

# Prisoner Express News -----Winter 2016

Welcome to another edition of Prisoner Express News. Our mission continues to focus on providing opportunities for incarcerated men and women to engage in activities that promote skill building, education, critical thinking and creative self-expression. Many of you comment on the dreariness of incarcerated life, and that it is boring with little to do. PE provides opportunities for you to tap into and further develop your creativity. Despite our differences we are all more alike than different, and as a society we are as strong as our weakest link. Our hope is that by participating in some of our programs you feel more balanced and ready to embrace tomorrow, whatever it may bring.

Easy for me to say on the outside of prison looking in, but in truth we all struggle to find balance and strength to get on with everyday activities. Everyone pretty much needs engaging activities and a sense of purpose and belonging in order to thrive. When we find meaning in what we are doing, life becomes more engaging and interesting, and hopefully some of the activities PE offers in this winter 16 cycle PE will provide you with positive stimulation. So many of you discover the joy of reading after incarceration. I myself know the transformative power a good book has over me. I can travel a million miles in my mind while reading.

The book I am currently reading, "What happens When We Die", by Sam Parnia, is by a cardiac emergency room doctor who works in a crisis unit on a big hospital doing research on people who have near death experience stories. During the time their heart stops and their brains are registering no activity on EKG machines, the patients separate from their body and claim to have witnessed the scene unfolding where docs are trying to save them and they can see it all as well as see great light through a tunnel and often previously dead loved ones beckoning to them and talking to them. This doctor is fascinated by the stories he is hearing and he is setting up scientific experiments to try to figure how is this consciousness happening while their brain is dead and their heart is not beating. He is trying to study the science of the brain to explain why it can do this. He is setting up experiments where he is putting hidden targets in the room that can only be seen by someone viewing the scene from above during emergency resuscitation. I haven't read far enough to know if anyone clinically dead sees them. He is writing the book explaining that his research will take many years. He is writing about the emerging science that is developing to monitor the stories of people who come back from near death experiences [NDE] tell. From his research 6% of people resuscitated seem to have some small telltale signs of this experience, but only a few are full blown, where the people

have graphic stories to tell about other beings and viewing all that as happening in the trauma center or wherever they had their NDE emergency. What is so cool about the book is that the doctor author does a great job in explaining how the brain works and especially how it generates electricity as we do different cognitive tasks like talk or eat or move or breath etc., but he also explains no one understands how this brain activity leads to organized thought, and then he poses, what does it mean if there is organized thought when the brain is electrically dead. Reading is fun and the great books I find while sorting through the PE donations let me know that we continue to send interesting books to many of you throughout the year. While we are not always able to make the best matches for your requests, [See Expedited Book program later in issue], I know we pass along thousands of books to you each year that make great reading.

Writing offers you a pathway to maintaining balance in an otherwise insane environment. I hope more of you will join some of this cycles writing programs. Art is still yet another way to express your inner self, communicate with others and create meaning in the material world, and hopefully this newsletter will propel you along those lines. There are many interesting projects we will offer this cycle and I encourage you to read through the paper and choose the projects that resonate with you. As always I ask that you only sign up for the projects you will follow through on. With currently over 3000 active participants, PE struggles to raise the funds necessary to photocopy and pay postage costs on our programming. I do my best to create low cost yet creative projects, but the sheer number of participants makes it so we never have enough funds to do as much as we'd like. Still we have been creating this project for the past 13 years and find a way to keep it going. If any of you have friends or relatives who can help support our efforts, please let them know we need donations. We never advertise for more participants, but as more publications list this newsletter in their resource guide the number of new people writing to join just keeps growing. If you are new to this program and this is your first newsletter I particularly welcome you, and would appreciate your feedback on what types of programming we can create that would serve to awaken/heighten your creative drive.

My name is Gary and I began PE from a single letter from Danny Harris asking for books. Danny a skilled and talented writer awoke in me a desire to share books with those who love to read, and it has led to this program. Danny is a lifer and the fact that his single letter could inspire this program which has served over 16,000 men and women these past years should let you know that your words and thoughts have power, and that we at PE want to

assist you to bring forth your art, writing and other creative energy from inside you and out into the world.

PE is a project of the Alternatives Library. I work at the library and PE is one of the library's outreach projects. The library is located on the Cornell University campus, and I am fortunate that I can get a variety of college students and community volunteers to help us with the project. Without them I could never manage the vast enterprise PE is becoming. Even with the help I get I am limited in what I can do; mostly what we offer is the projects that are listed later on in the newsletter. It is too much for us to respond to individual requests. It is a matter of both time and money. If you notice this newsletter and most all PE mailings are sent by bulk mail rates. It is affordable and makes PE possible. For example, when I send out this 32-page newsletter by bulk mail it cost .19 postage per issue. If I were to mail it by first class mail it would be over \$1.50. Multiply that by 3000 and you can see the importance. Individual responses cost .49 cents each and I don't have the funds. Sending self addressed envelopes is nice but isn't really helpful as most of our mailings are too large to be covered by a single stamp, and again there is the issue of time it takes to write individual replies. Sometimes program volunteers do write individual responses to you, but it is the exception rather than the rule. I tell you this so you don't think we are ignoring you or we haven't gotten your letter. It is just the reality of a few people trying to manage correspondence with the 3000 active member of PE.

Everyone here in NY is talking about the weather. December was like springtime and even flowering trees bloomed!! This is unheard of in my lifetime. I know many people are concerned about global warming and climate change. The cause for this unusual weather is the warming cycle that is happening in the Pacific Ocean. It is called El Nino. El Nino has been re occurring since the end of the last ice age, but as the earth gets a little warmer and drier due to both natural cycles and humans accentuating these cycles thru the burning of fossil fuels, weather events like El Nino get more pronounced. For me who can spend most of winter typically buried under snow and ice, the warmth is a welcome change, but in the long run what it really signifies is weather instability, which can be crippling for a society. Take my small example of garlic farming. The garlic I have been growing needs to be dormant in cold ground during the winter. This year it is growing when it should be dormant. If the cold weather comes later and it has already launched itself into the deeper phase [leaves]of the growing cycle, the cold weather could kill the plant. A bulb in the ground is protected, but the grown plant cannot deal with the adverse conditions. Also new invasive plants and animals move in as climate changes. Here where I live, the deer ticks [carrying Lyme disease] were unheard of 15 years ago, and now it is so prevalent many of my friends and neighbors have been affected. Instead of snow I fear we will get huge frozen rainstorms. They are devastating bringing

down trees and power lines. Of course we all know that sea level is rising and that to can be a danger. I could write about this all day and not touch all of the craziness that is going on. The most astounding thing I have been following is the giant methane blasts happening in Siberia. The ground there was typically frozen year round. As it warms all of the trapped methane that is in the ground there rises up too the surface and explodes leaving deep beautiful craters, this is a relatively new phenomenon, but it does not bode well. Perhaps packets on the consequences of global climate change and actions that can slow it down would be of interest to many of you. This cycle we will introduce a new science journal compiled by Mia. Let me know what you think.



Siberian Methane Crater  
See the people at top for scale.

Oh yes I forgot to mention my busted hip and the slow recovery I am experiencing and how that is affecting the PE schedule and programs. This newsletter is about 2 months late. As I mentioned in a fall mailing, I fell off my son's skateboard [DUH!] and broke the neck of my femur as it enters the hip. It is surgically repaired and in many ways I am getting stronger, but there are a few ways my hip doesn't yet work, and I have to face the possibility it may never be right again. I know I am responsible for what I did and that helps me deal with the consequences of a busted hip. I also know if it gets worse or I get tired of the pain there is hip replacement surgery possible. For now, I will just hobble along and hope it repairs over time. My bones are still strong and though I am getting older [turned 63, 3 days before I broke my hip] I am still vital. At this point I have ditched the cane, but walking over distance takes its toll. It hasn't stopped me, but this injury has slowed me way down. Perhaps I will learn something valuable during this new way of moving through time and space.

Last cycles programs went out later than expected. As I write this I still am trying to finish the poetry and humor packets from last cycle and expect they will be out soon Truth is I have not figured out yet where the money is going to come from for this cycles programs, but I plan to find funds for all of them. Once you have read through the newsletter either use the form at the end of the newsletter or if you don't want to rip your paper just send me a letter listing the programs you wish to join. Try to be prompt with your responses. We hope to start sending out the programs listed sometime in late March. I wait awhile after we mail the newsletter, as sometimes it takes a while for some of you to

get your mail. As we use bulk mail services I wait till we have 200 folks signed up for a particular program before it is mailed. If you join after it is already mailed you may not get the program you ask for unless there is a 2nd mailing. It is the only way I can make this work financially. I can email programs as well, and if you have someone on the outside that can print them for you and mail them to you directly that could save us money and help you get the program you want. Have them email us at [prisonexpress@gmail.com](mailto:prisonexpress@gmail.com) I have had a few folks write through email through a program call Corrlinks. When I have tried to follow the registration process I have always gotten bogged down and not been able to successfully complete it. If any of you have advice about that let me know. It is only in Federal facilities, not state run correctional facilities.

### Winter 16 programs

**Expedited Books**--The expedited book program has replaced our initial program of offering free books packages to anyone who asked. After we had 1500 plus folks backed up waiting for their packages and no money to mail them we created this program. We still have a room full used and new books that were donated to us, but we need you to help pay the postage cost of mailing them, and we ask you to send either \$4 or 8 stamps. You must check with your prison mailroom to see if this is allowed. Some prisons allow mailing of stamps and others don't. Once you know the rules then send us a note telling us the types of books you like. Please give us some choices, as we do not always have what you want. The broader the category the better. Of course you can be specific as well, but be sure to give us options, as what you specifically want may not be here. Many of you want art books and I just can't get enough to satisfy all the requests. If you give me other choices, I can at least get you something you want. If it will make you upset not to get what you asked for than this might not be a good program for you as there is no guarantee we can make a suitable match. Other areas where it is difficult to make good book matches are heating, air conditioning, car mechanics, building trades, chess strategy. Any book I get on those subjects goes out quickly, and it is dumb luck whose letter is read when a particular type of book is available. When I get requests for books we don't have I set letters aside and hope to find those books. Eventually I send the person requesting the books a general selection of what I do have and hope something I send is useful. That is why the more topics you list the better your chance of getting what you want. After that long disclaimer I believe we are able to make really good matches for about 80% of the people that write and I get great pleasure in sending out books to you. It does usually take 3 months after receiving your letter to get your package mailed. We have a 150 plus requests to fill every month or so and get backed up depending on the amount of volunteers we have to create and mail the book packages. Please see the signup sheet

for book mailing at end of newsletter and let us know the rules for receiving books at your institution. If you order Expedited Books you must be patient as at times the wait is longer than planned, but we follow through. If your address changes, your books don't follow you so please let us know ASAP.

**Poetry Project**--Every 6 months we produce and print an anthology of poetry submitted by readers of this newsletter. Everyone who submits a poem for consideration receives a copy of the upcoming poetry anthology. A team of students reads through all the submissions and selects poems that are meaningful to them for inclusion in the anthology. We receive many hundreds of submissions so please understand that we cannot include everyone in the anthology. Every cycle we have a different team of students create the anthology and their tastes change based on who is doing the consideration. New this spring we plan on having a public poetry reading from some of the poems that were featured in PE Poetry Volume 15. If your poem is being considered for the public reading you will get a letter from Jenna. She will ask for some biographical info about you, the author to share with folks who attend the reading. We hope to film these readings and perhaps post them on our website. It should be interesting. The poems you send this upcoming cycle in will be used for PE Poetry Volume 16. Those of you who sent in poems after we finished accepting submission for V15 were automatically entered into the Volume 16 pool. While many of you understandably focus on your incarceration in your poems, don't feel this is all you can share with us. We encourage you to share your poems on any subject or emotion. We are all potential experts on the human condition.

**Russian History**—Last summer Ella, who worked at the library, through funding of a local youth program, witnessed Jaffre create the previous cycles Viet Nam study unit. Ella was inspired to create a packet on Russia. She let me know her grandfather had been fascinated with the unique story that is Russia and he passed his interest on the subject to her. The packet will provide a background to you of a country that we often read about in our newspapers, but never really understand. We often confuse the Russian people by the actions of their leaders, but as in the US, often these leaders are more about representing the interests of the wealthy and powerful than they are in reflecting the will of the people.

This is a large topic and Ella's packet will provide an introduction to the subject. There will be interesting questions on the subject to ponder and respond to within the packet.

**Civil Rights**—Jonathan, a new PE volunteer has offered to create a packet on Civil Rights. He will both explore the

history of the movement as well as modern day issues. Below is the introduction he has submitted for you to consider. Please sign up if you would like to receive this packet.

*Civil rights have always been an important part of the United States' history since the Civil War. There has been this continuous theme of civil rights being violated and limited in the United States through several laws that directly impact people of color, specifically Black people. As time passes, the government has started to strictly enforce these civil rights laws but the opposition strongly fights them. Each time period where the government tries to enforce these laws on a large scale, opposition to them steps in and creates indirect laws that still limit civil rights. As time progresses, more minorities are being suppressed. First with Black people, second with Latino/Latina, and now with people who are Islamic and/or have Middle Eastern descent. With this project, the intentions are to educate prisoners across the nation about the history of the civil rights movement in America. The lesson plan will incorporate self-reflection about your civil rights, possible insight to where the future of civil rights is going, and how certain groups have historically had their civil rights violated.*



Art by Robert Miller

**Journal Program**--In this ongoing program you are encouraged to keep a journal for a year. Once we have 200 enrollees we send a starter packet that helps you get started in keeping a journal. You can write about anything you choose, whether it be memories, dreams, plans, or everyday life. The emphasis is for you to stop and reflect on your life. Often our thoughts can get confused inside our minds. Writing them down often helps us sort through what we are thinking and helps us gain perspective. This project provides you a forum to share your thoughts with others, and PE volunteers will read through your submitted journals and organize them in a file for you. Some parts of your journals are chosen and posted to an online blog by the program volunteers [led currently by Nic]. Often the volunteers who read your entries will write to you to share some thought on what you're are writing. You can use your journal to share your thoughts with the world on the outside. You do not have to wait until you receive the intro packet to start sharing your journals. Pickup a pen and see what comes out! Be sure to date all your entries and if you write

Journal on the outside of your envelope that is helpful. Please write neatly as we scan some entries on line, but only if they are legible.

**Chess Club**--Jack has been creating chess lessons for you the past 3 years. He graduates from school this May and has time to create one more lesson before he goes. I believe it will be his best. It will be a combination of chess puzzles, strategy and history. I will be on the lookout for a new volunteer to take over this project. Jack is one of a chain of students who have stepped in these past 10 years to keep the chess project flowing. I wonder if these are any of you still participating who remember the first lessons of this project that were created by Ettie, a young chess prodigy from Eastern Europe. There is a chess club at Cornell and I hope to recruit someone from there to help in the future. Sign up if you'd like to get another of Jack's World of Chess Packets.

**Art**--Treacy continues to create art projects and lessons for you. From my perspective she is focused on helping you find your individual artistic self. She combines instruction with technical skills and mind-expanding ideas to help you on to a path of artistic self-expression. Usually she has a specific project in each issue of PE news for you to join, but this cycle we will try something new. Treacy is going to expand her contact with you by creating a themed newsletter focused on art. Her words are italicized and follow

*Greetings to everyone!*

*The following is an essay I wrote for Broad Street Review, an online art journal in which I write a monthly essay on art. Sometimes prison things weave their way into these essays; sometimes prison art is published within these essays. The following is my feeling that everyone can draw....*

*When Everyone Draws*

*Speaking in a dialect only a dental professional understands, I tell Marguerite about drawing from life — in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, at the zoo, anywhere — while she cleans my teeth.*

*I tell her about drawing at Julio Romero de Torres Museum, where I stopped taking seeing for granted. While looking at a still life painting, I realized that seeing the painting was not enough. I needed to draw the mysterious patterns of light and shadow to fully experience its complexities. And I talk about standing so many hours drawing one painting at the Capodimonte Museum that the guard offered me his chair. I am passionate about drawing, and because I believe the world would be radically different if everyone drew what he or she sees, my ideas become messianic.*

*A recent Guardian article outlines the argument that drawing should be essential in all curriculums. I agree with making it*

a requirement but disagree that the reason it should be is its importance as a cognitive tool. Drawing intrudes beyond cognition into the realm of tacit knowledge — know-how that cannot be verbally transmitted to another, such as riding a bike — and even further, to where knowledge itself is left behind.

And even though postmodern philosophy suggests language descends into our primary perceptions — how do we perceive sky as sky without language? — visual artists know there is far less chatter down there.

Drawing challenges me to explore different levels of awareness. Drawing from two-dimensional sources like a photograph is easy because the work is already completed; planes have been reduced, forms flattened, and light and shadow averaged. Through reduction, the world becomes itemized, providing the artist a simple shopping list to follow. Drawing taxidermy or still life becomes more difficult because actual forms and light-shadow relationships are introduced. Yet at this level, the objects are removed from the activity of life: Animals are dead, objects have been decommissioned from use, and the world becomes immobilized, allowing the drawer to catch up.

Drawing at the Philadelphia Zoo presents yet another level of difficulty. An elephant or zebra becomes most challenging because of that enigmatic dimension of being alive, reminding me of Temple Grandin's, the autistic author, exclamation over a cow's death: *But where did it go? What makes a drawing of a standing cow different from a drawing of a dead and stuffed cow?*

In neither drawing is the cow moving or breathing. How is life acknowledged, and that knowledge transmitted, beyond biological verification?

Most often, life is defined by identifiable facts. While drawing at the zoo, I hear adults endlessly explain facts to children, making me wonder what would happen if facts weren't force-fed? Would children explore animals in other ways? Would they discover what I have discovered — that animals become curious about me as I draw, thus equalizing the observation?

Initially, it was a gorilla that showed curiosity, sitting near me while I drew him for almost half an hour. When I closed my sketchbook, he walked away, leaving families with their cameras shouting for him to return. Since then, I have had similar experiences with meerkats, flamingos, and giraffes, making me think that these are not funny accidents.

I began to ask people why they don't draw. It isn't hard to initiate the conversation — as I am the witness to endless recitation of facts, I am also a magnet of regret.

Countless similar zoo conversations begin when the adult wants the child to demonstrate interest in my drawing. I could respond by saying that children have a natural interest in drawing until being discouraged. Instead, I ask the adult where his or her sketchbook is. Most don't dismiss my question, instead musing that they used to draw but gave up. Sometimes drawing is dropped from lack of time, but

more frequently it's from feeling inadequate. In either case, I sense their regret.

But their answers don't really answer why, and I wonder about the relationship between an overreliance upon facts and drawing. Is good drawing equated to properly copying those facts?

Sometimes, the adult tells me the child can draw something perfectly, wanting me to conclude that the child will be an artist. But does drawing a giraffe "perfectly" suggest a potential artist or an extremely dutiful child?

Plato bemoaned mimesis because he saw our world as the mere copy of divine forms of being. How horrified he'd be at the countless drawings copied from celebrity photographs, which, if Instagram is an accurate pulse of public opinion, are now considered great art. When every rendering of, say, Brad Pitt is exactly the same regardless of the race, nationality, gender, or age of the artist, these drawings function no differently than the child repeating animal facts back to the adult.

Drawing has potential to be a singular defiant act against an accepted universal vision when drawing is seeing the ever-changing living world instead of repeating facts. Through this defiant act of drawing, I discover an invisible cord connecting me to everything, making the drawing not about things with facts but an exploration of a relationship.

Drawing becomes the contradictory activity combining defiance and connection because drawing knows no rules.

When I return to the dentist for my six-month cleaning, Marguerite says she and her colleague Renee have been drawing at the Herbert F. Johnson Art Museum. I excitedly start talking about light, shadow, and form, but Marguerite reminds me what I know happens in drawing: She answers, *When I drew, I felt the spirit of what I was seeing.*

In my world, I imagine a free Draw at the Philadelphia Art Museum Day where everyone is invited to draw; draw not what one is shown but what one sees in order to forge relationships where the chatter is left behind.

**Open-art and stationary projects:** We have received many wonderful pieces for the Open-art project held last cycle, and will include some of the art in this issue. We haven't yet selected particular art for the art booklet I am creating. Likewise, we received many wonderful submissions for the stationary contest and will include some of these in this newsletter and will select at a later date a collection of stationary to be sent to everyone who submitted work. Feel free to continue to submit art for these projects. 40 Open-art pieces will be chosen for the booklet. Send you homemade stationary and we may use it for our mailings, and we will send you a set of stationary collected from the submissions.



Stationary Art by Nate Lindell

**Animation project:** The first packet of the animation project was sent out in November. Hopefully you have received this if you signed up for it. After the animation story is written from the answers and drawings sent in response to this first packet, a second packet will be sent out in February asking for specific drawings. It is my hope that the animation will be finished by the summer and shown in a museum in California.

**On-line posting of your artwork:** There are two sources for on-line posting of your art. One posting to be set up by PE. It will be only minimally selective; meaning that volunteers at PE who post journals on the blog will also select some art, to be posted.

The second on-line posting is a "curated" posting; meaning that it has to meet certain criteria for being posted. If you read my essay closely, you will understand what it is that I am looking for – something that is original and out of the box – seeing through your own eyes! Original and out of the box does not mean a different arrangement of over-rendered prison art. If you look at any website art for prison work, it is the same images over and over again; celebrity drawings and that strange woman with lines on her face and a red big nose. I want drawings and art in which the world is seen through YOUR eyes. If you read a book, draw the images that come into your head. Draw your cellie – but not from his ID photo; draw him so that the viewer understands

him – what is he about? Draw a dream. This site will not post cartoons, copies of photos, cliché images, or things I have seen millions of times.

This curated site is on Instagram. This enables many people to see the work, make comments on it and say whether they like it or not. The Instagram account name is: Now\_that\_im\_in\_prison

.....the name's little irreverent, but most artists are a bit irreverent.....If I choose your art for this posting, I will send you a picture of your work posted on the account with the responses it generates.

**ARTknow: NEW!!** An art newsletter: I have decided to do something different. I am creating an art newsletter that will be sent to those who sign up for it. It is my plan that it will be sent out twice a year – after the general newsletter is sent out. There will be a check box in each general newsletter allowing you to sign up for the subsequent art newsletter.

The purpose of this newsletter is to give more information about art and the art world outside prison. Unfortunately, prison is a closed system and because of this, art created in prison has the danger of becoming repetitive – I see the same big bosomed woman again and again and yet, again. The art newsletter will be directed at giving a larger view of what art is OUTSIDE prison. I will discuss specific art, write reviews of shows that I have seen and my critique of the show, and images demonstrating that art.

Each newsletter will have some kind of theme. The theme may be based upon a medium – sculpture, painting, printmaking or drawing. Or it may be based upon a style of art. Many of you have shown an interest in symbolism – so that may be a theme. Within the theme, I will talk about different artists and, hopefully, review some shows based upon that theme. I will also give some assignments that a reader may want to work on and send in to be published in the general newsletter, poetry anthology, Instagram, or PE website.

Thanks for all of your participation and involvement and wonderful words!

Treacy



Stationary Art by  
Dominic Marak

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Buddhist Meditation Newsletter- Tara has been creating inspirational packets helping folks explore Buddhism, meditation, and self-reflection. Her packets have been full of inspirational ideas and quotes.

She has also offered practical advice on how to remain balanced and calm amidst troubling circumstances. She is planning her next newsletter and I look forward to reading it. Below is an introduction from Tara explaining her project.

*"Learning to meditate is the greatest gift you can give yourself in this life. Through meditation you can undertake the journey to discover your true nature, and find the stability and confidence you will need to live well, no matter what your life circumstances are. Meditation is the road enlightenment." Sogyal Rinpoche*

*"Meditation is also the road to peace, joy and wisdom. It awakens compassion and loving kindness for yourself and others. It changes your inner world, and this changes your experience of the world around you. Our true heart opens, transforms us into our greater selves, connecting us consciously to our own divinity, and this transformation overflows to others as wisdom, compassion and kindness. The journey into your true self, through meditation or prayer, is the greatest gift you can give yourself, and the world."*

A testimonial from participant in Tara's program below. The changes were instant. All my anger disappeared. I saw the world in a different light. I think of people differently. I see the good and the bad in them. It's helping my anxiety as well. I sometimes go to bed angry in prison, so many egos to deal with. Your practices are helping me to learn compassion. William Levi Perry

If any of you have ever been interested in meditating, we'd love to have you join our meditation and study group. The focus is learning simple ways to meditate that will help you experience more peace, patience, compassion and loving kindness for yourself and others. I offer different styles of

meditating so you can find one or ones that feel comfortable for you.

You do not have to give up your religion to practice Buddhist meditation. The Dalai Lama said "Kindness is my religion." These simple techniques can help you be a better person as you learn how to relax, center yourself, and not get as caught up in the negativity in yourself or others. So you become a better Christian, Muslim, Jew, or whatever your religion is. Some of our sangha (spiritual community) are having great success with their practice. You can put in as little or as much time as you want and still have good results

We also have a great list of organizations that send free Buddhist books, magazines, newsletters and more. You can receive the teachings from different teachers. That's really helpful. Every few months I send out newsletters that have inspirational quotes, helpful articles, (for example on dealing with noise or anger) meditation instructions from Buddhist masters of different traditions, (ie, Tibetan Buddhism or Zen). I will also start putting in quotes and feedback from participants.

I cherish meditation and how it's changed my life. So this project is very dear to me. I read every letter. But if I don't write back to you personally I will do my best to answer your questions in the newsletters.

Ours is a journey to find our own true hearts...and to find ways to live in ever awakening peace, kindness and compassion for ourselves and all beings. I wish all of you peace in your path, and kindness in your hearts.

With loving prayers,  
Tara

Slaughterhouse-Five Book Club- Here's bit of good news. We recently had several hundred new copies of Kurt Vonnegut's classic book Slaughterhouse-Five given to us by folks at Cornell University. Every fall the school has a freshman read project. All new students are asked to read a book and, answer some thought provoking questions about the book. When they first come to campus they meet in small groups to discuss what they read and what they wrote. This year the book was it "Slaughterhouse-Five". I want to continue that practice with you. I have to raise the funds to pay postage to mail the books to you, so I don't know how many people can join, but I will send at least a few hundred copies. Let me know if you'd like to join the book club. Along with the book we will send you some biographical info about the author and some thought provoking questions to consider while reading the book. We expect you to answer some of the questions and send your answers to us. We will create a compilation document of some of the most interesting answers and share them with all who respond.

Below is a short review of the book written by a reader on Amazon.

This novel is essential in many ways. It is undoubtedly one of the best-written, most well respected novels of the 20th century (No. 6 on the list that was a compilation of all the other lists) and is, therefore, essential to your understanding of 20th century fiction. If you have never read Vonnegut, this book should be the first one you read: it is the most famous and one of the best and really captures the essence of Vonnegut. Finally, despite its literary merit, this is a FUN book to read. You will laugh, you will think, but, most of all, you will enjoy reading it and you will finish it FAST.

This should be your introduction to Vonnegut. I've found that true Vonnegut fans don't often choose *Slaughterhouse-Five* as their favorite, but, instead choose one of Vonnegut's other wonders (*Breakfast of Champions*, *Cat's Cradle*, *Sirens of Titan*, etc.). I think that most would agree that this is a good jumping off point, just as, in music, people often start with Greatest hits albums and then work from there.

Only Vonnegut could make such a strange premise believable and emotional. The book shifts time and place from paragraph to paragraph without warning. It is about aliens and WWII. It all works so perfectly, however and is so profound to those who read carefully. Billy Pilgrim is one of the great characters in all of literature. Don't be scared off by aliens and the weird premise. It works better than 99% of so-called "normal" books. Absolutely ESSENTIAL

Plasmodesmata---Science Journal Group Mia, a new PE volunteer has an idea to create a science journal. She is working with a writing professor, whose students are creating thoughtful essays on surprising science issues. I have read a few selections and have been impressed with the subjects and the writing. I also believe many of you could learn to write science articles with some practice. Research and observation seem to be important components to good science writing. Below is Mia's introduction to our new science journal.

*Plasmodesmata are channels between plant cells, through which information can be exchanged. In this program, we bring science articles from our cells on the outside to yours. Many scientists struggle to communicate their findings to the general public, typically exclusively writing complicated articles about their work that only other experts can understand, despite doing important and exciting research that can have huge impacts on our world. Therefore, this journal, written by science students, is a great way for us to practice communicating science to the greater community, as well as an excellent opportunity for you to learn about some interesting scientific issues and discoveries. If you are interested in biology and the*

*environment, this first issue is for you! This issue will address questions such as whether or not we should eat shark meat and how grassy front lawns are wreaking havoc on suburban ecosystems, as well as the latest developments in male contraceptive technology. There are other interesting articles and you'll have to sign up for the newsletter to find out what they are. We hope that this program will give you an exciting glimpse into the world of science.*



Art by Leon Jones

**Themes Essays** are the heart and backbone of PE. Reading each others writings helps process your unique experience while incarcerated. Initially the program started because many of you wrote that you could never show true feelings while locked up. Normal emotions can make you look weak to others around you. Sad that you have to live inside an environment that does not encourage you to feel your emotions, and to let others know what you are experiencing. As much as folks said they couldn't talk about these matters, they were willing to write about these sensitive issues. With that in mind we started the monthly theme writing program. If you submit a theme on the monthly topic you will get a copy of everyone's writing on that theme. It can be a revelation to read what others write. Each newsletter contains a few selections from previous them topics. I wish I could include more selections but I must keep this newsletter to 32 pages. If you want to read all of the entries for a given theme, you know what to do. [hint... put pen to paper, and do it legibly]. Please remember we ask these selections to be non fiction, and about your life experiences. Further writing assignments, later in this issue, can be used for fiction pieces.

## Upcoming theme topics

Lost	due 3/1/16
My First Job	due 4/1/16
Grandparents	due 5/1/16
The Big City	due 6/1/16
Rescued	due 7/1/16
In the Old Days	due 8/1/16
Nicknames	due 9/1/16

Selections from previous Themes cues

### First Time

By Edward Williams

It all started as we began to load up leaving Cook County jail to come to prison. It took three "Bluebird" buses to bring about 230 prisoners from Cook County to Joliet correctional center (which was Illinois oldest maximum facility). There were Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Italians, Cubans, Jamaicans as well as some Chinese. You had some tall, short, fat and thin. I saw more handcuffs than I had ever seen in my entire life that day! And all you could hear was the sound of steel cuffs and link chains. There were many faces among the men. Looks of loss, disgust, confusion and some shame and disappointment. You saw those who pretended to smile as though they were happy... thinking how they had eluded stiffer sentences, which meant a longer prison stay by copping out for a plea deal! But the hard-core reality was that they had been convicted of a felony and were indeed there with me. Everything was different (strange) from the milk that tasted as if somebody forgot to properly pasteurize it, and which came from a farm somewhere inside I.D.O.C. The meat was unlike no other meat you'd ever laid your eyes on before, placed on the insides of two slices of bread. I swear it had been sitting out for days! It looked funny and smelled spoiled! I had no choice but to eat it, because I didn't know when the next time I'd get my next meal. Prison strips you of any expectancy of normalcy. My living quarters were the size of my bathroom at home (if not smaller) To top it off, the toilet was included there in the cell, not even two feet from where I slept and I shared this cell with another individual. Showers were designed so ten or fifteen men would be forced to shower together (nothing separating us). No privacy what so ever and all I wished for was to be back at home. You had to ask yourself "how did I get here" and you go over those last moments of freedom, speculating how it could've, would've and should've been had you seen and reacted differently. Today if had I known then what I know now—I could've spared myself a lot of grief. I don't wish this on my

worst enemy. After five more trips like my first time, I can truly say "this is my last time."

By Ondrea Maffeo

The first time... is a statement used by everyone on the planet at one time or another. We recount some of the stories that make up our lives. As, I sat here thinking about these three words, I realized something. There's a little bit of magic that can be inherent in these words. Like abracadabra or bippity-boppity-boo they can feel transformative. Think about it when you start a story with the words, "the first time" a couple of things start happening. At least for me, my heart beats a little faster, I get excited, a smile might break out on my face, maybe my hand starts to shake a little. All in anticipation of recounting this particular first time experience. Like the first time I rode a bicycle, the first time I kissed someone, drove a car, rode a roller coaster or held my children. Or maybe for you it was, "the first time" I got in a fight, had surgery, or was in a car accident—you get the picture. Whether it's good or bad, you relive that first time experience and whatever emotions you felt and for a time you are taken back, and therein lays that "little bit of magic". After some thought, though, I came to understand a sad fact about myself. Even though these "first time" moments continue to happen, I have become jaded and blind to them. I don't know when this happened but I started overlooking them or taking them for granted. I lost sight of the fact that there is magic happening, the first time I hear a song and it moves me to tears, or the first time I hear someone speak and it moves me to act. There is even magic in the moment where for "the first" you truly recognize the impact of your choices. For whatever reason, I like many people probably lost sight or was too consumed with life in general to slow down and appreciate all the "first time" experiences that, good or bad, make life great. The moments and experiences that shape us, define us, convict us. Luckily thought it's not too late! No matter how old you are, where you are, what you've done, or where you've been its still possible to reclaim this magic. It takes paying attention to everyday stuff we've been taking for granted to teach us to appreciate god's gift of first time moments. And in doing this we can redirect some of this magic to help us recognize, life is full of these moments and there is always a new "the first time" story just waiting around the next corner. What will your next "first time" story be?

### Redemption-

Rest by Tom Williams

To know again the unattainable peace  
That resting of troubled soul  
Beneath the restless sleep

By Tommy Hightower

When I was sentenced to life with possibility of parole in 24 years 9 months: the day of redemption for my trespass against my victim was 24 years 9 months after day one in prison. That is a type of redemption all Prisoner Express members can relate to, amen? How did I come to this definition of redemption? I take the word prompt, then write it in the center of a blank page. Then write down words and short phrases that relate to "redemption" [or whatever word you are working with], draw a circle around it and a line to the prompt word. It's the most basic of writing techniques. Also a good dictionary or thesaurus are prime tools in the writing trade. What a rich wealth of inspiration this technique has spawned within me. Redemption or to be redeemed is what all prisoners should dream of; work for; crave. I have spent each and every day of the last 21 years in incarceration, building up within myself - a better human being. Not one idle minute of wasted life have I allowed myself. I was, and still am, determined to be a human being worthy of redemption. P.E. has contributed to this goal. Take advantage of these programs, books from the expedited book project. I take the college texts; each day I learn something new. For each new skill I learn, makes me more worthy of redemption. For we, I especially, have done wrong in this life to others. To be worthy of Society's forgiveness, of my debt owed them, I must become a valuable asset to my community. Through intellectual growth, my value to my community grows. When I share this intellectual growth with others, my redemptive qualities will grow exponentially. This is redemption. To be redeemed, means to be of service to others in order to offset or compensate for my debt or defect. To buy back my debt to society. Redeem also means to be free from captivity by payment of ransom. I pray that each of you who read my meager prose, have a spiritual life with your chosen creator God. For my creator is who has redeemed me from my sin debt. He is Redeemer. As Jesus was one who paid the price for the sin of this world. He is known as the "Redeemer" who grants "Redemption" from sin to the repentant sinner. Christianity is not the sole religion that believes in "Redemption." A majority of the human race believes in a "Redemption" from wrongdoing. For the Jew [I'm one], the Muslim, and the Christian, all base their faiths or prophecy from Abraham's Creator God. The First 5 books of the Old Testament were written by Moses. Known as the Torah by Jews, Old Testament by Christians, Quran by Muslims. Faiths based on Redemption from Sin, Eternal Life, Resurrection of the dead. Over half of our world believes in, or hopes it is true, that they can earn redemption, eternal life for being of the quality fit to be redeemed. As a theme writing word prompt, Alyssa you chose the most powerful word available. I look forward to reading what my fellow sisters and brothers behind bars write about this powerful word. As I close this- let me say from the bottom of my heart this: Every one of you, no matter your crime, or sin: free or

captive: it makes no difference, you are all precious beings worthy of "Redemption", you are wonderfully made, by a loving creator God. Let no prison guard, no boss or professor, no significant other, no one can say you are unworthy or no good. You are all precious, beautiful beings. Love yourself for who you are. God makes no junk; you are perfect in God's eyes, as long as you spend each day growing and loving each other. May Hashem bless you all.

By Raymond Swanson

It had been a rough few months. Frankly, the past year of my life had become something of a train wreck. In addition to my fiancé moving out and my falling behind on rent payments and falling into a pit of pornography, I'd served a thirty-day suspension followed by a six-month suspension from the fire department that was such a part of my life. I'd been a member since I was fifteen and was even allowed back after over a year in juvenile placement so it became clear to see why I considered this my extended, sometimes dysfunctional, family. I'd spent the prior five months trying to fit in a place my late grandfather had served for 44 years, but when my suspension was over I was eager to return yet didn't want anyone to see my desperation. On Tuesday I evening I heard the department get dispatched for a heart attack at a known individual's house and decided to take a ride ten miles north to see if I was needed. As I crossed into the township I thought of turning back. I guess it was just the frustration I had from having had to serve the suspension as turning around hadn't ever been, and never was going to be a choice. My quick, if unexpected appearance at the scene warranted a couple of smiles and greetings, but because of the intensity of the emergency scene, there was mostly reluctance on their faces. On that evening I decided I was coming back, and over the next ten months I washed apparatus, rolled hose, swept floors, and signed on with my Firefighter One certification to aid in the training of the county's future men and women of the volunteer fire services to show my dedication. Over these ten months I only missed three fire alarms. William Shakespeare said, "He who sheds his blood today will forever be my brother." When you fight fires, you have to have a sense of trust for the guy beside you. I'm sure, through my actions and the talks we'd had, those guys knew they could trust me. So on Monday evening mid-October, there was no hesitation in them about me as our pagers tripped and we all ran inside the old concrete station to the report of a structure fire. From stepping into those boots, pulling the suspenders over my shoulders, and grabbing my coat and helmet while that forty-year-old siren blared overhead to firing up the engine, doing a walk-around inspection and having the Chief, a rookie, and the Lieutenant climb into the cab and instantly allowing my responsibility to be in charge of their safety, I knew that regardless of what happened that night or in the future, this was the culmination of the changes I'd made and I was

getting out what I'd put into it. Hard work. This is what I loved and now I was back behind the wheel of sixteen tons of rolling thunder as inconspicuous on the old rural route as a herd of rumbling elephants. Our firefight was unsuccessful that night. The fire had had too much of a head start on us, and the home was a total loss. But as we cleaned up the equipment and returned it to service late that night and the following morning I couldn't help but look around that sweaty, soot-stained building and feel like I had come home.



Art by Robert Moore

#### Unbuilding a Mystery by Lloyd Dennis Hartley

I imagine that there was a time when it was all so simple. "When the world was unbuilt" is what I'll call this time. For a moment I would like to imagine the unbuilding of myself. As I look all around me, I try to see the simplicity of everything. I remember a book I read once. It was all about a boy named Dick, a girl named Jane, and a dog named Spot. It was all so simple. Their lives were unpolluted. It was meant to be read by minds that only saw what was real. I read that book in a time I'm still trying to unbuild myself towards. During the deconstruction; the unassembled if you will, I started to see things as they were. This time there was only potential. People became all the same. A world opened up to me through a window and I'd like to share a few simple observations. Objects began to change. The view from my simple little window showed a hospital where this prison once stood. It changed into a house. It could have been The White House. The only difference was the people inside. Were they really that different? Someone told me only yesterday that Heaven (if you will oblige me) was full of bad people, while Hell (bear with me) was full of good people as well. It was the only person who died that was judged. Everything between birth and death was subject to change. I looked at a tree on the horizon. If I could come closer, I would see the effects of pollution. My mind reeled as I walked out of my room. I passed a mirror on the way and I caught a glimpse of myself. Did I just see a piece of me falling away? I didn't need it. I wanted to unbuild more. To

be able to stand in a room with a hundred men (including myself) and see something good in every one of them became an increasingly realistic goal. This room became a boardroom. It became a kindergarten. I began to unbuild the people around me in my mind. I imagined them all as children before someone told them that life wasn't fair. I saw them before someone told them that you couldn't talk to a stranger anymore. This wasn't always told, just as there was a time before you locked your doors. The anger that I saw was wasted passion. The man who threw his tray in disgust could lead a nation, I thought. The man who stood by, saying nothing, could be an advisor to children one day. He could warn them not to build. He could tell them how simple life was. I saw hundreds of fathers. It disturbed me to imagine the blame laid upon them. I heard another piece of me drop. I had children that were unbuild. I saw me in every one of them, but I didn't see what they would become. How could I live with the knowledge that I would ruin them only by telling them what I knew? As the sky outside my window revealed clouds, stars, and sun, I thought of how I loved it all. I thought of how I loved my children when they were born. I expected nothing from any of these things. How could I ever tell another human being that I loved them again? I felt another piece of me sliding away. I didn't need it. I wanted a dog. I wanted something that wouldn't understand what happened to me. I wanted something simple. I pictured the so-called worst man in here with his son. He was all alone in a land long gone. He was raising his son and he didn't have to tell him how it was. I wanted to go outside and stand in the rain; let it wash away the pieces. I wanted to lie in the snow. I wanted to lie in the purity. Now, even the snow wasn't as white as it used to be. The sky at night is never as black. See Spot run. Never wonder why. See Jane jump, don't worry, she'll be fine. See Dick play. Quit laughing at his name. See sun shine. See water run. Hear rain fall. It's so simple. It's alright to mourn for what we've become, but could you pick up something that someone else dropped? Could you leave something better than you found it? Weren't you better than this a long, long time ago? Maybe we can unbuild ourselves enough to love someone. Maybe we can become potential again. So, if I seem to stare into space and smile, it's only because I felt something fall. Maybe you even helped

#### Noise

By Felipe McMillian

*Loud human song, with the voice of uttermost woe* - Walt Whitman

Maybe I don't even like to write. Maybe I just don't like the noise a story wanting out makes. The relentless voices of characters not content with the space they occupy in my imagination, knowing there are more worlds than it; tired of walking the land-scape of my psyche, soaring through the

sky of my soul, swimming in the depths of my heart. Alone in my head. Plotting. I'm no narrator. Nor navigator; the story says "This way!" I pilot pens through papered streets, like a cabby with a melting pot of fares and their affairs. Any of three persons—first, second and third—directing me to "Blow through reds if you will. Just get me there." We sonic boom through no fly zones. We leave port in a storm. We stay off beaten paths until they command, "Let me out right here. What do I owe?" What does a story owe? How does a story pay? When does a story stop paying? The story's escape is my escape from this unwritten story of mine. Often, I feel like noise in God's head. Noise full of noise, in this setting full of noise. Surrounded by sto-ries with no structure. Same themes from similar scenes. Plots that thickened at birth; climaxed in adolescence. Earplugs leave me shut off from most of the noise inside, but not the noise "inside." My own, or these sounding eerily like mine-truths I label fiction. Stories imprisoned, I hear your bars shake. My story's imprisoned; there are no bars here. I relay the story that would be heard, while learning to tell my own. To make my own noise. You can let me out right here.

By Michael Pitman

A deaf person would probably welcome it, but I'm sure that it has driven many men mad at the extreme. Noise, all kinds, all levels and durations. Music is simply noise to some and not all singing is truly welcome. On an aircraft carrier the noise is not just loud in decibels, but nearly constant with launch and recovery operations around the clock. In prison the noise is both loud and persistent with a little easing of the din in early morning hours. Normally, there's the clanging of chains, slamming of doors and gates, the banging on walls, doors and windows by those inmates who want, need, and seek attention; the yelling by those needing the same but without means; the screaming by men in physical and mental anguish, TVs blaring, men talking loudly, slamming dominoes, guards yelling over the din, men screaming back at them! The onslaught is ever lasting it seems. Attempts are made to control the noise – Guards control the TV volumes; domino slamming is against the rules, but who cares about the rules in a max prison? A guard will say something to one convict and 50 others will hoot and holler back! I've been here for over 23 years now with little prospect of leaving this noise behind, but there remains within me the deep desire to hear the sound of a different noise; the barking of a dog, a baby's cry, children playing in the yard – what a wonderful noise that would be.



Art by  
Alex Hernandez

By James Bauhaus

Noise is what you hear on your average "news" cast. They spend more time asking questions than supplying facts. Many of the questions that they ask are directed at people who have no answers. You can always tell that you're wasting your time when the "expert" "answers" the reporter's question with "That's a very good question!" Politicians especially like to con-gratulate their interviewer on how very good their question is. Unfortunately for the people who want to learn something from the newscasters, the best questions usually are the ones that never get asked. Unasked questions are the ones that got us railroaded into a couple of trillion dollar wars. The answer was noise. When the cops cause cities to burn because of their getting caught on film perpetrating too many street executions, the question is "How can we track down all these looters?" The noise of the gov/media alliance prevents the real problems from being fixed. Phony wars and street executions are no problem for gov't, business or the media. Citizen protests are a big prob-lem: how can they enjoy their beer and ball games when they're all out rioting? The answer is noise. A passive, product-buying citi-zenry is kept quiet with video and audio chewing gum. Dancers dance, singers sing, talkers talk, audiences clap, cheer or hoot in approval. Everyone must have their eyes glued to the thrown, kicked, chased, or bounced ball while the thumb-warriors in Nevada patrol the globe with their drones and hellfires, keeping us (buzz, cackle) "safe." An old newspaperman from the past, H.L. Mencken, summed it up nicely when he said, "The aim of politics is to keep the people alarmed (and thus clamouring to be led to safe-ty) by menacing them with an endless series of hobgoblins. "The most recent and ridiculous hobgoblin released for the purpose of stampeding the public around in circles is the one that they named twice, like New York, New York. It's called "ISIS" or "ISIL" to keep us confused and distracted over the name to

remember its origin. They are the former Iraqi army, which our military goons and CIA spooks stitched together into a Frankenstein monster from the dismembered parts of Saddam Hussein's army. As long as we had billions of dollars to feed it, and had it chained down and caged with our planes, helicopters, bombs, bullets, drones, and hellfires, it would take our small arms, trucks and artillery to the "enemy" (its brothers and sisters) and shoot while saluting our flag. Soon as we left, however, and the coast was clear, it changed its flag, attacked the phony, puppet gov't we left behind with the same weapons we had given it, and returned to its real purpose which has never changed: Getting their land free of the American invaders. To camouflage this monumentally stupid Pentagon presumption that our puppet gov't could stand for five minutes after we left, a lot of noise was required. The noisemakers on the news told us, "Our Iraqi army ran away!" To "prove" this phony, ass-covering, face-saving nonsense, they showed a tank cutting donuts on a street that we paved. What ignorant goatherd wouldn't cut donuts in a million dollar tank given him by invaders who had just left? The whole Iraqi army flipped back to being the Islam army soon as the Christian army took its money and stole away. This same, exact scenario occurs in every war in which the invaders lose. Famous examples are: In Vietnam, we didn't let all our helper-turncoat-revolutionaries get killed off by the winners. We brought hordes of the Hmong tribe home with us, along with many others. We had an explosion of Thai and Vietnamese restaurants right after we lost that war. Our noisemakers loudly lauded us as humanitarians for doing so. We used the Hmong to help our military find and mass-murder their enemies. We rewarded them with citizenship and subsidies. When we had to start a war in Somalia so we could feed their starving, yet very fertile, desert hordes, we had to buy snitches and rats to show us where the enemy hideouts and headquarters were. They did a good job, and we couldn't leave them to be murdered by the families of the people that they had told us to bomb. We brought hordes of our Somali helpers quietly over here for their rewards. This same, exact process occurred with the people we bought to show us who to kill in Chile, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Cuba, El Salvador, Congo, Nigeria, Libya, and many more. How many lucky Iraqis made it over here as a reward for helping Sonny Bush (Cheney) with his phony war has yet to be revealed. The Nightly News Noisemakers have not let us in on this little secret. Since they have not started any rounds of self-congratulatory backslapping among the public for humanitarianism this time, my guess is that not many Iraqis made the cut. Looks like, this time, our military mega-minds left most of our little helpers in Iraq to face the sword. We get plenty more noise at home. Our poor cops were fervently praying for noise to take the heat off them and their nation-wide, years-long murder sprees. Their prayers were quickly answered with a virtual smorgasbord of disasters, from plane crashes, train crashes

and earthquakes. There seems to be no limit to what the super-privileged can get away with, just as long as they get to hide it behind noise.



Art by Braxton Bowers

## Leaving home

By Jonathan McGeoch

In order to leave home, one must first establish just what home is in the first place. To me, home is where I can relax and be comfortable. Not so much a physical location as an established routine, a comfort zone. At times, leaving home does involve physical displacement to a new region. At times, leaving home could involve quitting a job to go elsewhere, taking a couple classes at a college towards attaining goals, or even just walking up to the one that you don't think you have a shot at getting.

It can be a good thing or a bad thing. When leaving home, ask yourself if you are just running away from problems or if you are putting yourself in a better position. Like a parking spot, some-times you need to put it in reverse to get out. Taking a couple steps back financially can be offset in the long run. If I just run away from my problems, will I ever truly escape? My number one problem is myself. Right now, I am leaving home. I am leaving a good job on the compound-one with good pay and a decent hustle that teaches marketable skills, to go to a job with less pay, no hustle, and fewer but still valuable skills for the outside. Why? The new job will give me a better opportunity to step back from the rat race and focus on what I need to right now—in this case—my writing. If I want to be a writer when I get out, then shouldn't I focus on writing while in here—take (make) the time to write some stories, poems, essays, that will be publishable? Isn't it easier in here? When released, the pressures of rent, food, utilities, etc. will be forcing my hand to the grindstone, at least initially. Here, I can do what I enjoy and get it prepared. Will I some day make it as a writer? I do not

know. I do know that there is only one way to find out. Don't follow your dreams; live them.

## Road Trips

By Norman Theriot

From my earliest recollection, road trips have always been enjoyable experiences for me. As a child, road trips provided me with the opportunity to be with my family, all of us together in a small area, experiencing what the countryside had to offer, and from time to time seeing something out of the ordinary.

In remembering these trips, I am brought back to a simpler time. At the time, I remember my father had a 1970 Plymouth Fury III. The car was as big as a tank. The dashboard was steel, no padded plastic, the seat belts were lap belts which no one ever used. We only had an AM radio.

I can remember riding, laying on the back dash waving to people, even cops. I was six or seven years old. Let a kid do that today, someone's going to jail.

There was no navigation system, no cellphone or GPS; yet, we always ended up at our destination. Back then things were so much more simple, honest even. Life was better, less stressful.

Today our nation is encumbered by technology that is supposed to make life easier, but it makes us lazier. We have so many laws that there is no longer true freedom.

Family get togethers have been replaced with weekends working a second job just to make ends meet. Our children have become addicted to video games and computers. Social skills are not gained. Parents for the most part are never around for they are either working or sleeping. Our youth lacks guidance.

My last road trip was the Bluebird bound for where I am now, chained to someone else sitting on hard plastic seats seeing the world through perforations in stainless steel. This ended in a place of such desolation and absence of comfort.

My next road trip will be again on a Bluebird, again chained to someone only this time, heading toward freedom.

False Assumptions" by Richard E. Smith

Boom! Boom! Boom! My cell's steel door echoed from the guard's repeated kicks. I snapped awake, my heart thundering in panic.

What's going on? I wondered.

"Smith!" he yelled through the black expanded metal covering my door's window. "Pack up, you're on the chain." (The term "chain" comes from the chain gangs of old time prisons when men were physically chained together every time they were transferred around the state. They were still "chained" together. Just now it was done in pairs and with handcuffs instead of chains.)

"Huh?" I squinted through one blue eye. "I'm not on the chain."

"Pack up," he repeated before walking off.

Why would I be on the chain? I silently asked myself. My groggy brain refused to give me an answer so I kicked off my sheet and packed my property. Despite his gung ho attitude of earlier, several hours passed before the guard returned.

"Come on with that property." He jammed the pry bar into the tray slot released mechanism and popped the slot open. The tray slot was used to pass meals through – thus the name "tray slot" – but also used as a way to handcuff dangerous prisoners in a safe manner for the guards. I was labeled as one of those dangerous prisoners.

"Where am I going?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Yeah you do," I argued. "The chain list says where I am going."

"Yours don't."

"You're lying." I plopped down on my bunk. "I'm not moving until I know what's going on."

Call me paranoid or crazy even, but after years of being a high ranking gang member involved in all sorts of no-good, I was leery about taking an unexpected bus ride.

The guard tired of the conversation and clicked the handcuffs open. "Submit to hand restraints."

"No."

"Don't make me call rank," he warned.

"Tell me where I am going."

He took a deep breath and exhaled loudly.

"Something's squirrely," he said. "The list doesn't say where you're going."

I crossed my arms across my tattooed chest and remained silent.

"Look," the guard tried, "I'll find out what I can but I'm not promising anything."

"Cool," I answered. "Don't mess me over."

He didn't.

"You're on a special chain for McConnell."

McConnell Unit? Why was I going there? I didn't want to leave Connally. Although the Connally Unit was declared one of the most violent prisons in the state, I enjoyed the place. It was home even though it wasn't always the best place to be.

The administration decided it wouldn't be my home anymore.

"Smith!" a stocky guard called me as the bus pulled up at McConnell's gate house.

"Yeah?"

"Get in the cage." He jabbed a finger at a small fenced area.

"I'm supposed to be staying here?" I replied.

He shook his head.

"Where am I going?" I stepped into the cage.

"Don't know." He slammed the doors hut and snapped a brass lock on my cage. "And really don't care." He walked away.

"You'll care in a minute." I yelled at his gray-shirted back. "Get me some rank or bring the team!" (S.O.R.T. Team – Special Operations Response Team – is a group of five guards wearing riot gear. They deal with unruly prisoners in an unruly manner.)

The guard stormed off. Five minutes later a sergeant came to my cage. I knew him as a guard on Connally before he received his rank.

"Smith," he said. "Why are you tripping?"

"I just want to know where I'm going."

"That's it?" he asked. "Give me a minute."

When he returned I knew something was amiss. The sergeant was smiling! My stomach twisted in anticipation. Smiling sergeants usually meant bad news to me.

"What's up?" I waited, uncertain if I really wanted to hear the answer.

"How long you been in seg?"

"Thirteen years."

He nodded. "It's over."

"Huh?"

He smiled wider, if that was even possible. "A special van's coming to support you to the Ramsey Unit. You're getting released from seg."

I was getting out of seg! I couldn't believe it. After almost thirteen years of solitary confinement I was going to be free. True I'd remained imprisoned, but I could take a vocational trade. More importantly, I could hug my parents after years of physical isolation.

I couldn't believe this was really happening. What began as a journey of despair had morphed into the grandest dream. road trip would be the beginning of a new lifetime – a life of hope, happiness, and achievement.

This unexpected blessing would be a never-ending journey of re-discovering who I was meant to be. This road trip was awesome!

### Extraordinary Happiness by Jeremy Brown

When I was younger around 14 years of age, my biological father and I drove from California to Florida. My dad's name is Donny Lynn Brown. He grew up in Kentucky, but was a surfer at heart with a mane of yellow. At 54 years of age, he taught me a lot on our road trip.

"Dad?"

"Yes Son?" he'd respond.

"Let's get a bow and arrow, I want you to teach me archery."

"Are you sure? You're a city boy. You don't really want to learn, do you? You're still all electrified from the city, although not so much as when you came up here to California."

"Yes I'm sure Dad. But before we do this, let's go to church."

"You know me and God don't believe in each other right?"

"I know it's just I feel the need for some church! Free coffee and doughnuts! Me and you both know it's a business, sometimes it's good to fake it and be around others."

"Alright this one time."

My father really hated church, but I was a little son of a bitch who liked to play tricks and get under people's skin. This quaint little church had a great group of eclectic individuals. Very optimistic and positive people. At a young age, I was very intelligent and knew that it would be good for my father and me to be around new people and situations. Life is full of different places and faces and I wanted to see it and experience them all!

After we finished our church adventure, my dad was grumpy and real quiet. He could be like that, very moody and sensitive at times. Maybe it was because I had put my foot on the brake pedal and jumped out of a moving vehicle to go to church. Haha. I was bold, too bold. In contrast, when dad was happy, his energy was magnetic. His aura just drew people out of the dust, I must say!

We drove to an army surplus store and picked up a handmade bow made of oak. With arrows for 500 dollars, I was very happy. My dad sure as hell wasn't because of the price, but I was spoiled as a child even though we didn't have a lot. We drove out to the desert and were now somewhere in New Mexico. We first set up camp and then fired off on targets. Back then, my dad had a compact bow with a scope!

"Let me try yours, Dad!"

"You ain't strong enough Son," he spoke like a cowboy, or John Wayne, whom he idolized. "But I love you enough to trust ya. Take a good pull and see if it doesn't do you in," he replied. I notched an arrow and it took off so fast, it busted our 15 dollar styrofoam targets in half. I had set up all targets in a special angle, one behind another. "Holy shit, there goes another 15 dollars but damn, you're strong boy!" He actually started whooping and hollering. His girlfriend Loretta was from Texas and she remained in the background the whole time, as if she knew the inner power I had within. She and I liked each other a lot. She told me if I was 18 and had a beard, she would be with me and we'd date. But I was too young and she said she, "...wasn't no cougar."

Later on that night, my dad fired us up some smokes and let me drink some white wine. He wouldn't allow me to smoke weed. He said I was too young and he wouldn't be babysitting. He was pushing me to be a man at 14 and to be honest, I loved him for it and hated it at the same time. I was always somewhat of a rebel as a kid, yet I could be good too. There's the duality of human nature. "Son, this is the only time I will allow you to drink, I don't

care if you smoke. You've shown great skill and here's your reward." That was one of the times my father was truly beaming with energy, when I started to show promise.

Eventually we made it to Mississippi while picking up few hitchhikers along the way. They were really strange and cool. One stood out though. His name was Tiny Tim and he was a carnie. What a fucking character this guy was. He could stand on his head, fix anything, shoot, and make everyone laugh as well. He had some bad luck when he lost his job after he came to work drunk and lost a finger setting up one of his rides. After doing a variety of jobs, people began to call him Tiny Tim because of his middle finger being so small. He flicked off a lot of people too, so the name stuck. One day he said to me after we smoked some ganja, "I was tired of it, so I left everything. My house and my woman and I got up and went just about everywhere."

I asked, "How old are ya Tiny Tim?"

"22 I think. I can't remember much. Too much drugs."

Later we got a hotel, turned on the news, and we soon discovered Tiny Tim had killed over 10 people and escaped a mental hospital for the criminally insane! Good thing we weren't killed. As my Dad went out to get groceries, Loretta cried on my shoulder and we kissed. She was a tall buxom blond with red ruby lips and a full bosom. But that was it. "That's only a taste of what real manhood is," she said to me. Dad came back with some liquor and weed. "Ya'll deserve a treat for my ignorance, coulda got us all killed." That's the first time I had ever seen him tear up. I received extraordinary happiness later that night when I was high and got to see my dad's girl strip for both of us. The freakiest road trip ever. \*\*My dad was a biker and Indian, so this was his treat to me teaching me about our "other side.



Art by Kellv Fredricksen

By Steven P. Arthur

The sweltering California summer heat was overwhelming as a gracefully aging Chevrolet drove us to the cool Pacific

Ocean. Our little family of four had made this trip many times, but this trip would be the best and most memorable for me.

We took the familiar back-highway route, a secret known only to valley residences, or so we like to tell ourselves. These back-highways, encroached by dirt, zig-zag through thousands of acres of farmland irrigated by the California water canal system that runs parallel to miles of the highway.

We were more than halfway to our destination. The low rolling, sun burnt hills of the valley were mostly in the rearview mirror and we had just passed a large green sign announcing that we had entered a new city. However, after some time the old Chevrolet gave up the "ghost", or in the mechanic's jargon, "threw a main bearing."

Living in the age of cellular communication does, on occasion, show its superiority as it did that day. My wife of seven years called for a tow while I informed the two wild animals, who carried a combination of my wife and my genes, that the beach trip might not happen. Needless to say they were not happy about the development. My girl, who unfortunately for her, carries a striking resemblance to me, somehow developed the same look on her face as when she is waiting for the punchline of a joke. At only six years-old going on sixteen, she could be more than slightly intimidating. On the other hand, my son, at the ripe old age of four, just wanted to play video games and didn't care where.

The ride in the tow truck was rough and slow. We were on smooth asphalt, but by the way the truck shook and lurched, we could have been on a dirt road peppered with potholes. The kids loved it.

The tow driver was a cordial and chatty fellow in beat-up coveralls with a Santa Claus type of stomach that pushed the limits of his buttons. We finally arrived in a nameless and forgettable little town composed of eight buildings, with the newest being a Chevron gas station. At last, he dropped us off at a motel.

After a brief encounter with the motel desk clerk with the Norman Bates vibe, we found ourselves in a basic room. The amenities included four walls and a heavy duty door with multiple locks. Nothing more. The television had two and a half channels, no cable or internet service.

That night we were all huddled together, simply talking and sharing stories of mostly the fictional sort. My wife and I talked to the kids about our childhood and that segued into card games of Go Fish, Old Maid and original games of our own. We laughed and talked well into the night. No computers, phones, internet or games. Just the four of us spending time together, much like the way my wife and I had spent with our parents at that age. It was the best vacation ever.

## Breakfast

By Shannon Richardson

What do you think of when you think of breakfast? Does it give you a sense of good things or bad things? Do you believe that it is indeed the most important meal of the day? I don't know about you, but for me, it depends on the time of my life and who I was with.

Breakfast for me as a child bought a sense of terror. I had to avoid flying glass as my daddy and step mother fought, while trying to stay away from my step brother who molested and raped me. I also had to avoid my daddy so I wouldn't make him angry and get the belt. When I was around 7 years old, breakfast became the most peaceful part of my day. The step-devils moved out and daddy left for work before my alarm clock woke me up. Eating alone was okay with me because it was peaceful and it didn't hurt.

When I became a mother, I swore my children would have a better life than I did. They were the center of my universe. Breakfast seems like such a small thing, but I knew how important it was. I would get up crazy early to get breakfast ready and then get them up early enough for us all to eat as a family. We laughed and enjoyed being together. It was the perfect way to start a day. How I long for those days again.

Now that I am in prison, breakfast is like a combination of a concentration camp and feeding time at the zoo. We are told when we can eat, what we will eat, and how much we will eat. However, just like in the zoo, not all "animals" follow the rules. Some want to fight against the rules. Some want to fight each other. Some want more food and risk going through the line twice. Breakfast in this environment is anything but peaceful. To me, breakfast is about more than food. It sets the mood and tone of the day. It can help to build you up or tear you down. Most people see it as just another meal, but not me. I know why breakfast is the most important meal of the day and it isn't nutritional.

By Anthony Montecino

It has long been said that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. I for one believe that. Allow me to share my breakfast with you. I have cheese grits, eggs, sausage, hash browns, and toast with jelly or jam. Now, sometimes my eggs are scrambled, fried, or boiled. Sometimes I have sausage patties, links, and sometimes bacon. Sometimes I have grape jelly or apple, and sometimes strawberry jam on my buttered toast. I always have a mixture of cranberry, grape, and apple juice.

One morning while sitting at the table for our breakfast, my young daughter of nine asked me a question. She said "Papa, why do you eat the same thing every

morning? Wouldn't you like to have some pancakes or cereal with milk, or some fruit?"

Looking at me with those beautiful big blue eyes, I could see that she was very serious and extremely curious as to my answer. So I replied, "why, *mi cielo*, I do have pancakes, cereal, milk and fruit; you see *mi vida*, the grits are a type of grain and is therefore cereal, the toast is bread/flour which is pancakes, the cheese is made from milk, and my juice is a blend of fruits! So I eat a different breakfast every morning depending on what I want everything to be!"

I could tell by the look on her face that she was somewhat confused and trying to think it through. Finally, a big smile spread across her face as she turned to look at her mother, then back at me, as she said "So, if I want my bowl of cereal and milk to be ice cream and blueberries, then can I?"

"Well, of course you can make believe it to be anything you like" I replied.

To which she responded "Well, sometimes Momma gives me a glass of milk and a bowl of frozen fruit for breakfast, why can't I have ice-cream with blueberries which is actually the same thing since ice cream is made from milk and blueberries are fruit! And that way you guys can make believe that I am having a glass of milk and a bowl of fruit, so I don't have to!"

Breakfast means many different things to many different people. To me, it is a time for bonding, a time to be close to my wife and daughter. It is a time to discuss our goals for the day and talk about our dreams we had the night before. I will always cherish memories of those times, and when I once again am able to sit at the table and have my breakfast with my family, that will be a joy to my heart. It is a time to create more memories.

So, until then, I will continue to make believe that I am at that table and eating my breakfast of whatever I want it to be, despite what it really is, with my wife and daughter. And for the record, on those sometimes mornings, you can best believe that instead of a glass of milk and a bowl of frozen fruit, that little girl got ice-cream and blueberries.

Coffee by Edward Walsh

As a boy my breakfast consisted of Cheerios, toast, and Carnation Instant breakfast powder mix. My brother Timmy and I would always eat on the living room couch while watching Captain Kangaroo and The Skipper Chuck Show. I remember my mom telling us to hurry up and eat, "...or I'll turn off the T.V.!"

We lived with my grandma who dedicated her life to us. My mom, along with my grandma, did the best they could raising two wild and independent boys. While Timmy and I ate breakfast mom would busy herself getting ready for work. Grandma would sit on her favorite easy chair and watch the kid's shows with us.

I never liked Cheerios. They always reminded me of little circles of compressed sawdust. No matter how much sugar I put on them, the flavor was always bland. I would only end up with sugar sweet milk and a sugar sludge on the bottom of the bowl. Then, even worst, when I got hypnotized by the Captain or the Skipper those little circles would get mushy. The overly buttered toast would get cold and soggy. The best part of breakfast was the instant breakfast mix. My favorite was the egg-nog, and Timmy always claimed the chocolate flavor.

After I graduated from high school, I joined the Navy. My breakfast was endless cups of coffee, no cream, no sugar. Sometimes if I had time I would join my friends at the base chow hall for an omelet. I would get a three egg, ham, cheese, onion, green pepper, mushroom omelet with hash browns and biscuits, and of course the coffee, no cream, no sugar.

I'm not a morning person. After I wake up I need peace and quiet, and my coffee. Over the years I've stepped into the routine of getting my cup of coffee and taking my dog for a walk. When I lived by the beach we would walk to the water's edge. There I would sit to watch the sunrise over the Atlantic. My dog would be busy doing his dog thing- he had his routine too. When I lived in the country, with my coffee, we would walk the trails in the woods. I would enjoy the trees, birds, fresh air, and my coffee. My dog would sniff every nook and cranny. In the effort to get my head straight for the day ahead, my walks were my breakfast in a way, my breakfast of solitude and peace. Oh, but on those special occasions or out of pure hunger I'd create myself a big breakfast, with eggs, bacon, and toast. Or, sometimes I would add grits with salt and pepper and a raw egg mixed in. And coffee, no cream, no sugar.

In my later years on Fridays I would meet mom and her husband Mark at their favorite restaurant Cracker Barrel for breakfast. I would wake up extra early to drive ten miles to meet them for the 8am breakfast. Mom and Mark, being humans of habit, would always sit at the same table by the big picture window. They would have the same waitress who they knew by name. They even had the menu memorized and every week they would wait patiently for me to read over the numerous breakfast specials. Pancakes, eggs over medium, bacon, hash browns, biscuits with gravy was my favorite. Mom enjoyed pecan pancakes, and Mark had the ham and cheese omelet with hash browns with endless cups of coffee. And I had my coffee too, with no cream, no sugar.

After I would go to their home and sometimes spend the weekend with them. In the mornings, mom and I would sit in the quiet living room eating butter soggy toast and coffee. Mom always saves up a little bit of her toast to share with the dogs. Mark would be at the table eating a bowl of cheerios. He would always ask, "Eddie, would you like a bowl of Cheerios?" and I would respond with "Umm... no thanks Mark."

I'd answer remembering those little circles of flavorless compressed sawdust particles. After Mark would leave for work, mom and I would sit out on the back patio that overlooks the woods. With a second cup of coffee, I always enjoyed our quality time together.

Now I sit in prison. My grandma passed away years ago. A year and a half ago we lost Timmy to cancer. My mom is really sick and she needs me more than ever. Mark is doing the best he knows how. And, I've had a few different dogs to walk for morning breakfast. Now my morning walk is in a straight line with other prisoners to the prison dining hall. My breakfast is served to me on a cold tray. I don't get to choose what I eat. The one thing that hasn't changed is my love for coffee, now instant coffee, no cream, no sugar, but coffee nonetheless. I once made a bad decision and I'm now paying dearly for it. Funny how things go. Simple things that I used to take for granted, things I didn't like, things long forgotten are now cherished memories. Life was so simple once. I miss breakfast with Timmy and Grandma. There is no more Captain Kangaroo or Skipper Chuck shows. I miss Navy coffee and going to the base chow hall for the huge egg omelets. What I would give to eat a simple bowl of Cheerios, butter soggy toast, and carnation instant breakfast egg-nog. I miss my breakfast coffee walks with my dogs and early morning breakfast with mom and Mark at our favorite restaurant. Most of all, sitting in the quiet living room sharing toast and coffee with my mom. I miss good coffee, no cream, no sugar.

**Picture Themes** are like the word themes except you can look at the picture and then see what story it evokes in you. A picture is worth a 1000 words, and that is the word limit we can accept for these selections. These writings can be fanciful or true. It is yours to choose. Again there were many selections I wished to include, but had to cut them to make this all fit in the 32-page format. At the end of this paragraph are some selected writings from pictures from the last cycle. I still have to mail the completed packet to all who participated in the themes due for Aug and Sept 15, so please know I did not forget to mail them to you, but rather I am still behind from my accident. If you too wish to receive a complete set of writings for a picture cue see the new assignments at the end of this section. Let your imagination or memory connect to the image and share a story. Last year we created and distributed a program on creating flash fiction, and in a previous newsletter I reprinted some of the work contributed through that program. In reading through the themes in order to select ones for reprinting this cycle I was struck by how the quality writing is improving as many of you continue to submit writings, and develop your craft. Practice makes perfect and the more you write the better your skills. Please continue to utilize these programs to improve your ability to think and communicate.

## Past Picture Themes



UNTIL THE MOMENT I'M CAUGHT pt.1 By Chad Dias  
 You're probably thinking this paper-selling gig is legit. Naw, I stole these papers from a vending machine where they expect you to honor the system. Where one paper is all you're expected to get, suckers. I've been selling them at the train station every few days before school, at a quarter a pop. Fifty papers at a quarter apiece don't seem like a lot. But when you're 10, you know how much candy and junk food \$12.50 could've bought? Trust me, a lot. Eventually the newspaper vendor stopped restocking my particular block. Now I got to put forth twice the effort just to steal the papers from the machine up the block, 'cause when you're 10 this kind of logic make perfect sense. How could it not? Why would I stop? At least that was the frame of mind up until the moment I'm caught.

Extra, Extra by Todd Pate

Extra, Extra read all about it. WMD's used by early man. Yes, there is evidence that WMD's have been around a lot longer than previously thought. With all the terrorism and wars happening around the world, when we hear the letters of WMD, we think of "WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION" and that is true. However, there is another WMD that has been happening since the dawn of man, and it is just as destructive. That WMD is "WORDS OF MASS DESTRUCTION" and it has been killing the human spirit for centuries. Words have power. Words can create or destroy. Let us start the beginning. Genesis 1:3 and God said, "Let there be light", and there was light. Everything that has been created and will be created is spoken into existence. Then in John 1:1, "in the beginning was the word, and the word was with God." Through the word, we express our creative power. It is through the word that we manifest everything. Regardless of what language we speak, our intent manifests through the words we use. The word is a force; it is the power we have to communicate, to think, and thereby to create the events in our lives. Words are the most powerful tool we have as humans. It's like a sword with two

edges, our word can create the most beautiful events, or our word can destroy everything around us. The word can set us free or it can enslave us more than we can ever imagine. The words that we use are so important that if we use WMDs, they can literally kill. In Proverbs 18:21, "death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit." We as a society have created chaos with the word. We use the word to create hate between different races, between different faiths, and between different nations. We have misused the word so often that it now seems normal to pull each other down, and keep each other living in a state of fear and doubt. Some years ago, a man in Germany, by the use of words, manipulated a whole country to commit the most atrocious acts of violence. He activated people's fear with WMDs that he spoke. Hitler's words, based on fear generated beliefs and agreements, will be remembered for centuries for all the destruction they caused. Here is an example: You see a friend and you give him an opinion about his appearance. You say, "Hmm, I see you've lost a lot of weight. My brother started losing weight, and he found out it was cancer." If he listens to your WMDs, and if he agrees, he is likely to have cancer in a year. Another example of WMDs; someone gives you an opinion and says "Look, that girl is ugly!" The girl listens to the WMDs, believes she is ugly, and grows up with the idea she's ugly. It does not matter how beautiful she is, as long as she agrees with the WMDs she will believe she is ugly. What kind of WMDs do you tell yourself? "I'm fat," "I'm dumb," "I'm a bad person." If you believe these words that you keep telling yourself, your life will become an experience of endless suffering. The next time you want to give your negative opinion to yourself or someone... DON'T! There is a timeless phrase that goes "if you can't say anything nice about somebody, then don't say anything at all." That phrase also applies to what you say to yourself. Gossip is the very worst WMD because it is pure poison. We can hear people around us gossiping all the time, openly giving their opinion about other people. They even have opinions about people they do not even know. Emotional poison is transferred along with the opinions and becomes very unhealthy for a society as a whole. It seems gossiping has now become the main form of communication in human society; it makes us feel better to hear someone else feel as badly as we do. Soulchology 101 states: "people who gossip to you, will gossip about you." Also just listening about gossip is like accepting stolen property, it makes you just as guilty of the crime. There is an expression that says, "misery loves company", and people who are suffering do not want to be alone. This is madness that WMDs cause. So, is there any hope? Yes, if we use the word as God intended. If we can stop using WMDs against others and ourselves and start using words that go in the direction of truth and love, then we can literally change the world one word at a time. Find some positive or loving words to say to others and see what happens. That action

will produce a like action. If I appreciate you, then you will appreciate me. If I am kind to you, you will be kind to me. Start every morning with the word, by telling yourself, "I'm beautiful," "I'm intelligent," "I'm a good person," and the truth will manifest through you and clean out all of the emotional poison that exists within you. God gave us the gift of the world, and has entrusted us with this power. That power being the power to create. When you use the word to empower yourself and others, you both feel good, you both feel happy, you both feel joy, and you both feel at peace. It is a win-win situation. Use your words as WMDs and you will bring constant suffering into the world. Use the word in a positive manner and you will bring heaven into the world, just the way God intended. It is your choice. You can speak "WORDS OF MASS DESTRUCTION" or speak life



#### Son, Brother, Friend by David Kiluk

I fishtailed into the empty graveyard and followed the narrow gravel path to its end. I killed the engine and glanced at the fading winter sunset. The cemetery was just as I recalled it from my youth, desolate and abandoned. No one was around for miles. I stared at the length of rope on the passenger seat. It was thick enough for the job and long enough to tie around a sturdy oak branch. The silent ambiance was eerie. It was a perfect place for a perfect ending. I took a big swig from my whiskey bottle, jumping at the sound of a piercing caw from a huge crow perched on the tombstone in front of me. It ambled back and forth surveying the somber February sky. The old granite monument was topped with an archaic cross rising out of its sturdy sides and stretching upward towards heaven. I squinted from my sagging front seat and barely made out the words on the stone: "Son, brother, friend...loving 'Shawn.'" So there laid somebody's son. Someone's brother. Someone's friend. Not a father though. Neither was I. It was probably too late for me. Nothing seemed to work out for me anyhow. Every job, every woman, every relationship – it all ended up in pain. What if something good did happen? It would probably end up hurting too. So here I sat, tired of it all. I took another swallow from the

bottle and lit up a Marlboro. All the trees were bare and their branches cracked and tangled in the chilly gusts. The firmament was the color of old charcoal ashes and the clouds sprinted across it from East to West. The echo of more cawing blew in from a distance and the crows began to alight on the ancient grave markers around me. I wanted them to leave. I wanted to wallow in my misery. I thought about this "Shawn" lying underneath the Earth. I considered all his dreams, wishes and desires that laid unfulfilled beneath the soil. I shed a quiet tear for his soul. What did this world have to offer anyways? Money? I always lost it all. Sex? I always got my heart broken. Food? Well, I did like crispy bacon and ripe, juicy tomatoes. God? He never seemed to answer me. I stared at Shawn's dark gravestone again. "Son, brother, friend..." I was somebody's son – not a very good one though. I had become the black sheep of the family after doing time in prison. Plus, a violent argument with my father had damaged our relationship for good. That's when I stopped talking to him. I told him I would never speak to him again. I was also a brother, but not a good one either. I hadn't spoken to my two brothers and three sisters for over three years. I always blamed it on them, however. After all, they were the ones who didn't call or write so why should I attempt to contact them I was also a friend to a handful of people. Three, to be exact. But we drifted apart after two of them got married and moved away. One talks to me occasionally but we never seem to have anything to say. I wasn't a father but a child could've been a blessing. I bet I could've done a better job raising one than my family did for me. I closed my eyes as a strong wind gust whistled through the barren trees. I lumbered around the grave markers and it rustled my leather jacket. The pain in my heart became overwhelming and I screamed out. I was in desperate need of internal comfort. For someone to console me. I wailed again and my voice blended with the moaning wind as it soared into the sky, leaving the Earth like a fervent prayer asking: "Why? Why should I keep on living?" I crouched down and sat in the mud next to the tombstone with the cross. I had never known Shawn but for some reason I missed him. I read the dates and discovered he was 45 when he passed – my age. I knew he didn't get the chance to accomplish all of his dreams, wishes and desires. I got up and leaned on the front bumper of my old Ford, shivering with my hands in my pockets. A light snow began to fall, floating down all around me. "All I have is time," I thought. The moonlight bathed the whole cemetery in an eerie cobalt blue. The dark, bold cross caught my eye again. I pondered deeply about what it stood for. A stone angel with closed eyes stood guard next to it. I got into my car again. Sinking into the front seat I switched on the radio and hit scan. The tuner stopped on an evangelical station and some preacher roared, "You are forgetting that He loves you." He went on to explain that people tend to ignore the fact that God cares for us. I stared at the cross again. Tears formed in the corners of my eyes.

"How do I know?" I whispered. The radio then said, "Examine your heart. The truth is in your heart." I tried to sort through all the pain, all the chaos that filled my heart. A shred of emotion was lying at the bottom. I didn't know what it was but I knew it was something good. Suddenly, all the what-ifs and could've-beens turned very real. I was going to die one day. It was going to happen. But now I was alive. I inhaled deeply. That feeling in my heart told me I still could experience all the adventure, all the thrills, and all the excitement of the world. It was here. It was mine. I didn't want anyone else to look at my gravestone one day and say that all my dreams, wishes and desires laid unfulfilled beneath the soil. I could still be a good son. A good brother. A good friend. I still had the opportunity to be a father. That feeling in my heart seemed to be growing. Now I knew what it was. It was love. The preacher warned one more time, "You are forgetting that He loves you." I switched off the radio. "No, I'm not," I said. I started the car and felt like the day was suddenly wasting away; ticking away. I drove out of the cemetery and tossed the rope out my window. It landed in the ditch below the small bridge I was taking back into town. I had a lot to do. Phone calls, e-mails...etc. My mind was racing. But first I had to stop somewhere. I had to go see my dad. Then I was off to get a BLT.

#### The Reminder by Aaron V. Hill

Is there any doubt as to that which brings to life a shadow? The tree withers and the seasons change... To some it is a dead thing. To others it is just beginning a rebirth. And to others still, it simply is. Without those colors one might imagine apocalypse come. Or one might imagine a dawning of inspiration. What I see is dark clouds blocking the rays of the Sun... a raven, which is known to many as a bad omen or a sign of death...a tree with no leaves, a sign of a dead season for nature...a stone cross atop a grave, a sign that someone has left this world and those who cared had this stone placed in remembrance and hope that a God awaits beyond that remembrance. It is a picture with which emotions or thoughts could change to anything, just as the seasons change so. And because death begins with life, it is for me a picture about wasting away those opportune moments of living. Of loving, of being in time where there is just the moment. Just the now. As one could ponder what I've written and be perplexed, I am writing not to express my topic as a man most normally would, but to discover the topic the way a woman would begin an intimate talk about the depth of her feelings. Try to disassociate the sexist (weak vs. strong) stereotypes, and travel with me... see what we find here... To proceed... The picture makes me think about why I still argue, knowing no one ever wins. What am I trying to accomplish every time I disregard the rules I say are so very important and sacred? ...Nothing different seems to happen in every moment. There is a picture...then a thought...then a response to the thought in some way, which leads to recycling of the same process in

every moment, over and over forever. The picture is a moment. What it means to us will never be what it meant in this time of existence. The picture doesn't exist anymore beyond a thought. The power of it exists because of my desire for it to be something meaningful. Just as some will consider this writing "babble" just as they say about when a woman talks on and on, they can't fathom the importance of what is being expressed. They can't gather the meaning in the expression that exists beyond the words...but would not exist without those words that mean what is expressed...but it will never mean what it does now. While I'm writing... The bird is life. The tree is death. The sky is the battle between day and night, like the serpent demon Apophis. And the cross is the higher self, the enlightenment, the "reminder" that an accurate understanding of a truth can blind that truth's depth. How many levels of depth does each thing have? ...How many ways can each "who," "what," "when," or "where" be described? ...The picture is beautiful to me. Because it is the level of expression and depth which enlightens, strengthens, guides, and inspires me through my days. Now that I understand the "seeing" I have is a choice, I am given each moment, and not some victimizing imposition upon myself that could somehow control my mind or my nature, I see that: "The sun is coming out soon. And though we may wither, with faith, our spirits may yet soar..."

#### By Michael Chris Morales

When I look at this picture I think of death or things dying. It took me a while to remember the first time I heard of something dying and seeing the dried up dead looking tree. I recalled when I was in kindergarten we planted a bean seed in a plastic cup and mine died. I asked my Grandma what happened to mine and she said it died because you (I) didn't water it. After that it seemed like everything started dying. Then, the first time I saw an animal die my uncle Fred shot a squirrel off of the telephone wire. Then I started shooting birds out of trees with my BB gun. And as for the cross, well, that reminds me of all the people I have personally met and know that passed away. I am only 33 years old and have lived in Houston, TX; Detroit, MI; and Staten Island, NY. All in bad neighborhoods so you can only imagine, but yeah let me try and remember all the souls that are in some other place now. My uncle Tony Santos supposedly hung himself in jail. I actually saw him in a casket, and that was the first time I seen a dead body. I was about 7 years old. He looked really pale and gray and his body was really cold. My friend Goffrey got stabbed 17 times. He got caught in bed with a married woman; the husband wasn't too happy about that. My homeboy Skip Lane got shot in Detroit for selling crack on somebody else's block. My homeboy Greg Parada died of cancer I believe from cigarettes because all he did was smoke Newport 100s. My homeboy Jose de la Rosa got shot 20 something times by the Houston police department, as he went on a killing spree and the cops caught up with him. They went on

a high-speed chase, he wrecked and came out the car shooting at the cops. He lost the gun battle. That was on the show *The First 48*. When he killed that kid at a taco stand. My uncle's sister also was on *The First 48*. She owned and operated a gambling shack and these 2 dudes went up in there and shot her. I don't remember her name right now but I knew her. My homeboy Adelbert Sanchez got shot in a home invasion. This young couple thought he was a big time drug dealer. That happened in Clear Lake, TX. Him and 3 other people all got shot and killed. My stepbrother Sergio Lopez got shot and killed. He went to go help a guy in a fistfight and got shot 3 times in the head. He was brain dead and they pulled the plug on him. My homeboy Jason Ramirez got ran over after a bar fight. He smashed his head on the cement when they hit him. My homeboy Hugo DeLeon got all messed up on pills and weed fell asleep at the wheel and smashed into a telephone pole. My homeboy Jayman was with him but didn't die. But years later he killed himself playing Russian Roulette. My homeboy Big A got drunk and thought he could drive. He used to cut my hair all the time. My cousin Dustin overdosed on pills. His sister killed herself. She took some pills, went into her car turned it on and died of carbon dioxide in the garage. My grandpa died of cirrhosis of the liver. I seen him in the casket, I was the pallbearer. I actually took care of him right before he passed. That was my Dad's Dad (he loved horses). His name was Samuel Morales. My other grandpa on my Mom's side, Tony Santos Sr., died of a heart attack, he loved playing soccer. His wife, my step-grandma Gloria Santos died of some sickness. She was Puerto Rican and short. My homeboy Daniel Martinez died of a heart attack, his nickname was Dopehead Danny. His brother tried to wake him up out of his sleep and he got so scared his heart popped. My step-dad Billy-Harrington died of a heroin overdose, he was a truck driver. My uncle Ben Garcia and aunt Ester Garcia both died of health problems. I saw uncle Ben in a casket and I was the pallbearer for his funeral. They had a bay house I loved to go to. My homeboy Rory got shot and killed in a dice game. My old baby sitter Na died of health problems. The guy across the street Donald died of health problems I used to cut his grass all the time and he would always wave a hand at me. My grandpa's brother died, I remember him a little. He had health problems. My step-mom Irene's grandma "Ama" Ochoa died of health problems. My uncle Fred's friend Lupi shot himself. He was cool. My homeboy Mike died of a heart attack, I'm guessing due to crack cocaine. Another friend Mike blew his brains out over a girl with a shotgun. My homeboy Saulito did the same thing but that was over him being drunk and depressed. My homeboy Greg Mendoza died in a car accident in Hawaii. I don't know if he was drunk or what. My homeboy Rene's brother died too in a car accident. He was cool too! I guess that's about it. I almost died once a NYC cop put a gun in my mouth and said he would kill me. I had stolen his wife's wedding ring. His daughter let us skip

school at her house. While my friend was in the room with her I was looking for something to steal. While I had that gun in my mouth I was thinking about all my past life. I was only 15 years old at that time. Oh yeah, I also know somebody that died and came back to life. His name is Jesus Christ and he is my personal Lord and Savior! And now that I accepted him I'll live forever eternally in Heaven and I'll never die!!!



A Hand in Time-Richard Mikelson  
They say, "Never give up." They say, "You are like a mighty tree by the river." They say all sorts of stuff. Ultimately you just have to believe in yourself because all that matters is that "it is what it is." We have all sorts of signs in this prison. A narrow strip of smooth green grass is marked "International Airport" with another sign that says "Home of the Bum Rapped Dudes." We have signs that say "No Smoking" and "Drug Free Zone." We even have signs marking the bathrooms "Men," in an all-male institution. Then we have a poster/sign of a big Egret trying to eat a frog. The frog's head is in the bird's beak to its shoulders, but the frog's hands are choking the Egret's neck so it cannot swallow. The caption reads, "Never give up." Automatically, you think that the frog cannot ever afford to give up. But, in a twisted sense I guess you could say the Egret cannot give up or it will starve. Regardless, the truth in life or death, or just plain old dire situations is that you just cannot afford to give up, lest you perish. It is also said that, "if you do good, that good will return to you" and that "if you just reach out then someone will lend a hand." "Faith, have faith." I came to prison in 1978. The farm/slave work was brutal for the first ten years, picking my quota of cotton, digging ditches, doing the work tractors should have done. Prisoners fighting amongst each other and so much worse was a virtual nightmare. Guards openly attacking prisoners. But I survived and fought for freedom the whole time by writing writs and appeals. In 1988 I was still here but the prison had calmed down some. There was more control, more respect. I made trustee and got a job. But I was still

reaching out. I was still young and had faith that I would go home. I continued filing writs and appeals, and tried the pardon board. In 1998 I was still (mature, aged) here. I was still strong, clear minded. We instituted rehabilitative programs. A.A., N.A., C.P.R., musical bands, literacy. We were like a mighty tree, strong, but reaching out. Faith was strong with dreams of going home still alive and vivid. Knowing that right around the corner freedom must surely still be there, one more page on the calendar. In 2008 the prison just about cleaned up, hey, a model prison to be copied around the country. We give ourselves awards and have banquet ceremonies. Now past mature, seen it all and hoping not to remember half of the experiences that brought us this far. Yet still, filing writs, petitions, appeals, applying to the pardon board. Like a mighty tree, almost indestructible in time, but still reaching out in faith. Now it's 2015, still here. We have built golf courses, sport one of the biggest rodeos in the area and export more farm products than some small countries. I still have faith, even after almost 40 years, even now at almost 60 years old. I am like a mighty tree by the river, reaching out in faith. Knowing in my heart, sure as my soul lives, I am still reaching out and I will never give up! Freedom is near.

#### Beyond Lost by Robert Richter

I don't know what this place is. Am I on Earth, or even alive? My memories are blurry. Childhood is clear, but where was I just before this? I don't know. The building in the distance doesn't look right, and the tree is definitely wrong. Where am I? The hand looks so real. Is it plastic, did it grow like that naturally, or did someone train it? I can't bring myself to touch it, or even get close. It looks dead, but somehow I KNOW that if it grabs me I will wither as the tree flourishes, and my dusty skeleton will rest under leafy branches. I don't know how I know this. This is Hell, or an alien planet, or I'm insane. I know I'm not dreaming, nothing changes. I can shake hands, swim to the building, or just sit here and wait. I don't know what to do.



Until The Moment You're Caught (Part 2) by Chad Dias  
I remember it like yesterday. More so because it rang true. This older lady and her ailing sister, I assume, saw me pilfering papers. And in her feeble attempt at chastisement she said; "Nothing lasts forever little boy, there's consequences for everything that you do". Yet I was too young to give her words just due. All I knew, is this hustle amounted to arcade game change, candy and junk food. Eventually my desire for material things grew. And so did the hustle. I went from stealing papers, to strong-arm robberies, drug deals and B & E's. Why work hard when I could get money so easily? You see, my deal was struck way back in my youth, a trade with father time where I exchanged chunks of idle time for faster means to get loot. So naively I'd willingly signed away chunks of my youth. You see, for every crime there's allotted time paid consecutive or concurrent. And it ain't until the moment you're caught, tried and sentenced that you begin to see the error of your ways, confined to a cage reflecting on the old lady's past saying...Nothing lasts forever little boy, there's consequences for everything you do. Profoundly that shit rang true.

#### By Bobby Bunderson

The Tabby slunk sinuously down the long deserted corridor as the residents of the Shady Pines retirement home began to stir. The feline, affectionately known by everyone as "Tabs" was making her morning rounds. The large old tabby had faithfully been visiting with all of the residents every morning for years. Her visits had become every bit of their routine as were the Jell-O at suppertime, jazzercise in the recreation hall and bingo on Saturday nights. All of the elderly inhabitants that lived at Shady Pines just loved sneaking morsels from their plates to feed the already ample belly of the friendly cat. Yes indeed, Tabs was a vital part of this small, close-knit community. Thelma Buckley, who had been living at Shady Pines for the better part of two years now, arose from her bed at 5:00 a.m. The exact, precise time that she had been awakening for the past 40 years. Mrs. Buckley prided herself on her punctuality. She had never once in her 32 years as an elementary school teacher been late for work. It had been exactly one week to the day that she had awoken, fairly startled, to discover that Tabs has stealthily slid into her room and had fallen asleep at her feet. At first this seemingly harmless act had unsettled Thelma Buckley. A rather discomfiting rumor had become almost folklore concerning the tabby. The good people at Shady Pines, both residents and staff alike, believed that Tabs possessed a rather ominous gift. Of course Thelma regarded these stories as "hogwash," even though she herself had witnessed these strange events on a number of occasions. The story behind this mystery goes something like this: Four years ago one of the elderly guests, a Mr. Michael Riddle had been driving his electric cart on the sidewalk on his way to the recreation center

when from out of nowhere Tabs suddenly ran across the carts' path. The cart hit the cat and Mr. Riddle had become so distraught believing he had accidentally killed her, that he suffered a heart attack and died right there on the scene. Michael did not live long enough to discover that Tabs had survived the whole ordeal. After "the incident" Tabs had began sliding into people's rooms and would curl up at their feet and sleep. Without fail, that unlucky person would die strangely within the week. Tabs had become some sort of harbinger of death. Still? Mrs. Buckley thought herself to be a rational thinker, depending on science and common sense to form her opinions. Wherever the truth lay, Thelma was relieved to wake up healthy on this beautiful morning. Maybe she had somehow managed to break the curse? Thelma laughed at her own whimsy. "A curse? Oh for Pete's sakes!" she said aloud, and then chuckled again, "you silly old bird—" However this time the laughter became lodged in her throat as if she swallowed something wrong. She had been absent-mindedly looking out the window as she pondered her foolishness when she caught a glimpse of her mother, Jean. Thelma went to the window and hurriedly flung it open. Yes, yes, it was her mother! But how? How could it be? Jean Buckley had been in her grave for over two decades! "Mother, Mother!" She yelled desperately. Thelma quickly grabbed her jacket and ran out of the door. Although her mother was mobility impaired and relied on a walker to get around, it took Thelma two blocks to finally catch up with her. "Oh mother!" she said as she threw her arms around her. Jean glanced at her daughter and smiled sweetly yet spoke not a word. Jean continued on ahead. They reached the intersection and Thelma was afraid that a car might strike her slow moving mother and so she stretched out her hand like a traffic guard and safely ushered her out of harms way. Jean continued her silent journey forward until they had reached the city park. They walked to the center of the park where there stood a large gazebo. The gazebo was washed in a beautiful sparkling white and silver light. The light was beckoning them both forward. A fragrant smell, similar to that of honeysuckle and jasmine, radiated from the light. It was beautiful and comforting. Then, Thelma heard music. It sounded like harps, of feathers being blown by a cool summer breeze and of children's laughter. As mother and daughter entered the light, they heard voices. Lovely, long silenced voices of everyone that they had ever loved, the voices greeted them like long lost lovers. Thelma and Jean submitted themselves to the light and they both knew bliss. Back at Shady Pines the attending nurse looked sadly upon the face of Thelma Buckley, who must have expired sometime during the night. The nurse was amazed at the serenity on Thelma's face. Tabs was rubbing herself against the nurse's ankles as she purred loudly. There was much more work to do, Tabs thought as her eyes blazed in an unholy red stare.



By Delvin Diles

This is my last cigarette. Just took my last drag off it. There's maybe half a centimeter left, which I'll let burn to cotton because my last pull was a full, savored one. Hitting it again would only be dissatisfying, pissing me off further than I already am. The ember reaches its line and goes out. I flick the butt to the dirt patch of other dead cigs and live ants. As they scurry on, I sit up on the bench.

Now what? Here I am--broke, smokeless, and basically homeless. I would call Mr. Cranky Old Luddite and give him a chance to apologize, but ironically his infraction is the very thing that makes that impossible. I can't believe he did that...

On another normal day in our apartment, he was telling me about somebody's incompetence on the managerial staff at his job. I nodded, as I usually do, at the pauses in his monologue while arranging images on my Pinterest page with the iPhone he bought me. Then I heard the sigh again, so I told him, "I'm listening, babe." So, as I'm modding the background of a selfie, while waiting on him to continue--as a multitasking Millennial--this psycho snatches my phone, runs to the balcony, and shaking my hand off his arm, launches it into a busy street three stories below.

Wordlessly, I stared at him and he only scowled, breathing hard. After a few beats I intoned, "Real mature. And smart. You're the one who bought it and pays the bill."

"Fuck you, you little gold-digging bitch!"

That stung. He'd never called me that before. I thought he liked buying me things. Refusing to let on how shaken I was, I stated flatly, "No, fuck you," turned and left.

I didn't even look for the phone, knowing it would be demolished by traffic if not the impact alone. I just walked until I got to the park to lay down on my favorite bench. Then I realized that I was crushing the cigarette pack tucked in my bra. I'd hidden them there because that old snob of a boyfriend I got (I mean, had!) always throws my packs away, "For [my] own good." Whatever. I'm an adult. If I wanna ruin my health, that's my business! I don't smoke a pack a day anyway. Well, until today, because thanks to

that anti-tech asshole... speaking of which, look who's walking up the sidewalk. I get up before he can speak, and walk away from the bench. "Kayla! Baby, I'm sorry! Please come home!" he calls after me. I keep walking. He follows and pleads on, "Kayla! Please! I'm--I'll get you another phone! Just... please don't leave me!" I stop, turn around, let him close the space at a run, reach out and take hold of me before I inform him, "You're damn right you are! AND a carton of Newports!"

She's Just Waiting by C. Dias

She said she'd wait for him. Which for her meant for as long as her patience could allow. Yet, every once in awhile, she continues to dream and waits here on this bench. On any weekend her schedule permits, spending a few ideal hours with him is all she needs. Eventually her weary heart and mind find the needed strength to recommit to just waiting rather than focus on the duration of time left on his stint. She's just waiting for the next opportunity to be out here on this bench.

Hello There by Heather Beasley

"Hello there pretty lady, where you off to"  
 Those were the first words I heard  
 The start of an unhealthy relationship  
 The lonely and hurt teenager that I was, those words caught me  
 I didn't know how toxic things would be  
 But who cares, in society's eyes 18 was an adult  
 I felt I was one that knew everything  
 I could do whatever I wanted  
 Hello there to adulthood  
 I would soon learn that adulthood would have consequences  
 Most of all there would be fun...  
 "Let's party," said the 32 yr. old man.  
 That "party" turned into moving in with him  
 Good-bye to school and graduation  
 Hello there to a new relationship  
 Even though he wasn't my "type" of guy, he had alcohol and weed  
 That made up for his poor looks to me  
 Hello there to my love affairs  
 All my insecurities were gone for the moment  
 For a while it was fun "partying" everyday  
 Hello there to trouble  
 Soon after I'd be covering up for him  
 I'd take the blame  
 Good-bye to my clean record  
 Hello there handcuffs  
 Underage drinking? But I'm 18  
 Hello there to my first visit to jail  
 Then there was a day that I thought was a "normal party day"  
 It turned into something new

"What is it?" I asked  
 "Just try it," he told me  
 The white rock looked appealing to me  
 I was up for anything that would make me feel good  
 Hello there, my name is crack cocaine  
 The first hit of poison would cause me years of trouble and pain  
 In my eyes I had a new best friend  
 The white pony  
 Hello there new friend  
 I'll always be here for you  
 I'll take away your pain  
 I'll take away anything that's troubling you  
 Even if you try to turn me away, I'll be there saying,  
 "Hello there I know you want me"  
 I just won't tell you all the bad things that comes with me  
 Hello there to lies, deceit, pain and broken relationships  
 Hello there to more physical abuse  
 I really thought it was a sign of love  
 Better to be abused than no attention, right?  
 Where did

the

fun

go...

Hello to the hell that the white pony caused  
 Hello to the insanity



Every Man is an Island by Richard Mikkelson

It all started out so early in life, I do not even remember the exact point in time. Maybe it was when I asked a question in grade school that everyone thought was silly and laughed at me. Maybe it was when I skinned my knee and people

mocked my tears because they thought I was being a crybaby. But, I do know it started before I realized that I was building walls, emotional walls to save my feelings and to avoid embarrassment. One brick at a time, the walls were just beginning to rise.

*I build walls,  
A fortress deep and mighty,  
That none can penetrate.*

Later in life the walls kept rising. I was better than the average athlete, but I quit the team when I dropped what would have been the game winning touchdown. My first crush left me, up goes the wall, higher and higher. It did not occur to me then that everyone's first love leaves and life goes on. I only felt the fiery blistering of my little broken heart, a few bricks more I add to my wall.

*Deep within my gloom,  
I touch no one,  
And no one touches me.*

I tried mild drugs, smoked a little weed, and drank a little alcohol. I let my hair grow long, got a few too many close calls, and landed myself in jail. In any case, I felt shunned, started hanging out with rougher crowds. Enough bricks now, I am an island, alone in this world.

*I am a rock  
I am an island.*

The next thing that happened was a more serious crime, which resulted in a more serious sentence. I could only see my walls now, so high that people could not reach in to help me, and I could not reach out. My fortress destroyed me and my island insured that destruction. As pretty as my walls were, as intriguing as my wonderful island had become, it was all in fact, my own undoing.

*And a rock feels no pain,  
And an island never cries.*

Now, instead of my walls surrounding me for protection, my island is isolating me. I am surrounded by real bars, real brick walls, and real razor wire. Not to keep others out, if only that were true; but, to keep me in, in, in, for so, so, long.

*And a rock feels no pain,  
And an island never cries.*

Even so, I have learned that people need people, that sometimes growing is not always kind, and that adversity is only a building block for a better future.

Calvin Clarke

Eleven days. Eleven days I've spent clinging to this makeshift raft made of flotsam, clinging to life with everything I have. Madness set in about seven days ago, that is if madness can be defined by a common midshipman washed overboard by a rogue wave. I know that they are out there looking for me since protocol dictates bed checks every six hours. But where do you begin a search when that which is lost is but a drop within trillions of gallons amassing into a vast abyssal ocean?

I saw the first tentacle seven days ago. It reached out from beneath the waves, towering twenty meters or so above the surface. It was seeking me out as if it could smell my fear or sense my terror. Frantic kicks upon the water, propelling me up this dark water even further from my rescue as I sapped my strength and bile rose into my throat. This is all that I can do against this massive appendage.

Twice more, over the past few days, this giant tree-trunk-thick tentacle breeches the salty water as if it was seeking me out. My dry mouth contains the scream that would escape if it had but a bit of moisture to allow it. I once again kick frantically to create distance, but distance from what exactly? Closing my sunburned eyes, I pray to the gods to allow me to live, to keep me safe from this abhorrent child of Neptune. I wonder at its origin. Could it be a giant squid or the feared Kraken of Norwegian legend? Why would something so massive seek out one as insubstantial, as insignificant, as myself?

I don't see signs of the creature this last day. The water is calm and silent when I wake as if from some nightmare born in the sunken city of R'lyeh. My mind is lost to madness as my body is tormented by hunger and thirst.

Sounds of sea murmurs and terns rouse me from this morning stupor. I at first believe them to be hallucinations, or possibly decoys hanging from gossamer threads.

Rubbing my eyes in exasperation I realize there are hundreds of these nutritious birds flying about an island impossibly drifting atop this unending sea of indifference. Kicking like a hungered madman, which in both cases I can attest to its truth, I slowly make my way to the shore and find a small waterfall coming from within, its source a mystery but the freshness of its emission a bane to this tired soul. The birds screech their hatred as they fly above me encircling two enormous trees standing not unlike guards upon this impossible manifestation of an island. How could they grow so majestic in a place this barren? What nutrients feeds their roots?

Stone structures completely cover the surface. A maze of concretions covered in some unknown script and stairways leading nowhere. Atop the island sits a small building carved it seems from a single piece of cyclopean stone. A doorway within the stone beckons me like a magnet does metal. Blackness resides beyond this doorway. A blackness so deep, the nothingness hurts my eyes after so many days of staring at the evil sun.

My legs barely support my withered body as my malnourishment is so severe. The water that once supported me now drips helplessly from my tattered clothes. I think I feel a vibration emanating from deep within the island. My stomach lurches, allowing me to taste the bile once again of an unknown terror. I grab ahold of one of the trees as the entire island begins to rise higher above the ocean until I witness what cannot be true. The one god I had forgotten in my pleas of mercy has found me once again.

Modern instructors at the famous Miskatonic University have catalogued all of the Great Old Ones and now I find myself riding upon the back of the great forgotten god, Dagon, himself. His trap set out for me alone gives me a sense of belonging. He did this all for me. I am something special in his many eyes.

I cannot kick myself away from the tentacle this time, for I am upon land, upon Dagon, and with my final breath I see not just one giant tentacle, but hundreds. Each one taking a small piece of me with it.

#### Special Place by Shannon Richardson

Everyone has their own special place. Their retreat. Their heaven. This is mine. You can't tell from the picture, but I have hammock in the back between the trees. It is amazing what lying in the hammock can do for one's mood. Lying there listening to the waves of the water, the birds in the air, and the breeze through the trees... just describing it to you brings about a peace in my spirit.

My home is simple. You see, I don't require much anymore. I used to be so materialistic, my clothes wouldn't even fit in my home that you see now. But, a lot has happened to change me.

Prison changed me.

I've always considered myself to be a good person, but I was also very materialistic. I had to have all of the trendy clothes. I would be the girl who always had to have the shoes to match. Oh, don't forget the purses and jewelry! After all, accessories make the outfit, right?

Prison has a way of taking all of that right out of you. As far as pants goes, you have 3 options- khaki uniform pants that don't fit, gray sweatpants, or gray shorts. When deciding what shirt to wear, you have a few more options- a brown t-shirt, a khaki button-up shirt, a gray t-shirt, and a gray sweatshirt. When it comes to accessories, the options are even more limited. They sell one pair of earrings on commissary. That's your only accessory-unless you buy something off of someone else, but that takes money I simply don't have.

Prison has humbled me and brought me to my knees. I no longer have the need to fill my life with stuff. This is why my simple home is perfect for me.

Being separated from my children has put a hole in my heart that I can't imagine ever being whole again. I went from never being away from my children to having no contact whatsoever- their father won't allow it. Unless you've been in this same heart-wrenching situation, you can't imagine the pain this brings. Words simply can't describe it. This is the reason I choose such a peaceful place to live now. It hasn't healed my heart, and maybe it never will, but my surroundings keep my spirit at peace- most days.

Being claustrophobic is not a good thing when you're in prison. Have you ever heard of a "paddy wagon"? Let me describe it for you- imagine the back of a normal-

sized van, split that in two and put in a metal cage. Imagine 5'9" claustrophobic me riding in that! Once I survived that, I was locked in a cell not much bigger than that- with two other people. That's where I am locked down for 4 pm count and all night. This is why I need a place that is open. I have been closed in for too long. I refuse to be locked in anymore.

What's unusual about all of this? When you look at my name in the system, beside it reads, "escaped by death." That's what they call it when you die in prison before you are released and they're right, I did escape because now I am free. Now my spirit lives on and I am at peace. Feel free to come and visit. You'll never want to leave, but you have to find your own special place to stay. This island of peace is mine.



Art by Brandon Rushina

#### Yearning For Need by Dexter Rabadan

Birds, trees, and waterfalls all came out of his cell. A jungle of imagination, a utopia of escape. He would flip through the pages of National Geographic, gyros of Greece, fracking in Oklahoma. This fantasy pushed the reality of the cell walls further and further away.

Coffee, Good Morning America; he had not drunk coffee nor did he watch GMA until he came to prison. Calm, humiliated, on the streets; he was prideful and turbulent. He had let prison change him, strip him, control him.

The only relationships he sustained were with literature. Zola never complained. Steinbeck never talked back to him. Through literature, the world ceased for him; he controlled this fictional world. If he wanted birds, there would be birds. In this fictional world, a raucous of happenings occurred, but in reality, he lived a quiet uneventful life.

Years and years of solitary confinement had left him with a slight hunchback. He would slowly hobble back

and forth from the toilet to the bunk, anxious to return to his shows.

Many visitors; preachers, lawyers, and so on; had walked the tiers over the years with the false promise of hope: "You will be saved!" or "You will be released!" and so on.

Today, a non-profit organization dealing with families of prisoners were to walk the tiers of the shu; this did not interest him. There was a quiet hush on the tier, as always. The occasional flush of a toilet could be heard.

The rotunda door slowly slid open. In came two women and a man. He did not see them; the TV had his full attention. They walked from cell to cell talking to the inmates. Quick disengaged conversations.

Three cells down, he heard the cry through his perforated Plexiglas covered door. It was a small cry as a mew of a kitten, small lungs belting forth disagreement, yearning for milk, for need.

He was clad in gray thermal bottoms and top. He slouched to the door. The source of the cries was warmly bundled up in the young lady's arms, it's closed eyes and rosy cheeks barely visible beneath a small baby blue beanie. A boy.

The baby clenched his tiny fists and wailed. The baby's small mighty cries climbed the walls, up the high ceiling, and into his cell; up his spine, beneath his bones, and into his heart. He was entranced.

He thought of his first lover, succumbing to passion. He remembered his father coming home from working in the orange fields, too tired to talk, too tired so he slept. He remembered walking downtown seeing a man standing in the uppermost window of the Radisson barefooted, curtains flapping in the breeze; the fire department below telling the man not to jump. His mother had told him to close his eyes. The man had jumped. He did not close his eyes.

But he did not remember the last time he heard a baby cry. The cries cocooned him in reverberating chills. Mind, body, and soul were moved.

He was on his knees, hands outstretched above his head. "My God!" he said. "My God, my God!" He had not heard a baby cry in thirty-seven years. Beneath the chest, beneath the ribs, came forth a deep guttural cry. His and the baby's cries mingled into a pleading for their needs; salvation and milk, always milk. He had not cried in thirty-seven years.

Upcoming Picture Themes- Let your imagination open up. Let your memories surface. Here are some new pictures. See if you can let these images dance in your mind, and if you are able, please write and send us the story you create from them.



Due 3/1/16



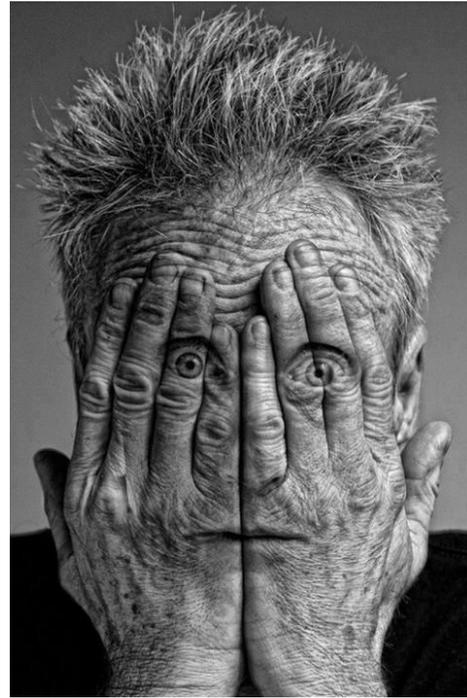
Due 4/1/16



Due 5/1/16



Due 6/1/16



Due 9/1/16



Due 7/1/16



Due 8/1/16

### Final notes

First if you write to us and especially if you send us poems, journals, essays etc. please be sure to put your name and number on your writing. Too often we find a poem or essay with no name on it. Also take the time to write legibly. I know that can be a challenge, but if you have too, take the time to rewrite an essay if it is too messy. Often volunteers complain about the difficulty of reading a submission. Take your time. Proofread what you write and try to be neat.

I had a short trip to Hawaii this past fall to visit my daughter. She moved there a few years ago and I had not visited her since she moved. Maui is as beautiful as anything I could imagine.



Black sand beach in Hana, Hi. We swam deep into caves. Black sand beaches were formed from hot lava cracking upon entering the ocean and eroding after years of waves pounding.

Tropical beaches with great waves, protected bays with great snorkeling on coral reefs close to shore, stunning plants that I have never seen before. It was very trippy walking through a 40 ft. tall forest of bamboo. It would have been easy to get lost if there wasn't a river to work our way back towards. Waterfalls everywhere. It was especially nice visiting with my daughter. She and her friends know the island well and took us to amazing spots. She lives at about 2000 ft. above sea level so we could always retreat there to escape the heat. We went as high as 10,000 ft. on top of a volcano, and swam in black caves under the rocks. The beaches had sands of many colors, and there was recent lava [500years old] fields running into the sea. Maui is not very big, but around every corner is a stupendous view or waterfall to climb, a pond to swim, a trail to follow and an ocean to dance in, so even though the island is geographically small, it is immense. It has a much more laid back culture than mainland America. People were very friendly to us as well. Tropical fruit was growing everywhere. Once you leave the small commercial area by the airport it gets rural quickly. I certainly feel fortunate for having the experience. I took this trip 8 weeks after busting my hip, but there was no way I was going to miss it.



### **Haleakala summit [10,000ft] with daughter**

Even better, on the way HI we changed planes in Seattle and were able to get 6 days between flights. My good friend Dave picked me and my traveling companion, also named Gary up, and in his 35-year-old RV we went up into the Northern Cascade Mountains and camped along a hot spring near Mt. Baker. An assortment of very eccentric men and woman stopped by to bath in the springs by day and night. Each had their own unusual story. We shared lots of laughs and beautiful moments in deep nature. One day we heard of an encounter with a Bigfoot from one of the bathers. While I tend to be skeptical, he certainly was convincing. I hope many of you will one day be free to roam about the countryside to see the amazing wonders of nature that are abundant in this land. Till then I will try to share some of my experiences when I get off the grid and experience beautiful moments in nature.



The other Gary in front of our mountain cruismobile



Dave at Hot Spring in shadow of Baker Mountain

These are times of change at PE. The new of requests for service keep coming in. We will both search for new funding sources as well as keep modifying the programs to make them work with the money we can raise. There is no outside support for this project other than the funds I raise. If you find this venture worthwhile please help to support it with donations or by writing folks you know and asking them to help. This newsletter and all previous newsletters are available on our website. This increased number of participants also slows down our response time. There are few of us at this end and many of you writing and asking to be included. I ask for patience, and hope to reward it with an assortment of interesting, creative and educational packets for your enjoyment.

I am grateful for this life even when it appears hard and hope even in your distressed environment we can provide some bit of respite. We care. I wish we could do more, but at least we can do this. Please continue writing and let us know what types of programs would benefit you. Hopefully in 2016 PE will better develop our website and I can feature more of your writing and art on it. I am not skilled in that area so must depend on the help of others.

Wishing you strength and balance-

Gary

PS. If you read this far, and find the newsletter and the programs we send helpful, drop us a line letting us know why this is an important program for you. Perhaps we can share your testimonials with people who can help us with funding.

## REGISTRATION FORM

Please Note: If you received this newsletter, you are on our mailing list through July 2016. This form or a letter should be returned in a timely manner if you want to sign up for programs. 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. If we do not hear from you in 6 months you are removed from our "Active" mailing list.

For those of you who can you can email us at [prisonerexpress@gmail.com](mailto:prisonerexpress@gmail.com). Our website is [www.prisonerexpress.org](http://www.prisonerexpress.org)  
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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 \$4.00 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.

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Poetry Project – *Please send me the next Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology Vol. 16.* I understand that to receive the anthology I have to submit a poem for consideration in the anthology.

Russia- History and People – *Please send me Ella's packet on Russia and it's people. I understand that there will be a written assignment with the packet,*

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

Civil Rights – *Please send me a packet that helps explain what civil rights are, the history of the civil rights movement as well as explore how this movement may look and act in the future.*

Book Club – I would like to read "Slaughterhouse-Five" and take part in a study & discussion group focused on ideas in the book. Limited to first 300 participants unless more funding comes through.

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

ARTknow: *Come explore the world of art with Treacy with her new art newsletter. Treacy has a lot to offer those who want to explore the artist within, as well as practical tips for improving your art skills. She shares her passion for art and artistic expression in the pages of ARTknow.*

Buddhist Studies and Meditation Newsletter-*Come explore the practice of mindfulness through breath and contemplation as well consider the inspiring quotes and ideas shared by Tara*

Plasmodesmata---Science Journal Group *come read and celebrate Plasmodesmata, channels between cells, through which information can be exchanged. How poetic!*

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 that specific art or writing project.

NAME: (PLEASE PRINT)

ADDRESS and ID #

I give the Alternatives Library permission to post my writings and artwork on the web

SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Prisoner Express Newsletter

### Winter 16

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

*The Durland Alternatives Library which sponsors PE is a project partner of the Center for Transformative Action. Additional support comes from the Cornell Public Service Center and the Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives [OADI].*



Cover Art by Christopher Avitea