

PRISONER EXPRESS

Newsletter

SPONSORED BY THE DURLAND ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY
The bridge between prisoners and the outside world

Fall 2012

ORGANIZATION'S HISTORY

Welcome. My name is Gary, and I work in the Durland Alternatives Library. I have worked here for more than 13 years, and after completing my first year, the Prisoner Express (PE) program was created. The program's origin was inspired upon receiving a letter from an inmate, Danny Harris, stationed in Texas.

Danny's excellent writing truly was what moved me to begin a free book program fostering prison education through independent studies. Over the years PE has evolved into much more than ever anticipated. Today, it has grown larger than one person is able to manage alone, so fortunately, our volunteers and work-study students make time to help out.

I find that our constant internal turnover really keeps things fresh as we maintain the integrity of PE's mission statement: *to promote rehabilitation by offering inmates information, education, and the opportunity for creative self-expression in a public forum.* While volunteers assist in moving the organization forward, I am able to focus on the bigger picture, meet new needs, and respond to new program goals and visions.

It is important to note that without the collaboration of all of our volunteers, students, and staff, PE simply would not be able to provide and maintain the vast number of services that we now offer. These services include: public prisoner journal entries on our website, website updates, illustrated poetry publications comprised solely of prisoner submissions, and of course, our fabulous newsletters.

We hope you enjoy this season and will be sure to contact us with any questions, concerns, or feedback.

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HOW P.E. WORKS

Let me welcome all the new and continuing members, and share with you what programs we are offering this cycle. Each cycle is defined by the printing of a newsletter. In the newsletter we will make certain offerings. You enroll for the programs that most interest you, and we do our best to send them to you.

An important piece to understand about our programs is how they are put together and mailed. Usually mailings are sent out in batches of 200 or more. This way we can take advantage of nonprofit bulk mailing rates. Using lower postal rates helps us afford to send more programs. It also means that if you miss out on the mailing because you wait too long to respond, or if you hear about a program after it is already mailed, you may miss out on being included in that program.

The good news is that we create new programs every cycle, and as one is just beginning you will have ample opportunity to join. If you send us a letter and we do not respond right away, it is because we cannot afford the postage or lack the people power to respond to each individual. It is better to save what funds we have for mailing programs to all of you.

For those of you who have been part of PE for a long time, you are familiar with this process, and for newer members I want to explain that I try to wait as long as I can between offering programs and then mailing them out so as to include as many folks as possible. Sometimes it makes you wait what seems like an outrageous amount of time from when you register until you get the program, but believe it or not, I am still getting registration forms from last summer. We continue to receive new requests, even as I am creating this fall newsletter. I hope this explains the wait for those of you who signed up for Massage, or the History of Music offered last June, and their late October mailings.

LETTER FROM GARY

Dear Friends,

I am once again privileged to create another issue of Prisoner Express News, and look forward to sharing with you information on all our upcoming programs, as well as recapping what we have been up to in the recent past. As always there are many new readers of this page and I believe it is important to get us all to the same place in understanding how PE operates.

New members join through a variety of channels and depending on how you have heard about the program, you may be working under a different set of assumptions as to how this program works. Our primary aim is to provide you with information, education and opportunities for creative self-expression in a public forum. How we carry that out often depends on our finances. PE has no regular source of funding and we are constantly on the lookout for donors and creating

fundraising opportunities to create and continue programming.

In creating the Prisoner Express program, I want it to be a partnership among all members. I certainly have access to more resources than many of you, but you know what programs and services would most enhance your daily life and help you find meaning in your daily activities. I understand how easy despair and depression can creep into people's lives in the free world, and I am sure there is an even easier path for it for those of you behind bars. How to stay centered and balanced is a challenge for all beings. Creating community is one way in which we can prevent ourselves from feeling so alone with our personal struggles. I know it can be problematic to show vulnerability when locked away, yet spending your life hiding how you are really feeling can compound your problems.

My hope is that within the confines of the PE community you can write and share the truth that is within you. By sharing it through our publications with other prisoners it can help set them free from some of the traps in their own minds. Much of life is made up of the stories we tell ourselves. PE projects focus on exploring your humanity, and in the process alerting folks in the free world that prisoners are complete members of humanity too.

In each newsletter, I usually share a little bit about myself, and my personal perspective. There are so many of you anymore who write about your lives to me, that I cannot keep with demand on the same individual and personal level as I was able to when we started out, so I use this forum as a means to reach everyone at the same time. Please just take it as a glimpse of me, rather than the position of the PE organization.

First, I am beginning this newsletter in late October. It is the Day Hurricane Sandy is to make landfall 200 miles away in NYC, and we are expected to receive high winds and rain tonight. We are in the middle of a colorful autumn and my guess is these high winds will blow all the leaves off the trees as well as blow down some trees themselves. I've seen towns in Florida [Homestead] flattened after hurricanes, so I take nothing for granted. It seems we are getting hit with some big storms lately and whether it is due to man made climate change is certainly something to look at. [One day later, and the east coast has been hit hard, but here in Ithaca we had a regular rain storm]

I watched the three presidential debates, and neither candidate mentioned climate changes as an issue. In many ways there are many similarities between the Democrats and Republicans, yet it is also clear to me that Mitt Romney is dangerous and an out of touch rich guy who doesn't publicly stand on principles. He changes positions often, depending on whom he talks to, and I will be so disappointed if Americans chose him as their national spokesman. You'll all be reading this after the election so you'll know the answer even as you're reading this. While I can fault President Obama for a number of policies, overall he is a clear speaker with

principled ideas working through a system weighted to benefit the privileged classes, and I see him as trying to assure equal opportunity for all. That seems like a great first step.

As many of you know I love to garden and preserve food. This has been a difficult garden year for a variety of reasons including drought and blistering heat. I moved away from my country land a year ago to live in town due to the better educational opportunities for my children. I miss country life, but am in town for the next many years. I rent my country house out and now finally have tenants who don't mind me gardening there.

I am working the land this fall to get it ready for next year, and in the next few weeks will plant plenty of garlic for next summer. Working with the earth keeps me sane. I am not sure why, but I it is clear how much meaning it gives to my life. It grounds me, and the relationship seems real and straightforward. When I talk about politics or social issues, it is opinions, but when I talk about gardening it is more about my soul. As long as I can continue to work on my land, I figure I can put up with living in town. In town I am more caught up in the rhythms of civilization and in the country it is the cycles of nature. Civilization does not nurture me at this stage of life and being closer to nature does.

If I had my way, you could each have a garden plot to work or share, but that is what moves me to a deeper more balanced place. I am interested in what moves, inspires, and balances you. It is great if we are able to create a program around your ideas. If not now, no one can exactly predict what will be in the future. I am interested in hearing your ideas for how PE can best create meaning in your life.

The program is growing and with growth spurts come changes. One of the pleasures of writing the newsletter and mailing it to all of you at the same time is that I can address many of the questions and comments I receive on a regular basis. PE has been listed in a number of resource guides. The services we provided two or three years ago are different than what we provide now. Being listed in these guides has led to a surge of mail asking for services without a corresponding increase in funds. I have never wanted to advertise this program, not because I didn't want to share it with as many folks as possible, but because I knew the result of free book packages and other fun educational programs would eventually overwhelm our fundraising capability. The more successful we are in mailing books, the more the word spreads, and the sooner we face funding problems.

I want you to participate in as many programs as interest you, and ask you to be aware that the pie is only so big. The more slices we cut the smaller each slice is. If you only sign up for programs you will follow thru on, then we can be most effective and serve the most people.

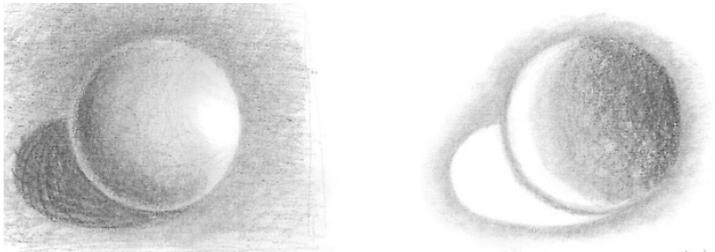
In the last couple of weeks I have been mailing out the programs from the last cycle. We have run into some problems and I appreciate your patience. For those of you who have followed thru on the Astronomy (1) project, we created an Astronomy (2) packet. It was

only mailed to those who sent in answers to the first packet by the required time. Some of you have since sent in your answers to Astro (1), but we do not have any more packets. If we print more I will send you Astro (2). It is clear that astronomy is an interesting field to many of you, and I am hoping Roy and others volunteers can create a third lesson after winter break in January. In a future cycle we can offer these Astronomy programs again, so please be patient if you missed them this time around.

We recognize that on occasion, mistakes do occur and inmates miss their mailings. If this should happen, please do not take it personally. More often than not, it turns out that we were slightly delayed in supplying everyone for one reason or another. So, at the moment, we ask that you please practice patience and persistence. If you still feel that you have missed your mailing, do send us a letter so that we may respond to your concern. More about delays can be read throughout this newsletter. Thank you in advance for your cooperation, forgiveness, and understanding.

Best to all,
GARY FINE

ASTRONOMY



4-1-12 — by, **THOMAS WOJNAROWSKI**

In the Astronomy packet we mostly focus on scientific facts, but in considering the vastness of creation and how we perceive it working, we open ourselves to the wonder of the universe. Below is a submission from **RON JEFFERSON** inspired by his study of the astronomy packet. I resonated with his thoughts and would be curious as to your response.

THE FORCE WITHIN

A force beyond the comprehension of mankind, it lives in the now, while we live in space and time. For it, there is no tomorrow, there is no yesterday. It is only because of our unawareness that we believe the sun has gone away.

We worry ourselves with the feeble chores of our day-to-day lives, moving along cluelessly, fearful that we will soon run out of time.

But if we stopped for just a moment and appreciated the natural beauty, we would realize that we are truly the divine.

What's the rush? You can only move with the universe. You have no bearing at all on which planet orbits first. Everything has its own course, you're just too occupied

*to see it, but whether you accomplish all your chores or not, that energy, you will never succeed it.
It is the all-knowing; the ever present; the one we believe we know. But, until you lose track of time and free your mind, the unknowing you will never know.
It is a breathtaking realization to be one with everything, to be a star, a planet and even an ecliptic plane.
I'm the sun, the moon – trust me, they're all the same. Is it not the same force driving the universe that also drives mankind? If you want to know the secrets of the universe then just dive deep into your being.
You are the universe, you are the all knowing, the unseen, you're the force within.
Emotion.*

– by, **RON JEFFERSON**

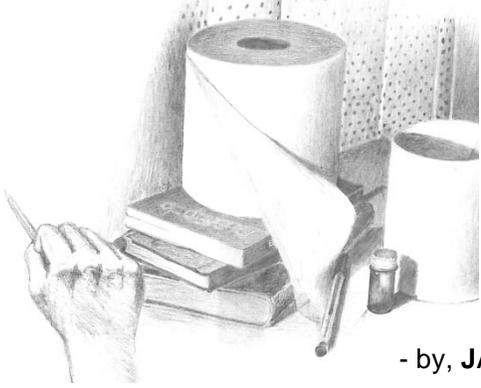
PROGRAM UPDATES

We recently mailed out copies of the **MESSAGE STUDIES AND THE ROOTS OF AMERICAN MUSIC** packet. The message packet is a self-study unit and I would appreciate feedback. The **MUSIC** pamphlet has critical thinking questions and I hope all of you who receive it will take the time to answer some or all the questions. It also asked for you to create your own songs within certain genres, and we hope to find a way to get some of them performed. The student who was to put out the **GENDER STUDIES** study unit became so caught up in her school responsibilities, and she could not follow-through on creating the packet. **CATHY**, who many of you remember as the student who coordinated last years art show, and also created **ASTRONOMY PROJECT #1** when the former volunteer bailed, showed up out of the blue last week and has said she will do something with the Gender Study Unit.

Cathy has finished school, and is hanging around town a little while longer, and stepping up to help us out. I have read an outline of what she is working on, and look forward to sending out that packet soon. We are also working on **POETRY VOLUME # 9**. All the poems are selected, and we are picking out artwork. Hopefully the final copy will be ready print and mail soon as well. It is going to be the most beautiful publication we have produced to date.

In the following pages, readers will find examples and descriptions of both: ongoing projects as well as upcoming projects available for the new cycle. All projects were completed individually. **PLEASE REGISTER FOR THE PROGRAMS YOU WANT MAILED TO YOU.** There is a sign up sheet at the back of this newsletter, or you can just write us a letter letting us know which programs appeal to you.

EXPEDITED BOOKS



- by, **JAMES SEPESI**

Sending book packages to folks in prison was how this program began. As time went on we were unable to afford the postage cost of this project. At one point we had 1,000 people waiting for a book package and no money for postage. A typical package costs \$4.00 to mail. **TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR A BOOK PACKAGE WE HAVE BEEN ASKING FOLKS TO SEND US A MINIMUM OF \$3.50 OR (8) STAMPS, AND WE WILL SEND THEM A PACKAGE OF BOOKS.** All of the books are donated, and what we have at any given time is dependent on our donations. Usually we have a variety of interesting books and we can make reasonable matches based on your interest. We ask anyone requesting an expedited book package to give us as many of your interests as possible. The narrower the information you provide us, the more likely we will not send you a good match to your interests.

Volunteers pack books; sometimes the packages fly out of here and other times it could take a few months until your books are packed. We work on a student schedule. For example they all leave town in the summer and during Dec and January. Sometimes we can fall way behind during those times. I ask you to be patient. Also sometimes we hold a letter until we can find the right book selection. If you have sent away for expedited books and have not heard from us certainly write and remind us, but don't assume we have forgotten you or are trying to rip off your stamps. As a volunteer organization our movements ebb and flow based on funds and volunteers. We usually put between 4 and 6 books in a package. Please let us know of any special rules in your facility for receiving books.

IF YOU SEND US A CHECK TO COVER EXPEDITED BOOK COSTS, MAKE IT OUT TO: CTA/PE.

POETRY PROJECT

You may have received **POETRY VOLUME 9**. REBECCA, a new student worker who will be graduating soon, is compiling it even as I write this. This project has been created by all of you. The poems you have shared with us compelled us to create this project. Here is how it works. You submit your original poems to us. Student volunteers read through all the poems and select the ones that touch and inspire them. We then put together a collected volume of poems that reflect all the submissions we have received. Everyone who sends us

a poem for consideration will get a copy of the volume. We are already collecting poems for volume 10. As soon as we have the poems selected for a volume [#9], we begin setting new poetry into consideration for the next edition. Regarding volume #9, I will send a copy to everyone who has sent in a poem whether you have been considered for 9 or are in a folder waiting to be considered for #10. Please be sure your name and ID # are on your poems, and if you are sending a book request or an essay with your poetry it would be best if it is on a separate sheet of paper as they all live in separate folders. We will also illustrate the poetry anthology with some of the artwork that we have received through our programs. Here are a few poems for your consideration:

CARMINE SLACKER

*I had a cockerel named red
So lazy, he looked half dead;*

*He wouldn't cock-a-doodle...
When other roosters did,
He'd simply nod his head.*

- by, **ROBERT L. HAMBRICK**

ROSES AND SUNSHINE

*Early morning sunshine glistens
as it beams fracture in the dew.
Casting off a sparkle effect
as if a million lights were shining through.*

*Tiny hairs along a roses' emerald stem
have collected so many tiny drops.
Where they come together to form a bead
and like tiny rain from clouds they plop!*

*Upon the ground amid green grass
they have fallen to rest once more.
Alighted gracefully as an angel perched
upon heavens celestial door.*

*There is a gentle warming caress
as dawn's hand rests upon a rose.
Enticing much beauty from within
to watch a velvet cloak unfold.*

*Into this world with crimson silk
a morning rose is spread anew.
Awakening beneath a golden sun
to flaunt its beauty true.*

*While those sparkly little drops
once held upon such rose.
Have spent their life remembered
seem where beauty grows.*

- by, **BRANDON RUSHING**

THIS I KNOW

*I've never met the Buddha
Or spoken with God, Allah, Krishna,
Or any other spiritual beings
It's not that I doubt their existence,
I've just never felt their presence
However,
I've met with some holy men
I've been around evil men
I've even seen some evil holy men
But then,
I've also seen the stars
I've seen nature untouched
I've seen the water flow, the grass grow.
The winds blow, the birds crow.
The moon glow, and the sun show
And from that I learned this...
It's not prayer or piety
Or faith or fear that master
It's the understanding of reality
That completes the human spirit.*

– by, **KRISTOPHER SMITH**

SALUTE

*Strife and war intertwine with life and love.
A soldier said, "There is more honor following the dove."
Red, white and blue binds us, and bands us.
An American soldier said, "Don't make a fuss."
This soldier had shed blood and bone
while overseas protecting my home.
"Sir," said I, "may I ask you just one question?"
"Sure," said he, while almost standing at attention.
"Did you lose your arm, and eye, fighting for me?"
"Sir, it was my job, and I still have one eye for seeing."
Grinning he said, "And one arm for shooting."
A tear falling down my cheek, I stood to salute.*

– by, **GERALD CAIN**

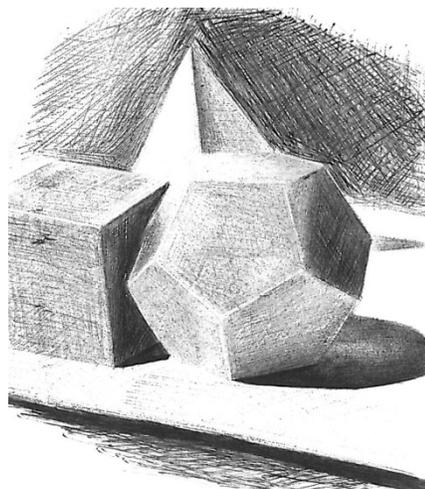
FORGET TO REMEMBER

*Sometimes I forget to remember –
That life is short
But love is long;
That while looking outward
To keep looking inward;
That a strong mind is good
But a soft heart is better
That I may be smart
But still know so little
That I'm just a man
But I'm also a human
Sometimes I forget what I'm doing here
But then I remember.*

– by, **KRISTOPHER SMITH**

ART PROGRAM

The good news is that a bona fide artist who understands issues regarding prisoners and art is now leading our art program. TREACY visits prisons in the northeast and mid-west and gives workshops in art for prisoners. **SHE HAS TWO ART SHOWS SET UP FOR THIS WINTER TO DISPLAY YOUR WORK.** We would appreciate any artwork you would care to share for display. In the past the funds from any artwork sold is used to fund the program. It has never been a lot of money, but every bit helps. We also have offered scholarships to the participants of the shows. In the past we offered \$100 first prize scholarship, \$75 second prize scholarship and TEN \$20 honorable mention scholarships. Sometimes we give out more in scholarship funds than collect in funds for selling artwork, but it is nice to offer these scholarships. Please feel free to write Treacy if you have any questions about the art program, and if you are already part of it please keep sending in your assignments.



– by, **BILLY SELL**

TREACY'S MESSAGE

To Artists and Viewers of Art:

During an art class with a group of men in a mental health unit of a maximum security prison, I read a statement from Georg Gadamer, the 20th century German philosopher: "A stunted tree in itself does not express misery, but a drawing of that tree can." When I asked the class what Gadamer means by this, they all ball parked the answer: "The tree stands for something else than just a tree – maybe your feelings." Yes, the tree as a drawing can become a metaphor. This class is familiar with my art. I asked this class, "When I create a painting of a chair am I trying to show the viewer what a chair looks like?" "No," they answer, "The chair is about ...waiting...maybe about death...about being in here...." Yes, the chair has become a metaphor.

I tell this class, many of whom will never leave prison, that their jobs as artists is to show the viewer that the tree is more than a tree, that the chair is more than a chair. I tell this class that their jobs as artists is to look

BEYOND themselves to the viewer, so that the viewer discovers the metaphor as the viewer's own metaphor, such that the artist is no longer important.

In prison, there are two deal breakers to this understanding of art as metaphor. What are they?

Well, the first deal breaker is that the viewer does not see the drawn tree as anything more than a tree. This happens all the time. This is when the CO or the staff person comes into the art class and says, "Wow, that looks just like a chair, I could sit down in it." This is when art is understood as a "correct" representation of what it is about. A chair looks exactly as a chair should be; that movie star looks exactly like that movie star looks. I tell my classes, "Listen, you are already inmates in a department of corrections. When art is only about how "correct" it looks, you then become a double inmate in the department of art corrections.

Of course, this does not only happen in prison. My husband creates bronze nude sculptures and has very sophisticated clients. I have heard these clients say about his art, "Wow, she has all of her fingers, ten of her toes, and would you make the breasts a little bigger." And I am thinking, "Whoa people, this is not a sex toy! This is a metaphor!

I tell my classes I am not interested in their getting it "correct". I am interested in their developing a sense of "perceptual authority". "Perceptual authority" is the capacity of seeing something with one's own eyes before someone else told you how to see it; like seeing the sky before someone dictated to you that blue was good and grey was bad. Can you look at the sky for yourself and experience it without the filters that you were taught? Do we see anything anew without someone telling how to see it?

The second deal breaker for this understanding of art is that the viewer understands that the drawing or painting is a metaphor, but the viewer does not discover that metaphor as his or her own metaphor. This happens all the time in prison as it happens all the time in art world. When the viewer does not connect with the metaphor in a personal way, the art becomes "objectified." By this I mean, the viewer sees the art as if they are seeing an animal in the zoo. I tell my classes that I want Warden "So-and-So" to see their art and say, "Wow, that's me! That's how I feel!" Probably not going to happen but at least that's the direction I want the art to go in.

If the viewer only sees the metaphor as the artist's metaphor, then it becomes the "animal in the zoo" thing where the art, particularly in the case of prison art, becomes "let's see what the people in prison are making" not giving the art serious respect as art.

I often ask my classes why do people want to see their art? The most frequent answer I get from my students is that the public is interested in prison art because it allows the public to see that prisoners have feelings just like everyone else; that they are human beings like everyone else. My concern about this attitude is that it is another way of saying: "Bring me your artwork

and I will decide whether you are a human being." However, I want to cut to the chase where deciding the status as human being is not left to anyone's opinion; we are all already human beings. When we understand this as a given, we can focus on the art as art. Art becomes real and not a fake way of humanizing someone.

I had a student in a prison class tell me, "I draw from the heart." I told him, "Personally, I think the heart and the head are both a little overrated. You follow the heart or you follow the head and the next thing you know, you're in this dreadful place called prison."

Try following your eyes. The eyes will not lead you to dreadful places because they do not judge. If you find yourself looking with judgment: good sky, bad sky; you know that the heart or the head have taken over the controls. The eyes only want to listen. A good example of how the eyes "listen" is this written description by Manuel Gonzalez (#T42888) looking at light coming into his cell. Because he allows his eyes to listen without judgment, he can experience the light in how it presents itself, not as he thinks the light should be

"Inside the cell I could see that the light and dark tones are not flat. I notice the light and dark patterns near the windows. The areas around the windows are extremely dark, but the area where the light comes from the window is bright. There is no in-between color tone or grey near the window surrounding."

"However, in the "reflective light" coming from the window and striking the right side wall, I could see the change in color tones mentioned in the curriculum. I noticed the darkest tone, the grey tone, and the light "white" tone. I could see the difference from the reflective light also coming from the front door where you would see the two reflections from the front door window on the wall in the back. The reflective light is coming from the outside the front door which is a different form of light and it does not have the different shading tone surrounding it."

Manuel goes on to explain the bright light on the concrete bed; how the light changes when an object is placed in the light and how the light from the object is seen reflected upon the surface it is placed.

When the eyes are trained to "listen" in this way, perceptual authority is developed. In Manuel's description, he is not speaking of a "correctness" of light coming into his cell. He is describing his "visual experience." Another person might describe the light differently. Both are valid.

Ironically, the metaphor that I spoke above cannot be "manufactured". If it is "manufactured", it becomes contrived – an insincere Hallmark card. "Meaning" is always and already and everywhere; we just have to allow it to show itself without pushing it. I don't believe art is a tool for our expression. We are the tools for art. In other words we don't use art as a way of expression; art uses us.... Art uses us to allow meaning to show itself; meaning that is always there, meaning that is always already, meaning that is always everywhere; meaning that is larger than we are.

TREACY'S CURRICULUM & PROJECTS

Gary and I hope to be able to offer another curriculum, a sequel to *Draw For Life*, in the spring newsletter. Depending upon money, it would be either a color curriculum (costs more money) or a curriculum on composition (let's stop putting that object right in the middle of the paper) or a curriculum on art history (we are all a product of where we came). In the meantime, for those who wish to have a copy of *Draw For Life*, please send in a request.

However, we are offering a new winter project:

THE MYSTERY PAINTING PROJECT –

This is a project in which you will be asked to work on a painting whose identity will not be revealed until it is finished. You will be sent materials with paper to instruct you how to do this. We will send paper that can be used in any status location (SHU, etc.) so that no one needs to be eliminated because they can only use "pen and computer paper".

I won't give any more details, after all, it is a **MYSTERY ART-SHOWS FOR THE WINTER (FEBRUARY AND MARCH)**. This winter we will have two art shows. We will have an art show in a bank in Ithaca for the months of February and March. The other show will be the annual art show at Cornell for the month of February. Please send in your artwork by the first week of January for both shows (we will curate the art to the different shows depending upon what comes in and how it goes together). Of course, the sooner, the better, so if you have artwork finished now, send it in now.

This is a very early notice of a show that is developing for March 2014. It is a show that will be based upon working in a 6" circle. The show will be divided between Cornell and a gallery in Philadelphia. All work will be shown at Cornell; the work for Philadelphia will be selected. We will give a mock example of a 6" circle in the spring newsletter as an example of the size. So start seeing in circles.

– TREACY

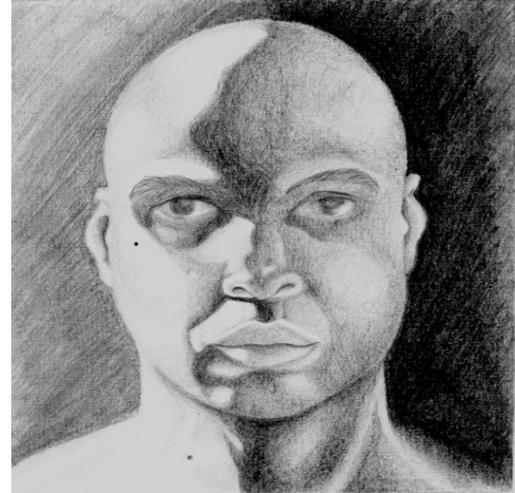
EXAMPLES OF ARTWORK FROM THE DRAW FROM LIFE CURRICULUM ASSIGNMENTS

FIGURE DRAWING



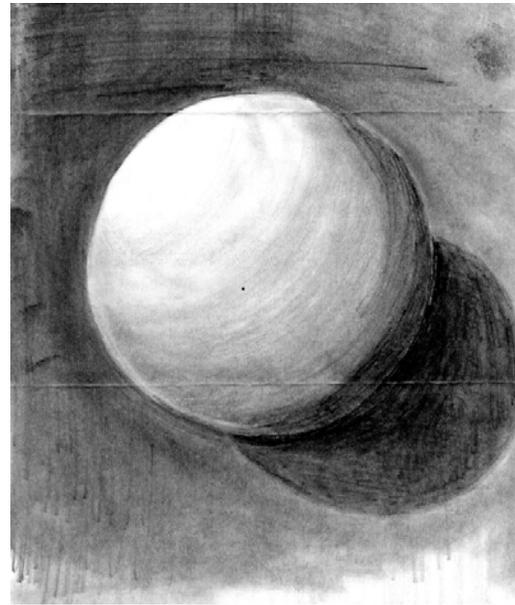
by, JAMES SEPESI #920102

SELF PORTRAIT



by, JOEDANIEL BOISSE #680079

DRAWING OF SPHERE



by, JACKEY SOLLARS #646400

PE BOOK CLUB

While we can't send personalized free book packages to everyone, we do have a free book club you can join. We will get 500 copies of a new book, *THE LIFE BEFORE US*, donated and we will send you the book along with background information about the book and some of critical thinking questions. After you read the book, we ask you to answer the questions and share what you thought of the book. Volunteers will read all your responses and create a compilation of the answers they find most interesting. It can be a fun project and it is interesting to see all the different perspective we can take away from the same book. In life, we can all witness the same conversation and have completely different opinions on what went on. I hope we can get a glimpse of that by participating in this book club and seeing all the ways this book might affect the reader. I have just read the book, and it definitely provides food for thought. This

book was part of a reading project for all entering Cornell freshman. Everyone who sends in some answers will receive the compilation document of the most interesting responses.

THE "LIFE BEFORE US" is the story of an orphaned Arab boy, Momo, and his devotion to Madame Rosa, a dying 68-year-old, 220 lb. survivor of Auschwitz and retired "lady of the night." Momo has been one of the ever-changing rag bag of whore's children at Madame Rosa's boarding-house in Paris ever since he can remember. But when the check that pays for his keep no longer arrives and Madame Rosa becomes too ill to climb the stairs to their apartment, he determines to support her any way he can.

This sensitive, slightly macabre love story has a supporting cast of transvestites, pimps, and witch doctors. Published by Romain Gary under the pseudonym of Émile Ajar, this novel won France's premier literary prize, the Prix Goncourt, in 1975, making Gary the only author to have won the Goncourt twice (illicitly). *The Life Before Us* breaks many other rules, as well as the reader's heart.

JOURNAL PROJECT

Participants in this project keep a journal for a year and send it to us. We have a team of volunteers who read thru your journals and keep them filed and organized. They select portions of your journals and post them on a Prisoner Express Journal Blog, so anyone in the free world can read them. We used to type whole journals online, but it would limit who was getting typed. This way more people's work can be highlighted. The journal is a great way to sort through your thoughts and revisit some of your memories. We have an instruction sheet on how to keep a journal that we mail to all participants. We just mailed it out a few weeks ago and when we have 200 new participants we will mail it out again. You do not have to wait to receive one and can begin sending your entries as you wish. You can send them as often as you like. Some people send them every few days and others once per month. Whatever works for you is okay with us. The volunteers will contact you after they have received a few of your submissions and can answer your questions. We are unable to send blank paper for you to write on. When we have tried it is usually confiscated. Write about whatever is important to you. Sometimes folks think they have nothing to write about, but I believe once you get started, even if you start by writing about how bored you are, something comes to the surface. Please consider sharing your thoughts with us. We care.

CHESS CLUB

So many of you have written to let me know how much you like to play Chess. A number of years ago we began sending out newsletters on how to improve your chess game. Grant, a student at the university has volunteered to take this project on. His first lesson is at the printers, and should be mailed to you soon. He is working with

the Cornell Chess Club and they have agreed to answer your chess questions, so send them in and we will send the answers back in our next chess newsletter. Please feel free to sign up for the next edition of the chess newsletter, which hopefully will be mailed in early spring 2013. Chess, like art and writing, is one of those activities where when you are engaged in the game, the bars can temporarily disappear.

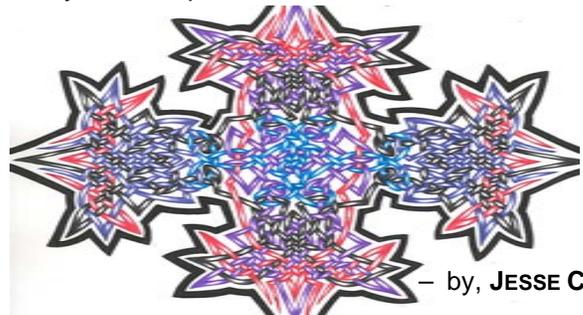


– by, **LESTER RANSBURG**

HEALTH & WELLNESS STUDY GUIDE

KATE, a student at the university studying nutrition, has volunteered to create a packet for you focused on health and wellness. In the year she has worked in the program she has been focused on providing excellent service to all of you. I imagine this will be a comprehensive and informative guide for those of you concerned about creating good health habits. It will also illustrate how the mind and body work. To me that is always a fascinating study, and one that often leaves me in awe of creation. Below is **KATE'S INVITE** to the program:

The way we take care of our bodies and the lifestyle choices we make directly influence our thoughts, emotions, and decisions. In prison it may seem like many things are out of your control, including decisions that relate to your health and well being. While it's easy to blame circumstances for our problems, there is often much more we have control of than we care to admit. Knowledge about nutrition and other areas of health is useless if it is not put into practice. However, when such knowledge is put to use, it is empowering and it often times improves self-esteem. The goal of this packet is to identify aspects related to the care of one's body in which better choices can be made to improve quality of life and prevent future health problems from arising. This packet will explore the topics of diet, exercise, and sleep among other health and wellness topics, with a focus on how they relate to prison life.



– by, **JESSE CLASBY**



– by, **RONNIE MORGAN**

GARDENING & BASIC HOMESTEADING

So many of you have written at one time or another that you hope to get out of prison, and find a piece of land in the country and set up a homestead. This packet will primarily focus on how to grow vegetables, but will also address issue of finding land, building low cost housing, alternative energy sources and basic do it your self tips. I have lived in the rural countryside for 25 years. Having been raised in the NYC, I was not trained for any of the tasks that are part of country living. I have learned some of the essentials through necessity, some from watching friends and yet there is still so much to learn.

I am comfortable creating a packet on gardening, and preserving the foods you harvest. As conditions keep changing in this society, I believe it will be empowering to learn how to grow your own food, save seeds for future planting, and preserve the food you grow. I will also use the extensive collection in the library on alternative, inexpensive home building and alternative energy to create this packet of information for those of you who are interested in getting back to nature, or at least learning to live on the fringes of the cash economy. I will make this interesting, informative and fun. Please sign up if you are interested in receiving this pack

THEME WRITING PROJECT

Every month I suggest a theme topic for you to write on. If you write on the topic, volunteers type it up and we compile all of the themes into a packet. We will send the complete packet to everyone who contributes a theme. It is a great way to practice writing, share stories, and read what others have to say. So many folks have written that the effect of being isolated causes their minds to play tricks on them. Reading writings on a common theme can provide you with insight on how you are feeling. As I wrote before many folks in the free world struggle with self esteem and mental health issues, and it is no surprise that these struggles move inside to prisons given the makeup of modern society and add to that the

environment you are living in. It is no shame to struggle with mental health, stress, and self esteem issues, and it is much to your credit, when you can find ways to address these thoughts. I believe “writing to sanity “ is one route available to you, and I hope that many of you will utilize one or more of our writing programs to explore your inner self, and share it with us. Despite that preamble please know that you can write anything you care to on all the topics suggested. It does not need to be some soul bearing expose, but wherever your creative muse takes you. I reprint some stories from the previous theme topics in each newsletter.

My hope is to inspire those of you who do not participate in this project to join. For the effort of writing your thoughts down on a theme you can receive an interesting thought provoking packet of themes. Please be sure to put your name and number on each of your submissions. I have noticed over the years how many of you improve your writing skills, by regularly participating in this project, and I want to commend you for staying with it. Your efforts inspire me. If you can put individual submissions on its own paper, rather than putting a couple of themes on one sheet, it makes it much easier for us to keep track of your writing.

I do not print submissions that I believe will be censored by prison mailrooms as that can keep the whole packet from being delivered. I also do not print submissions that I believe generate hate. If you have a problem with an individual and want to write about it, I understand and encourage it, but if you have a problem with an individual and then generalize it to include every one of that race, religion, ethnicity etc then it is just an exercise in some stereotypical hatred. There is too much of that out there already and I do not want to add to it by publicizing it in this project.

My intent is to examine our feelings and use the experience to create ourselves as more compassionate beings. We have all been wronged in this life and we have all done wrong. This project is an attempt to externalize some of these feelings and to transmute these energies into their flip side, which is compassion, understanding and forgiveness. It is a tall order, but also a great reward for anyone who can do it.

UPCOMING THEME TOPICS		
TOPIC		DUE DATE
TEMPTATION	–	JANUARY 1, 2013
HEAT	–	FEBRUARY 1, 2013
BULLIES	–	MARCH 1 2013
TRYING AGAIN	–	APRIL 1 2013
TOLERANCE	–	MAY 1 2013
IN THE DARK	–	JUNE 1, 2013
FIRST KISS	–	JULY 1 2013
CLEANING UP	–	AUGUST 1 2013

I reprint a small sampling of themes from previous months in each newsletter. I wish I could print more but it gets to costly if this newsletter gets too large. The way to read all the submissions is to send in your writing. There is not right or wrong, good or bad. There is only you putting out your thoughts using words on paper. Please consider writing.

– **ROLE MODELS**

I TAUGHT THEM

Big brothers are in a position to be role models. The little brother usually idolizes his older sibling, following him around like a puppy dog, imitating his every mood and action. Little sisters also rely on a big brother. He is the first male, other than the father, with whom the girl interacts and becomes aware of her femininity. And when some prospective boyfriend gets frisky and steps over the line, "Oh no you don't: I'll tell my big bother on you," --- is usually enough to slow the roaming hands down a bit. No doubt but that big brothers have unique influence on the younger kids, for good or ill; they are teachers and protectors. But this prominence carries a responsibility. How many boys can trace their first cigarette, or beer, back to their big brother? Who taught them to lie convincingly, or how to shoplift, or to peek in the neighbor girl's bedroom window?

Out of six kids, I was the oldest brother in my family. My siblings were good playmates when I was young, but I soon out-grew them and spent my time with friends my own age. I lorded over my brothers and sisters by virtue of size and strength. Only dad kept me in check; and mom, because she had the backing of dad. As the years went by, my lifestyle pretty much kept my siblings at a fair distance. We were always a tight-knit family; but of course, each of us had our own lives to establish, and this naturally led to separations.

After my first stint in prison during the 70's, we were at a family Christmas get together, us kids, (now with kids of our own) were sitting around gabbing, when the subject of role models came up. "Well," I announced, "I guess I have been an excellent model for all of you," I said. Everyone was instantly silent, mouths dropped open, and all eyes turned on me in disbelief. "Yeah," I continued brightly, "out of all of us six, I'm the only one who ever smoked, drank, did drugs, or broke the law. So see, I have been a good big brother," I smiled. "I taught you all... what NOT to do!"

– by, **ROBERT L. HAMBRICK**

Prison is not somewhere I thought I would find a role model. They are hard to find in prison, especially if you are looking for a positive one. When I first got to prison, I was confused and overwhelmed. I had never known anyone who had been to prison and the ladies in my county jail made prison sound like a place for fun and good times. I never bought that idea. Why would a place used as punishment be such a fun place to be?

Several people I met my first year seemed to be having a good time. But these inmates were usually involved in abusive relationships, drugs, or just seeing how many rules they could break just for a good time.

During my second year in prison I noticed an older woman I'll call "Mrs. P.". She carried herself in a way that made her stand out. Mrs. P had a quiet, dignified, peace about herself. I noticed that she was respectful of those

around her, both inmates and officers, even when they may not have deserved it. Mrs. P was involved in chapel activities and enjoyed an inmate work assignment that kept her active. She had been incarcerated for about 15 years and had over a decade remaining on her sentence. Yet Mrs. P didn't display a negative attitude or any worry about her future. Inside I desired to follow her example.

Inner strength and discipline are required to display these behaviors daily. It isn't easy to be respectful to those actively disrespecting you; to keep your mind focused on positive areas of your life and improving yourself instead of saying "what's the use"; and to do the "right thing" when doing the "wrong thing" seems to make your prison life so much easier. I would like to say that I soon was behaving just like I saw Mrs. P behaving. I would like to say that I became a positive role model for other inmates, but I didn't. My respect for Mrs. P grew even more.

I have since transferred to a different prison. I no longer see Mrs. P on a daily basis. I wonder if Mrs. P ever set out to be a role model to others. I wonder if she knew I considered her a role model. I know I never told her how much I respected and admired her. The longer I spend in prison, the brighter and rarer a person like Mrs. P seems.

– by, **Yolinda Zinnerman**



– by, **VALENCIA C.**

– **PROMISES**

"Promises are never kept, rules are meant to be broken, and love never lasts. I can tell you that, son."

The young man looked up at his grandfather and his thoughts held him silent. He sat at this great man's feet as he reclined in his thick, wooden chair and he stared at him. His grandfather held much wisdom that had guided him in his short twelve years of life. These wisdoms, as he saw it, led him closer to being a man since they were given from the oldest man he knew, as well as the coolest.

The young man's grandfather or "Pops" as he called him was a generation roofer who worked hard during his days and relaxed at home every night without exception. That was life as he lived it, as he viewed it. Pops' wife of

sixty-five years had passed last year and he was well into his retirement, ten years. He had defied a lot in his years of trying to establish himself as a Black businessman and a lot of the people who promised him help were generally the first to fail him in keeping those promises. At a young age he learned the oral lesson that he had just given his young grandson, Ernest. Within that statement were years of hard study, a rough life, and good love. Within that statement was experience, and young Ernest took it to heart.

Ernest set out one day for school. He was fifteen years old now and had just moved into a new neighborhood on the Southside of St. Louis. He didn't know anyone yet, but that would all change in due time. Ernest was observant, quiet and a thoughtful boy for his age. These are some small things he picked up from being taken care of by Pops as he grew up. He smelled the burn of hot tar nearby and he immediately was reminded of a time when he saw Pops climbing a roof in his white suit and "checking his money" as he called it. When he came down from the roof he came over to Ernest, with a huge smile on his face. "Big guy!" he would always say. He put out his seventy-five year old hand that still had a young man's firmness to it and Ernest met it with his young unworthy hand; and smiled a smile of love and endearment for his favorite person. Caught in his thoughts, Ernest ran into someone, dropped his books, and anger took over his face.

He looked up and just as he was about to say something that would fit with his large frame for a boy his age that would threaten the majority of those he faced, he was struck quiet. "I'm so sorry," she said. He remained silent, dropped his head, dropped down and began to slowly collect his books and papers.

"Are you alright? I didn't see you coming," she said trying to catch eyes with him, almost stooping down to find a reaction on his face. She hated to be the cause of any harm to him, she was so clumsy.

Ernest was fine, however, love struck. His mind raced as to what to say. He moved his head every time she stooped to speak to him. If she saw his face she would see, she would know. "I'm good," he managed still skirting her vision. "I'm alright."

"Okay I'm still sorry, okay? I'm just a little clumsy. I always do stuff like that."

"No that was on me. I was thinking about something and I wasn't paying attention. It wasn't your fault," he said. He now managed to look at her, hoping that he had gained any semblance of self control over his face, because his heart now beat, it seemed, well beyond what his chest could tolerate.

"I'm Amber," she said, holding her hand out. He almost laughed because it reminded him of the memory that had just taken his mind away, now a new memory of a much more delicate hand had taken his heart from his chest.

"I'm Ernest," he smiled.

"What?" she asked bashfully, stretching out the middle of the word. She saw the light in his eyes when she stuck her hand out.

"Nothing," he almost chuckled. "I was just thinking about something, that's why I bumped into you. Nothing," he smiled, "Nothing."

"Well, you got to tell me now. Maybe you're laughing at me, I don't know."

He smiled. It occurred to him, when he thought back at this moment, that he was no longer shy with her, no longer intimidated by her. He knew that, for lack of knowing a better way of saying it, that they would be good friends.

He told her about what he was thinking about and about his grandfather and how he missed him. Amber listened and she smiled and interjected a few times just to ask about his grandfather. They talked about his old neighborhood and he found out that she was born and raised right there on the Southside. Amber was a small framed sixteen year old. She was short, thin, wore pink eyeglasses that fit snugly against her face and over her small round nose. Her smile covered her face and her teeth would shine if the sun caught them just right. The first thing Ernest noticed, however, was her eyes. They were large, hazel; almond shaped and could catch you by surprise if you didn't know she was to look your way. If you asked Ernest at any time during his life and hers, she was the precise description of beauty. If you walked by, you would have thought Ernest to be the oldest of the two by a few years. He was a tall, well built, and an awkwardly agile youngster for his age. He had even already begun to develop a deep, resonant voice that he hated and tried to speak as softly as possible for it not to be noticed. That never worked. Amber heard it; she would mention it much later in their friendship. She would tell him how comforting his voice is, and then she would joke about how it was needed because his size could throw the average person off.

The two stood there talking for what seemed like and turned out to be hours. They were late for school and decided to miss school together, something that neither of them had done before in their lives. They spent the day going all around the Southside. Amber showed him all of the places that the teenagers frequented. She was smart, he found out, and her laugh infected him from the inside out. It made him smile. They realized that they had several classes together and that she lived on the next street over from his. They exchanged numbers about midday and held hands the rest. She had never met a boy like him and he had never met a girl that he wanted to even talk to. He did not realize that he was pessimistic in how he thought, in how he interpreted Pops' advice. Rules were definitely meant to be broken or else he would have never met and got to know Amber today. Promises, he understood, could be broken because people do lie. Love, however, as Ernest now experienced briefly had to last. This was his hope to himself that afternoon as he walked home. In his mind he went over all that he and Amber had talked about, the laughs, and the concern he saw on her face as he spoke about his Pops. Something happened between them that was magical, that was beautiful, that made him humbled by her thought.

When he arrived home his mother had already begun preparing dinner for the family. He joined her in her nightly preparations something he always enjoyed. "If you can't take care of yourself, you'll never be able to help a woman out when you get old enough," she would say, too much for him to want to remember, but he did at this moment. He looked over to her in deep thought.

"What, boy? What's on your mind?" she said in a knowing tone.

"Ma," he started, "Love... you know, being in love."

Her brow furrowed. "Love? Boy what's going on with you?"

"No, I was just thinking about something Pops told me a long time ago. He said that love didn't last. Is that true?"

She laughed. She grabbed her huge son, who towered over her, pulled his head down and kissed his brow. "Love lasts, Baby," she smiled the words out, "It lasts... I promise you that."

— by, **AHMAD ADISA**

I remember the day as if it was yesterday, and the promise that was made. I was 7 years old, in the 2nd grade, it was the Christmas season, and our class had been chosen to do a Christmas play in the gymnasium. All the school kids would see it, and all parents were invited. We were taken to the gym for rehearsals, and it was during this time that I was selected to play a part in the play. I was given some lines on a piece of paper, and told "you need to memorize these lines." As my part in the play came around, I was called by the teacher and told exactly where to stand, then she had me read my lines. Explaining that on the day of the play, the stage would be a little different. Because we would set up the stage to look like a manger. That day I flew home all excited. When daddy arrived home I rushed out to his truck to tell him "Daddy, I have been picked to play a part in the Christmas play!" He said, "That's great son, but I have to work that day, and may not make it." I went to sleep that night wondering if momma would make it to see me in the play. She never came home while I was still awake.

When I awoke the next morning dad was gone to work. I knew the routine, get ready for school. Momma was still in the house, but would leave soon, headed for work at the bar. So I rushed into the living room, to find momma sitting in the recliner with a cup of coffee on her lips. "Momma, guess what?" She said, "What son?" "I have been picked to play a part in the Christmas Play at school, and I was wondering if you would come and watch me?" She swallowed her coffee, and looked thoughtful. Then she wanted to know the day and the time. I told her and gave her the paper from the school. She took it, and read it, and then responded, "I will be there, I promise."

I eagerly awaited the day, as I practiced my lines. I learned my lines, and could say them with my eyes closed. Then the day finally arrived for the play. Our entire class was taken to the gym; we were dressed in our costumes, and continually reminded to be sure we

could say our lines. I'll never forget my moment of entry to the stage. I searched the crowd of parents and students for my mother. I could not find her. I was stepping forward to repeat my lines, still my eyes searched. I completed my lines, and resumed my position with the other young actors. Momma was not there, and it hurt.

School was over, and I caught the bus home. Everyone seemed impressed with my performance. But the one that mattered the most was not there.

Some years later, while living in Beaumont, I met a young woman named Diedre Driver, who had a young son named Major Driver. She had him enrolled in school; he was in the 1st grade. It was Christmas, and her boy was in the school play. She had a drinking problem, just as my mother had so many years ago. Diedre had been invited to come see her son in the Christmas play. She had no transportation, and I offered to take her. She claimed she did not want to go. I said, "We're going." We got ready, and went, Diedre placed her beer in a soft drink cup, placed a top with a straw in it. We went to school, and watched the play.

I will never forget the look of joy on Major's face, as he searched the crowd, and his eyes landed on his mother. He did his part with a shine on his face that could only express pure joy. When the play was over, and school let out, Diedre gathered up Major in her arms, and we took him home. I know that memory will be with that boy all his life.

Promises, many are the ones that parents make to their children. I know some us in this prison have kids; many will not be there for their Christmas plays, or other events in their lives. For some it's just a continuation of what has already occurred in our own lives. Don't you think it's time to reverse some of the absenteeism in the children's lives?

— by, **TOMMY SANDERS**



— by, **MARTIN RIVERS**



— by, **MICHAEL DAVID RUSSELL**

— **DREAMING**

Dreaming is such a mysterious activity in spite of extensive scientific research such as; when your mind and body rest and recuperate, your dreams take you into numerous weird and wonderful situations. You can be the leading character in your own play.

You can soar and dive like an eagle, swim like a fish, leap buildings, defy space, time and gravity. You can be a hero, or villain or both. You can make up for all you real or imagined inadequacies.

In dreams you are not required to suspend your disbelief because in this parallel universe, the impossible and absurd seem effortless.

In 1957, Hugh Everett proposed the theory that numerous parallel worlds exist. According to the theory, each time a Quantum event occurs, the universe splits. With each split, new universes are created, each of which contains a clone of you.

If you follow this theory to its logical conclusion, you could be experiencing anything from one to a billion different universes during the course of your dreams.

That's what the scientists have to say, but dreaming can be something as simple as what kind of car or house you would like or a slice of that pie that a loved-one is cooking.

But dreams can become reality with the right formula; dedication, discipline, plus hard work can make most dreams become a reality, because with this formula you will learn to prioritize responsibilities making life more than just a dream...

— by, **WALTER MYERS RICE**

GETTING THROUGH THE NIGHT

It is near midnight I think, somewhere in that neighborhood, and I am sitting here inside my solitary confinement cell listening to the sound of rain drops bashing themselves against the concrete walls of this super segregated prison unit. Tucked away from view, deep in the piney woods region of East Texas. Out of sight and out of mind on a drizzly March night in the year of 2012. The deep sonorous rumble of thunder churning just overhead rolls slowly and ponderously across the measure of my cell. Across the length of it and the width of it, from the top to the bottom of it, filling it with all of the noise and feel of a behemoth brushing passed. I enjoy sitting here alone inside the cell listening to the world around me. Tonight's storm is a real treat and I am enjoying the ride with a cup of cold water coffee. It is amazing how well we can see with our ears, recognizing sounds and identifying objects beyond our sight simply by listening intently to them. It's a game I play here in Sol. Each day I spend time sitting with eyes closed and ears open and I have been doing that since the day I entered solitary confinement sixteen years ago...

One of my legs was sawed off back in ninety three, while I've been behind bars the consequence of smoking cigarettes and I was warned that worse would come if I didn't quit, but I couldn't. You hear? I had smoked cigarettes for thirty of my forty two years and I was as addicted to nicotine as a newly born crack baby is to cocaine and before I even left the hospital the guard assigned to my room and I were sneaking into a small bathroom together to light up. He stood holding a can of air spray and I sat holding my stump, both of us puffing away to get that nicotine relief sending clouds of smoke billowing up to the tiny ventilation fan wheezing away overhead with each exhale. Two years later the state banned tobacco from prisons. That decree did not stop tobacco from coming inside but it did make it harder to get, and because of that I believe there just might be a way to quit.

It was an audacious idea, and shortly became my plan: to have myself thrown into solitary confinement where tobacco could not get to me. I consoled myself that it was necessary and for my own good that if I didn't go through with it then I was doomed, all of which was true. The only problem that I could see in the scheme was that the act required to get dumped into Sol; I had no idea of what to do...

5,840 days have passed since I fathomed that dilemma and I have lived every minute of them in solitary confinement and more too, I sometimes think I've actually done twenty years in Sol because I have relived so many of those minutes over and over again distressed over some wrong suffered or imagined and unable to move on because of it, stuck in a moment of time just as firmly as a fly stuck in a spider's web. Such is the nature of solitary confinement. There is a warden here inside this super segregated prison who infrequently walks the corridor to make his presence known and along the way he employs the favored response to many inquiries that goes like this, "Well, you

brought it upon yourself, now didn't you?" He uses the reply so often it has become a lampoon bantered about by cons and guards alike as the answer to everything and I must say that for me it is. When I tossed that cup of tea into the guard's (surprised) face inside the prison chow hall I knew where I was headed. After five years I shed that awful craving and lost all desire for tobacco. You hear me? I quit! I quit!

The patter of rain drops on concrete walls and thunderous clangor that accompanied the beginning of this midnight confession have moved on in a way that spring storms do, showering and booming it's way across the green countryside like a school band on a parade and other sounds have come and gone through the night as well, chess moves hollered out, doors opening/closing, Aretha Franklin demanding a little R.E.S.P.E.C.T. on somebody's contraband radio speaker, and at this very moment the heavy sound of the food cart bulky and lumbering as it rolls onto the cell block with sixty breakfast trays aboard. It must be 4 am. *Tempus Fugit*. I am as hungry as a skinny dog and am going to stop writing long enough to eat breakfast. I'm back and still hungry as a skinny dog. The meal was a crime, we had one serving spoon of oatmeal (unsweetened), and some stewed apple slices, ½ a teaspoon of butter, two pieces of French toast and a choice between a cup of coffee or powdered milk. Actually, it's a mug that holds two cups of liquid and I went with the sludge this morning because after drinking half of it I can fill the mug back up with water and extend the ride.

A John Lennon song says "whatever gets you through the night is alright...is alright." Writing this has gotten me through another.

– by, **JOSEPH STANWICK**

Sitting back I watch my fiancé sleeping and a thought goes through my mind, "I wonder what she is dreaming about?" I know she is dreaming because I can see her eyes moving back and forth under her eyelids. R.E.M, Rapid Eye Movement, is the sign that you're in a deep sleep dreaming.

Could she be dreaming of the first time we met? That place in our apartment complex where all the basketball players go to play. The first time our eyes met we both knew we were meant to be together. We played on opposite teams, but we made sure we were guarding each other. Afterwards we talked and got to know each other. Or...

Could it be the first time we kissed? At her apartment on the stairwell. I was getting ready to go back home, so we chatted for a little bit on the stairs leading up to her place. After a couple of minutes, before I went down stairs, my lips met hers and slowly we opened our mouths so our tongues could explore each other's mouth. Or...

Could it be the time I was on a bended knee asking her to marry me? Middle of the night at our favorite park, we were walking the small trail through the forest. We stopped at a picnic area and she sat down on the bench.

I reached in my pocket and pulled out a ring and asked her to marry me. When I looked in her eyes they were teary and she said yes in a choked voice. Or...

Could it be that moment when she told me she was pregnant? I had just come home from work and sat down to watch TV and relax. She sat beside me and laid her head on my shoulder. Rubbing my arm she whispered to me "Baby, I'm pregnant." I was so happy I almost cried.

Slowly my eyes open and I sit up and look around noticing that I'm in my bed alone at my place. I look beside me and realize she isn't there anymore. In fact I realize that she is but a dream and tears slide down my face because I know that is all I was doing. Dreaming.

– by, **JAMES R. ORMAND**

– **COURAGE**

IS THIS CREATIVE SELF-EXPRESSION?

I lived for trouble. Seeking it, creating it, beginning and ending it. My world was a selfish, violent, antisocial, dangerous one. If I wanted something—I took it. I didn't know love, but grew up as a child with rejection and abuse of every type imaginable. Thus when I was old enough—I struck back at everyone who was unfortunate to be around me. No one was safe. I was evil incarnated.

Now I've learned that humans have a tendency to mold themselves or to be molded into something we're not. Our upbringing, our environment, our friends, all influence us to become a projection, an illusion, of what we think people should see. We may feel this illusion of ourselves as a shield of protection from the tsunami of turmoil we carry inside. Sure...inside we think we seek a peaceful state or even joy, but we only find temporary pleasure through drugs, fast women, strength, and control. But we perpetually face the fact that peace and joy elude us. We may even accept that by destiny we were never meant to be happy...another delusion!

My loved ones, the world, "friends", and people as a whole, would have to see me to believe the change that's come over me. I've learned patience when before I had a hair trigger, even gentleness when before pain was food for me. I've learned to feel gratitude for every minute of life I've been given. The peace I've always wanted to find was not in a better neighborhood, or a country absent of war. The joy I looked for did not consist in the people around me. That peace and that joy are already within my heart. They were gifts just waiting to be discovered within me. If I struggle with turmoil it's because I chose to. Not because I had to. No. I was made with the capability to feel the inner peace, and the inner joy, that have always been within my heart, just waiting to be discovered. Now I can live. When before, I used to walk as a dead man, sowing nothing with good. Now I'm truly alive. I'm not the person I had made myself to be. Now I help others around me in whatever way I can, freely satisfying my heart which hopes no one ever goes through the terrors I have. I used to sow horror. Now I sow peace. I hope I can do something good

outside. It's now my desire to help whoever may need, and want, my help. A smile is a priceless reward.

— by, **EDWARD "BLUE" RAMOS**

I like the thought of courage. Courage is a powerful word with a powerful meaning, because it takes a lot of courage to be a real man. It takes a lot of courage to be a real man of God. And when I was growing up I had a lot of courage for all the wrong reason. To me it is two kinds of courage, having courage in a good way, and having courage in a bad way. When it came to fighting I had much courage, when it came to getting into trouble I had much courage. When it came to being disobedient to God I had much courage. When it came to being disobedient to my mother I had much courage. When it came to being disobedient to the law I had much courage. When it came time for me to hang out with the wrong people I had much courage. But through all these times my heart always my heart always wanted me to be of good courage for all the right reason. But I did not have that kind of direction. I did not have that kind of wisdom or knowledge. I did not have that kind of understanding. I was still young and did not know what direction to go in with all the courage I had. My mom used to always try to talk me into doing right, and try to teach me how to make a productive and peaceful life for myself. But too much courage in the wrong way got me life in prison at the age of 18 years old. And even in prison while in prison for a long while I still had a lot of courage for all the wrong reason. But I wanted so bad so bad to have enough courage to humble myself around turn my life around for the better. I wanted to use all this courage I had to turn my life over to God. That's the best kind of courage you can ever have.

It takes courage to follow God's lead. It takes courage to live up to my responsibilities. It takes courage to believe in me. It takes courage not to give up on God's will for my life. It takes courage to be close to God in each and every moment.

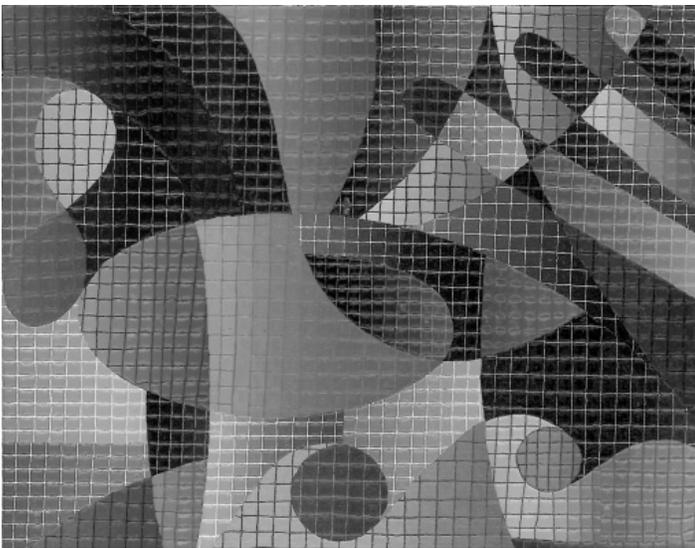
— by, **MICHAEL JEROME MCKINNEY**

In the age just before cave men, two nearly-men sat together, gnawing raw carrion they had found. One grunted with effort and stood high on his two back feet. The other gasped in astonishment and shouted a warning; "Get down from there before you hurt yourself!"

This act of courage changed the world. It marked the close of the age of mammals and the beginning of the age of man. It happened quietly. No media news-sellers commented on the event. No talking heads convened panels of themselves to debate the controversy of standing versus crawling. There were no shrill arguments pro or con. There were no legislative bodies filled with lawyers trying to force us to conform to their particular prejudices against standing. No government commission full of politicians convened to fearfully, secretly, discuss the future ramifications of the probable consequences of others suddenly deciding, en masse, to defy crawler tradition by standing and dangerously walking around. Persons who discovered the benefits of uprightness went on to experiment with the utility of walking. Traditionalists and conservatives continued to crawl, and they tried to convince others of the extreme hazards of standing. Standers advanced to perform new feats. Crawler technology fell by the wayside as it was replaced by the newer, better technology. All it took was a bit of courage and the development of a sense of balance.

Courage, by itself, however, can lead to bad outcomes when it lacks proper understanding of the forces evoked. E.g. a collie is a very courageous breed of dog, but not very cognizant of expressing its authority alongside our roadways. I used to drive my motorcycle past one on the way to school. I'd see the far-away blur running full tilt towards me from a farmhouse. There was no way he could possibly catch me. If it hadn't been for my getting trapped behind a school bus, I would have probably never even noticed his effort. Each day, I'd cruise up one side of his property; turn the corner and motor down the fence line that held the driveway to his estate. Then I'd reverse the process coming home. All of his fury, charging across the pasture to get me, was for nothing. Eventually, I felt remorse for his weeks of failure. One evening, I slowed enough so that he could get in a few barks and nips. I kicked at his feet a few times, just to give him a sense of realism. He got the satisfaction of fulfilling his purpose; I got the satisfaction of spreading a little happiness where before there had been frustration building to despair.

Years later, it came to me that I may have, by decreasing his frustration, shortened his life. I had, in fact, rewarded him for chasing vehicles: conveyances, which may have eventually killed him in his boldness. This revelation occurred to me in horribly graphic detail as I sped down Highway 20 at midnight in the company's step van. This truck is like a living room on six wheels, that you drive as you sit at the picture window. At 75 miles per hour, the dimly lit landscape comes at you quickly. Far ahead, there seemed to be an exceptionally large blob of oil in the middle of my lane. More scenery rushed past, and the blob resolved into a three dimensional artifact, probably another of the many dead



— by, **JASON FORBES**

animals that appear on desolate Texas roads. More road rushes past. It's a fuzzy carcass, like a chocolate bear... no, it's moving! Its teeth flash as it gnashes over its shoulder as it runs ahead of me. It's a big, stupid chow who has invented a new way to chase high speed vehicles; get directly in front, wait for a victim, then run ahead of it so it can not escape noticing the fangs and fury. By the time I process these facts, it is too late to change lanes. The stupid dog would only follow. Instead of wiping myself out and flipping the van to indulge a dog's excessive courage, I merely noted the crunching noises he made as he became intimately acquainted with my front and rear axles. It was sad that this dog had more courage than forethought, but good for dogs as a species for this one to be sacrificed. Bad genes succumb, leaving better genes to compete. The species benefit at the loss of the too-courageous individual.

In humans, evolution advanced significantly beyond mere genetics. We evolve socially. Unlike animals, we don't have to die or proliferate to benefit the species. We can effect changes in behavior that benefit the species. Some of us are effecting behavior changes now. Our state-steered media does this to us constantly, preaching subtly, 24/7, that, basically, the police can do no wrong. Every time the police or any arm of government is caught in criminality, the media hordes put together panels of reporters and industry "experts" to "debate" the "controversy". These press-parties have the function limiting damage to the public's image of government and police as super beings worthy of their god-like privileges. E.g. years ago, when 9-11 fever was at its peak of shrillness, seven corpses were uncovered at the U.S. run prison in Abu Ghraib, Iraq. Their brains had been blown out. The guards there blamed these murders on anonymous CIA interrogators. Instead of tracing the killers and "bringing them to justice" or "putting them behind bars," as media hacks love to say, the story was reported shallowly and briefly, then quietly dropped forever. When not-cops are caught mass-murdering people, the news stalkers don't stop shrieking about it until the cops select someone for conviction.

More recently, three varieties of cop have been caught doing what cops do after successfully completing a mission in a foreign country where they are unsupervised; they got drunk and paid barflies to get cocaine and provide sex. Despite the fact that overlords and occupying armies are famous for indulging in these types of immorality since before recorded history, panels of experts were convened to subtly assure the voters that this did not happen. As more facts escaped, the media's line evolved to: it was the first time it ever happened. Everyone who has paid even a little attention to his political surroundings has noted this process where government and its corporate media propaganda arm work together to keep their tax-paying, product-consuming herds placidly munching our cuds while they cavort obscenely together to our detriment behind closed doors.

With the rise of cheap, widespread communication, however, the public mind has evolved toward true intellect. Before, the public mind was what the

government and media alliance told it through its one-way mediums of TV, radio, newspapers, books, magazines, speeches, etc. Now thanks to technological advance, the crowd can talk among ourselves, compare notes, reach our own conclusions, ask embarrassing questions that previously were omitted or ignored, and we can sometimes force our rulers to provide real answers.

This is the height of courage; to stand up, be identified by power and demand it answer questions that its media tools would never ask. This is the type of behavior that gets people to vanish for years, only to turn up later in overgrown fields as skeletal remains. This type of courage runs rampant in Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, Palestine, Syria, even Saudi Arabia and Israel, to a lesser extent. Decades-old dictatorships have fallen, at the cost of thousands of lives. New waves of dictators and puppet rulers are being installed as we watch, yet the people's courage to oppose them as well continues unabated. They are determined to obtain a government that they deserve, or at least that is not as rabid as the one they just ousted.

We are fighting the same battle here. The Glutton of Privilege party is trying desperately to convince us that a corporate looter would make a better president than the semi-competent one we have now. The media uses phony, useless "polls" to convince us that they are neck and neck in a tight race. Thinking people know better. Common people who lost their jobs due to our last corporate looter, oil thief president far outnumber the wealthy parasites who live off the interest we pay them on the loan of their money. And, the working class resents being transformed into a welfare class. We have not forgotten that they fired us and hired in China and India. We have not forgotten their worldwide financial robbery. We will not vote for a looter who makes dogs travel on the roof of his car or a bully who leads a gang to knock down a longhair and shave his head. Citizens are simply not that mal-informed anymore, and certainly not that timid. While the corporate media continues to pretend that this man deserves respect, on the net, there is no bigger laughingstock. In all my years of providing an altruistic net site that gives voice to the oppressed, I have seen no one of the political elite generate more disgust and revulsion among the working classes.

Despite this wholesale rejection by the masses, the Glutton of Privilege party may again decide to steal the election through use of their Electoral College scam, which was never fixed, and their GOP-packed Supreme Court. People who work for a living must be alert to this. We are on the brink, and cannot survive another looter president. We must not let this occur, and, if the interest income, capital gains class tries this again, we must oppose it with all our strength and courage.

— by, **JAMES BAUHAUS**

FOGET ABOUT IT

People sometimes say, "Ignorance is bliss." They tell you to forget about something if it has had a negative impact on your life. That somehow it'll make your life easier if you try to forget about the problem. I've found that not only to be untrue but also harmful to my interactions with the world. The problem is that we can ever truly forget the past; we can only suppress it. Eventually something will come along and trigger that memory, causing various consequences. It may keep us from having a healthy relationship with someone or stop us from achieving our goals in life. Some people are ruled by their past and fears and on a subconscious level sabotage themselves in their efforts to lead a productive life. Trying to forget the past may lead you down a destructive path. Some may resort to various addictions to escape hurtful memories: drugs, sex, violence, crime, food, excessive shopping, etc. etc. Living a life with these addictions stops being a life and more of a survival to eek out an existence as best as possible. Never being truly satisfied with how things are going, we repeat a cycle of self-destruction. We try so hard to cover the pain that we end up doing more damage to ourselves than if we had just dealt with the problem. People tend to shy away from pain. But without pain, how would we know what is good? Can there be good without evil? Darkness without light? There is no "Never, Never Land." We cannot expect to grow without trial and error. How can we learn from our mistakes if we forget how we got there in the first place? Embrace the pain. Embrace the hurt and turn it around into something that fuels your motivation. Accept what has happened, learn from it, and move on. Do not let the past solely define who you are. Incorporate it along with everything else you do to mold yourself into who you're supposed to be. The harder you resist, the harder life is. Never forget who you are. Never change for the sake of others. To forget is to lose yourself. Never to be truly whole. A shell of your true self-searching for something to make you complete. Rise to the challenges life throws at you, and continue down that road of experiences. And if you come to a dead end, make your own path. Remember the way you came, and find that right turn. Never forget how you came to be. You can be that one thing that makes all the difference in the world. Choose to remember and never to forget.

– by, **SEAN CHURCH**

NEVER

I will never forget my time of perpetual pain and suffering. Even when I'm in a place of eternal peace and happiness – I will always remember those endless days and nights of misery. Holocaust survivors will never forget the smell of burnt flesh and piles of lifeless bodies being stacked; Christians will always remember Jesus Christ, who was cruelly mocked and inhumanely whipped on his bloody back – so will I...never forget my time of suffering.

My period of captivity is much to the contrary, but the affliction I felt was real and profoundly deep. I've witnessed my share of human cruelty and shame. I've cried out to God, and at times I even questioned my faith. Like the blameless man Job, I too was cursed and bore many complaints: why must life be fraught with so much hardship and hate? Is that all life is? To miserably suffer, and then we rest in peace for all eternity buried deep in a grassy grave? These painful thoughts infest my weary brain, while the rain drums a somber beat on my windowpane. And when I step up on the stage, I begin to sing a sad song that only those who have felt the deep sting of pain will understand the message I desperately try to convey. I remind them with all sincerity to firmly hold on to hope and never give in, and never give up because it's never too late. Maintain goodness and positivity no matter how difficult the task may be. In the end, there is light shining with love and compassion on the other side of the golden gate.

During my time of slavery, I could have succumbed to depravity like the vast majority. But I refused to degrade my dignity – I refused to be a slave. Insurmountable obstacles that were high as the Himalayan peaks – I've climbed and conquered the gruesome beast and laughed in its demonic face. This sadistic being who brought tears to my mother's eyes – I gladly demolished and kissed it goodbye.

I will never forget those countless teary-eyed nights. It's embedded in my heart and mind, possibly until the day I die. I mustn't forget, because if I do, I will utterly return to my old ways, and will have forgotten the love and grace that was shown to me in my time of desperate need...even when my faith couldn't compare to a tiny mustard seed. I will never forget...I will never...

– by, **SANG "DAVID" KIM**

DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT

Sitting at the day room table writing letters, I got interrupted by an inmate, "Say, could you help me write an I-60?" He looked young and lost. I felt bad for him. I stopped and said no problem. After filling out the form for him, he asked, "Watcha want for doing it?" I said, "Don't worry about it."

A little while later another inmate comes up to me and asks to borrow my hot pot. "Go for it," I said. "I'll give you a soup for using it." Naah... "Don't worry about it."

"Big C, can you help me write a letter to my mother?"

I say, "Billy Bob, you know I don't mind doing that for you." He thanks me and looks a little crestfallen. I ask him what's wrong. He states that he's indigent and broke. "Dude, don't worry about it." Later I throw him a soup on his bed without his knowing about it.

During the next week the I-60 guy comes and thanks me graciously, saying that I helped him get some "lost time back". He was so happy. He said, "I owe you one." I came back with, "Forget about it."

The hot pot borrower comes over that afternoon stating that after we make store, he's going to spread with me. I told him, "Don't worry. Forget about it."

Billy Bob comes up to me that night after mail call, looking downright joyful. "What's up?" I said. "Dude, I just heard from my momma and she said parole called her...They letting me go!!" "I'm so happy for you, Billy Bob." "Man, I owe you big time for all those letters you wrote for me," he says. Instead of saying forget about it, I gave him a big ole hug!

— by, **CURTIS COLVIN**

NOTHING REMAINS TO HOLD

The first thing you have to learn after the prison invitation is to "forget about it". After prison gangs chain drive, not only was I physically beaten but my spiritual and psyche had been beaten to an exponential degree. Physical beatings a person can heal from, but the later two, spirit and psychological sometimes never heal. Some things in life you just can't 'forget about it'. Left bloodied, bruised, and soiled physically and mentally. I tried to clean off and retreat to my bunk. The body can be washed but the psyche is forever stained. I lay in my bunk having given up on life, pondering a definitive of exactly what I was. I was no longer a man, for a man can't protect his own ass. This wasn't the first time I had been stripped psychologically of my being. When a man loses his masculinity, what is he? Such events greatly alter ones thoughts and behavior. Sometimes, it leaves you realizing you have no more reason to go on. In a short three months I had been stripped socially, economically, physically and mentally.

I lay in my bunk waiting to die, wanting to die, realizing with every hunger pain that I would soon lose the pains of hunger. I rolled over ignoring the body's needs. Occasionally, I drank but soon threw up the water, sometimes by thought, other times by force of a finger in my mouth. It was August, with its heat. The afternoon sun baked the wall of my cell, my bunk hung on this western wall. Heat radiated burning my skin. I would roll now and then as if to get my body ready for the world I was headed.

My cellie paid me little attention that first day. "Hey! This is prison. Shit happens. Violent shit. Especially to non-affiliated white and Hispanic men." He didn't have to suffer the initiation process being black and a gang member. To him, this was what society wanted for their shared race. Society loves violence; the blood lust wets their mouths as they take joy in knowing more in prison were 'paying' for their crimes. "They're running chow Cellie." He said on the forth or fifth day, about to walk out the door. I didn't respond. He strolled out, calling to a homeboy while rolling the door 'til it clicked shot reminding me of why I needed to die. On returning from chow, he would bound inside, grab his gym shoes and t-shirt and head. "Cellie... You going to rec?" he quizzed.

I ignored him. Again he walked. I sank into my thoughts. Thoughts that reveled a music video to The Stone's classic "Paint It Black". By the end of the week,

my cellie had become an ever-increasing hemorrhoid that no amount of preparation could sooth. He'd roll over and peer down at me from his bunk, "Man Cellie. Is that your stomach or a train? Look man! I got plenty of food." He'd say. I ignored his invitations. In prison, you don't take anyone up on an offer of good will. There are always strings attached especially when you are new. See, all too often the first timers can successfully kill themselves because the culture shock numbs them to the spirit. It is a very real danger, to wake up one day and see a new boot walking through the door, fresh meat, tender and already dazed. You can literally watch them die by the hour and it becomes a real challenge to try to give a man with no reason to live, a reason to live. Especially if you are a man bent on speaking frankly and honestly because you are no longer like the back-biting self righteous Christian society. You just can't look at another person and say "Don't sweat it Cellie shit'll work out." Or (the all too popular cop-out) "Everything is by God's will to show you love." [Spit!] As a new boot, I was on that one way trip with little concern as to where the spirit would end up. It is hard to believe in some fucking place called Heaven with a so-called loving father when all that fucking merciful father had ever done was beat you with the red hot poker of destruction.

The cell door rolled open hard the solid metal door crashing into the iron frame. Startled, I weakly rolled over to see my Cellie standing aggressively hands on hips in the door. "Cellie!" he began. "We can do this two ways. We can.... Fuck that! I can talk and you can listen. Or! I'll go catch the Boss Man, give him the run down and you can go jester and fool. Those psyches got no problem with pumping your ass full of Thorazine." He threatened.

Harper, a big burly black dude the same size as me, street wise and hard, stood staring at me. Later I would learn we were a lot alike. But unlike me, his people and the prisons black community reached out to intercede in the effects of the culture shock. After a few minutes, he softened his stance and expression, turned and rolled the door shut. It clicked locked. A minute later, he was kneeling in front of the bunk digging in his locker. He pulled out a bag of coffee and a package of cookies, a two pounder of vanilla cream sandwiches. Rising, he mixed two cups of coffee, and then he ripped the cookies open. He set the coffee down on my bunk then the cookies. Satisfied, he took a seat on the table with his feet on the stool. He had a handful of cookies. He stuck one in his mouth then pointed at me with a finger from the handful of cookies.

"You gamble?" he quizzed, not waiting for the answer he continued. "Got a bet for you. If you can eat just one cookie and then roll over and go back to this death wish. I'll walk out that door, keep my mouth shut and let you fucking die dude. I just ask that you try to get up and out of the cell before you really die. Its kina fucked you know? Waking up to see your ghost floating about the cell." He paused, stabbed a cookie in his mouth then picked up his cup to drink.

At the time I was ready to do anything just to be left alone. He spoke like a man of his word. I picked up a

cookie and nibbled at it. As he watched, he ate another and smiled. I took a bigger bite. After a few minutes I swallowed the last soggy crumbs and found myself fighting the temptation to eat another. Harp chortled, broke a cookies in half so he could lick the cream filling off before dabbing the hard round crust in his coffee.

"Mm... Reminds me of a snowflake I dated in Houston, you don't come across very many women who are literally sweet. But that snowflake? Mm... She was sweet like that little plastic container of Bettie Crock white cake frosting. Eva smoke weed Cellie? Get the munchies? Get all stoned and buzzing around the house with a damn sweet tooth? I did. All we had was a thing of that Bettie Crocker frosting." He nodded, smiling big, reminiscing.

"Chocolate frosting with coconut or that little hard candy speckles. The white frosting? That's good too." I said without thought, the mind slipping back into another life.

Harp chuckled. "Yeah-yeah. Good weed." He grabbed another handful of cookies then pushed them closer to me. "Nothing' like some good herb, some creamy treats and some good snowflake meat."

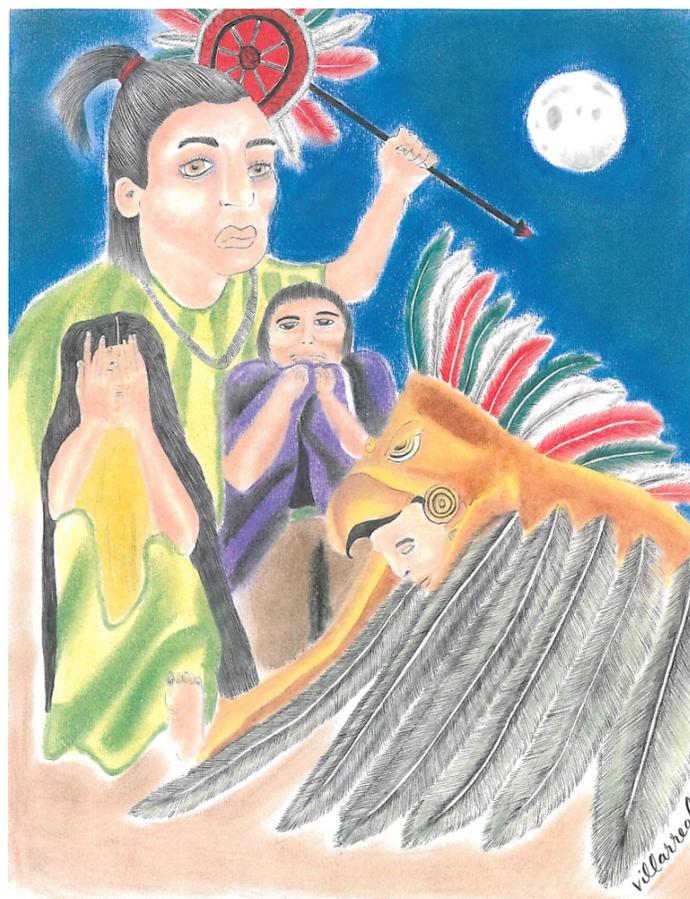
Before I knew it, I had bit into another cookie. In a matter of minutes, I had eaten half a dozen and Harp was fixing another round of coffee. We joked around. He pulled a second large pack of cookies out and set them down. Finally, he got a serious look, his eyes locked on mine, I stopped eating. I didn't want to talk serious.

"You got to forget about it!" he said, pausing for effect. "You got to forget about it all. All of it!"

I had sat up but suddenly lost my appetite.

"You got to forget about it Brother. You? Me? All of us locked away? We is all we got. You got to forget about it. Your old world. Whatever you had! Your wife! Your kids! Even your Momma!" he said confidently. "I'm serious, everything... you had... in that life! It don't exist. You got nothing material. If you had a car? A house? Hell even your clothes? It's all gone. Your people is done thrown it all out coz they is already trying to forget about it! Forget about you. Forget about that life. I'm sorry. I don't want to bust your ass on the depressing shit. But the sooner you realize that you don't exist beyond this wall, the sooner you can do time instead of time doing you," he paused, took a cookie and twisted it apart. Licking the cream off, he smacked his lips, "It's some fucking depressing shit dude. But it's the way it is. Your old lady? If she ain't found another dick, she will coz any dick will do and no bitch really loves you. We men? We are a fucking necessity. And your kids? They'll call any fool Daddy. Blood don't mean shit. Your Momma? Dad if you got one? They have already moved on." He chomped the cookie crust and downed the coffee, walking to the door as it suddenly popped open. He stopped at the door and glanced back. "All we got Bro is this concrete and steel. Everything else? You got to forget about it." He said then walked out. Suddenly I realized, there is nothing now. "Nothing remains to hold."

— by, **JACKEY SOLLARS**



— by, **JOSE VILLAREAL**

— **BARTER**

A FOOL'S BARGAIN

"I'd trade my first-born son to start over again," said the old man, with a twinkle in his eye that was very short-lived. For although the moment was fleeting, I saw clearly the pain cross his face as his own joke backfired on his heart. He had no sons. Only three daughters whom he had never met. Whom he would never meet.

It had been late afternoon and we had shared a bench on the bleachers, the old man and I. Soaking up the last of the day's warmth on the prison yard, we waited for the guards to call us in for count, and another cold night on the cell block.

We had never spoken before, but that was nothing remarkable. The prison had 2,500 inmates, give or take, and not too many people took the time to know everybody. No, to me he was just another old man; someone who had been caught up in the cycle of incarceration long before I knew what incarceration was; but I have never forgotten him. And likely never will.

Close to an hour we shared that bench, without a single word passing between us, when he spoke:

"Yard's sure changed over the years."

"What's that?" I had been thinking of something to do with cars, I believe; though I cannot be sure now. "Said the yard's changed," he repeated, looking over at me for the first time. He was old; early-to-mid 70s. I would guess, with watery blue-gray eyes, and spidery,

red, veins on his nose, which was a goodly size. His wide mouth was very thin lipped and surrounded by a prickly looking white goatee that was maybe 4-5 days old. His brows were long and bushy, and his ears lay flat against the side of his, slightly oblong, head. Though his white hair had needed a few inches, what was left was thick and combed neatly; somewhat shaggy at the nape as though needing a trim. He had a slight frame, and his skin was deeply tanned, with a spattering of liver spots on his large wrinkly hands.

"You been down a while, ol' timer," I asked, interested.

"Oh, a li'l while," he sighed. Then he began to talk; like one who had been holding it back for a long time, only waiting for someone who really wanted to listen, who really wanted to know.

He had been in prison for 38 years (longer than I had been alive then; longer than I have been alive now), given life in prison for killing someone in his younger, wilder, days; but he did not talk too much about the crime itself, and I did not pry. Instead, he spoke of regrets, and I listened closely.

You see, he was a married man when he committed his crime, with a baby on the way; and being the stud he was (or so he had thought as a youngster), he had two mistresses, also pregnant. And so it came to pass that all three women left him shortly after his daughters were born, and he had not heard from them, or his children, since. He spoke long; of missing out on all the precious moments of their lives: birthdays, graduations, marriages... children.

"At times, I just know I got grandkids out there; I can feel it! But I just can't be sure..." he said.

Watching his face as he spoke, his eyes seemed to stare vacantly at something in the distance that I could not see; he spoke automatically, as if I were never there. As if he was speaking to himself, or somebody else. Nearly an hour he spoke without pause (in the way of the elderly when they have a vast audience), never acknowledging my presence.

I had begun to wonder if this old man was half crazy (time in prison can do that to people, after all; and he had done plenty of time), when he just stopped abruptly and stood to go, much to my bewilderment. But before he went, he turned back to me one last time.

"Kid, I hope when you're my age you'll look back and rejoice, not regret. Don't trade your life for this," he gestured around himself, "It's a fool's bargain."

And he was gone.

I never saw him again after that day. I don't know if he was transferred to another prison, or died. But, as I have said, I never forgot. Now that I sit here contemplating my fast-approaching release, I think of that old man and the things he said. I think on the regrets I already have, and the time I have left to experience things in which to rejoice. And I know I will no longer make a fool's bargain.

Life is far too precious.

– by, **CARLOS TRINIDAD**

PICTURE WRITING PROJECT

This program is similar to the theme project, though in this instance we give you a different picture every month and we ask you to create a story from whatever you find in yourself after looking at the picture. Everyone who sends in a story will receive the complete compilation, but in this newsletter we will reprint (1) or (2) stories from pictures from previous months, hopefully inspiring you to participate. Upcoming pictures for this cycle follow:



DUE 1/1/1



DUE 2/1/13



DUE 3/1/13



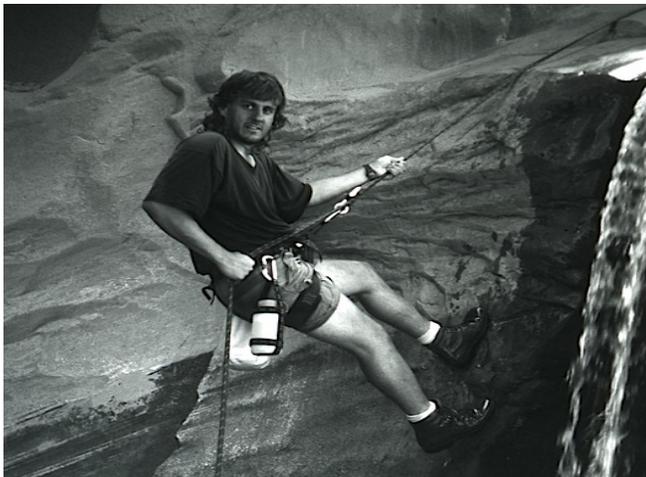
DUE 6/1/13



DUE 4/1/13



DUE 7/1/13



DUE 5/1/13



DUE 8/1/13



RECYCLING LIBERTY

Designed by French sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartoldi and commemorating French-American friendship, the Statue of Liberty was laid to rest today. She has stood on Liberty Island in New York Harbor since 1886 and was as symbol of freedom and liberty. The statue, formally known as "Liberty Enlightening the World," was hauled to waiting furnaces in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania to become bombs of liberation to Third World countries and anyone else who piss us off and the "Liberty for All" Act. But fear not loyal Americans. A new statue designed by Steven Spielberg and Jimmy Carter is now under construction at various Lego factories. The New Lady Liberty will be made of America's finest recycled plastic. Lego urges all Americans to donate all used disposable diapers. They also recommend on your next visit to New York Harbor that you carry plenty of Air freshener.

— by, **MICHAEL PACE**



PICTURING A DREAM

My father used to tell me that the greatest gift that any man can give a woman is to make her wish come true. Then he would get all starry eyed and a look would

come over his tan weather beaten scar strewn face, like he was lost in a memory. Of course, for as long as he would tell me that great inspirational piece of fatherly advice, I remember the same question that I would ask immediately after. Dad? How do you know what a woman dreams of? He would just laugh and say, son, you have to love her enough that you dream the same dream.

For many years of my life I wandered blindly into one town or another, not really knowing what it was that I wanted out of life. Finely put, I had no dream of my own. And when I would become desperate for some direction to travel, then somehow my father would be always there to guide me. As time dragged by and father got older I started to slow down. And as I slowed down it was like my dreams had finally caught up to me. And so it was, I knew what I wanted.

I wanted what my father had. I wanted a family, and a home, and to share moments making memories. When I told my father this he simply smiled and asked me. Well son, how you gonna get it all? To which of course I dumbfounded shrugged my shoulder and mumbled something about tricking some hapless woman into marrying me. At exactly that moment my father had started to sip his drink and in a fit of uncontrolled laughter at my all too loud mumbling; managed to spew his drink all over the waitress as she walked by.

In extreme sincerity I managed to stand with a napkin in my hand to apologize to the hapless waitress and perhaps help dry her spewed upon smock. When I found myself staring into the most beautiful eyes that I had ever seen. And naturally I did what seemed perfectly logical at the time and commenced to stuttering (a heretofore never known problem) an apology. To break myself from this embarrassing, performance I spun back toward my father to demand he apologize, only to find my old man had deserted me!

The waitress however, took the movement as an invitation to sit down with me and slid into the seat for a brief respite. All the while maintaining her fascinating stare with her luminous hazel eyes. Not wanting to seem rude I too repainted my stuttering tongue and sat down with her. By-and-by our worlds grew together and one night I asked that waitress to marry me. But, I made sure she understood that I had very little wealth and very much love. Although I did promise her a gift someday.

Seventy years later, that very same woman sat holding my hand as I came near to the end of my journey. Just her touch and those eyes were comfort a plenty in that my final hour. Yet, one thing held my thought even then and in a soft voice I whispered. Darling, do you remember that gift I promised you when we married? The one I never got around to getting. Will you forgive me? And my beautiful old wife just giggled softly as a tear streaked from her eye and said "oh dear." She then rummaged quietly through her purse and pulled out her wallet. And as she opened it a row of 10 pictures dangled from it showing our children and grandchildren. Slowly she showed me the first picture of the set. It was an old faded picture from our wedding day. The day we walked on the sun as it slowly fell from

the sky and hid beyond the ocean at the end of the world. Pointing, at that picture she told me then that, that very day I had given her the gift that I owe her. She said, "You made my dream come true." Remembering my wise old father, I sighed, year, "it was my dream too."

– by, **BRANDON RUSHING**

LOVE & LOYALTY (L & L CONNECTION)

They were married exactly ten years ago to the day, as they stood facing one another as they had done every anniversary since, to renew their vows in a commitment ceremony.

The only other people present with them was their daughter and the same man who had married them, the "Reverend Stanley" who was a childhood friend of Lonnie's and still remained a close family friend who had even blessed their daughter, "Donisha" who was now nine years young, standing there smiling at her parents proudly...

...Out of all the places, Lonnie and Lisa had renewed their vows; this was the first time that they had decided to do it outside.

The idea came to them for a beachfront vow ceremony by chance during one of their evening walks as they paused to watch the sunset a month before, when Lisa had an epiphany! "Lonnie," she said, "Look at the way the sun is dipping into the ocean and tell me what it says to you."

"It looks like the sun is going down in the water," but we know that that's not true! Lonnie said...

"No, I'm talking more of what it symbolizes. See, the sun is a life force and all life supposedly originated in the sea, right?" she asked but continued without waiting for a reply, "Well to me, it says that the life force (sun) is going into the ocean and life came out!" Get it?

Suddenly it made perfect sense to me and I could only smile. "You know sweetness; it does make a lot of sense now that you pointed it out to me!" Lonnie said.

"You know what else babe?" asked Lisa without looking away from the setting sun's orange glow.

"What's on your mind sweetheart?"

"Let's renew our commitment to one another right here this year!" There was no way he could of not said yes as she now faced him with the most serious look on her face. Sweetness, "whatever you want, I want," so it's a done deal, plus it speaks volumes to our life long theme of "Love & Loyalty" to one another right at the spot were life came from, because at least that's what the "theory of evolution" says. I just hope we don't get struck by lightening. Together, they laughed and headed for home, "hand in hand" ...

... Now here they were, celebrating the commemoration of another year of shared "love and loyalty" together with a kiss, just as the sun was beginning to set and that moment was captured on film as their daughter took their picture...

– by, **LONNIE PERKINS**



FOLLOW THE LEADER

Why am I last? Why can't lead? I know I can find better feeding grounds than this hard stuff we're on. Being last is no fun. Always smelling someone else's tail and trail. Just because I'm small, doesn't mean I'm slow. I can keep up with the best of them. Why just last week I made it across the back lawn in 32 hours flat. I know that was a record. Try to beat it!

OK were coming up to the end of... whoa... what happened to Pop?! Mom, did you see... No stop! Damn. Where did they go? O.K.... Keep cool. Just a little more forward... Wow!! Look at that drop! I can't even sense the bottom. Now what? I can turn back or make my own trail. Man I can finally be a leader. Just think of all the places I could go to. But, who will I lead? Myself? Oh man, Shoot! This ain't no fun. What good is it to lead while being alone...? Pop always said "If you can't beat em, join em"... OK. Here goes. Geronimooooo!

– by, **CURTIS COLVIN**



Back in 1982 there was this pretty little blonde minx with big brown eyes, which my buddy J.D. and I were both pursuing. Faye loved the attention and was careful to spread her affections evenly between us. She was ebullient, with unconventional rules for herself, and saw to it that our relationships eschewed and jealousies. She soon suggested that we all get a house together, rather than having to pay three separate rents. I had my room,

J.D. had his, and Faye divided her nights between us. (No – you perverts, there was no ménage-trois; she was woman enough for both of us.) We quickly ensconced into an easy symbiosis.

J.D. brought his tawny tabby he had had since a kitten. For some reason, that cat just did not like me. It would be ambling through the house, and when it saw me, it would stop, look up at me warily, then literally circle wide around me. It was not out of fear, for I was never mean to it. In fact, I always spoke to it; there were plenty of times I was even the one to fill his food dish. But that cat would not get within ten feet of me. I've always had a penchant for dogs, but I like cats well enough. This one's behavior had me flummoxed.

One evening after supper, we three were in the living room blowing numbers, listening to the Doobie Brothers, no less. I was just relaxing in my La-Z Boy when out of nowhere, that cat landed in my lap. I looked down at him in utter amazement, but he just curled his paws beneath himself and settled in. "How strange," I said to myself. "After all this time, he just decides to up and treat me as if I actually exist." I carefully reached down and started to stroke his back. As everyone knows, you don't just pet a cat – you are "allowed" to pet him. I massaged him gently, rubbing all the right spots, especially the ears. I knew it was getting good to him when his purr became really strong and rhythmic as he dozed. I was enjoying the exchange myself.

Suddenly, that darn cat stands up, stretches and yawns, curled his head and looked me in the eye. Then he arched his back and purposely... dig all four paws into my thighs! "Son of a...," I screamed as I lurched up. That cat disappeared. I was furious. Here I'd spent close to an hour loving on him, and he goes and claws the shit out of me... just because he's ready to get up? What a perfidious act! J.D. and Faye had seen it too.

I stormed around the house frantically chasing that mouser until I finally cornered him in the kitchen. I sprightly dove like a linebacker after a fumbled ball – and I had him! My right hand closed around his throat, my left, held his rear feet as I clutched his body under my arm-pit; I was going to twist that bastard's head off. J.D. came running, "Bob," he exclaimed plaintively, "Don't kill my cat!" I was in a sanguinary fury, almost out of control, and J.D. knew it. Almost with tears in his eyes, he touched my arm. "Please Bob... please don't kill my cat." I paused. Then I turned and threw that tabby as hard as I could across the living room where it crashed into the front door and slid down. When it hit the floor, it beelined straight for J.D.'s room. Needless to say, that cat stayed invisible for several weeks, then always ran when he spied me.

If I had not loved J.D. like a little brother, I would have macerated that varlet little pussy and roasted him on the bar-b-cue pit outside. Ironically, the next song to come on the stereo, was Al Stewart's "year of the Cat!"

– by, **ROBERT L. HAMBRICK**

DOG WATCHING

"Lookout Bennie, he's late." "I know Ernie, this is getting boring."

As the two cats sit quietly on the windowsill, they wait patiently for the dog. He always comes around in the evening, right before the streetlight comes on, smelling around then doing his "business".

What Bennie and Ernie like to do is pick at him. They always wait until the dog is in the middle doing his "business". Right when he's hunched over, straining, they start to meow and scratch at the window. The dog sees them, then tries to chase and get at them while almost dragging his butt. Comical. Funny. But mean. But Bennie and Ernie enjoy it. One time Bennie laughed so hard he fell off the sill and bit his tongue. That was a laugh.

"So where's he at?" said Bennie. "Maybe he moved," Ernie says. "He could be full of worms and he died!" "I hope not," said Bennie. "It would be really boring around here."

As they waited, it became darker. The streetlight came on hours ago. Just as Ernie was about to fall asleep, Bennie says, "What's that smell? Something smells mildewed." "I smell it too. Did you poof?" "No I did not poof!" says Bennie. "Well what..." As they both turn their heads, a big "WOOFF!!!" blasts out at them. It scares them so badly, both Ernie and Bennie slams into each other trying to get away. The dog is only two feet away from them, growling intensely, giving them the evil eye.

"Oh shit!" says Bennie as he scrambles to get away. "Where did he come from!?" Ernie says as he himself tries to climb over Bennie.

"Through the open door Dum-Dumbs," growled the dog. As both cats sprang off the sill to get away, they shat on themselves, the floor, and left a trail way out the door.

All the dog could do is laugh. He couldn't even growl anymore. It was so sweet to be able to get revenge on those assholes. He thought, next time I'll bring some friends. Now maybe my constipation will go away, as he smiles and walks out the door.

– by, **CURTIS COLVIN**



SOMERSAULT; (THE DAY I BECAME A PERSON)

It was only the second time ever I saw such a big pond. I stared out over the lake, the fluid surface creased with gentle ripples. It was late in the evening; the sun clung to the scarlet curtain that slips across the blue sky to usher in the night. The twilight fabric, a tapestry of twinkling lights, Cimmerians they were, winking and blinking at me. The last vestiges of orange light grasped at each cresting wave shredding into a twinkling, twisting, roiling snake that plunged into itself, leaving bobbing mounds of dancing foam. A late evening breeze, cool upon the skin caressed my face. This huge body of water mesmerized me, "Surely there is a God", I recall thinking, awed by the beauty.

My mom, and sisters busied themselves in cooking dinner upon a newly built fire. Scrambled eggs, bacon and diced potatoes sizzled in the large iron skillets. The flames leapt up about the edges of black iron as if trying to steal a taste. The sound, a chorus of hisses in this log and that as the fire devoured it, boiling the sap until the pressure exploded. The popping and crackling sent sparks spiraling up into the hot column of air, swirling about in the smoke until, like fireflies in the bushes, suddenly vanished. The smell, bacon eggs, peppered potatoes and fisherman's coffee mingled with the mesquite smoke, floated upon the cool damp musty air. I gulped the essence in, fearful that I would wake and find myself in a dust ridden bed on a fruitless farm in Tahoka, Texas. But this wasn't a dream and the intoxicating flavor of the air already had me swimming in ecstasy.

At a fresh age of seven there was little I could do. I had the joy of going to gather firewood, something I had never done in the woods. Not even on the one trip my family went with my aunt, uncle and cousins to that bus lake called Texoman. On that trip, I wasn't allowed to leave the camp, not even to go swim with my brothers and sisters. It wasn't that I didn't want to go. I did, but my mom and dad didn't trust my siblings and cousins to watch me, and they themselves were too busy having fun on my uncles new ski boat. All I had left in memories of that trip was the huge expanse of water along red stone cliffs and then the tragedy of seeing my oldest brother being run over by a boat. The trip ended as all went to the hospital to wait the outcome of my brother's

accident. It was one of only a few memories of a life with that man everyone called 'Dad'.

I stood waiting, watching flush with excitement of the moment. Things were different this time, not because I was older. No, this trip was different because the man my mom had married, my new dad, looked at me differently. I was no longer a headache, heartache, freak or unwanted baggage. Why he even let me help carry the fishing gear to the wide, sandy beach just below the stone-ringed campfire. He and my brothers had set up folding chairs but had yet to bait a hook or throw out one fishing line. "Supper's ready", Mom called out. She was busy dragging the large iron skillets out of the coals. My sisters had pulled out a stack of pie pans.

"We bes' get our grub so we can go bait huntin'." My new dad said, gripping my shoulder firmly, confidently.

"We?" I quizzed, joining him, walking precariously awkward so I didn't run into his leg with every step. He said 'we', a word seldom used around me and especially to include me. Dad nodded. We arrived at the fire as Mom began shoveling food from skillets to the pans.

Sitting around that fire, Mom told the stories she always told. "This reminds me of," she would always begin; the story would go on to describe how she, my aunts, my uncles, Grandma and Grandpa lived when she was a girl of thirteen. Their days were spent following the harvest on rotted dirt roads that crossed the land from Oklahoma to California. "It was route sixty six before it was route sixty six," she always said as if that meant something. Most of their days were spent in fields, picking cotton, berries, peaches, apples, and vegetables. At night there home, an old model T with a canvas cover over the bed. "We'd just find a spot along the road, pull off and set up camp. Might be there a day or two, In California. We could set up a camp for a couple of weeks," She'd go. The story went on until she came to her fondest memories. "After supper every night, Jerl and Daddy would pull out their guitars and play. We'd sit for hours just singing," She said, and then drifted off into her memories.

The sun, vanished for the night, left a slight chill in the air. I expected the all too familiar command to go to bed. That was how things were, but for some reason the evening only grew more exciting. My new dad told my brothers, "Pile the wood high on the fire boys. It's time to go swimming." At which they began dragging half logs of mesquite up and laying them across the fire. "You come're help me," he said to me.

'WHA?' I quizzed to myself, totally confused and ecstatic with something unknown to me, joy.

While Mom and my sisters cleared the tin pans and skillet, my brothers piled yet more wood on the already tall fire. Following my new dad and a fella I was beginning to consider making my best buddy. We strolled down to the sandy beach where the chairs had been set up for fishing. Green limbs with clipped branches to form little 'Y's were stabbed into the sand, three here, four there, one here, one there, scattered along the beach in front of the empty chairs. The orange-yellow pulsing glow of the fire bathed the beach and water. Dad picked up a stick that had a net rolled over it.

"You stand on that stick." He ordered. I hopped on a second stick that one end of the net had been tied to. He quickly backed away, unfunneling the freely meshed net.

By the time he had the net rolled out, everyone had converged on the beach dressed in cut-off shorts. My new dad looked at me, "Now! We are ready to seine some minnows." He said, turning to a folding chair and sitting down. He busily stripped off his boots, belt, and shirt. He stowed his wallet and pocket contents into the boots.

I stared at him in disbelief. This fella used that 'We' word again. If there was ever a time of complete confusion in my life, it was at that moment of my life along the banks of a lake on the Colorado River. Here it was, dark, and this man is saying 'we'. Uncertain of events I hadn't paid my siblings much attention to as they began wading out into the water. In fact, it wasn't until my sisters squealed and screamed from being splashed by the next to oldest brother. I looked around in time to see my oldest brother out in the edge of the light in waist deep water, dive in and vanish. My other brother followed. A firm hand surprised me. I looked up at this giant of a man, as he stared down smiling. My mom walked up beside him.

"How 'bout we go for a swim first." He said, nudging me toward the water following my mom.

Not being one to ever shy away from a chance to play in the water, I didn't hesitate. Yet, walking across that sand into that cold water caused me to stop. My dad splashed around beside my mom. They moved deeper and deeper until waist deep. Then with a shocking gasp, Mom fell back till only her head showed. Dad just kneeled where he was at, turned, and looked at me.

After much coexisting, I began to move deeper into the water. Dad waited patiently, taking time to toe up a fresh water muscle, something Mom, my siblings, and I never knew existed. He held the clamshell muscle up for inspection to see if it was big enough to use for fish bait. He showed it to my brothers, sisters and mother, instructing them on how to find the creatures buried up in the sand. Suddenly, my brothers were diving in deeper water to scour the sandy bottom. Upon arriving at Dad's side, I found I was shoulder deep in the coldest and best smelling water I ever played in. One didn't find such pure water upon the barren plowed up fields of the Uano Estacado.

"Come here," dad said, grabbing me and lifting me up so I could stand on his upper thigh. "You ever wanted to fly?" he quizzed.

Now what kind of question was that, I thought? Of course I dreamed of flying. I was a kid who believed anything was possible; after all, men had flown into space.

"Here, climb up on my shoulders." He instructed, taking my hands to help secure me.

Carefully, I made my way up until I sat, squatting so I sat on his head, a foot on each shoulder. My mom moved to one side, something that should have warned me. With legs shaking, I slowly rose. Then suddenly I felt the surge of energy thrusting me up without warning. My dad released my hands then stepped back, leaving me

shooting through the fire lit night. Exhilaration flooded my heart and adrenaline pulsed through my veins. Flinging my arms like a bird, I squealed, that I'm sure, echoed long after I plunged into the water.

Coming out of the water gasping for air 'cause the damn water was damn cold, I spun about wiping my eyes. My mom was laughing, watching, reassuring me now that all was well. Giggling, I raced through the water back to my new dad, excited, because I suddenly realized I had become a person that day. I was finally someone to my dad, even if he was my new dad.

– by, **JACKEY R SOLLARS**



THE TREE IN THE MEADOW

I experienced pain, true pain, for the first time, underneath that tree; the old tree at the back of our property, on our small farm. The tree in the meadow...

We didn't have much money when I was growing up; but then, nobody I knew did. We were on welfare from as far back as I can remember, and the only reason we had a house is because we received HUD (Housing and Urban Development) assistance.

I was coming on 12 years old when we moved to the farm in rural Kansas. Everybody called it "the farm," but I'm not sure why. Whatever it used to be was a faded memory by the time we moved there. The fields were nothing much but dirt patches, with some trees and weeds sprouting up here and there, as far as you could see to the left and right of the house. The nearest neighbor was 3 miles away.

Not much more than a shack, the house was a single story, 3-room structure, with a peeling white paint job, and an old, empty, chicken coop to the left; a rundown barn to the right. If the barn was ever painted red, you couldn't tell it; it was the dark blackish-brown of rotting wood and the roof was half caved in.

The most striking, and memorable, aspect of the farm was the large meadow behind the house, to the

east. It was a good size, maybe the size of a football field, with thick lush grass, and wild flowers that popped up all around; and the sprinkling of dandelions here and there. I assumed there was a natural well somewhere below it, as it had the look of an oasis in the desert; and it stayed green the whole year.

My mother hated me, or at least I think she did, long before we ever moved to the farm. I think she blamed me for her wasted youth. She was only 17 when she had me. Whoever my father was, I never knew, and mom never spoke about him (maybe she didn't know either); she would grow angry if I asked, so I learned early on not to ask. It kept the punishments to a minimum.

Mom was a party girl, so it was weird when she moved us to the farm when she spent so much of her time in the city, 50 miles away. So she was gone a lot; sometimes a week or two at a time. When she did come home, it was only for a few days, and she brought a different guy every time.

Some might wonder how I survived, but it wasn't all that bad. I washed my own clothes, and cooked my own meals. The bus stopped in front of the house, so getting to school and back wasn't a problem. While other kids were playing games at recess time at school, I snuck off to the store and picked up what I needed with the \$15 or \$20 in food stamps my mom would leave me when she took off (back when they still gave paper food stamps). I would fill my backpack and bring it home on the school bus. Usually when she got home, mom would bring a box of commodities from the food bank. So I didn't starve.

I didn't mind the guys so much either. I know now that most guys feel awkward around a woman's kids, and that seemed the case with me. Most guys ignored me, and they spent most of the time in the bedroom with my mom anyway. It wasn't often that she brought the same guy more than once. I actually looked forward to her bringing someone home. Mom really cared about her image, for some reason, and whenever anyone was around she seemed as if she actually liked me, playing the part of doting mother. It was the only time I got hugs and kisses; affection.

No, the worst times, the times I dreaded the most, were when mom came home alone. Those were the times I knew she hated me.

See, mom wasn't happy unless she was yelling at somebody; and that somebody was me, most times. I suspected that was why she brought home so many guys; she could only play the part of the sweet, nice girl, for so long before her real personality asserted itself. I think all the guys dumped her after that.

I wouldn't say that my mom beat me, not in the traditional sense, like you see on TV or read about. Though I would get a slap, or a push, or an occasional whipping with the belt, mom didn't enjoy the physical as much as the mental. Her thing was name calling and belittlement; she loved to make you feel worthless. If I didn't know how to do something, I was "stupid". If I ate too quickly, I was a "glutton". If I didn't move fast enough to do her bidding, I was "lazy". She was a mental bully.

The majority of the punishments were also mental, not physical. She once accused me of pouting like a little girl, then made me put on one of her dresses, with high-heels and make-up smeared roughly on my face. When I wept tears of frustration and anger, she threw tampons at me, calling me girl's names, and told me to dry my sissy tears with them. I didn't know what they were for at the time.

But by far, my mother's favorite punishment, which she meted out often when home, was to tell me that I was a filthy, disgusting animal; and that I had to sleep outside like one. This entailed being stripped naked (animals don't wear clothes, after all) and being sent out into the dark to spend the night.

The first time this happened I think I nearly froze to death. I was too afraid to seek shelter in the barn or chicken coop. I knew they were filled with spiders and other insects. I didn't sleep. I had to keep moving to stay even remotely warm. So I spent most of the night walking and jogging in the meadow behind the house.

Sometime before dawn, with the sky still dark, I collapsed at the base of the old tree in the meadow, exhausted. I had given up and thought for sure that I would die. I must have drifted off to sleep because when I awoke I was shivering badly and the dawn had just broken over the distant hills. I stood next to that tree in the meadow, in the early morning mist, and waited for the sun's warmth to wash over me. And I cried. I cried because I knew in my heart that my own mother had probably wanted me to die that night. I was alone in the world, and that hurt like nothing else.

After that night I made sure to stash extra clothes and a blanket in the barn. I had a feeling that it wouldn't be the last time I slept outside, and it wasn't, it happened more times than I can count. And every time I would wake with dawn, strip off my stash of clothes, put them away, and stand naked before the sun, crying. Every time. I was 15 when my mother was murdered in the city she loved to party in so much. The police came to the farm and woke me up at 3 AM to break the news. She was beaten to death by one of the men she was staying with (I suppose he didn't like her personality either). I was told I would be placed with a foster family, since I had no relatives that I knew of. A Very nice older woman from Child Services was there rubbing my back as the police explained things. Maybe she was expecting me to freak out about it. I'm sure most kids would.

Dawn began breaking as I finished fathering what little things I had, and the woman was waiting to walk me to the car. I can only guess what they were thinking as I set my things down and headed out the back, towards the tree in the meadow. I heard them following me, and they may have even called my name, but I ignored them and kept walking. As I reached the tree I began stripping off my clothes until I was naked. Then I faced the sun, closed my eyes, and let the warmth wash over me one last time.

And I didn't cry.

— by, CARLOS TRINIDAD



— by, **RICCO SOLIS**

ADDITIONAL CREATIVE WRITING

Many of you have written stories and opinions separate from our PE projects. Sam a former volunteer, who is off traveling, is willing to read through your submissions, help with some editing, and perhaps post some of the writing online. Right now Sam is in Australia and I scan writings for her into the computer and email them to her. If you wish to send something for Sam please make sure it is neat and on standard paper than won't get chewed up by a copy machine. If you have a manuscript perhaps send a copy of the first few pages or chapter 1 and I can try to get them to Sam. I do not have any connections with the publishing world, and do not know how to help you get your work to a publisher, but getting your work to Sam is a first step. If your essay is for her, please put her name on the envelope and please be sure to put your name and number on the essay.

Here is a submitted essay that was not intended to be part of our theme topics, but might have fit under many of them. I was moved by the story and wanted to share it with you. So many of us were hurt as children, and it is important to realize these events were often no fault of our own, and that getting over them is something only we can do once we have faced what happened in a balanced and reasoned way. Thank you **S.W.**, for sharing your story:

When I was a child I had quite a few unfortunate situations that took place in my life. I was brought up as an only child with just my mother. She was an exotic dancer (stripper) until I was around 13. As a result of her lifestyle I was left to deal with all types of neglect and abandonment issues. I can remember being all alone and scared at the age of nine and calling my mother at the bar she was dancing at and begging her to come home and be with me, only to hear her yell at me and tell me to grow up. I did not tell her the real reason why I was calling, that I had just been raped and molested by our upstairs neighbor. I was scared, ashamed and all alone. I've carried that shame, guilt and pain all of my life along with another situation, where I was raped about a year later, by a friend's older brother.

I allowed all this stuff to fester my whole life. I never told anybody because of the shame and pain. I've tried to just forget about it, in the hopes of it just going away, but it doesn't. Early in life, I turned to drugs and negative behavior as a way of coping and escaping. The reality is all they did was complicate things. I struggled with sexuality issues for quite some time. I thought maybe I was gay or something or that I was just not normal. I felt broken!

I've spend most of my life blaming all my problems on everyone else, not taking any responsibility for myself. It's only been since I've been here in prison, these past two years that I've begun to accept the bad things that happened to me as just bad things that happened to me. Not by my fault or anyone else's. I've never talked about these things to anyone (truthfully I can't believe I'm writing this to you, a perfect stranger). But I've come to realize that it's the secrets, the bad and painful things that have kept me struggling throughout my life. I may never know why the people that abused me did what they did, and that's ok. I just know I don't have to live in shame and pain anymore.

I've wasted so many years by living my life on the edge in a very selfish, angry, and destructive way. I've truly had enough. If it takes me having to get this pain out of me to find healing, then so be it. I'm not ashamed! To tell you the truth, writing this has been quite liberating. I'm looking forward to getting out next year on parole and using my past experience to possibly help others who went through similar situations. I certainly do see the bigger picture!! Peace and clarity inside of self is exactly what I'm finding.

— by, **S.W**

GARY'S FINAL NOTES

I wish for Prisoner Express to be more than a book club or purveyor of educational packets. I am looking for partnership among all of us as we continue to invent this project. The partnership I seek is also beyond hearing your suggestions and creating projects that engage and intrigue you. It is a partnership of spirit and action. I

know it is easy to speak positively in the free world and you face hardships in some of the simplest facets of living, yet focusing and transforming yourself and this organization by the power of your thoughts and inspiration can be a profound action. It is an affirmation of your spirit and being, when you can focus on positive action, despite the hardships in everyday life. We all get so lost in the day-to-day responsibilities of our life, and yet there is something more powerful going on slightly out of sight and beyond time. It is existence. I value self-examination of my daily life, but believe it is compelling as it relates to the exploration of existence and what it really means. Basically what can we learn about the big picture of reality by what is reflected to us by our experience and perceptions in our every day affairs.

In addition to our own individual struggles, there are these deeper issues to face. That is where I hope to meet with all of you. I am glad this cycle to have the book "The Life Before Us" from Romaine Gary, to share with all of you who participate. It is not a happy book, but it is engaging, and it is instructive in the expressing the confusing reality we live within. The book gave me many times to pause and reflect; yet it is light and childlike in many ways.

I am not a religious man, but have had occasion to live with very religious people on occasion. Once years ago I was a houseparent for teens in a foster care situation in the mountains of North Carolina in a Christian group home setting. There were at least 5 or 6 cottages and lot of house parents and a number of support programs, so there was a sizable staff. It was a religious focused group and chapel was mandatory. The teenagers I had in my charge were all juniors and seniors in high school, and my focus was to teach them independent living skills so they could go off on their own after high school.

In that job, I was surrounded by Christians. I was so thrilled to meet another house parent, Joe, who was a god-loving Christian. He only had good news and positive regard for everyone and everything. To him god was love. He was a manly man type and was strong and still also kind and sweet. I was so happy to know him because I saw something I could value and honor. The vast majority of the Christians I met were god-fearing rather than god loving. I was so put off by that. They would listen to radio shows that were the equivalent of a biblical Rush Limbaugh. Lots of evil, lots of sinning, lots of fear! Then I would hear the houseparent's say absolutely stupid things to the kids. Things like God would have made tan people if he had meant for blacks and whites to marry. If he believes it I can accept his personal right to believe as he does, but to ascribe it to God. Holy cow!!

The incident that still sears me was one day at mandatory church when the minister called for all the students who loved Jesus and didn't want to burn in hell to come up and accept the lord with him. What choice do the kids have? Is that really the reason to live a Christian life? Anyway this election cycle was about Americans choosing tolerance. I believe we have to embrace one another, if we embrace a loving god and his creation.

We should encourage love, not hate. When I grew up in the 50's, African Americans were so marginalized in society, were segregated in poorer areas, had poor opportunities for an education, and it was considered right that it was that way. Homosexuality was a crime and a disease. They were to be feared, and no one knew anyone who was gay. Women did not work or play sports. If women worked they could teach school, be a nurse or clerk in a shop. They should not expect to be paid equal to men. The glass ceiling was flattening them. On TV and in the movies the culture of Native Americans was expressed by them chasing wagons of god fearing white folk in the old west, only to be shot down by the heroes. We lived in a "Father Knows Best World" yet for many of us fathers were seldom home.

Let's fast forward to today. When you see the coalition of people supporting the Democrats it is inspiring. Women and men, humans of every color and shade, religion and ethnicity are working together and respecting one another. Human expression and reflection of spirit is still more meaningful when we value creation and the natural world. We want the best for one another and for ourselves. If prosper by the destruction of the natural world, **MOUNTAINTOP REMOVAL FOR COAL MINING, CHEMICAL FRACKING FOR GAS, POISONING OUR WATERS, FOULING OUR AIR, CUTTING DOWN THE FORESTS, ACIDIFYING THE ATMOSPHERE, MELTING ICE CAPS, THEN ALL THE PROSPERITY WE GRASP IN OUR HANDS SLIPS THROUGH OUR FINGERS AS DUST AND WE HAVE NOTHING!!!**

Let' chose to have something, and let it start with it being a support for each other. Of any group of people that should drop the prejudice regarding skin color, religion and ethnicity, it should be you the prisoner. What good does it do any of you to be at war with one another, rather than being united to support one another in prospering and thriving? It is not easy to resist being a tool of power, especially when you can plunder and dominate just as you live under domination. Think about the possibility of working together to support one another and seeing the commonality of the human condition that you share. When we die, what we may be fortunate enough to take with us is the goodness in our heart. And I hope we, through our writings, art and actions can cultivate that goodness.

FUNDRAISING

We need to continue raising funds. Perhaps you can suggest someone on the outside, family or friend, who can help us support you and other members of PE. I will send out a fundraising letter to all the folks you can recommend. On the sign up sheet at the end of the newsletter I am asking for you to list people you think might help support the PE program. While it would be terrific to find 1 sponsor who would give us a big chunk of money to continue, it is more plausible to get thousands of little donations to help us continue this work. Please consider sharing with us the name(s) of a few people who you think might help us. I will create a donation letter and send it out. **IF ANYONE HAS A FEW SENTENCES THEY WOULD LIKE TO SHARE AS TO WHY**

FRIENDS OR FAMILY WOULD BE WELL SERVED TO SUPPORT THE PRISONER EXPRESS PROJECT PLEASE SEND THEM ALONG AND PERHAPS WE CAN USE YOUR WORDS IN THE MAILING WE SEND OUT.

LEGAL HELP

I am sorry to say that we do not have any connection to lawyers who will review your case or offer free legal advice. I know it is a need many of you have, but just want you to know that we do not have resources to help anyone with their specific case. If you want to share your story with us, or some of your legal issues, please do as we do care, but know we are not in a position to help you with specific legal requests. Often we can find donated law books that we send out as part of the expedited book program, but currently that is as much as we can do.

Men differ by what they show, and have in common what they hide”

Season’s greetings and may good news come to you.

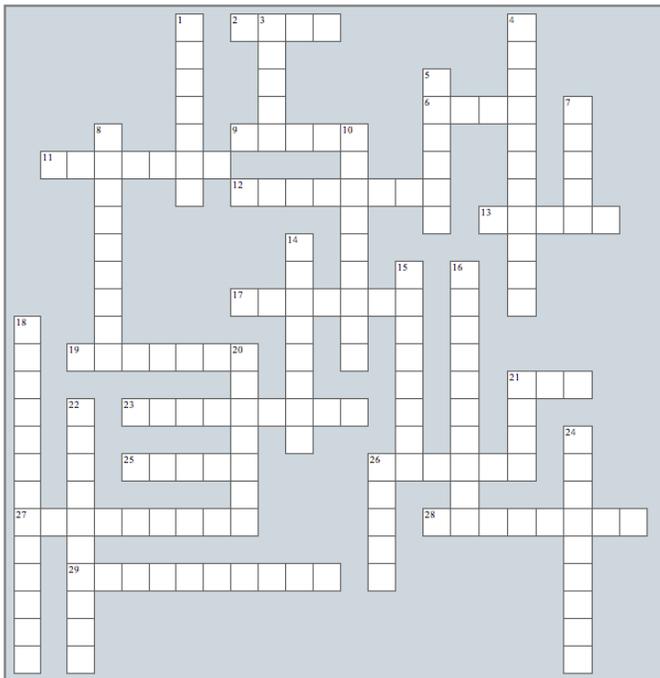
Best wishes from my heart and mind,



GARY FINE

– by, LARRY BLACKBURN

**BONUS: CROSSWORD
TOPIC: COFFEE**



www.freeinternetpuzzle.com/crossword/coffee/print.html

ACROSS

2. Coffee is sometimes called by the nickname ____ which it shares with a software programming language.
6. When served cold, a drink containing coffee is called an ____ coffee.
9. A ____ is an Italian word for a coffee drink containing steamed milk.
11. Coffee is first _____ before it can be ground up and prepared.
12. Coffee has a stimulating effect in humans due to the _____ it contains.
13. The seeds of coffee plants are known as coffee _____ and ground up to make this drink.
17. Thin paper _____ are used to make coffee and keep the grounds from entering the drink.
19. For convenience, some coffee drinks are sold from a _____ machine.
21. Coffee in supermarkets is commonly stored in a ____.
23. Since it is sold and traded in such vast quantities, coffee is a _____.
25. Before coffee berries are ready to be dried and turned into coffee they are _____ in color.
26. Coffee drinks in America are often bought by the _____ in grocery stores.
27. Coffee plants are grown in 70 different _____ around the world.
28. Coffee can be _____ for drinking in a variety of ways.
29. Two things commonly added to American coffee are _____ and _____. (2 words)

DOWN

1. Irish coffee is a drink containing _____.
3. The scent of brewed coffee is referred to as its _____.
4. Coffee was first popularized in the region known as the _____ or Arabia. (2 words)
5. Coffee tends to have a _____ flavor.
7. Coffee, once prepared as a drink, is often dark _____ in color.
8. Coffee produced in ways that are better for the nations that grow it is called _____ coffee. (2 words)
10. Since its leaves do not die in winter, coffee is an _____ plant.
14. A famous type of coffee comes from the South American country of _____.
15. The _____ method of making coffee using hot, not boiling, water and creates a more concentrated drink.
16. A coffee _____ brews coffee automatically using gravity.
18. Coffee that can be made right away is called _____ (2 words)
20. What is left over in the machine after coffee is made is called _____.
21. A place that serves coffee beverages is sometimes called a _____.
22. A coffee drink containing steamed milk froth is called a _____.
24. _____ is a popular coffee drink brand based in Seattle.
26. Coffee that has nothing added in by the maker is called _____ coffee.

REGISTRATION FORM

Please Note: If you received this newsletter, you are on our mailing list for 2012/13 This form or a letter should be returned in a timely manner to make sure we receive it before this cycle's packets are sent—to receive books you must send either 8 stamps or \$3.50 to cover the cost of postage. If you don't want to cut up your newsletter, you may copy the sections of the registration form regarding the programs you want to join on a separate piece of paper.

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

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

PRISONER EXPRESS
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alt-lib@cornell.edu
www.prisonerexpress.org



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

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

Poetry Project – Please send me the next *Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology* V10. **I understand that to receive the anthology I have to submit a poem for consideration in the anthology.**

Health and Wellness project– I am interested in learning more about the connections between habits, behavior and health.

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

Gardening & Homesteading Please send me information on how I can grow my own vegetables and country living tips

Book Club – I would like to read *“The Life Before Us”* and participate in PE book club. [Limited to first 500 respondents]

Mystery Painting Project- Treacy has described this project to me and I can assure you it will be interesting. Please consider participating.

Chess Club-Yes I want to receive mailings on how to improve my chess game.

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

NAME: (PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS and ID #

This is a new address.

SIGNATURE:

DATE: _____

Donations Needed to keep this program going. Please list names and address of anyone you think we could approach with a fund raising letter. If you have more than names than will fit in this space please send all names on a separate sheet of paper

Name _____

Address _____

Your relationship to this person

-- by, **JEFF HARNDEN**

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NEWSLETTER
Prisoner Express
Fall 2012/Winter2013

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

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

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

PRISONER EXPRESS

Newsletter

SPONSORED BY THE DURLAND ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY
The bridge between prisoners and the outside world

Fall 2012

To All:

Prisoner Express (P.E.) would like to convey its gratitude to each and every one of you this holiday season for sharing so many wonderful and talented works. Your voice is important, and we would like to let you know that through every one's collaborative efforts, your messages are both heard and thought of by many. To be more specific, we have made a list for you naming all sources-of-contact and friends that you have here supporting, recognizing, and encouraging you and your works: the program's staff, volunteers, students, visitors, viewers of the program's website, readers of P.E.'s print media, and those with whom we share conversations. Wow! Now that is a lot of people!

So stay cheery this holiday season, and if you find yourself alone, remember we are here for you. Because we believe in your potential and talent, and care about your futures, we ask that you take the time to share your thoughts, illustrations, poems, stories, experience(s), or feelings - with us. Do not become an Ebenezer Scrooge by being a loner. Remember, with P.E. you are not alone!

Enjoy the holiday season, New Year, and e v e r y t h i n g else you have reason to celebrate. If you find someone who is isolated, sad, or lonely, consider sharing a story, illustration, or something positive with him or her. Share the gift of giving this season and stay healthy.

Until next time,

Your Friends at P.E.