount.

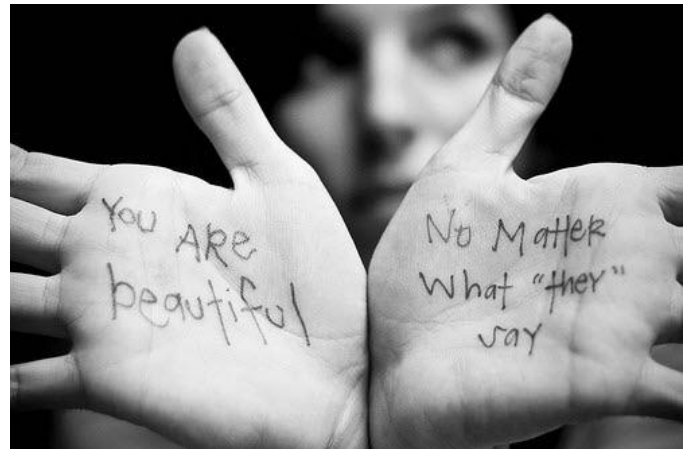
Possibly they stir in you a new and imaginative story. If so, send us the story the picture evokes and we will mail you a copy of what everyone else submits for these pictures. You who read the newsletter only see the smallest sample of what we receive. If you want the full collection you must put pen to paper and share your thoughts with us.



due 8/1/12



Due 9/1/12



Due 10/1/12



due 11/1/12



Due 12/1/12



Due 1/1/13



Due 2/1/13

### FINAL NOTES

We can do meaningful things together. Last night, I saw a film called "I Am." It was made by a Hollywood director who had made a number of high profile expensive films. He had a mansion, private plane, lots of stuff and used crews of 400 to make films like Liar, Liar, The Nutty Professor, and Bruce Almighty. He had a bicycle accident and suffered from a concussion. The concussion symptoms lasted for months and he suffered from incapacitating dizziness, headaches, light sensitivity, and mood swings. He was ready to face death, he says, rather than go on. Once he realized this he asked himself "**What do I want to say before I go?**" Out of this experience, the film "I Am" was born.

It is too much for me to describe, but he really looked at the interconnectedness of humans to the world, and each other. He explored how our bodies are hardwired for compassion. Some of the things displayed you can hardly believe. In one scene he goes to a laboratory where they have electrodes connected to a bowl of yogurt. Keep in mind yogurt is full of living bacteria. They would have Tom, the director, think about charged thoughts like his lawyer or his agent. Each time he did the yogurt registered a response. He was not connected to it in any way. He was just sitting in front of a bowl. If our thoughts can affect a bowl of yogurt, how must they affect other humans and the rest of the natural world? You are all locked up in close proximity. The system keeps you in a state of wanting and dissatisfaction. I can imagine the powerful pull that must have on everyone in proximity to that vibe.

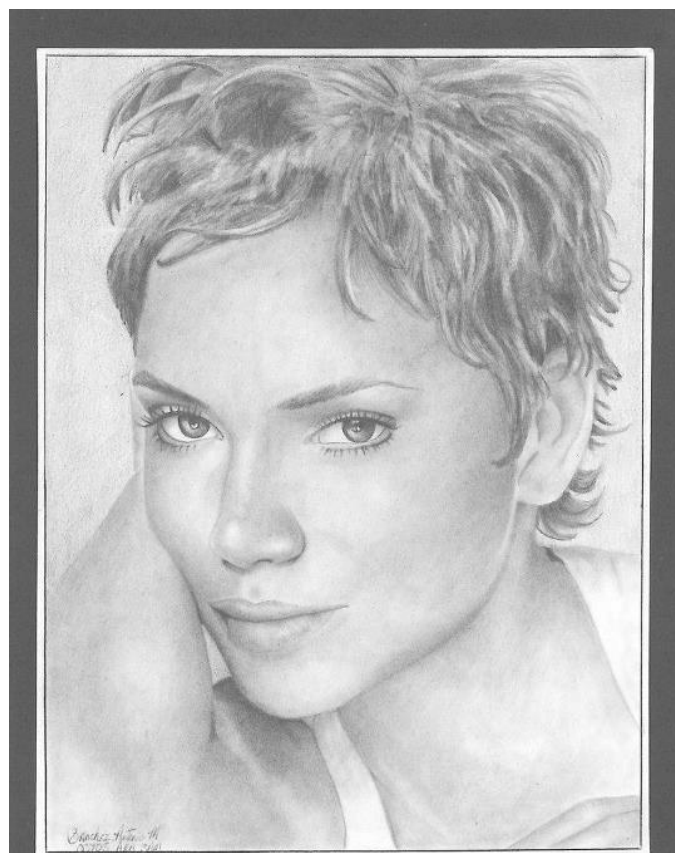
Life has not been easy for me in many ways. In the past I have described to some of you the abuse and neglect in my childhood. I figure that torturous episode was an opportunity for me to learn valuable lessons about life and how I want to be as I move through it. I hope some of you can see the bigger picture, and while you most likely don't want to be in prison, perhaps there is a way use this time to find peace and clarity inside yourself. Is there something to learn? Can you take the negativity in your environment and transform it to support positive action? Can you see the



common ground you share with all who are in your world rather than the differences? I know it is a tall order and easy to say from the comfort of the free world. [Though at times it is not so comfortable.] Perhaps in the scheme of things you have the most potential to grow as humans simply by developing good humor, compassion, and an open heart while in confinement. Maybe this lifetime has a valuable lesson for you to learn, and for some reason none of us can fathom, you are where you are to learn that lesson. It doesn't mean not to strive to do better or to get out of confinement, but even as you do so, still use the present moment to explore kindness, consideration, and giving. You can take a stand to change the culture dominating prison life. We are all in this together, and the artificial divisions man creates are from fear. See yourself as a timeless, eternal, creative and balanced particle of a grand universe. Even in the smallness of our being, there is something majestic about being alive in this cosmic creation. It is a gift, and from my perspective ranks as a miracle. That is the focus I am working towards maintaining in my life, and while I am not always there, I can keep coming back to this truth. We are in this PE project together and I hope you will continue to write and let me know how you are and how we can grow this Prisoner Express program to best serve you. You are not forgotten and your thoughts are valued.

## CORRECTIONS

We made a few mistakes in some of our publications recently and I want to correct them. We gave credit for some artwork to Angel Patrick Boyar when it should have gone to **Ralph Padilla**. Also the editors of the Poetry Anthology V8 did not include **Jeff Harnden's**

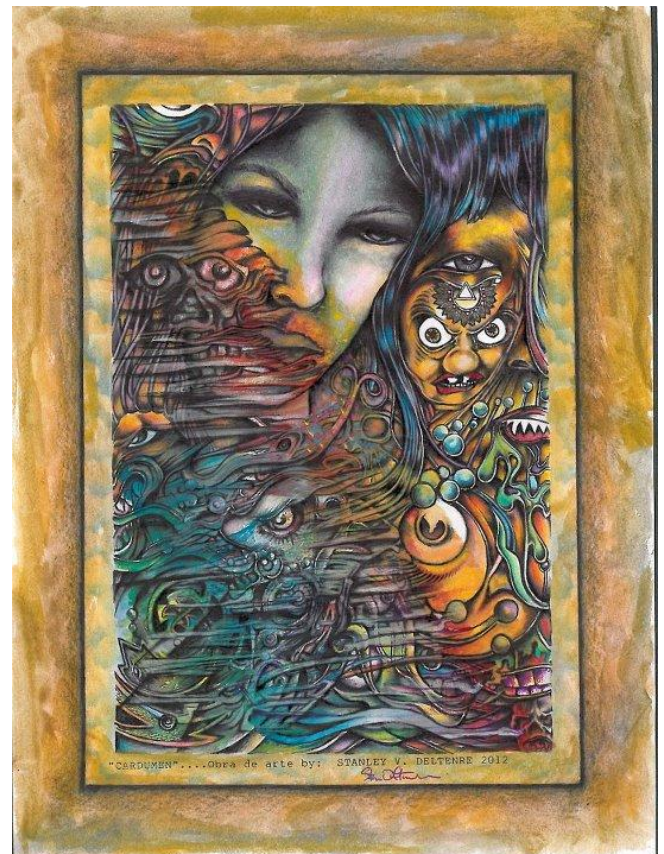


By Antonio Sanchez

contact info in the publication. Jeff is a truly talented artist and has been very generous in sharing his time and art with our program, and should never be overlooked. Also we credited some art to William Migs, and it should have been **William Miles**. We posted the wrong address for **Frank Johnson** in our poetry anthology as well. We can correct some of these mistakes on the online material, and will try to be more careful next time. Please be sure to write clearly and put your name on all submissions. Sometimes we struggle to read even your name and address. Better to take your time or recopy what you write so it can be read by the volunteers who help at PE.

Just to clarify for any new members, our services are free as long as we have funds. The book program is the only program currently where you have to send the postage money to cover the cost of postage. If you have friends or family that can help, please have them send donations to PE on your behalf.

Light and Love to you all,  
Gary



By Stanley Deltenre

## REGISTRATION FORM

**Please note: If you received this newsletter, you are on our mailing list for 2012; if you do not wish to participate in any of our other programs or update your registration, you do not need to return the registration form. This form should be returned in a timely manner to make sure we receive it before this cycle's packets are sent—You are always free to request books but you must send either 8 stamps or \$3.50 to cover the cost of postage. If you don't want to cut up your newsletter, you may copy the sections of the registration form regarding the programs you want to join on a separate piece of paper.**

**Personal Profile - Please check one choice and then print your name and sign in the spaces provided. Even if you check A, B or C, you can still ask that a particular piece of writing be posted as anonymous or never be posted at all. We will respect your wishes.**

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

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**D. ☐ Do not use my name or any of my writings in your program.**

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

☐ **Book Mailings** – Only the Expedited Book Package Program is available. Send postage to cover cost of book package. List types of books you want, and we will make best match with our existing collection of books.

☐ **Poetry Project** – Please send me *Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology* V9. **I understand that to receive the anthology I have to submit a poem for consideration in the anthology.**

☐ **Roots of American Music** – I am interested in learning more about the roots of contemporary American Music. Send me this packet.

☐ **Journal Project** – I will keep a Journal for 2012/2013, and share my entries with PE. Please send me a Journal Starter packet.

☐ **Massage Studies** – I am interested in learning how to heal with my hands. Please send a packet on massage techniques that relieve stress and pain.

☐ **Gender Studies** – I am interested in learning about gender roles throughout history and how they influence my worldview and actions. Please send me this packet.

☐ **Chess Club**—Yes I want to receive mailings on how to improve my chess game. The mailing will also attempt to answer some of your chess questions, so include those with you registration form

☐ **2012/2013 Prisoner Express Newsletter** I wish to enroll for another year as a member of the Prisoner Express Program.

**NAME: (PLEASE PRINT)**

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**ADDRESS and ID #**

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**SIGNATURE:**

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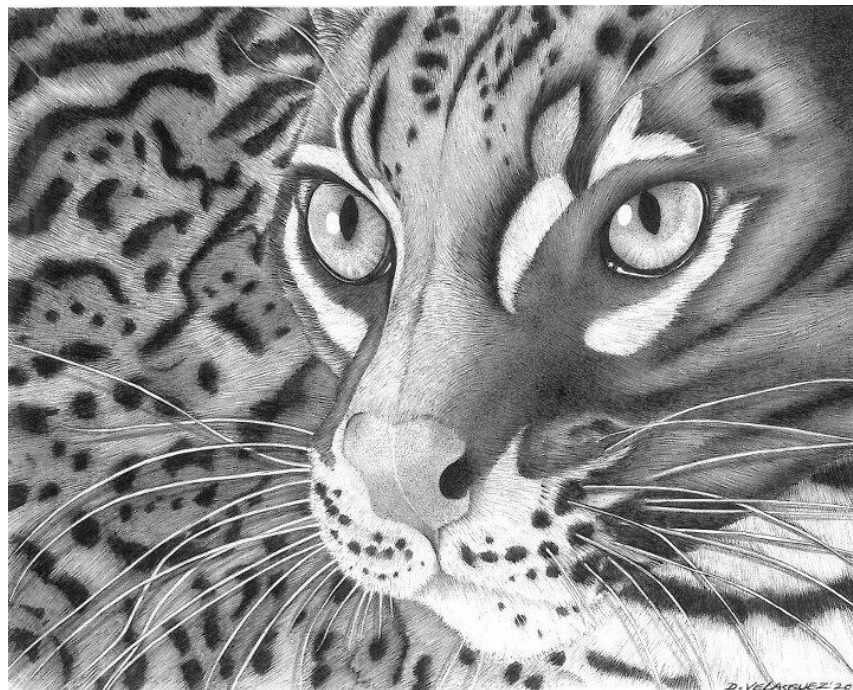
NEWSLETTER  
Prisoner Express  
Spring 2012

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

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

**The Durland Alternatives Library, which funds Prisoner Express, is a project partner of the Center for Transformative Action.**

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David Velasquez