

Prisoner Express Newsletter

Welcome friends to Prisoner Express. At this dark time of the year we are a beacon, bringing light and energy into dark places. We join with you to spark creativity, wonder, curiosity and the gaining of knowledge. Every 6 months we publish a newsletter and we fill it with a listing of program opportunities for you to consider joining. Our finances are limited so please only choose programs you truly intend to do. These pages will also be used to report on our last cycle's programs, and to share some of the writing and art we have received these past months.

Many of you are receiving this for the first time, so these pages explain what we do, so you can better understand the services and our limitations. Due to cost and time most of our correspondence is done by bulk mail. We have a few thousand folks receiving the packet you hold in your hand. Through the miracle of bulk mail rates it cost .19 cents to mail. If it was mailed regular first class it would cost over a \$1.00. Multiply by a few thousand and you can see where that leaves us. Many of you have written these past 6 months asking for books or some other service and did not hear back from us, as I only send out a newsletter every 6 months. Some of you send self-addressed envelopes and I appreciate your consideration, but often our mailings won't fit in an envelope or it doesn't have correct postage for a typical mailing. Once you receive a newsletter [as you have now done] you are enrolled in the PE program and you can choose programs to join. Each newsletter will have a series of programs offered. Built into to most programs is a feedback loop. If you complete the assignments you are then included in future program mailings for that program. Regarding timing please know it takes a while to respond to your programming requests. Say you join our history program. We collect a list of participants but we cannot send it until we have at least 200 participants, as we must have that number to utilize bulk mail rates. If we try to send out our programming any other way we are bankrupt in a few months. Please realize this will cut both ways. Say you do not respond to this program invitation until next February and then you send in the signup sheet. We may have already sent out the bulk mailing of this history program, and you no longer can receive the packet. Of course I would like to send individuals the programs they want, when they want it, but that is fantasy land. Our meager finances dictate I be organized and precise in the program methods. I will not send out any of these new programs offered in this newsletter until February, and then they will be mailed out thru late winter and early spring 2015. So if you can, please try to respond by 2/1/15 if you want to get the first mailings in Feb. You can reply later, and if we have not yet gotten to

that program of course you will be included, but if it comes in too late, you now understand the consequences. PE is a program of the Durland Alternatives Library. The Durland Alternatives Library is dedicated to providing free and open access to materials expressing viewpoints and information not readily available through mainstream publications and mass-media sources. Our collection features alternative viewpoints on current social issues. We are committed to providing information and educational materials to under-served and incarcerated people. One of our outreach efforts is Prisoner Express. My name is Gary and I coordinate this project, and it is carried out with the help of community volunteers and student workers. The library is located on the Cornell University campus, and we are able to utilize this connection in generating volunteer help. All funds for the program are raised by the library and all donations that help us to continue to supply these programs is welcome.

As I write this, all programs from the previous cycle are in the mail except for the Poetry Anthology #13. That will be in the mail soon I hope. Josh is collecting all the responses to the Devil Dogs and Jar Heads book club. He will be creating a compilation document of the responses and mailing it to everyone who wrote. Tara is excited to read thru the responses to the Buddhist History and practice course and is already planning her next endeavor with the group. If you received the packet and want to hear more from Tara on mindfulness and balance please be sure to respond. Treacy is cooking up some great ideas in art and she will share them with you later in the newsletter. It is always a pleasure for us to receive your art work. We have the Mona Lisa created through the mystery painting project still on display along with your self-portraits in the hallways of this building. We are brainstorming how to use your creations in the next art show. Alyssa has taken over the theme writing project through May so she will be organizing your theme writings for the next 6 months. Jack will be focused on another chess newsletter, and of course volunteers will be packing books and doing all the things it takes to keep us moving forward.

We have not been posting themes and essays on the web for a few months. Our systems and methods are antiquated, and we hope to have a new system in place so we can both post your writings and pictures, and also our programs. Then even if you miss a registration deadline, a friend or family member can print the program from our website and mail it to you. Hopefully by the next newsletter I will have more progress to report on that front. Besides serving you with information, education and opportunities for self-

expression, we also intend to share your words, feelings and experiences with free-world folk.

Every edition of Prisoner Express is designed to bring you an array of programs to choose from. Please choose the ones you wish to join, but as I keep reminding you please sign up only for those programs you believe you can commit to doing. If you want them all, be our guest, but please don't just mindlessly check the boxes as each program takes time and money to mail, and we want to spread our resources to as many PE members as possible. All of our programs are no charge except for the Expedited Book Program. Read the list of current offering and at the end of the newsletter there is a signup sheet that you can return to us. If you don't want to rip up your newsletter you can simply send us a letter letting us know what programs you wish to join. Please feel free to suggest programs that would be meaningful to you. Much of what we create is due to the feedback we get from you all.

PROGRAMS FOR WINTER 15

Expedited Books- Sending book packages to individuals is how this program was birthed, but as time went on we realized we could not keep up with the demand for free book packages. A few years back we invented the Expedited Book Program as a way to continue to send books to you and stay financially afloat. This program only works in prisons that either allow you to send stamps to us or allows you to draw a check or money order on your account to send us. Of course you can have a friend on the outside send in the fee as well. We have a room full of donated books. They are most often used books. We get them from individuals and organizations. You send us a letter with your book request. **We cannot list the books we have as they are always changing.** You should list the types of books you want. Ideally you should list as many subjects as possible. List them in order from most desired to less desired. Then we walk through our room and make the best match we can, but you never know in any given moment. We have a very diverse selection, but sometimes we just do not have what you want. Most everyone is pleased with at least some of the books chosen, but we do get letters from some of you who are not happy with the selection. Not many, but those squeaky wheel do get heard. My best response to participants is to give us a number of choices. If volunteer book packers don't find what you want your letter gets moved to another pile, and a few weeks later we try again. If then it isn't still possible to find a match I often take the letter and pick out books I hope you will still enjoy. I use intuition and my own taste to create something for you. I guess you can say for some our book program is hit and miss. Also if you move prisons the book package will usually not be forwarded to you by the US Post Office. We send all packages media mail rate, which is all

we can afford, and those packages end up in some postal wasteland when you are not in the location we have on file. If you are moved please send us your updated address. Also in a number of states each facility has its own unique rules about what is allowed regarding hard and soft cover. We are developing a way to keep track for individuals so please be sure to let us know, especially in CA, FL, PA as it seems there every prison sets their own rules. [I know the rules for NY, TX, and IL so you folks don't need to repeat.] Let us know about hard and soft covers and whether we need to create a receipt for you to receive books. If your prison only allows new books, we often have some titles left over from our book club selection that we can send, but selection is limited to about 5 titles. We still subsidize the postage but we ask for a check for 3.50 to defray postage on the books. If you are allowed to send stamps [check with your prison administrators] then you can send 8 stamps to get a book package.



By Antwon Tyler

Poetry Project- Free world people would never know how many people in prison turn to poetry to sort out feelings and express themselves. At least I had no clue until this program began. I am still impressed with how many of you have shared your poems with us since we began our anthology program. Every 6 months we put out a new anthology. Everyone who submits a poem for consideration will receive a copy of the anthology. A team of students reads the poems and select the poems that speak in some way to them. I can't imagine how they do it, as there are so many poems submitted and they do take careful reading. They organize the poems into a volume which we both print and post on our website. In the past we printed the names and addresses of those whose poems were selected in the anthology. Big mistake! Including your id# and address may

have caused many of you not to receive the mailing. We are constantly learning how to tailor our mailings so they are allowed to be received by you. As you know the rules are different from rules in the free world about what can be in our publications, and like the rules for receiving books, the rules for newsletter or poetry content and format varies from state to state. As we send this out to every state we need to find ways to make it available to all without sacrificing our content material and your self-expression. As you can imagine it is a tight rope to walk. Keep on sending your poems. Right now and for the past month we have been saving the poems sent in to be included for consideration for Vol 14 as Vol13 is just about done. The good news for you who have sent recent poems is that you will still receive V13, and your poems are in a folder and will be under consideration for V14 so you will get both. If you're not sure, send in some more poetry. All it takes to get the poetry mailing is to submit at least 1 original poem. Put your name and ID number on your poetry and all creative writing you do for this program, as the volume of mail can be huge and it makes it easier to not overlook what you have done if your name is on it.

Journal Project-This is another of our ongoing projects, and we just mailed out a detailed instruction letter on how to keep a journal to participants who signed up last session. There are about 100 of you actively sending us journals. As this program continues to evolve we are experimenting with ways to make journals available to the free world folks. In the past we have typed up whole journals and posted them online. We have also typed up selected portions that PE program volunteers post online. Now we have a new idea that has tremendous potential for sharing journals. **We are experimenting with scanning journals directly to a new website.** This will really open things up, but if your handwriting is difficult to read or if your journal is just on scraps of paper this process will not be easy. Scanning is basically sending your journal paper through a photocopy machine that can also post your entry directly to the website. It eliminates our need to type it. [But if your handwriting is not clear, scanning will make it hard for anyone to read it online] We are experimenting and learning how to do this, and it offers great promise. If you sign up for the journal project we will send you a few pages explaining some of the benefits to keeping a journal, some pointers on how to do it, as well as an update on how we are doing creating a website for your scanned journals. In 2015 we will start a new folder for each participant and keep all of your journals on file that you send thru 12/31/15. Student volunteers come in every week and read thru journals and often write

letters to the folks who participate. Keeping a journal is a great way to keep your thoughts ordered, to keep your memory strong, and to help you process the events of your life. It is a valuable tool you can use to stay balanced.

Book Club- Every cycle we try to gain access to 350 copies of the same book. A PE volunteer will read thru the book and help design some critical thinking questions for you to consider. Often the books are donated by Cornell University from their freshman reading program. The book we have for this cycle was sent to every incoming freshman coming to Cornell last September. We will use some of the questions created by Cornell for their students and some of our own. Your task is to read the book and send back your responses to our questions. We will read thru your responses and create a packet of the most interesting comments and share it with those who respond. It is a fun project and a great way to read a new book. I have not read the book yet, and I look forward to reading it with you. Below is a description of the book "**Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio**" by Amara Lakhous, I read a simple review of the book that I liked and will share it with you below .

Amiri Lakhous' CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS succeeds both as a whodunit, a humorous novel and a shrewd analysis of the "clash of civilizations" in Rome. Lakhous himself had to flee his native Algeria because he wasn't "Muslim enough," but of course his being Muslim at all unnerves many simple souls in his adopted country of Italy. Another writer might have become shrill and bitter; but Lakhous sees the humorous side of the relentless misunderstandings which propel his narrative. His Italian characters themselves illustrate a variety of regional cultures -- I was much amused (as an Alabamian) to learn that the bustling citizens of Milan feel about the laid-back residents of Naples roughly what



By Antwon Tylor

New Yorkers feel about residents of the Deep South! I look forward with great interest to more novels by this fascinating Algerian-Italian author, who has the rare gift of entertaining while he informs.

Sign up] for this if you care to participate. Please note that if we receive your request after book is mailed you will have to wait for next cycle to participate in the book club.

Art Projects- A few years ago Treacy joined us at prisoner express and she has brought new life to the PE art program. She has a number of ongoing art projects and in this newsletter she is offering two new projects for you to consider joining. Below are thoughts she has chosen to share with you. At the end of her writing is a description of her “Dear Self/Dear Other” drawing project and her new “Art History” project. Please consider joining one or both.

As a landscape painter, I am always thinking about space. Here is an essay that I recently wrote about the ambiguity of space. Despite all the controls placed upon us, we can only live in ambiguous space. What is ambiguous space and does it exist in prison?

Piet Mondrian and the Lighthouse



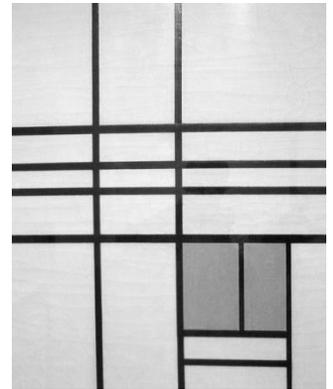
1.



2.



3.



4.

A few years ago my friend asked me about a picturesque scene she thought I would be interested in drawing. This friend, who is not actually an artist but with whom I draw on a regular basis, often suggests things to draw. This time, she suggested a particular meadow.

No, I said, the meadow is picturesque but not interesting enough to create a composition. I attempted to explain the difference between the picturesque and something that was visually dynamic. I said it would be more interesting to sit on the side of the highway and draw the overpass of one road over another road. The highway and its overpass are worthy of a painting because they offer light, shadow, and diagonals. The meadow merely offers nostalgia and does not necessarily provide anything visually compelling.

Having made this distinction between the picturesque and something upon which to create a dynamic composition, I contradicted myself and suggested a road trip to draw lighthouses in Maryland and Virginia.

The lighthouse seems to be the most picturesque image ever reproduced in photographs, paintings and prints – running the gamut from the kitsch of Thomas Kincaid (American, 1958-2012) to Piet Mondrian's (Dutch, 1872-1944) early paintings of the lighthouse at Westkapelle. (1)

On this road trip that developed into a kind of scavenger hunt of lighthouses, I was struck by the interesting names given to lighthouses, particularly the dislocating name of a lighthouse called Point No Point. What is a point without a point?

Ambiguity surrounding lighthouses became more evident when I brought my drawings into the studio. I was working on a particular lighthouse painting and inadvertently placed it next to another working landscape. This other landscape was a nebulous scene of sky and water with just a suggestion of the horizon. When placed side by side, the paintings emphasized the lighthouse as form against the

sea as non-form; the intersection of the tangible with the intangible.

On a clear day, the sea-sky nothingness is visually organized by the horizon; the irony being that this visually organizing horizon is an illusion.

Regardless of its illusion, the horizon works in conjunction with the vertical to create a world in which we understand. Our world is made up of horizons and verticals - with an occasional dramatic diagonal - and it is not surprising that Piet Mondrian in his later works reduced his marks to lines signifying these two directions.

While most creations myths of any culture begin with this horizontal line dividing earth and sky or heaven and hell, it is not until the vertical line is inserted that the world becomes inhabited. All landscape artists know this. Caspar David Friedrich's (German, 1770-1840) *Monk By The Sea* (2) is a strong example of this inhabitation.

I see many lighthouse drawings from my prison students. They are lumpen lighthouses; lighthouses for the spatially dispossessed: the sky is drawn on the same picture plane as the sea; the sea on the same plane as the lighthouse, the lighthouse the same plane as the foreground and the foreground the same plane as the background. There is no space in these drawings as if the prisoners know what we do not know; that measurable space does not exist. For what is measurable space in prison where 100 miles from home is equal to a single mile from home; a single mile is equal to never and nowhere from home; time and space collapsing into one another? What purpose can distance and time have in prison? I mention their spatial dilemma to my prison students. I tell them; "Maybe you are living in a Gothic painting."

I tell them "In a Gothic painting, a mountain could appear the same size as a man, or the Madonna may be 18 feet high sitting on a two-inch donkey. Space is collapsed to the foreground." (3. Simone Martini, Siena, Italy, 1300) I tell them that in Mondrian's later paintings, space also appears collapsed. Vertical and horizontal lines are painted on a white background. In neither the Gothic paintings or in later Mondrian abstractions are there any reference to perspectival space.

The prisoners are not living in a Gothic or Mondrian painting; they are living in the **opposite**. In a Gothic painting, space is not destroyed but is superseded with spirituality; meaning has no need for spatiality and therefore space becomes ambiguous. Mondrian understands it is the **ambiguity of space that gives meaningful dimension to experience**. In Mondrian's later paintings, ambiguous space is disclosed - space that cannot be identified by the grid of his lines or the whiteness upon which he paints this grid. This is the space **between** the lines and the

whiteness; it is space not seen, but experienced; it is ubiquitous and mysterious space where the intangible intersects the tangible. (4)

There is no mysterious space in prison and its collapse of space is not replaced by meaning; all meaning is destroyed. Distance and time do not become irrelevant; in prison, they are **totally nuked**.

Where is the horizon in prison? My students do not know and neither do I. When a student hopefully interjects that he is living closer to home than ever before in his incarceration, I ask if this has made a difference in his life. He answers sadly; "No, it doesn't matter, no one ever visits me."

We do not live in measured space and we cannot live in the annihilation of space; we can only live in ambiguous space. Mondrian knew this as well as the Gothic painters. If I had to run the mile to my neighbor for help, I could do it; that same mile to a person in a wheel chair could mean a death sentence. Without ambiguous space and the horizon, the fluidity of meaning is destroyed and life becomes insignificant.

The lighthouse called Point No Point compels me. Unlike the other lighthouses that mark a specific point in space, this lighthouse makes no assumption. It is a lighthouse built upon water on which no permanent marking can be recorded; liquid and always changing. Like Mondrian's space between the grid and the whiteness, Point No Point lighthouse occupies ambiguous space facing an intangible horizon where meaning is full, always changing, and never reduced to absolutes; the lighthouse offers no clichés; it offers no false clarity.

I imagine a space with an intangible horizon; and on this horizon I imagine prisoners are walking leading an eighteen-foot Madonna and her two-inch donkey.

Some of my thinking in the essay above is based upon an art project that several of you have participated: **Points of A Compass**. In this project I asked for the artist to identify the horizon in prison; to describe the sky that you as prisoners experience, to draw an experience of the earth, and to locate through drawing, the sun's relationship to you; basically to draw your relationship to landscape - even if that landscape is prison. You will see some of the work from this project in this newsletter and in the poetry anthology. A poster will be sent out to those who participated in this project that will represent a work from each of the participants.

Update on ongoing projects:

Self-portrait project: The deadline for this project was November 1 (although if you haven't finished, the deadline can be extended for latecomers...). Some of the art from this project is in the newsletter. Thanks to everyone who submitted work -lots of great art!

about this project in the next newsletter when the work will be printed in that newsletter. Please send in your work, thanks!

New art projects to join:

Dear Self/ Dear Other Project. What is a **riddle**? A riddle is a statement or question having a double or veiled meaning to which an answer is not readily available. What is **diachronic**? (Remember that word from a paragraph or so ago....) Diachronic is a term for something happening over time.

In this project, you will be presented with assignments (or riddles) that ask you to converse **through drawings** (no words) to your earlier self (historic time – “Dear Self”) and to your later self (futuristic time – “Dear Other”). This “later self” you have yet to meet and can only be known as “other” at this time.

Therefore, this project is a drawing dialogue based upon assignments that ask you to draw, experience, and think (and will **not** include moralistic or judgmental **could-have-been/should-have-been**) between you, your earlier self, and an unknown other (an unknown you) in the future.

Art History: DRAWING: I have hesitated to offer a course in art history because color is so expensive. But then I realized that if I focused upon drawing, I wouldn't have to worry so much about color. In this history of art project, I will focus on drawing through the ages starting from the cave drawings down to the present time. I will highlight on some artists who I think are particularly strong draftspersons (meaning they can render form well) providing an outline and timeline of these artists. This is primarily an informational course, although I will have some assignments asking you to draw in the manner of someone you have learned about in the course.

Thanks for your letters, your comments and sharing your art!

Treacy

Chess Club- Hi guys, my name is Jack and some of you may already know me from previous chess newsletter publications. I will be writing the next newsletter for you guys as well. Included in the packet will be more puzzles as well as some of the other running themes we have had so far, such as famous chess players. Because many of you seemed to like chess puzzles and problems so much, I will be including much more of these in the upcoming issues. I know that many of you have been writing in and be rest assured that I am reading all of your letters and will answer them in due time. Please let us know if the paper chess boards and pieces we sent to some of you were helpful, and if we should send them again. Also, let us know if there is



By Gabriel Roberson

The assignments included creating a self-portrait collage; portraits based upon **open form drawing** or **closed form drawing**; a diachronic drawing (a word which I will use again in an upcoming project and will explain then); self-portraits based upon Mexican imagery; silhouette self-portraits; full-length; self-portrait as seen in a reflection; portrait as if the artist was blind; chiaroscuro; portrait as a mask; and a self-portrait in a distortion. See if you can identify any of these different kinds of portraits in the art shown in this newsletter. Again, I hope to have a poster made of these portraits that will be sent to participants.

2. Open form drawing of Self-Portraits: I struggle doing direction on portraits, for lack of a better term. I prefer to work with the face turned slightly to the side, which, with one mirror, is not something I can do. It would require study, draw, study draw



The example of Rembrandt's etching, if you have ever saw it, is about the size of a postage stamp. It's amazing to do what he did at what size.
By Dominic Marak

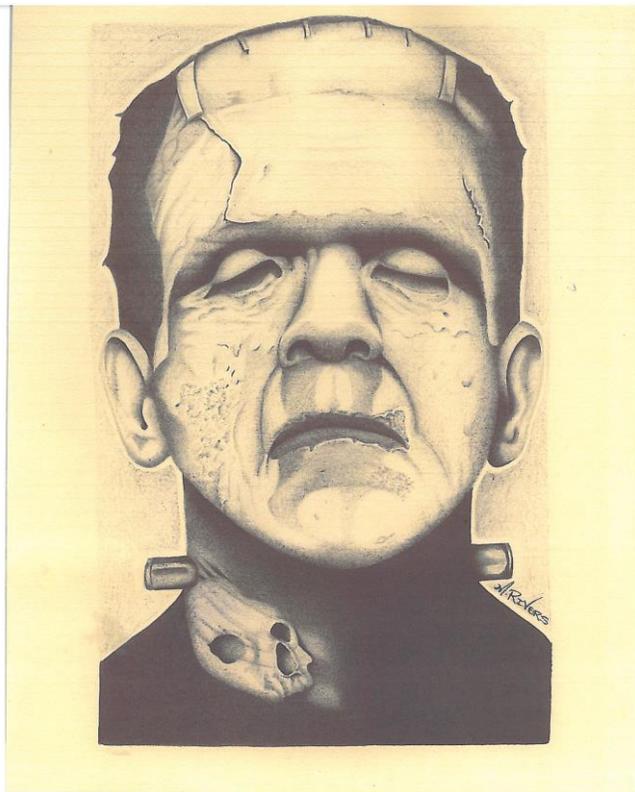
Two-dimensional project. The deadline for this project is December 1. I have received some work and will talk more

anything else you want to see added to the chess portion that everyone can benefit from.

Social Psychology Study Guide—“*Social psychology is the scientific study of how people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are influenced by the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others...It is the study of how people think about, influence and relate to one another.*”

My name is Monica, and I am a passionate Psychology major at Cornell. I am eager and excited about starting this new program with all of you. I decided to choose this field of psychology as it is broad and covers many topics such as “prejudice and discrimination, gender, culture, social influence, interpersonal relations, group behavior, aggression, and more.”

Psychology is a field that is applicable and relatable to everyone. Not only can we better understand others, but also better understand ourselves. My goal through this program is to encourage inquisitive thinking, conversations and tolerance of others by understanding that we are a product of our own experiences and perspectives, and thus different from each other. There are various reasons we each behave



By Martin Rivers

the way we do. Psychology has made me learn about why I am who I am and how to make the necessary changes to be who I want to be. I hope you are all as

thrilled as I am. I cannot wait to start this journey together!

Creative Writing Exercises- until May 2015 Alyssa will be working with us. She edits various publications and she hope to be a screenwriter one day. She is putting together a packet to share with PE writers who wish to develop their craft. Here is what she has to say: *Creative Writing Exercises will be a special packet dedicated to writers wanting to improve their creative (and creative non-fiction) writing skills. In the beginning of the packet will be explanations of what exactly is creative writing and creative non-fiction as well as the difference between autobiographies and memoirs, and possibly some information regarding writing as a career, editing, and publishing. There are two parts of improving writing skills, mechanics and story. Mechanics will include exercises dealing with grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation. Story will include developing character and plot, using dialogue, creating scenes, and finding a narrative voice.*

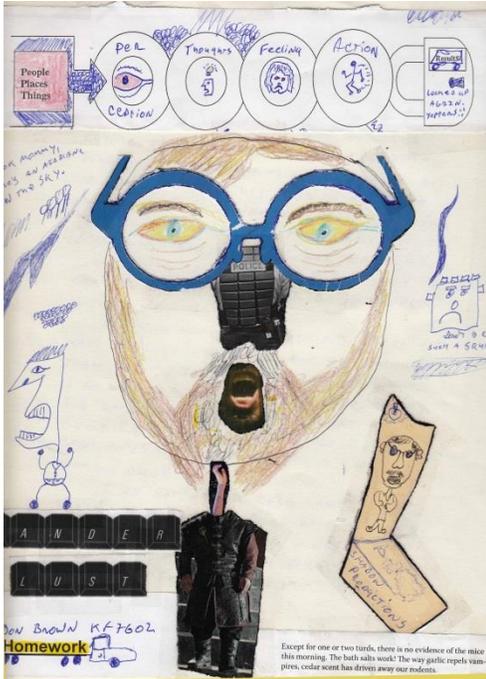
Alyssa who is creating this writing packet has let me know that she is open to reading some screenplays and manuscripts that you may have already written. If you would like her to read your work send a letter to PE Attn: Alyssa and let her know about your project, and she can let you know if she can take on your manuscript. Do not just send manuscripts as we get so much mail, and I would hate for you to lose something important. First set up an agreement with Alyssa.

Please sign up for this packet and put some energy toward refining and improving your writing skills. You can use the writing prompts we will offer in our theme writing/picture writing section to practice the creative writing exercises.

Theme Writing Project- Every month we will offer a theme topic writing cue. If you submit writing on the monthly topic you will receive a packet with all the writing submitted on that subject. Volunteers type up all the themes, and we create a packet that is mailed to all the participants. Writing is a great way to express what is inside of you, and to share your thoughts with others. So many of you have let me know how helpful it can be to read the writing of others. It is easy to feel alone and isolated while in prison. It is even more profound to feel that way while also being in a physical setting where you are surrounded by people. Sharing your words is not only helpful to you, but also to those who read your words who are also facing similar challenges.

Below are the upcoming theme topics and their due date. After the listing of topics you can read selected themes from our past selections. Due to space limitations I only choose a few selected themes from past writing cues. Remember if you want to get a complete set of essays on any of the topics you must write something to share. We ask that you

write true stories for the Writing Theme cues below. There is also a Picture Theme component of the project. If you write



By Dan Brown

on a picture theme topic you also get a complete set of theme essays.

Upcoming topics

Getting Even-Due 1/1/15 High School -Due 2/1/15

A Tough Decision-Due 3/1/15

The First Time-Due 4/1/15

Redemption- Due 5/1/15

Noise-due 6/1/15

Leaving Home-Due 7/1/15

Road Trip-Due 8/1/15

Previous Themes

Brothers

Brent Phillips

True brothers are ones not bound by family and blood. They are the ones having walked the razors edge with you; they know and share your strengths and weaknesses. They are the ones who stick by your side when the world chooses to shun you. Brothers have no expectations or requirements of you they are one-in-one-thousand, a rare breed, a rare treasure in a society that emphasizes that we trust no one and a brother knows no greater sacrifice then to give his life for your own survival A friend, acquaintance buddy or pal cannot fill those qualities only a brother will accept the call of the unspoken bond that is eternal as the beginning of time. Let us all who are brothers keep this flame alive to include the coming generations in a world of no guarantees.

Brotherhood by Jessica Mitchell

I have two biological little brother that I hardly know because of the life I choose to live. I'm thirty and a half

years old born and raised in San Pedro, CA. I joined a gang very young at twelve years old. Mom on drugs, Dad in prison, I went in and out of juvie, and my siblings went in to the care of other families but for me it was too late! My "homies" became my brothers, since I was twelve they looked out for and took care of me; we took care of each other. I was always surrounded by boys, I was a tomboy myself. I loved brothers, (my boys I would call them) I knew and trusted them more than my family! Until I was sixteen and learned that one of my older brothers I look up to, one I thought loved me killed my sister over jealousy of another home girl.

Meth destroyed our brotherhood that made me warm, covered, safe, etc. Our own Brother's start killing each other, it was heart breaking and then people wonder why I had trust issues! Meth destroyed me too, all the time I spent backing up a gang, riding for them, letting them into my house, my heart and even my soul, one of my most trusted brothers killed my sister. I'm not afraid to express this to P.E. readers because we all experience a lot of pain and suffering in prison together we got that in common. I still got major love for only a handful of my hood bros but I'll never let that life take me away from my blood sibling Jennifer, Joseph, Michael and Angelina are my family that is still there after everything!

"It's your job to keep it real with yourself and don't hate me because I can!"



By Thomas Stronblad

Joseph Alvin Parrish

Me and you we're kin to each other, we are theme writing brothers. That is one of the few things that we both have in common.

Hey you – all my brothers of Durland Alternatives Library Theme Writing Program. I would like to apologize to

all of you. For a couple of months there we lost touch with each other and that's because no one from Durland Alternatives Library wrote me and provided me with the upcoming theme writing articles; at least not up until now. For a couple of months there I was totally in the dark. But anyway it's not like you did like my articles anyway? My brothers, I mostly write about my faith and the Christian beliefs I hold. I apologize to you brothers if by chance my articles never seem to catch your interest. I hear you say, who wants to hear or read articles about the pursuit of God. I apologize. I don't know why I am always so inclined to write about things of such nature.

My theme writing brothers, I am not getting younger you know. I am fifty one years of age and every day that God allows me to see another day causes me to be that much more grateful to him.

My theme writing brothers, I wonder if you can get on the same page as me. I wish not to bore you with trivial details, but I am looking for you to understand me and the way I think. As long as I have been your brother in chain's participating in these theme writing activities; you should know me like the back of your hands. None of you wrote me and told me this, but I've come to the conclusion that some do and some don't think what I write about amounts to anything. Well then maybe I could write about something else besides my Christian faith and what I believe in. That seems like the important endeavor to me, but however; I am capable of writing about something else.

Have I ever shared the story with you about my mother and her siblings? Yes I have, but most likely it went in one ear and come out the other. So brothers, altogether my mother conceived twenty two children, and before I was even born eleven of my biological brothers and sisters perished in a house fire. Unfortunately, of the eleven, one remaining brother survived. He ran back into the burning house and rescued his sister, my sister.

May she rest in peace, her name was, Valerie Annette Parrish. She passed away month's past but fortunately my brother, my hero; is still living. He sustained burns all over his body from re-entering the burning house but he was able to rescue one of his sisters. I was born in the second generation of children. I am one of the last few of a dying breed. I have five remaining brothers that are still standing. Four of us have once been a ward of the state penitentiary. Freeman is the oldest brother of mine. Of course he's the one that ran back into the burning house. He now resides in Dallas, TX. He has a wife, Billie. Recently they went bankrupt. I have another, Richard, who just paroled on a twenty five year aggravated sentence. He did fourteen flat on lock but now he is out. He got himself caught up committing a robbery. As it always turns out obtaining drugs was the sole motivator. Out of all of my brothers Richard and I were the closest. Sometimes we played partners in crime. I guess that you can imagine we

thought that we were invincible, but one sad day the road came to an end and there was nowhere else for us to go but a jail cell.

Okay now, so let's talk about Charles. He lives in Dallas, TX too, and he has a real bad drug addiction. He smokes crack-cocaine – he's hooked for life. What's so amazing to me is that he always never seems to get caught up with the police. He is one of those kinds who stays in the house and does his drugs. That way he stands a better chance of not having a run-in with the police. He's been to prison only once. He says that it was a case of mistaken identity. He is my brother and I love him.

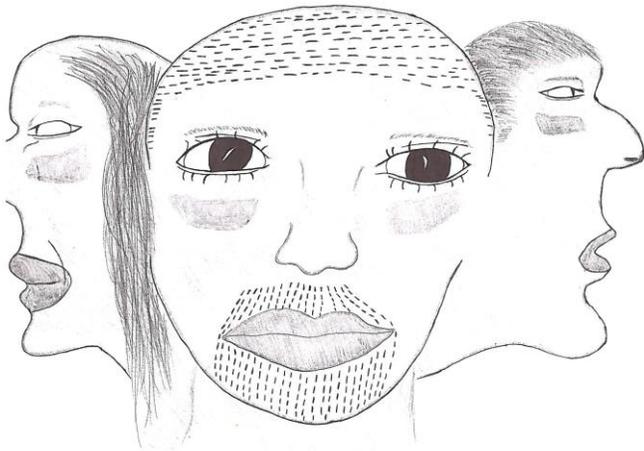
My second to oldest brother is, Elmore. He is an alcoholic plus he smokes crack too. When I was a little boy, coming of age, I would always want to be like him because of his smooth moves. He was a great dancer and I would always be in awe of the way he danced. As long as he stayed sober, and did not imbibe alcoholic beverages he was mild mannered and able to get along with. But once he started drinking and became inebriated, his personality would change and he would begin to display another whole different character. That was my brother but one thing that I admired about him was that he could do miracles on a pot of beans. My brother Elmore is a great cook.

Now let's talk about Robert. Robert had done a lot of time behind prison bars just as well as my other three brothers. The East Ham Unit was one place that he did time on. He smokes crack too. He is infatuated with scoring the rock. I call my brother a "tweaker" because after he takes that first hit off a "crack rock" he begins to pick at the floor looking for a piece of crack-rock that he supposedly had dropped when in reality he did not drop not even so much as a tiny micro dot. The terminology used for that particular vice is labeled, "tweaking." And you talk about professional Pan handling my brother Robert is at the top of the list. You say what, "It's against the law." You think he cares? All he cares about is getting more money so that he can purchase more crack-cocaine. These are some of the things I remember most vividly about my brothers. But don't get me wrong, I love my brothers.

As far as you and I are concerned, I consider you all my theme writing brothers. We always write about the same theme, that's what you and I have common. Even though we all have different personalities and may tend to think differently nevertheless you still are my theme writing brothers. Keep up the good work, and whatever you do, do not give up. Keep expressing yourselves. Don't let anyone or anything stand in your way. Sometimes the days seem so long, they drag on, and at night all you do is toss and turn. Things don't happen for you just when you expect them to. Your so called friends grow shady on you. You meet dishonesty at every turn. Sometimes you're broke and don't know where the next dime is coming from. But always remember that you have a theme writing brother. Through

writing and expressing oneself we can share our pain, our joy, our ups and downs, changes and turn around. My theme writing brothers keep your head to the sky and don't let this cold, cold world get you down.

So tell me how are you doing brothers? I pray that all is well with you and that you are making the best out of a bad situation. And so tell me, my theme writing brothers, what convinced you to join the Durland Alternatives writing program? The reason that I signed up was because I wanted that opportunity that was afforded me to read all the rest of my brother's compilation of theme writing subjects. My brothers keep up the good work you're doing a good job. I would like to ask James Bauhaus, are you okay brother? Please don't let those people get to you. I can tell that you are very bitter at them. It also seems like you've been locked up for quite some time now. Keep your head up, brother.



By Manuel Antonio Gonzalez

Manuel Antonio Gonzalez

Tears

Remembered Tears by Curtis Colvin

Of course, as a child, I cried a lot at different times. I don't remember the first time I cried in need of food or a change of diaper. Some people remember infant things and memories of them—being two or three years old—I don't.

I do remember my first tears of pain. I had taken my dad's pocketknife off the dresser to look at it; at 5 years old, I was definitely not allowed to do so. I opened it; then, as I shut it, I sliced my thumb open badly. I still have a scar from it fifty years later. Boy, did I cry tears galore.

I remember my first tears of heartbreak. My mom had me when she 15 years old—no father for me. So my grandmother raised me while mom still did teenage things. One early morning my grandma and grandpa, on their way to work, started arguing. They both were janitors for a local union hall. They would let me come and “help” them. Can you picture a 6-year-old kid trying to operate a floor buffer? I was ready to help them again, but to my broken heart, they dropped me off with my mom. I remember looking out, in that still dark morning, at the car driving away, and I was sobbing out loud.

My first tears of innocence came to me when I was 11 or 12 years old. I had gotten a Daisy BB gun for Christmas. Within a week I had my sights down. Poor Robin—that was my first kill. I cried, but after another week it was “watch out birds, the hunter is stacking you.” I didn't have any more tears for the killing game.

Today, I still tear up when a sad movie or touching commercial comes on TV. Of course, I try not to let the other inmates see me doing it in the dayroom. Prayers, some of the most sincere and personal prayers make me feel the spirit and cry; but that crying is a great feeling! It's okay to tear up my friends.

Tears by Jason Omar

Your eyes
Are the most beautiful
When I see you cry
I beg God to be merciful
Don't you give in to defeat
Let them run and fail
Take a deep breathe
And break down the walls
Your eyes
Are the most beautiful
A good cry is sometimes needed
Not all tears are harmful
Tears,
Allow yourself to release some pain
Everyone knows
That there's sunshine after the rain.

Pray For Rain by Brandon Rushing

I cry
as a scared child
a lone wolf
a lost wind in
winters night
and only when
it rains.

This was done shortly after my baby brother, who after celebrating the birth of his second daughter Piper Wiggins, chose to walk home instead of driving drunk, and was killed by a hit-and-run driver. He was 22 years old.

When I got the news from my wife on the phone in the Chaplains office I was devastated. My knees buckled under my 6'2" frame and 200lbs of stone cold pain sank into a strangers arms. But only a heartbeat later I took all that pain and shoved it to the back of my mind, away from my fragile emotional heart.

In the military, this is called focus. Or the pretty phrase of "Locking it in". It allows a person to ignore pain and distraction so that they can focus on their mission. Only after you survive can you pull out that pain and deal with it.

And in prison it is also a survival instinct, an automatic reaction to protect ourselves from predators that see a soft emotion as a sign of weakness. A distinct emotional response that hardens us against so much hurt and eventually kindness, I didn't learn to do it, but I also didn't learn not to do it. So I survive and tell myself to deal with the emotions later, alone.

Only later never happens. There never seems to be a moment with enough privacy to allow my eyes to betray the softness in my heart. Never enough space to howl and sob for the loss of a brother and a friend. Nowhere is it safe to curl in upon myself and allow the depth of quaking numbness to inundate my senses. I way, and wait, and wait, but later opportunity vanishes like the wind through the trees.

Eventually another call comes in. While I shove and hide and bury one emotion after another and build my heart of stone, I harden the very essence of my own humanity in a struggle to just survive. Alone in the darkness. Alone in the light.

In reflection on that time it is easy to justify what I did to myself. It probably saved my life. But what it didn't do was help. Even with all the mental blocks and barriers in place I could not contain what was never meant to be contained. Sorrow began to leak from my eyes for no reason at all. I would be walking to lunch and feel a tear stream down my face. I would listen to a song on the radio and just start crying silently, like the wind. Too much heartache, too much pain had filled me and my heart said NO! No more!

I had reached my later. It was time to deal with everything. And it was going to happen with or without my consent. So my choice was made. I started changing life. With help from Creator I was no longer alone. So I prayed. In the ways of my ancestors, I fasted and prayed. I gave my heart and all the pain and love in it to my God and prayed for acceptance and peace. As the lub, dub, drub of a drum filled the air I prayed for rain.



By Jerome Washington

Luis Ortiz

Tears hold memories, each time they fall – It's a relief. I've had tears in my life but none can compare to this hell I'm living in. It's been about 10 years since I've cried – sure every now and then there are moments like when I watch the news, a close person passing away but nothing can compare to coming to prison for the first time.

I only have a short time but, it feels like a life time of missing birthdays, celebrations, and those happy once-in-a-lifetime moments. I can understand why I'm in here – the system isn't perfect but each year I'm in, I find more evidence proving my innocence and it hits me to the point of tears. Sadly, each year that passes jeopardizes that same evidence being found.

Crying, tears come from sadness & joy but originate from memories. I also cry over happy memories, memories of me & my family reuniting & being one again. I cry when I day dream of finishing my life in peace.

As I go through my sentence crying both sad & happy tear's – the treatment as an incarcerated individual & future dream's.

Recipe for Trouble Catherine LaFleur

I am a veteran bridesmaid of many unusual—even bizarre—weddings. In general, my friends have been advocates of theme weddings. There was the Renaissance wedding, the fairy wedding, the *Gone with the Wind* wedding, the rock n' roll wedding and the Star Trek wedding. Elaborate weddings are just a recipe for trouble because the more extravagant the vent, the more things that can go wrong.

Then there is the problem of the dress. No matter what gown you choose to get married in or what style of bridesmaid dress you pick, it will always end in an unfortunate fashion faux pas. In my opinion, wedding gowns and bridesmaid's dresses are the worst part of getting married. A traditional wedding calls for the bridesmaids to spend an obscene amount of money for a hideous monstrosity of a dress. She will never be able to wear the dress anywhere else, it screams wedding. I have a collection of unwearable dresses stashed in my mother's attic, but at least with themed weddings I get to wear and outfit that I can later recycle for costume parties. Until my friend Phoebe's wedding, in which the dress choice featured: *not at all*.

As children, Phoebe and I lived for several years in a commune. Not the kind of commune where the adults sit around and meditate smoke pot and grow artisanal vegetables and flowers. It was the kind of commune where there was hourly prayer, strict scripture memory requirements and a dress code for women that screamed, "Ask me about becoming a sister-wife."

Fortunately, our parents become disenchanted with this life and stopped drinking the scripture Kool-Aid. Her family moved to Birmingham, Alabama and my family moved to the Panhandle of Florida; but, we still remained friends and met up at Bible Camp each year.

Phoebe was always a little fey, dreamy and idealistic. She became a vegetarian and went on a natural vitamin kick. She took up yoga and became a Wiccan, and was subsequently shunned by her fundamentalist religious family. Finally, she moved to Oregon, got a job in a gallery that specialized in personalized totem poles for the home and yard and met the charming yet equally fey, dreamy and idealistic Drexel.

When I answered the phone call from Phoebe asking me to be her matron of honor, I was four months pregnant with my first child. The previous three months had been a hell of nausea, daily vomiting, green skin and frizzy dull hair, but miraculously this disappeared in the second trimester. I developed the rosy complexion of a ripe peach—glowing and healthy. My stomach and hips curbed into the sensuous lines of a Greek fertility goddess. Rollie, my hairdresser, managed to banish the brown weeds growing

on my head and transformed it into a flirty French bob. In short, I looked amazingly beautiful.

Phoebe said she was planning a simple wedding, no fuss, no frills. The venue was to be Drex's family farm which sported a magical field of wildflowers. The date was in two months and she was willing to fly me out to share her special day. Of course, I asked about the dress right away. That is when there was a significant pause in the conversation.

Nothing says recipe for trouble like the words, "nudist wedding." These words are especially troubling when you are (a) not a nudist and (b) going to be six months pregnant at the time of the wedding. Phoebe immediately burst into tears and said I was the only person she was inviting and not even her family was coming. *Well duh*.

"How is that going to work?"

Fundamentalist right-wing Christians and a nudist wedding do not match," I said to her, "One of these things is not like the other, Phoebe!"

Turns out Drex and his family are practicing nudists and Phoebe has been turned to the dark side... or rather sunny side for a while now.

"So, hrrmmmm, everyone will be naked at the ceremony, not just us?"

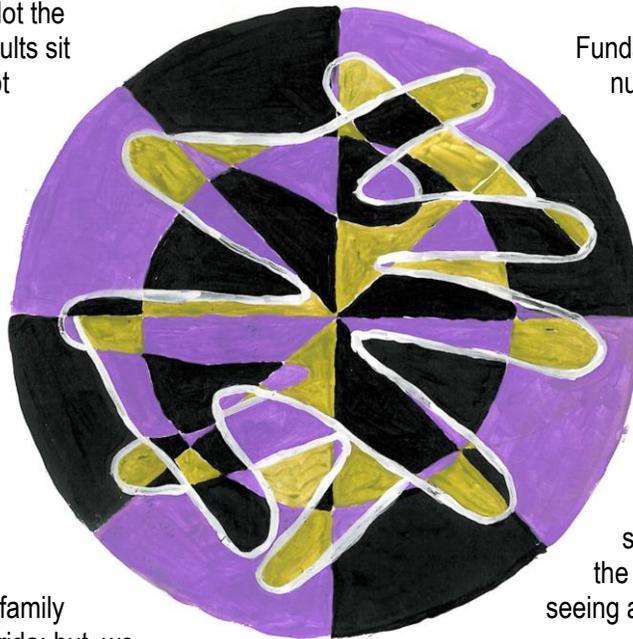
The answer of course was yes. I briefly contemplated this scenario, and then I asked for a picture of the family. Seriously, if I was going to be seeing and interacting with these people—

naked—I wanted to know what I was getting into—or out of—whichever I decided.

Nordic Gods. Really, it's the only word to describe them. Not surprising since Phoebe is the epitome of blonde, blue-eyed lusciousness. I was totally not surprised that my friend would attract someone exactly like herself.

Phoebe cried more, pushing exactly the right button with me, and throwing in for good measure, some extremely beneficial promises for the future. In truth, I love my friend. I love her enough to remain friends through anything, even her bizarre life choices.

So, after checking with my doctor, I agreed to fly to Oregon and stand up with her. By the trouble is that your shape in the fourth month of pregnant is not your shape in the sixth month of pregnancy. Did I mention that at four months I looked beautiful? Beautiful along the lines of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*; however, by the time I had gotten to Oregon, my body had morphed into something more



By Catherine Lafleur

along the lines of the Willendorf Venus (which is only attractive if you are living in the Paleolithic Era).

I met Drex's family, I'm not sure they were really human though. There were no members shorter than six feet, even the women. Fortunately, everyone managed to remain clothed for the time I spent with them, that is until the morning of the wedding. If you aren't a nudist a suddenly are plopped down amongst them, you have to get over the staring problem. I have been naked in the presence of other naked people, on beaches, in bed, etc., but not really at the breakfast table over juice and granola. So I stared a bit, and then apologized for staring. Also, when you are surrounded by tall Nordic god-like creatures and you are shorter and French, well a girl can start to feel inadequate. Thankfully, I had a robe on by I was dreading the ceremony and the *uhm* unveiling.

The field really was beautiful and there was a picturesque cow grazing in one corner. Drex and his friends had removed nay cow products lying around the field. The guest began arriving and disrobing. About twenty chairs were set up for them. I was from the porch of the family home as each was seated, and then it was time to shuck off my robe and walk with the bridal party own to the wildflower wonderland.

All in all, it wasn't that bad. I didn't die of embarrassment, a breeze ruffled over my skin, the grass was soft, the scent of flowers was intoxicating and a Spanish guitar was strumming a lovely melody. I pasted a smile on my face and followed Phoebe through the wedding rite. Then celebrant led everyone in a circle dance. We threw flower petals and herbs over the happy couple and lastly we adjourned to the house for the reception.

Really, the nude wedding turned out to be the best and least stressful wedding I have ever been a part of. When you make too many plans too many things can go wrong. How much simpler can you get then a wedding party only wearing flower crowns with a naked group of friends and family. Not much can go wrong, except for the pictures.

In Phoebe's memory book there are pictures of me, posing with them in all my Willendorf glory, wearing only a smile and a crown of flowers.

Recipe for Trouble by Rocco Ranallo

Sixteen trillion dollars of debt. Stagnant Economy. A moral fabric which has deteriorated to next to nothing. Moral Decay. Where acts which once were considered an abomination are woven in place. Acceptance of ideals of what is normal which are not ones own. Forced upon you by a majority or by those in authority. Brain washing. A mockery of justice, liberty, freedom, free thinkers and free spirits. Tyranny. Intimidating by and through violence quintessence against those who enjoy their lives differently. Culture wars. A capitalist monster devouring sympathy, empathy and humanitarianism for the proletariat. Class

warfare. Wage slave labor. Joblessness. As Corporate executives greedily take more than their share, companies seeking everlasting growth. Unsustainable. Tax breaks for the rich as they jump through tax loopholes. Tax increases to the extent that taxes for the middle and lower classes continue to rise proportionally higher than the other tax brackets. Campaign donations. Soldiers who have valiantly for their country shedding blood, sweat and tears living with the scars and injuries denied medical care. VA hospital, colleges and banks exploiting this nation's children with ever Interest increasing loans and debt. Regressive oppression. A criminal Justice system where bribes, excessive sentences, and political favors are commonplace, Justice nonexistent. Necessary insurance you might not need or pay the penalty. Affordable care act. Killings ordered by remote control, innocent civilians, the supposed terrorist. Drones/murder. Violations of the privacy of its citizens, prism. Deals cut behind closed doors which negatively impact millions. Government secrecy. The ingredients are ripe, the heat is on, timing the cooking. Time's up. Revolution.



By Katherine Hawkins

Success

Cesar Cabrera

What exactly is success? By definition, success is a "favorable or desired outcome" or "the gaining of wealth and fame." Realistically speaking, the latter is hard to acquire

while incarcerated. As for the former definition of success, I believe we all have the ability to reach success and be “successful.”

As kids, most of us had big dreams and aspirations of becoming police officers, fire-fighters, pro athletes, doctors, artists, etc., the truth is, we all could have become anything we dedicated our time and mind to. Unfortunately, many of us chose to live life too fast and make poor decisions which bring us behind these oppressive walls.

Honestly, there are days when I feel a tad big envious at the success of others; the kid from the suburbs who just graduated high school and is now headed to college; the kid who just graduated college and is now joining a master’s program; the young man who stayed out of trouble throughout his youth, who is now a successful business man, living life lavishly and loving it. Yes, I admit... a tad bit envious. However, I am far from resentful.

It’s time for us to accept what is and release what was. By this, I simply mean it’s time to push forward with every step in progression. If you just acquired your G.E.D. – no matter what age – but made the effort and were diligent in your studies, that’s success! If you have always struggled with mathematics but are now starting to comprehend the problems and are finding the solutions, that’s success! If you didn’t know how to read, most importantly, but you are staying strong in all possible aspects and refuse to lose hope although confined behind these oppressive walls, that’s success!

Yes, we might not be considered “successful” in comparison with the accomplishments of others but success is ambiguous and open to interpretation. Yes we are currently segregated from society and are confined behind these repressive human warehouses but we should never become complacent or be idle; for I once read that: *“the ladder of success doesn’t care who climbs it.”* Why should we disregard the latter?

David Kiluk

It’s easy to overhear inmates discussing their idea of success. They fondly remember fellow inmates who were released by reminiscing about who had the most money in their commissary account or who had the most stamps to sell. They admired those inmates who seemed to have a sharp business sense or a large accumulation of material goods.

But my ideas of success concern Will (whose name has been changed). Will is not talked about much. Even after he left, I seldom hear his name mentioned anymore. In fact, Will is one inmate that other inmates may not remember at all.

Not many remember the time he stayed after work in the kitchen in order to cover for some employees who had to leave to attend education classes.

Not many may remember that he had passed around his local newspaper to other inmates who were from the same city, without asking for anything in return.

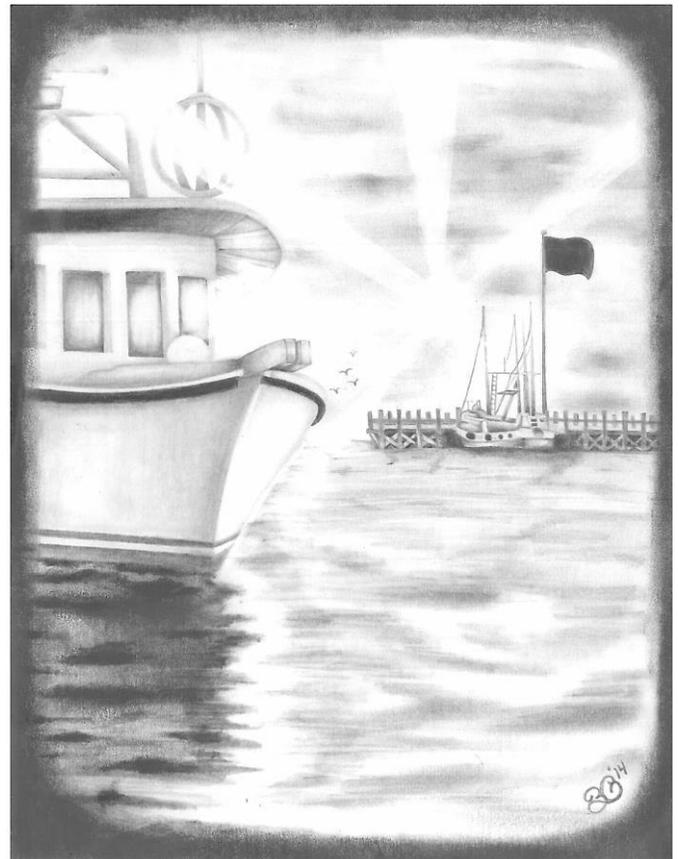
Not many remember the time he stated “live and let live”, when he refused to join in the gossip of putting down a gay inmate.

Not many remember the time he stood silently with a confident smile through a storm of chastisement as others poked fun at him for worshipping “an invisible man in the sky” as he went his way to church.

But I will remember him.

He didn’t necessarily leave a large void when he moved on, but you can sense emptiness in the unit now. Emptiness that once was filled with compassion, empathy, and spiritual peace.

I will remember him because to me, he was a success.



By Brandon Cruthers

Two Social Connections by Ricardo Dominguez

“Products of our environment,” oh how efficiently simple it is for us prisoners to cover ourselves with such a well knitted blanket; well, at least for those who don’t have a particular liking to the cold hard facts. And though I do admit that from time and season some of us have covered ourselves with such defense, one should not dwell under such ignorance for too long.

The fact is that most prisoners are scared of the dark (ironic statement considering that we live in a cave) but it is not the sort of darkness you'd find before dawn under the canopy of a monstrous forest. No, because in such a place one could utilize one's senses to understand where one stands. And once the environment and atmosphere have been detected, it's then a matter of the upmost existence and because even in natural darkness there is perception – one is never too far from adaptation.

This darkness that most of us fear is an unnatural darkness that deprives of all senses, that decapitates all reasons and butchers every meaning. This darkness is an enormity that swallows one into a black hole that sits inside an abyss which lies atop of a nothing. This darkness is an existence that has no existence outside of that nonexistence.

And yet, that nonexistence exists and we are scared shitless because we know what it's like. We've been pinned down by its murderous claws. We've felt its insatiable fangs tear into our flesh!!! We've looked into its hallowed sockets and seen our own reflections screaming in tortuous agony.

It exists at times for a flash, for an immeasurable instant. At times for a deliberate span and then when this darkness becomes infinite, there is no more time.

Ignorance is the warm blanket which produces such departed darkness. So let us step out into the cold world and weather the socially phenomenal because we are human and as such it is the order and nature of such things. To sense that we are dependent on our greatest weakness in order that we may create our greatest strength: existence.

Because to exist means that we must be willing to learn and teach some sort of exposure, we discard that blanket and bare the elements so as we may exist. It is not to say that we stand there naked for all to see and take notice. No, throughout the years and exposures, we've learned to become quite ingenious in the fabrication of garments. Some more subtle than the flashy or the extravagant, but we all wear some sort of protection.

We utilize our senses to the best of our abilities, for or against, any possibility using our garments to entice and attract or reflect and reject any and all forms of moral and emotional interaction. We attain to master the elements for we know that there is no ignorance to bliss.

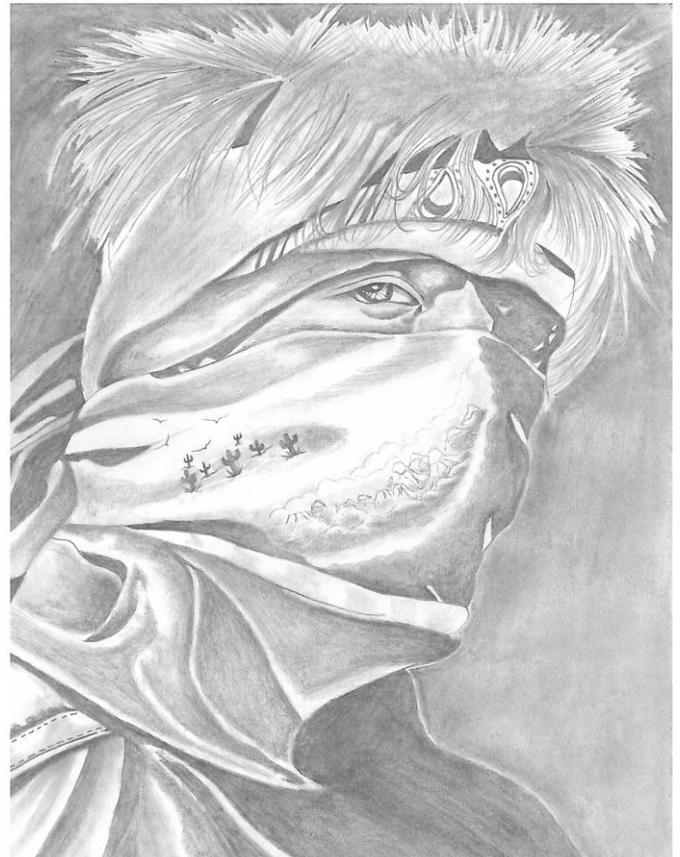
Here, in this cesspool of social rejections, where humanity has isolated its most deadly and infectious disease. Here is where the human resolution is most vigorously tested. For in an era of social connection, Human isolation is unequivocal embodiment for the vilest enormity.

So the fact is that we are definitely dependent on our weakness, for be it a warm body or just the conjure of one aside from our own allows us to understand that we've not been consumed by that infinite darkness; to sense any

sort of emotion or be conscious on any level means that we've not yet died with all our deaths.

We may be living in the shadows deep within that monstrous forest or freezing upon the merciless uninhabitable land, but we are alive.

At least that is what our senses tell us that it's cold; that we are exposed to irreversible adaptations; that our greatest weakness and our greatest strength are one in the same; that our mouths and our flesh is the epitome of your familiar paradox. For if in this era of social connection you have failed to see your reflection in our existence, we say to you: sweet dreams and warm nights. For the rest of us I say: rapture in your existence, for life demands nothing less than we defy society's cruel neglect by our absolute success.



By Alejandro Cruz Benavidez

Hitch Your Wagon through the Bars by Donald K. Brown

Success is such a partisan concept that it is almost impossible to define. I am in prison. I've been here awhile and will be here awhile longer. I know that for a large percentage of people that fact makes my life the antithesis of success but in a very real way I feel more successful today than I have in a very long time.

For those who measure success by their level of affluence I am extremely successful. I make 51 cents an hour which is the very top of the pay scale for us men here behind these fences. I can afford tobacco and coffee and

never have to rely on “Public Assistance” in any form. I can buy birthday cards for all my family and even afford to mail them out. Hell, I can even afford that pink goo that keeps my dentures from falling out.

If accomplishment is how you define success then once again, I am successful. As of today I have accomplished 1,147 days of living without the use of drugs or alcohol. I have read 221 books during those days of sobriety. A total of 108,963 pages of life, love, pain and glory have passed through my fingers. I have learned a great deal also. I’ve learned how to do algebra without having an aneurysm. I’ve learned how to help others by earning a nationally recognized certification in Peer Support. I’ve learned humility and I’ve learned how to forgive and be forgiven. I’ve learned how to be at peace with myself.

Many see overcoming their doubts and their fears as success. I no longer fear that I am not good enough, that I don’t measure up. I don’t have to measure up anymore, I just have to be able to honestly say I’ve done my very best and accept that as being reason to meet every challenge head on. If I fail it will not be because I was too afraid of myself to try. My weakness can now teach me that I also have strengths.

The realization of your dreams, your hopes, your desires and how could this not be seen as success. In this sense I have a MOGAL, a MAGNATE, one of the CZARS behind bars. I am a published writer, can you believe that? My silly platitudes and plebeian commentary has appeared in the pages of four different publications. These publications all focus exclusively on the prose of cons yet there is an incredible amount of talent, creativity and hard-earned knowledge within these walls and I am very proud to be a small part of that community.

While I was a practicing alcoholic my paramount purpose was the manipulation of other people. I did all that I could to ensure that every facet of my life was subject to and controlled by my desire to do what I wanted, when I wanted and how I wanted to do it. Now I am a prisoner, property of the Common Wealth, and one would think I no longer have any control over what, when or how I do things. This is not the case. I can still wake up every morning and chose to do things that will hurt me, my community and the people I love. But, I choose not to. I choose to find joy, humor, and fulfillment in my life and try to bring those things to the lives of others. I do not always succeed at that by my long, long winter of discontent and am able to sow seeds of hope.

The tree of life has bared much fruit to harvest. The greatest treasure of this bounty has been my family. I became a grandfather this year. I know this because my son, who I hadn’t spoken to for 20 years, has reached out and allowed me to become a part of his life and the lives of his wife and child. My parents recently told me they are proud of me. Proud. Of me.

Me, the outcast, the liar, the thief, the convict, inmate #KF 7602. My father said he was proud of me. I am happy, I am proud of myself and what I’ve become. I am a father, a son, a student and a teacher; I am free for the first time in my life. I, Don Brown, am a success.



By Steve Fegan

Lou Tompkins

Success in life, for me, has very little to do with accumulating material wealth. There’s nothing wrong with having money and the things it can buy. Money can make life easier if its value is kept in perspective: it’s only money and the things it buy are only stuff. As a measure of success, though, those things are pretty shallow.

I try to measure my success by how well I maintain my integrity and high standards (of work quality and behavior, for example) every day, especially under difficult conditions—like being in prison. It’s when my character is being tested that I am forced to stretch myself and become stronger. I also try to learn as much as I can about myself and how the world around me works. It’s a lifelong process. There’s never a time when I can say I’ve finally “made it” – unless it would be my last day on earth, when I take my final breath.

Along the way, it’s also important to have moments of sheer spontaneous joy and appreciation for the small things, when I transcend the ordinary work of family life. These moments usually come to me when I witness simple examples of beauty and grace. The ever-changing patterns

of clouds in the sky, the colors and movements of a butterfly, the gossamer delicacy of a drag on fly's wings, the graceful dance of a goat making its way across a lawn, or the unbridled joy of a dog anticipating a walk, all bring to me glimpses of something greater than my problems—which don't matter much in the great scheme of things anyway. If I can escape my small-minded focus long enough to truly appreciate these things, I am more successful at living life to the fullest. And as hard as it is sometimes, I also try to find the humor in everyday life in my own silly self-importance.

Those of us in prison are often thought of as life's losers. We can turn this around buy allowing it to free us to re-invent ourselves. We can use this time to create a new life without having to worry so much about what other people think. Those who have given up on us are not likely to change their opinions, so why worry about what they think anyway? Each of us needs to decide individually what really matters and by what set of standards we will live. We can strip away the old ways by which others have defined us to learn to be true to ourselves.

Also, having our lives narrowed and simplified can be seen as a gift. There's a little in the small prison world around us to bring us success the way most of us have been taught to define that word. This forces us to find joy and meaning from within ourselves.

We must create our own personal definitions of success and use them to re-create ourselves. This can be difficult, but very liberating. We can learn to reach deeper within and find new solutions to old problems. If we don't, we keep grinding our gears and stay stuck in the old behavior patterns that bring only frustrating, or at best, superficial satisfaction.

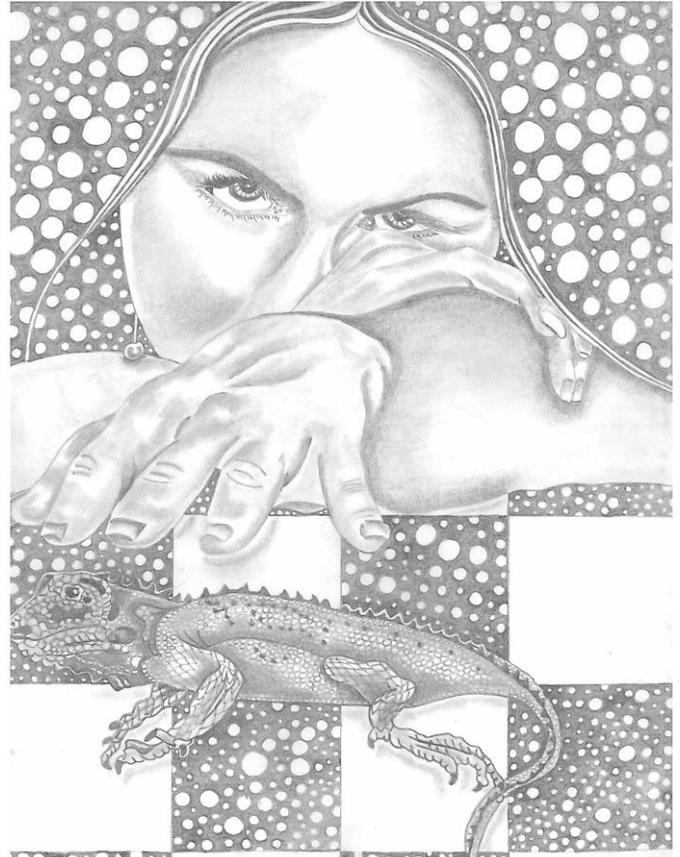
I believe success in life depends, to a large degree, on setting priorities and sticking to them the best I can: what deserves my time, attention and energy right now? What can wait? And what should I not waste those things on at all? This often requires making hard choices. But I have to remember that the time I spend doing things that are not true to who I want to become is time not doing what I really need to be do, focusing on each present moment while keeping in mind my long-term goals.

If I can't ignore the ignorant, provocative remark directed at me right now, for example, how can I become a more patient, considerate and self-controlled person in the long-term? If I respond to that remark, I'm giving it energy and life that it doesn't deserve. It's better to let it go, keep my mouth shut and walk way, so I can spend my time and energy more productively elsewhere. Like everything else, this requires practice.

There will always be people saying things about me that are not true (it was a bunch of lies that landed me behind bars, for instance). If the lies threaten my life or freedom, I need to fight those lies with everything I have (which is what I've been doing), If they don't fall into that

extreme category, I ignore them—or try to. I refuse to spend my life explaining myself to people. People who care about me will know the truth already and the people who require explanations won't believe me anyway.

Success happens little by little. Some days I'm more successful than other days. Each moment brings a new opportunity for a small success. And for all I know, this moment may be my last one on earth. I need to try to make it a true example of what matters most to me.



By Alejandro Cruz Benavidez

Playing Games Lucio Shadow Urenda

Who in this world doesn't start life playing games? I remember growing up it was all we did back in the days. You went to school racing your friends. Seeing who would get there first, and then trying to be the first to get out. We played some kickball during the PE breaks, and then raced home to grab our bikes. Pick up our wooden swords & wooden or plastic guns. We would ride up the levies in our backyards. Rode the bike trails made by kids before our generation. We would end up at our favorite hide out. Our secret forts & castles build up with old truck tires and plywood. We would choose our teams and we would play war games. And end up playing explorers and claiming our new territories. Then as time went by and the years passed by, some of the friends we made moved out; some we just

stop seeing around as they moved on with their lives. But the games remained.

As you got older the games we played got more serious. Then playing games became a gamble in life. I guess that's why now as grown-ups we tend to call life the game of life. It starts in our innocence. But along the way we forget there are rules and we totally disregard that part of the game. The rules become insignificant to some of us. For every game we have ever played there were rules which maintain the balance and the fairness to us all. Rules that made the game fun. There is no difference when playing at this game we all call life. In the end we all can have fun in life. Once we learn to play by the rules of life. Not every game is easy to master. With some games you will never become masters of that game. And I would think that it would take a God to become master at the game of life, some of ya'll have heard this saying many times, or said it once yourself: "we are only human." That's an important factor to remember in this game. But as long as we follow the rules in life we will be able to continue to play this game of life.

I understand that some of us didn't get that one piece of the board in life we all wanted. Some of us got stuck with the boot or the wheel barrel. Some got handed the Ferrari. Unfortunately, I wasn't one of them. But I will keep my boot. For it really doesn't matter what we got stuck with, in the end the finish line is the same. We reap what we sow as we move on this board of life. As long as one has the courage to pick up the dice and roll again, we will continue to move forward. The thing is to learn to play by the rules. No matter if we roll a one or a seven. The important thing is to never give up in this game we all play. For I strongly believe that as long as one is able to breath and does so, there is no quitter within us in playing at this game we call life.

Picture Themes- While some folks respond to the word cues above, others find inspiration through pictures. We will offer a different picture for each month. Please consider submitting an entry. Writing is a great way to open up to yourself, as well as sharing yourself with others. The writers in this program have inspired me to create the newsletter. While we at the library put out the newsletter, it is a product resulting from the power of the collaboration between us and the writers in this program. **Your thoughts converted to words give you access to power.** Below are the selected themes from previous assignments. **At the end of these essays are the new picture cues.** These writings can be either autobiographical, philosophical or fiction. Your choice! To see all the submissions you must submit a story. It can be short, but if it is longer please limit it to a 750 words.



Half-Full or Half-Empty **Crystal Wiesen**

This house is a reminder of how my life has turned out. Before the Great Storm, I was full of life. Laughter filled my halls. There were my friends to love, gardens to groom, and memories being stored in every corner. It was beautiful when I got in the holiday mood, with a tree blazing in the window and lights flickering in the moonlight. But that's over now.

I shudder as I recall how furious the Great Storm was. The winds howled so loud that my windows shattered. The rain and hail pounded my outer walls, stripping me of my lovely paint. Then the terrible flood drove out all that I've loved, scattering it over the land. My garden died from the months of neglect. I stood bare to all, barely holding onto the foundation and integrity that was left of me.

After the storm passed, I waited for those who love me to return, but have yet to come back. As my lawn grew back wild, I still waited and reflected on how my life was. What really drove me crazy was that I was damaged and nobody really cared.

Here I sit, my top level is unlivable and my bottom level has a squatter living within its boarded up windows. My garden is nothing but weeds and grass. The people who pass by me, do just that, pass me by. Yet, I still stand and will until my foundation crumbles or the insects eat me out alive. So consider me as this, depending on your point of view, I am a house that is half-full or half empty. Either way, I still stand.

Neighborhoods **Walter Myers Rice**

There's a change in neighborhoods today. Now you must learn to survive the best way you can. Instead of going to school then having a career; folks hang on the corners, doing drugs, and drinking alcohol while selling drugs in communities that were once nice. Now these same neighborhoods are lifeless ghettos.

There's a word I would like to introduce. The word parasitic – a person exploiting another while everybody's busy feeding off each other. You begin to see more dilapidated homes, now just empty shells of houses. Next I see a man riding a bike in the streets of the new lifeless ghetto that has become this neighborhood.

This house at one time had life; and the streets once had people moving about freely before the drugs and the alcohol brought the crime. The life was pulled out of this neighborhood like a leech had been attached.

Now this neighborhood is an empty shell; the aftermath of the hustle that can change a nice neighborhood into a prison. To those that were investing in this community: these people were robbed by crime that left their neighborhoods like this old vacant house that is lifeless and empty.

I would like to conclude by saying after spending almost 7 years in prison for a delivery charge; it's time to give back to these neighborhoods.



Broken Dater By Elisandro Antonio Nava Jr.

Oh, I know she was mad- don't even think that I didn't feel bad. I did, but I could push it to the back of my mind like the memory of a speeding ticket I received years ago- but having left her hanging bugs me anyway.

We used to fill our mouths with skittles and chew all the crunch out of them-savoring the tangy sweetness, and wasn't that the only important thing in our lives then? Having fun and hanging out? Then someone goes and puts the idea in her head to go on a date... and she wants to go on one with me.

I said "Yeah Sure" like I was agreeing to go to the store for milk, but then she wanted to start talking about where we were going and stuff like that- should we go to a movie or skating or even one of those weekend dances they held at the dancehall at the edge of town?

She chose the dance hall thing, and she wanted to go that weekend. I couldn't even get close to her anymore, when I called she was busy fixing a dress, or her folks were

taking her shoe shopping, she even made an appointment to get her hair done Saturday morning!

All kinds of thoughts came to mind- what in the world did she expect of me? I told my folks about it and my step dad gave me a 20 dollar bill- and said I could use some of his cologne too. I could even wear one of his fancy suits he usually wore for funerals, but I declined the suit.

On Saturday morning, I took an extra long bath- and I pretty much dressed the same as usual except for a clean dress shirt...and I called her to let her know I was going to be picking her up in my mom's Chrysler New Yorker (and yeah that's the one I got a ticket on).

I drove to town at noon and put 3 dollars of gas in the tank- back then that was enough to drive around town all evening- and I picked up some skittles, a bag for me and one for her.

I was passing by the game room and I went in to play some of the games and I went from game to game, not talking notice of time. When I realized I had been there a while I walked outside and got ready to go pick her up, but as I sat in the car I just decided, for no reason, not to go. Didn't call her house to let her know or nothing, just..didn't go.

I sat in that car and ate the candy, listening to the radio. I found out later that she had waited out in front of her house until her parents made her go in- I never heard her cry before, and I, well I just didn't feel like it was a big deal.

It was, for her, and I hope that someone finally took her on a date and treated her like a Queen. She deserved it.



Gently Weeps by Bobby Bunderson

It seems like only yesterday. The day that I first met her, Rita. Oh yes! My lovely, lovely Rita. Before she had come into my life all of my troubles had seemed so far away. But now it seems that they're here to stay. Yeah, well that was yesterday.

I shouldn't be, all the warning signs were there but maybe I'm amazed a little all the same, at how much my life has changed since that night. That night she climbed in through the bathroom window and into my life. I should have turned and ran. Just run far, far way. Perhaps back to the

U.S.S.R. where I was born. The girl was trouble; I just felt it. But my sweet Lord did she ever look good when I saw her standing there. Let me go back to the day before I met her.

I was working in a small donut shop on the outskirts of Lucy Diamonds strawberry fields. I didn't want to be a donut fryer forever; this was a temporary gig. I wanted to be a writer. A paperback writer. I had emigrated from Russia and had spent my life savings on some property I believed would become a good investment a few years down the line. But alas, the landowner, Eleanor Rigby had ripped me off. The title for the property, which I believed I had purchased, wasn't for the flat grass land I had intended on buying. Instead I was stuck with a small rocky hill. All of the locals referred to it as mount rocky raccoon. Named so due to a large family of coons who lived in the house atop the hill, my house. The locals had heard of my purchase and scoffed openly at me whenever they saw me. The aptly nicknamed me, "The Fool on the Hill."

Old lady Rigby did however try and make amends to me for her shady business dealings. She invited me to her estate the day before I was to meet Rita. We were to have tea in her back yard.

Eleanor's back yard was huge and in the center of it was a large overgrown garden. I imagine that at some point in history it was amazing, but these days it was just a shambles. A helter shelter of various brush, plants and flowers. Rita saw my perplexed expression and explained that ever since her husband had passed away, the honorable Sgt. Pepper Rigby, she just never got around to tending it any longer. She said that it was her "Octopuses garden in the shade." In the center of the garden was a long yellow tank of some sort. It looked oddly out of place. I asked Eleanor what it was? She told me that it had been a water tank that had fallen over on its side during an earthquake in the early 1970's. She said it was her "yellow submarine" now. I simply didn't like it and asked Eleanor if she would mind if I removed it. Ms. Rigby told me to go ahead and try but that it was firmly stuck in the mud. I accepted the challenge. Eleanor announced that she would pay me \$300.00 if I succeeded.

I waded out into the mire and grabbed hold of one end of the tank and lifted. At first it didn't budge but then suddenly there was movement. "Careful, don't hurt yourself," Eleanor teased.

"I can get it!" I hollered, my back screaming in protest. "Man, she's so heavy," I grunted as my grip began to falter.

"Let it be! Let it be!" Eleanor yelled. "I've got something better for you to burn your energy on," She said and smiled. And so I relented and dropped the yellow submarine back into the muck. It splashed, covering me in mud. Once again the yellow submarine was firmly sunk in the center of Eleanor's overgrown octopuses garden in the shade where it had laid untouched for years.

Eleanor informed me that I could shower and put on some of Sgt. Pepper's old clothes. When I was finished Eleanor announced that she would now show me around the place. She said it was her "magical mystery tour."

The last stop on the "tour" was her bedroom. She told me to look out on the balcony at the garden. From that vantage point I understood why she named it an octopus because that's exactly what it looked like from above. When I turned back around Eleanor was standing by her bedpost completely naked. She motioned for me to join her on the large four-poster bed. I had to admit, for a woman well into her sixties she was looking pretty good. But I just couldn't help but imagine all the people who had already been where she wanted me to go! In town I had often heard plenty of tales about her "free-spirited" escapades.

"I'm sorry Eleanor, but I cannot," I said.

"Hey Jude, don't be afraid," She said back to me. I honestly wanted to but I couldn't get past the fact that she looked just like my mother's superior from Catholic School.

"I'm really truly sorry but I can't, I'm seeing someone already." I lied.

"Who?" Eleanor asked suspiciously.

"Prudence," I answered. "I could never cheat on my dear Prudence," I said solemnly. But Eleanor wasn't going to take no for an answer and advanced toward me. She pressed her nakedness tightly upon my body. I felt myself getting aroused and yelled, "Get back, get back!" I then turned and raced toward the door.

"Wait!" She pleaded. "I'll buy back your land! I'll pay you extra," Eleanor pleaded desperately. "Hear these words of wisdom!" She screamed, "I've got to get you into my life, into my life!" I heard her scream as I left her standing there.

"Money can't buy you love!" I hollered back at her as I bolted through the door. That was the day before I met Rita.

I was working alone making apple fritters when I heard a loud bang near the rear of the donut shop. I hurriedly grabbed the owner, Maxwell's silver hammer from the toolbox and cautiously walked back to the rear of the store. That's when I saw her standing there. She had obviously just climbed through the bathroom window. She saw the large hammer that I held in my hand and said, "Hey bud, give peace a chance!" I felt rather foolish and so put the hammer down.

"Why did you break in?" I asked.

"Well, first off it's raining if you haven't noticed. And I am cold, wet, and have no place to go. My uncle Albert kicked me out of his house. That's why I broke into your stupid donut shop!" She bellowed as the tears began to fall. Just great! That makes the second girl I have made cry in as many days. "So what? Are you like going to call the cops on me now?" She sniveled. She brushed past me and made her way to the dining area. My sweet lord could that girl

walk! It was just something in the way she moved that touched me like no other woman.

“Nah, I’m not going to call the cops or kick you out. What I need is someone’s help. Not just anybody’s either. I think you’ll do just fine. So help me tonight and all’s forgiven. What do you say?” After a few minutes she answered.

“Yeah I’ll help. But I need some smokes. Got any?” I did not. I pulled out a twenty and told her to go pick herself up some along with a pizza. “It’s pouring outside!” She protested. “Can you drive?” I asked. She said that she did. “Well baby you can drive my car,” I announced.

“Don’t call me baby,” She said without much conviction.

“Well, you haven’t told me your name,” I informed her, “By the way, I’m Jude.”

“Hey Jude, I’m Rita,” She said and smiled as she snatched the keys from my hand. And with that I had unwittingly sealed both of our fates.

After finishing up at the donut shop at 1:00 A.M., I took Rita back to my house. We made love for hours. Rita was insatiable. And wild. I had never been with a woman who could twist and shout that much while making love. “Look, here comes the sun.” She sighed as we looked out at the last glimmer of dusk. “Let’s go for an adventure,” Rita ambitiously suggested. I told her it had been a hard days night and that I’d rather sleep, but she would have nothing of it, telling me that she was a day-tripper. And so off we went.

Six months later and everything changed in a flash. It was Rita’s birthday but I had to go to a very important job interview 50 miles away. She was pouting the whole time I was getting ready to leave. “But it’s my birthday, Jude!” She moaned.

“Look Rita, I know it’s your birthday and happy birthday to you, but I’ll be back in a couple of hours, you know how important this interview is,” I declared as cheerily as possible. I kissed her forehead and left. Twenty minutes down the road I realized that I had left my resume on the television. I had to go back and get it. As I neared the hill I noticed a stranger’s car parked in the driveway. As I entered the living room I heard her, Rita, shouting as she often did while making love. Enraged and blinded by fury I grabbed my gun. I entered our bedroom and my heart sank as I saw Rita riding some stranger in our bed. I unloaded the revolver; happiness is a warm gun, bang-bang, shoot-shoot. The guy was obviously dead. Rita wasn’t. Not quite. She looked up at me with big terrified eyes. “I’m so sorry Jude, I’m so sorry.” She reached out for me and I jerked away. “I want to hold your hand,” She cried. I turned away and went to the living room where I called the police.

That was ten years ago. I now spend my time writing and playing my guitar. I have a large poster of the Beatles hanging on the wall of my 6’ by 10’ cell. It’s been a

long and winding road but live and let die right? I used to write a bunch of silly love songs but now I write only ballads. Every night in the cellblock I serenade the prisoners until they all fall asleep. Every night as my guitar gently weeps.

Beetlemania by Curtis Colvin

In my baby book, my mother wrote that every time the “Beatles” played a song on the radio, I would start to “jiggle, wiggle, and move to the rhythm,” (Her words not mine). I believe it. Even today, over 50 years later, I still jiggle, wiggle and move to the rhythm... just not as good as I used to.

What made these Englishmen so famous in America is fad. The haircuts, the way they dressed, and their voices were unique. They were different. Some parents back then called their type of music evil. So when kids wanted to rebel, what did they do? Deny the folks and listen in. The “Beatles” were cool.

Their music stood out among the other musicians. With their words easily heard and understood, it was a gateway to the heart and soul, a bond of pleasure and enjoyment.

Remember the hurt of the breakup? Remember the sadness of the death? A lot of us remember where we were when we learned of John Lennon’s death. Do you remember?

I guess my mother knew was back then that I would grow up alright, listening to the “Beatles.” She was hooked on them too.

The Great Commotion by B.R. Bateman

I was much too young to grasp the reality of the Great Commotion when it was first revealed on television in the U.S.A. I was only four, the youngest of three boys. We had an absent father and our twenty-three year old mother (divorced) was off launching her acting/modeling career. We lived in Memphis, the home of the king of rock and roll. We lived with our grandparents and our mom’s teenaged siblings. My only memories of that night on February 9th 1964 were that all of the generations of my family were gathered around the TV set. An old man appeared on the TV and said, “It’s going to be a really big show.”

It was a year later in 65’ when The Great Commotion landed again on American soil. They took all the jabs that the media threw at them and they threw back some comic balls of their own. At first it was a love-hate relationship. The Great Commotion performed before a crowd at Shea Stadium in New York that was so raucous that they could not hear their own talented gifts over the noise of the thongs of squealing youth. From that point on America and the world would have a love-hate relationship with the Great Commotion.

Now a unique personal experience occurred in the 66' between the Great Commotion and me and my brothers. I was six years old, brother Dan was seven and Bill eight. The Great Commotion had come to vacation in our personal paradise, Kailua Oahe, Hawaii. The view from our back yard was that of Rabbit Island and Flat Island sitting in the Pacific Ocean. As I look at the clipping from the Honolulu newspaper of that day, there we are, three crew-cut tanned young boys in our swim trunks standing in line on the sand outback of our home waiting to meet the Great Commotion. Indeed this was a great commotion in our quiet town. We waited our turn to enter the home that was houses down from ours. Two large security guards let four people out of one door as two other giants opened a second door my brothers and me to enter. The Great commotion sat in chairs on the other side of a long table loaded with fruit, vegetables and flowers. They smiled relaxed grins at us, three innocent looking nervous young boys, when my oldest brother Bill got up the courage to speak. Bill asked, "So what's so great about you guys?" The one they called John, having understood the ironic poignancy of the young boy's question fell over backwards in his chair and released an enormous guttural belly laugh. Then John, lying on the floor answered, "Nothing."

No disrespect to the Rolling Stones and their immense talent and longevity over the past fifty years, but the Beatles in their short career together (1962-1970) would forever change the rock and roll industry and for that matter the entire consciousness of the world.

It has been fifty years since "that really big show" in February of 64' on the Ed Sullivan Show. The Great commotion (John, Paul, George and Ringo- The Beatles) have influenced every musical artist that has come after them. During a time of great cultural change in the world the Beatles brought to us all a simple awareness that is as true today as it was back then--- All You Need Is Love.

Forever changing mankind--- The Great Commotion indeed



Take a Good Look by Robert Allan Cooke

Just look at em! How can your heart not be swept away by their pure innocence and enduring strength? I keep them close in my heart. They need not know of the struggle that has brought them to this point.

From left to right I will give introductions to them for you. The young lady closest to you is Ruth. She is the youngest of the four. She, even at this age, wants to help everyone around her. She eagerly helps with chores and wants to help seed the fields as planting comes due. She is my youngest and a true heart of gold lies within her.

Next to her, beside her, as he always seems to be is my second youngest, David! He and Ruth are basically inseparable spending all their free time in the company of one another... bookends they are... yes indeed! Davis is a take-charge young man with an unusually strong sense of right and wrong for one so young. He is destined to be a leader of great strength; a ruler of untold wealth will be his legacy, my pride a great reward!

Beside David is my precious Naomi. She's the second born to myself and their mother, God rest her gentle soul. She has her mother's instincts to provide for the others. When one cries, she is there to ease their burden. When another becomes frustrated and uneasy she is there to calm the storm within. My love for her deepens as I see the reflection of her momma in all she chooses to be. No matter the turmoil life sets before her she will find comfort within as her spirit prevails.

Last, but by no means least is my Eve! She is the first born of loves union between their mother and I. She is truly the guardian of their youth. Sometimes tempted by that which she should have no concern in, she always stays the course and chooses what best suits the needs of the four of them. She will now great beauty in her life, her stature, strength of character, and forgiving heart tell me this is true.

Take a good look at them. You will see no distress, no angst toward each other as they find sustenance at the



breakfast table and in each other. They have known only my parental provision since the passing of their mother four years ago. Although they would deeply benefit in the comfort of mother's care they have the wherewithal to understand life's traumas. We have so little here. The farm provides for our welfare but little else. Unlike other children they don't know special belongings and wealthy lifestyle. They have no overbearing desire to be materially more than they are. They have each other and they have me and their contented smiles at days end let me know that they choose to have this just as it is.

As the morning's sun begins to rise we will take to the chores the Good Lord has provided and work hard as He did, in love, and the comfort of who we are. As for me, they are my reason for being, my drive each day as I wake, and my precious treasure from God above. As He did, I will give my all to and for them, they are my life.

We may be poor in belongings, but we have limitless riches found only in each other... We are family and we are strong!

This Used To Be Us by Brandon Rushing

The winter air was dry and cool against our skin as we huddles together in our cabin. An old pot-bellied stove gave us heat though, and cooked up some tasty beans and rice. Papa spent a lot of his time all summer cutting down trees and then chopping up the pieces. He would stack them all in separate piles on each side of the cabin, one pile for each size. When we asked him why he stacked the wood against the house that way, he would square his broad shoulders up and say, "When the winter comes that pile of wood will help keep out the cold." So naturally we all believed him, he was our father after all.

Mama was proud of that man. She said, "The Lord sure knew what he was doing when he made that one!" And then she smiled with the sweetest look you ever knew and kissed us on the forehead. Then she would go right back to mending our clothes or cleaning our dirty floor. At night when it was real cold mama and daddy would snuggle up close to us and keep us warm. And mama would sniff all our heads and then tell papa, "She sure loved the way them babies smelled." Papa just said that they should have had a dozen more, then the cabin wouldn't ever get cold and he wouldn't have to cut wood ever again. But there weren't fooling us kids. We knew there just wasn't enough room for any more. And if papa made new rooms he'd just have to cut more to wood to cover their walls too.

Conservation by Jonathon C. Holeman

If you wish to see a child smile in true happiness, feed a hungry child.

In modern times people are starving across the globe, even in the United States of America. Great droughts

cause hunger levels to spike. With little water to feed our livestock and agricultural crops we think of conservation.

Conserving water that we waste on household dish and clothing machines, on washing our vehicles often, conserving this water provides extra stores in our local reserves for the times of drought. It might not seem to be such a big deal to some, but perhaps, they should consider the world's ever-rising population levels and the future when there isn't enough food produced for everyone to eat.

In reality children, even in the United States, in low-income areas, are growing up right now lacking the essential nutrients and vitamins they needs to have a full productive life span. Many seem to believe that if they give money donations to charities that ship food to foreign nations they have a ticket to waste copious amounts of food and water. In general people seem not to understand that many charities pocket a large percentage of the donation. This is because people generally make donations based on the tax write-off it provides.

Giving money to charity is nice, and well, but research where the money's going first. Another thing to consider is that there is a much easier and more productive way to help the future of mankind in the long run, and right now.

The answer is simple conservation. Use what you need, no more, no less, and then if you want to do more, start with your community. Donate food to local charities, then the world.

Even in prison inmates are concerned with the state of world affairs and how we can help conserve natural resources, because we too have our own children, and we want them to have all the necessities they need to live long and productive lives. If we help our children now in the United States, then they will be able to help more across the globe in the future. If people in prison, society's outcasts, are concerned, shouldn't everyone be?

No matter what you are doing for others, you can always learn to do more.



Recovery Mountain by Ron Clifton

To me recovery is a lot like climbing a mountain. We start in the valley of addiction. There's always frustration and despair, and you use all your energy never getting anywhere. Up on the mountain there's sunshine and just

looking at it gives you a feeling of hope. Getting there from the valley looks hard, maybe it was impossible.

If we can only turn our back on addiction and climb a little bit, we soon realize some of our problems and depression get left behind. If we climb a short way further there's more sunlight. We start to see green grass and a few flowers. Things leak and are much better. Now and then the happy songs of birds can be heard.

We came across ledges as we climb and take the chance to rest, look around and enjoy the view. We may have come a long way a lot for all, but the things we see and where we are always much better than down in the valley with addiction.

We know from experience it's dangerous to move too fast. We have to be engulfing because some places will be more difficult. We lose focus on get to comfortable; we can easily slip on terrible all the way down to where we started. If we slide backwards we need to grab hold as quickly as possible. We shouldn't worry too much about what's ahead, a think too long about what we lost in the valley.

We need to learn how to be content with just being alive and enjoy the beauty around us. It takes a long time to climb a mountain and a moment to fall off.

If I never reach the top, staying out of the valley and taking pleasure in the climb is wonderful enough

It Is All About Perspective by Donald Thetford

You say potato, I say, no that's definitely an Idaho Russet. I fancy myself a bit of an amateur astronomer. I own a magnificent telescope, which can actually zoom in on the surface of the moon. I also consider myself to be quite critical when it comes to viewing new or unusual sights in our vast solar system. I don't just jump to conclusions, like some.

One night, back in 1986, I was attending a Christian based astronomy outing, which took place under the brilliant stars of west Texas, when our instructor gave each group-four in each, four in all- our own set of coordinates. My group consisting of a nerd named Donald Hodges, two giggling teenage bookworms name Mary and Tommy Wilson, and yours truly, had been given a quadrant of space yet to be explored by untrained eyed. With our respective scopes trained heavenward, we began our observation. Shortly into it, I locate what we are expected to find.

I wait on my group to catch up. Suddenly Donald yells, "Hey, guys! I see a planet!" Fact is we all see it. Although we all have a slightly different view of this Martian terrain, I am confident that my powerful scope can see well beyond what Donald's tiny scope allows him to see. As for the giggle twins, their scopes are fine.

"That's Mars, Don" I say confidently, once I spot the "face" that everyone on earth claims to be a message to earth

from our friendly neighbors across the celestial ocean. "See its red surface?"

Mary says, "Where? I only see a red blob!"

Tommy taps Mary's forehead.

"Oh," says Mary. Guess it would help if I wear my glasses" We all get a laugh out of that. I think I was blind; now I see! Then Tommy says: "Oh, hey, look! I see mountains! They seem to be joined together loosely at the base, where a winding valley must lay. I'll bet if we could see up really close, we'd see footprints. Maybe not like ours, but footprints nonetheless. It's possible."

"Yeah" Mary concedes, "It's possible. But not very likely." For once I force my analytical mind to take a vacation, to allow my imagination free reign. Why be such a bore. Right? "No, no," I say, zooming in on the "mountains" to which Tommy was referring. "They look more like desert dunes. Barren. Dead. I agree with Mary: Mars isn't livable. Don, what do you see?"

With a nervous laugh, if a snort qualifies as a laugh, Donald says, "I'm not really sure."

"Why not?" Mary wants to know.

Donald turns his telescope around. "Look. A ladybug has landed on my lens. For a moment there I thought for sure we were all seeing a Martian eclipse. Armageddon!"

We all burst out laughing... Then our outing came to an end.

Sometimes what we perceive to be one thing may look quite opposite to someone else, even though we are both seeing the same thing from the same angle. Prison is hellish, no two ways about it. But it's how we look at life that will determine how well we cope with our current situation. Remember, the glass is either half full or half empty. Only you can decide which one it is. For me, your narrator/character, I saw Mars as an inhabitable place. Think of it in terms of metaphor. The dunes represent my unstable past. Barren and dead are how I feel about it. Now Don, he saw doom because he forgot to clean his mental lens before observing the endless possibilities beyond. If only he had been more observant and less preoccupied with his fate, maybe he would have noticed that a ladybug was all that obscured his view.

How about you, fellow inmates?

How do you view your situations? Do you see beyond now? Or do you only see an eclipse? See, it's all about perspective. You have the power to reach for the stars... or to fall into the vastness of despair. It's your call. As for me, I'm never going to let a ladybug trick me into thinking my world has come to an end.

Happy Voyage, whoever you are.

Oh yeah. May the eternal force be with you.



Andrew Gall

Paula's petite frame weighed heavily on Everett's steadily breaking heart. Yet in his arms, her lifeless body was as light as a dream evaporating with the morning's dew. Their dream, their too short marriage ended while she was in labor as a spout of blood spewed forth. The crimson flood drowned Everett's plans for the future as well as submerging his heart in a sea of sorrows.

For three days Everett sat alone in his dark room. He couldn't banish the look of fear and agony that tarnished Paula's beautiful face as she died. It hung, just behind his eyelids, stabbing his soul each time he blinked. The sight of his beloved's agonizing death kept his sleepless eyes red and rimmed with sparkling anguish. He turned away all who came to offer their condolences. They couldn't know. Nor pull him from his pain, a pain that grew with the nearly constant wailing of his motherless daughter. The crying seemed to drag him further into the Abyssal loneliness that he was blindly wandering through.

Everett's aged mother opened the door bathing his living mausoleum in the harsh light of the spring morning. He winced. Her mussed hair and tired eyes told of long nights caring for his daughter, who slept in her frail arms. "Come," she told her son with a soft raspy voice, "Paula must be sent off this morning."

Everett looked up, his blue eyes dark and hopeless. "It's not fair," he choked, barely able to hold down the sobs that bubbled up from his gut.

"No son, it's not," she replied, her voice full of compassion. "Not fair that you lost her, or that a mother's love was taken from the wee one here, her father's as well. Your daughter needs you to be strong, needs you to be her father, and give her a name."

A sense of duty sprouted within the ruins of Everett's tattered heart. He rose from the crumpled blankets of his too empty bed. Then he looked upon his daughter's

face for the first time. Even in the gloomy light of the room, the girl's face shone with a recognizable beauty.

A tear of joy pushed through the rivers of misery in Everett's eyes and traced its way to his trembling lips as he said, "Only by the grace of all the gods have you been saved. Your name will be Gracie."

With Gracie held proudly in his arms, Everett walked down to the river's edge where the rest of the clan was gathered. The heavy scent of incense hung heavily in the air. Handing his daughter to his mother, Everett gathered Paula's lifeless body from the pallet where she lay. He carried her down to the edge of the water and gently placed her upon a carpet of wild flowers that lived in the small boat that would carry her down the river and her soul into the next world.

Everett looked down at her alabaster face, as beautiful in death as it had been in life. He kissed her cold forehead and whispered a promise. "I will keep our daughter safe and share with her all of my cherished memories so that she may know you, my love."

With a gentle push, Everett sent his fair bride into the river's current. A low chant from the clan resonated through the air, as he watched his love flow into the past with the river's cold waters. A dozen aching heartbeats passed before he turned back to his three day old daughter. Back to his future!

The Day the Earth Stood Still

Daniel Jackson

Only rainy days are in the future's forecast, smiles no longer exist

The sun put on a hood and hid behind the moon, the oceans have turned into mist.

The mountains have tumbled, the flowers have faded, and the trees have lost their leaves.

If I told you this scenery was beautiful once, my words you wouldn't believe.

Holidays are days without any meaning, no Christmas or Kwanza for me.

Everything that is anything has been taken away, now emptiness is all that I see.

I put my heart in the hands of someone that I thought would treat it with most concern

But I found it aflame in a fire near a lake, and I was forced to watch it burn.

Don't feel bad for me, you can save your tears, because I have my own to cry

Surround me with a million people, and I'll still feel alone inside.

Because now that you're gone, the hole that you left, will never be able to fill

And until my death, I'll always remember, the day, that the earth, stood still.

Love and War Anthony Murillo

Pictures are moments imprisoned by time. They come with invisible captions - etheric words relative to the perceiver. Some words are light and fluffy; they tickle like feathers. Other words are like poisonous barbs stabbing at the convict heart. Here, the caption reads: See what you are missing?

Maybe if I hadn't come in as a juvenile a quarter century ago, maybe if I had known this kind of passion, the caption would read differently, but I *did* and I *haven't* so it reads what it reads.

The God in me says, *the tiny acorn contains the might oak. Everything happens for a reason. Even the bad things we do and experience are part of the plan. Observe without judgment, close your mouth, open your ears...*

The devil in me says, *Fuck that! This is a Savage Garden. Kill or be killed. Darwin was right! Don't get weak... don't get weak...*

Somewhere between angelic manifestation and demonic possession is Balance. It says, *keep one eye on the past, the other on the future. Live in the here and now but pursue lofty ideals. Go back and fix what you can, the rest pay forward...*

Sooo... I am *many*, a multi-dimensional entity connected to other entities by fine gossamer threads of energy we cannot see. Everything is light- says the physicist *and* mystic- and there is no such thing as separation. Darkness is not nothingness; it is something directly related to light. All these relations have their place on the life spectrum. Light is all there is. *We* are the only beings on this planet who think there is something other than light, who feel compelled to judge and label and create the *idea* of separation- which is really just an *agreement*. Well, I *dis-agree*.

Blake knew. He turned within and saw gods and devils. At first, he thought they were fighting, but upon closer observation he realized all the running and chasing and swirling chaos was a complex *courtship*. In reality, the gods and devils were *making love*, and from their union came many hybrid offspring; beings conflicted by their dual nature.

Human beings.

The truth is everywhere- above and below, inside and outside, before and after. We are not what we think we are. We see an image but we do not know how that image is produced or where it comes from. We experience duality but fail to see *beyond* dual forces. We stare into the picture but do not see the individual black and white pixels, which make the picture possible.

All forms of union are mini symbols of the ultimate union. The implied and inevitable result of union is LIFE. In this way, we are always moving, *always* courting, *always* making love- even when, in our delirium, we think we are at war.

NEW PICTURE CUES



Due 1/1/15



Due 2/1/15



Due 3/1/15



Due 4/1/15



Due 7/1/15



Due 5/1/15



Due 8/1/15



Due 6/1/15



Due 9/1/15

Final Notes

It is a pleasure and privilege to create another PE newsletter. I receive so many letters from all of you, and I do not have the resources to write back to individuals. I like to take a little space in the newsletter to share a bit about myself and my current activities. It is almost winter in upstate NY which makes for cold weather and limited daylight hours. I believe coffee may be the only thing keeping me from hibernation. My gardens are mostly done for the year. I can push some snow around and still find some kale, leeks and collards to harvest. Every garden year is different. Even if I plant the same crops, what grows well in a given year seems to be a combination of timing, weather and animal predation. Usually I have a freezer full of greens at harvest time, but this year was not as bountiful as usual. I do have a basement full of squashes. I have made pumpkin pies every week for the past month, and will continue for at least 3 months or until my pumpkins start to rot. I have the best tasting pumpkins this year. I have lots of garlic and onions stored there as well.

In October I took off on a two week road trip with a buddy of mine. His name is also Gary and we have been friends for more than 40 years. It has been at least 20+ years since we took off like we did, but it was easy to get back into the groove of a road trip. We had a cooler full of food and an air mattress packed in the back of his car. We left NY on a Sunday at 3PM and drove straight thru to Leadville, CO and arrived at 10PM Monday [1750 miles]. We visited a friend and slept in a mountain cabin at 10,000 feet. We were just below tree line. It was off grid. See solar panels on roof.



We left the next day and slept out at the Colorado National Monument for 2 days. We did not set up a tent but slept out under the stars. It was superb! We hiked and rode our bicycles which we had strapped to the car. Stunning views wherever we looked! Compared to the east the west is so wide open!



After we left there we drove through the Cisco Canyon, which is bisected by the Colorado River. Huge red rock cliffs that burn bright orange during sunrise and sunset! We clambered around on the cliffs for a while, careful not to take any big falls. Then we continue on to Canyonlands Recreation Area where we camped for a few days on the edge of a tremendous overlook. More hiking and biking was done. It is hard to describe how absolutely awe inspiring the area and the view are.



The drop off from where we were sleeping was easily more than a 1000 feet. The cliff edge is the rock just in front of our sleeping tarp. The views were mind blowing. The night skies reminded us of the immensity of the universe we inhabit. Shooting stars flashed through the night sky. I do have the vocabulary to express how moved I was by the splendor of all we saw. It was so much fun, and really cost little money. All the camping was free!. From there we drove up a valley following a creek in southeast Utah near the CO border. We were surrounded by abandoned buildings from the Ancient Puebloans [Also known as Anasazi] that dotted the valley. We camped there for a while and scrambled along the valley, hills and mesa tops exploring old dwellings. It was

magical.



If I had a way to blow up the picture you could see the dwellings built into the cliffs. As the lands dried out living here became much harder. Folks abandoned this area about 900 years ago. The farming all happened up on the mesa tops. From here we drove over to both Mesa Verde and Chaco Canyon, two large ruin sites that have been partially restored. The cliff side dwelling below was is part of the Mesa Verde complex, considered one of the wonders of the ancient world. It is speculated that Mesa Verde was a ceremonial center for the ancient Pueblos. In Mesa Verde much of the dwellings were difficult to reach and were built also around 1100 ad, when climate change was making life hard and people wanted to live where invading folks could not get to them.



In Chaco Canyon the buildings were built around 700 ad and people lived in them for many hundreds of years. Some of the buildings were more than 500 rooms. Their stonework

is beautiful and solid.



We left Chaco and drove up to the Jemez Mountains in NM. Beautiful Ponderosa Pine forests abounded. We found a great natural hot springs and soaked for hours. Temperature of the water was about 102 degrees. Nothing beats a natural hot spring in a remote beautiful location to make one feel like royalty.

That night we froze sleeping in the mountains at around 8000ft, but we survived. It took many cups of coffee to revive us. From there we dropped into Santa Fe, NM and visited a friend and then it was time to go home. We drove to Hannibal, MO and explored the Mississippi River and Mark Twain's home town, and then put it in high gear and arrived back in Ithaca exactly 2 weeks later on a Sunday. Man, road trips can be fun. I know many of you will one day be free, and I encourage you to explore the vast open lands of the SW. For those of you who will not have this chance I hope you can enjoy my enthusiasm for the open road and can find ways to have adventures even in your mind or through your writing and memories. I do appreciate how hard it must be to be so cut off from the natural world, and I do hope some of the project offerings can provide you with meaningful activity.

While I date this newsletter "Winter 15", in truth time is a construct used to measure our spin around the sun. **In the scheme of things it is always "right now"**. The earth but a small part of the solar system which in turn is a bit piece in our Milky Way galaxy. The Milky Way is just 1 of several

hundred billion galaxies with each galaxy having hundreds of billions of stars. We live amidst a great mystery, and we humans create stories to explain existence and allay our fears. It can be hard to create meaning out of an endless expanse of universe. In the great scheme of things our lives are but an instant, and we all have an equal opportunity to soak in the richness of existence. Be kind to one another, share what you can, and work together to make each of your lives better.

Please keep sending in your writings and art. We value your feedback and want to know how this program can better serve to keep your mind alert and your spirit uplifted. Often the experiences that have fostered the greatest growth and change in me have not been ones I would ever seek out, but rather they were times I had to endure. I imagine there is a lot of hardship you face every day. May your tribulations open your eyes and hearts to greater balance and being.

Happy Holidays& Be Well

Gary

Mountain Hot Spring



Special Holiday Gift from Tara!--Quotes for Heart and Soul-- write to Tara c/o Prisoner Express if you want more wisdom in the Buddhist tradition.

Jack Kornfield-Remember the transforming power of forgiveness and loving kindness. Remember that no matter where you are and what you face, within your heart, peace is possible

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow- If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should see sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.

Pir Vilayat Khan-Overcome any bitterness that may have come because you were not up to the magnitude of the pain entrusted to you. Like the mother of the world who carries the pain of the world in her heart, you are sharing a certain measure of that cosmic pain, and are called upon to meet it in joy instead of self-pity.

Buddha-You can search the whole universe and not find a single being more worthy of love than yourself. Since each and every person is so precious to themselves, let the self-respecting harm no other being.

Lama Yeshe -If you expect your life to be up and down, your mind will be more peaceful.

Tara Brach-If the fear is really strong, silently offer these words to yourself: This is the suffering of fear. Fear is part of being alive. Other people experience this too - I am not alone. May I be kind to myself—May I give myself the compassion I need.

Viktor E. Frankl -Between the stimulus and the response there is a space and in that space lies our power and our freedom.

Mohandas Gandhi-Your beliefs become your thoughts Your thoughts become your words Your words become your actions Your actions become your habit Your habits become your character Your character becomes your destiny.

Chief Seattle, chief of the 6 Tribes-People did not weave the web of life, we are merely a strand in it. Whatever we do to the web we do to ourselves.

Gary at PE- Life is a gift. It is a temporary condition. Enjoy it as best you can.

REGISTRATION FORM

Please Note: If you received this newsletter, you are on our mailing list through June 2015. 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—If you don't want to cut up your newsletter, you can write a list of programs you wish to join and send it to us at

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Expedited Book Mailings –to be eligible to be part of the expedited book program, please check be sure to check with the administration at the prison you are housed, to learn if you are allowed to send 8 stamps or a check for \$3.50 to cover postage. Books are free, but the mailing cost is not. We have a good selection of donated used books. List types of books you want, and we will make the best match with our existing collection of books.

Poetry Project – Please send me the next *Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology Vol. 14*. **I understand that to receive the anthology I have to submit a poem for consideration in the anthology.**

Creative Writing Instruction and Practice – I am interested in honing my skills as a creative writer. Please send this packet of information and writing exercises

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

Social Psychology packet – Please send me a packet that helps explain social psychology and the formative influences that can create who we are and what we think.

Book Club – I would like to read *Clash of civilizations Over an elevator in Piazza Vittorio* and take part in a study & discussion group focused on ideas in the book. Limited to 300 participants.

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

Dear Self/ Dear Other Art Project- Treacy please send me the art packet that focuses on self awareness and communication through drawing.

Art History:Drawing-Please send this packet exploring the history of drawing though the ages.

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

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NEWSLETTER
Winter 2015**

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

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Wishing you Peace, Love and Joy this Holiday Season!

