

# Prisoner Express News

## Summer 24

Hi Friends, It is time for a new cycle of Prisoner Express programs. A new cycle begins when you are holding this newsletter in your hand and have the opportunity to sign up for our next series of programs. My name is Gary, and I have been directing PE for the past 20+ years. It started with a single letter and over the years has grown into a much larger and longer conversation between thousands of incarcerated men and women and hopefully thousands of people in the free world who read your writings, either online or while volunteering in person with the PE program.

First, I'd like to provide some context for those of you participating for the first time. It seems like every issue has a few hundred new people participating. To stay current on our mailing list we want to have heard from you sometime in the last 6 to 8 months. We track every letter you send to us and update your last contact date in our database, so it is important that we hear from you, every 6 months, even if it is just to say hello, if you want to continue receiving this publication. At the end of the newsletter there is a sign up sheet which you can fill out to enroll in the programs you want sent to you. By doing that your last contact date is advanced, and you will be sent the next newsletter as well. If your mail is returned to us because you moved, we will do our best to try to find your new address, but the best practice is for you to write to us and let us know your new address. I never like getting mail returned, but I have to live with it and instead focus on the half full glass and think about all of you who do get our newsletters, book packages and educational lessons. If you read through this newsletter to the end all our activities and your opportunities to participate will be explained.

PE is a program of the Durland Alternatives Library located at Cornell University in Ithaca NY. PE's main mission is to provide incarcerated men and women with information, education and opportunities for creative self-expression. We recognize the humanity of all people and want to help relieve some of the isolation and deprivation built into the penal system.

Besides mailing books and educational packers into prison, we highlight your writings, especially poetry, journals, short theme essays and also your art for folks in the free world to experience. We do this in a variety of ways. We have volunteers come to the library and read your submissions. Many of them then choose to write you a letter. We also have created an online archive so some of the works you submit to us can be found by anyone going to our website. We usually

display submissions that are 2 years old or less. Otherwise, there is too much to choose from. Letter writers either pick their mail up in person at the library or we scan your mail and email to the volunteer who has written to you. **We ask all volunteers to include their specially assigned number in their letter to you and for you to put their assigned number in the letter and on the envelope.** If the volunteer forgets to include their number, we will do our best to figure out who it is. If you'd like more mail in your life, consider participating in some of the programs listed later in the newsletter.



Art by Aaron Obeginski

**All our programs are free to incarcerated individuals except for the Expedited Book program. We ask for a minimum \$4 donation to help offset the cost of postage for the book program.** We get all the books for free and are happy to share them with you. There will be more instructions about this later. Before I start describing all the new programs, I'd like to take a moment to introduce myself and share some of what is happening for me these days. So many of you share your stories through poetry, themes, journals and art, and I cannot write back to individuals as I can barely keep up with processing all your

mail and sending out the lessons. I use the newsletter to replace that letter I have meant to send to many of you.

I am getting older and wiser, and perhaps more set in my ways. Mostly I spend my time working in the library and going home to my country house. I spend my time at home with various gardening and landscaping projects which never seem to end, and I like it that way. I rent a few rooms of my house out to some younger people [late 20's and the extra funds help me stay financially solvent. It is interesting to live in an intergenerational household. I am 72 but do fine with the young'uns in the house. All of my adult children are currently living in town as well. At any time 1 of them is usually living in the house with me. I like that they are adults and can fend for themselves. My youngest just graduated university and is planning to travel for a while. He doesn't yet know where he will go, but he has saved funds for this next adventure. and now his time is his own. Today

he called to let me know he is hiking on the Appalachian Trail in Southern PA with a friend and will be walking for a couple of weeks. I can see how hard it is to transition from school where everything you do is spelled out by assignments and due dates. Perhaps it is a little similar to the strangeness of unstructured time for those of you who are released after a long stretch

in prison. My middle daughter is currently living with me. She is 25 and has just returned from traveling solo in Latin America for the past 9 months. She has already landed a job as a server in a restaurant and hopes to build up enough funds to return to traveling before the winter is upon us. Of course, I worry about her traveling solo and then I remember what I was doing at 25 and keep my worries to myself. My eldest daughter is enrolling in chiropractic school this fall. As my life slows down, I take even more pleasure in watching my offspring spread their wings.

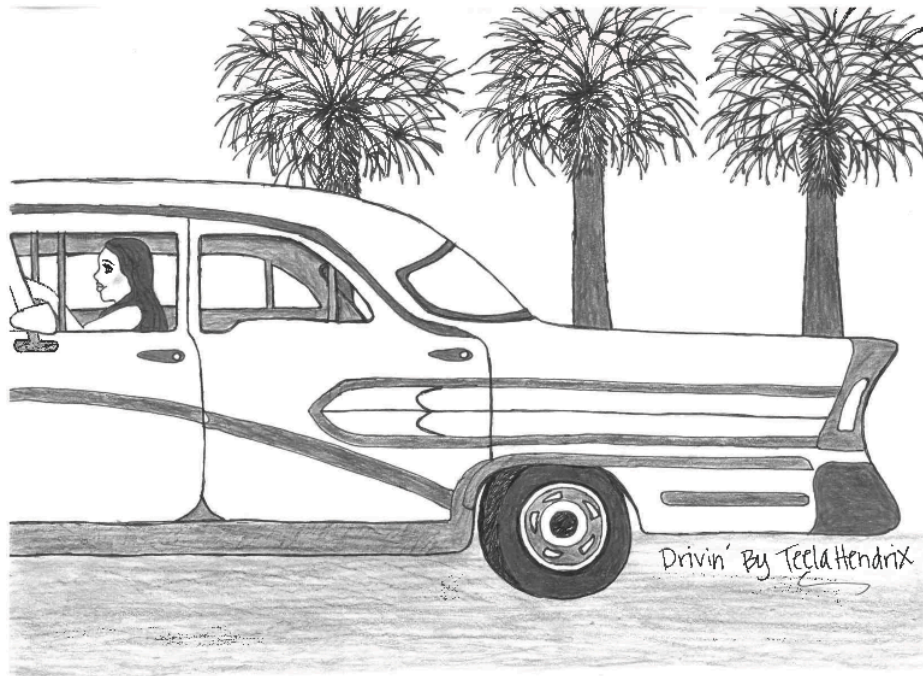
I'm growing lots of vegetables in the garden and the deer and groundhogs are well fed. It is always difficult to find the garden munched down. I am planning on rebuilding the fence this winter after experiencing some devastating devouring by various creatures. Between gardening and all

my work with PE I have lots to do that I find meaningful and that makes for a good life.

Speaking of meaning, let's find some meaningful things for you to do to help you find more meaning in your life even though your bodies are confined. I long ago realized that meaningful activity was the key to a well lived life, and only I could define what was meaningful to me. For that reason, I try to offer a wide variety of programs through PE, hoping some will spark your creativity, open new doors of perception and understanding and give a little more meaning to some of your daily activities. The programs we create come about in a number of ways, but mainly they are created by volunteers who read your writings and use the information you all share to come up with projects that will improve the quality of your lives.

On occasion we receive letters in Spanish. Not being fluent in Spanish I never was sure what was being asked. This

year Yazmin is working at the library. I have asked her to write to all our Spanish language folks to get a better understanding of what we might do to help them stay engaged. Her and my words follow. If you know someone who only speaks Spanish and wants to learn more about PE have them read the words below.



¡Hola!

Le escribimos a aquellos que hablan español como su primer idioma y que nos escriben en español. En el pasado, no sabía cómo responder porque mi único español lo aprendí en la escuela secundaria. Estamos considerando formas en las que podemos integrarlo a nuestro programa de Prisoner Express a pesar de la barrera del idioma. Somos afortunados porque Yazmin, quien dirige el proyecto de poesía, también es hablante nativa de español. Con esto dicho, buscamos comentarios sobre cómo podemos servir mejor a los hispanohablantes. Algunas posibilidades incluyen crear paquetes educativos en español o crear un paquete de aprendizaje de inglés como segundo idioma. Esperamos que puedan proveer sugerencias sobre la

amplificación de la programación para incluirlos en los beneficios de participar en Prisoner Express. Si nos escribe en español, asegúrese de poner "Attn Yazmin" en el exterior del sobre. Esperamos escuchar lo que tiene que decir.

Gracias,  
Gary y Yazmin

## Fall 24 programs

**Expedited Books**-This is the program that launched Prisoner Express. It started as a free books to anyone who wrote program, but. after a few years of doing this, we had thousands of requests and could not keep up. We modified the program to ask that those receiving books send at least \$4 to help with postage. This way we were able to keep up with the demand. It is the only program where we ask you to help offset the cost of postage. We make the best matches we can from the requests you make. We have a separate room in the basement, and it is full of donated books. What we have is always changing but we pride ourselves on making the best matches we can. It typically costs \$7 to \$8 for postage to mail books so you helping to pay ½ the cost lets us stretch our resources.

On the signup sheet at the end of the newsletter is a place for you to let us know how many books can be in a single package and whether you can get hard covered books or not. Most of our books are used, and as time goes on, I try to ensure the books are not marked up or dirty. This is not a program if you only want a specific book or books on a subject that can be hard to find. We ask that all people requesting to participate give us a broad range of topics as it makes it easier to make a good match. The last few months we had some extra stamps, and we were sending books out to anyone who asked, so some of you might think a simple letter asking for books will result in you getting a package. It might happen again when we are flush with funding, and on occasion a volunteer will still send books to someone who did not send in a donation to offset postage, but don't count on it. I make it a point to not over promising about anything we do, so as to not disappoint you or feel that you have wasted your time sending us a letter. I wish we could send anyone who writes a big package of books but at this time we must work within the resources we have. Remember to make checks payable to CTA/PE.

**Journal Program**-From the very first newsletter in 2004 PE has been encouraging its' members to keep a journal. It is clear that being isolated and without a lot of positive stimulation can lead to a lot of negative thought patterns. Writing has a way of eliminating that circular thinking that keeps perseverating, stuck on the same thoughts. Writing has the ability to set you free from the confines of negative

thinking and can lead to new understandings of your circumstances. We have hundreds of men and women already keeping journals and sharing them with our program. As mentioned earlier those who write often receive letters from our volunteers who read what you have to share. Kamili and AJ have created a packet to help anyone get started in the journal program. If you'd like a copy of their Journal Starter Packet, please sign up. Kamili has shared some thoughts on this project below.

*Hello everyone,  
My name is Kamili, and I co-run the journal program with AJ. Currently, I am studying animal science in hopes of becoming a large animal veterinarian. While home, I look like I am straight from a Western movie, running a farm with dairy goats and working as the animal equivalent of a nurse in a vet hospital. My career goals certainly have nothing to do with my job here at PE, but I have come to enjoy it. It is a great opportunity to talk to others and a way to create a good habit.*

*Writing can mean different things to everyone, and the journal program encompasses it all, providing opportunities for creative writing, daily journaling, and reflective writing. I hope you will consider this program. The Journal Program is designed to give you complete freedom in how you choose to document your thoughts and experiences. With no specific guidelines or limitations, you have the flexibility to write as much or as little and as frequently or infrequently as you prefer. Whether you prefer to write in a traditional journal format where we provide an outline or explore more creative options, the Journal Program provides a space for you to express yourself in a way that feels most comfortable and authentic.*

*We encourage you to send in entries as often as you would like. When they are received, we add them to your journal file and also post entries to our online database at [prisonerexpress.org](http://prisonerexpress.org), where friends, family, etc. can connect with you through your work. However, if you do not wish for your journals to be published or shared with anyone, then please mark them as private or send us a letter.*

*We encourage everyone curious about this program to join and send in entries! More information will be provided in a separate packet that you can request from the signup sheet at the end of this newsletter. We look forward to reading your entries and helping you share your thoughts and experiences with others.*

*Sincerely,  
Kamili and AJ*

**Poetry Project**- fifteen years ago a volunteer for PE let me know how much he liked the poetry you all were sending to us. He asked if he could create an anthology of the ones,

he liked best. It was a great idea, and we started publishing a poetry anthology every 6 months. Right now, we are working on volume #30. We are still accepting poems for this edition but will soon have enough to start compiling the packet. The good news is that we will immediately begin collecting for Volume 31. To receive the next volume of PE poetry you are asked to submit a poem you wrote. It can be about whatever you want it to be about. Students read through all the poems. Many are scanned to our online database so they can be read by anyone with internet access. Often poets receive letters from folks who have read their poems at PE or on our website. Getting the anthology and reading poems from other incarcerated individuals can help you shape a perspective that is bigger than your single experience of being in prison. When you realize many people are experiencing the same difficulties as you, it helps to realize that deep down you are okay, but you have the misfortune of being in a difficult environment. Once you see that clearly, then programs like ours that can give you something meaningful to do with your time can be especially useful. You are in a crazy making environment, and it takes heroic action on your part not to fall into the mind numbing experience of prison, but instead to develop your imagination and express it in creativity. PE is a place to bring your unleashed creative self-expression. We have many authors submitting their poems and our only rule for submission is that a poem can only be submitted one time. If you want a second submission, then you must write another poem. Yazmin who earlier introduced herself as our Spanish language interpreter has been leading the team working on the next poetry anthology.

Here's what she has to say.

*¡Hola!*

*I'm Yazmin, one of the coordinators managing the creative writing programs at Prisoner Express. You might have recognized me from our Poetry Anthology 29 a couple of months ago and I just wanted to express a hearty thank you for all the messages and poetry submissions I have received ever since then.*

*With that said, I would like to make a couple of announcements for this upcoming year. Prisoner Express is currently receiving poetry for PP31 (Poetry Anthology 31), and we are welcoming submissions from across the nation. Submissions are not limited to any particular style, word usage, or topic. The use of a language other than English is welcome in the packet as well. However, please keep in mind that longer poetry might be excerpted to make space on the actual packet. I look forward to reading some of your amazing works. Best, Yazmin*

*Here's a sampling of some poems recently sent for consideration. I hope they inspire you to submit a poem of your own*

### **Rumination**

**By Kenneth Lee Zamarron**

Here I am, yet again, Alone in a room,  
Like a wizard, I conjure up the day, to ruminate.  
The paradox: To be suffocated by throngs of humanity.  
I take refuge in the diminutive abode, to ruminate,  
Beyond the asphyxiating room, I hear souls quietly  
conversing,  
Shattered silence and riven entities are a melange to  
ruminate.  
The habitually mute pieces communicate their anger and  
sorrow among  
themselves- a bad spell to ruminate.  
A bad spell from which we all yearn to break free.  
Aspirations to ruminate.  
Breaking my bonds, I escape through you today-  
I am left to ruminate.

### **Amnesia?**

**By Jonathan E. Cantero**

This is all me  
In all my manic fluidity  
Self-defining stupidity

What for me  
Is a freshly avant garde  
Is a miser in the yard  
Pushing an empty swing  
One million times

### **A Reason for Fight**

**By Jonathan Holeman**

They take away what's personal  
Photographs, letters and wishes  
This is their form of punishment  
Some attempt to force behavior  
The less I have to carry  
The more I reach to violence  
Not in anger, never random  
Justifiable by the word  
The inner knowledge of what's wrong  
The calmness in knowing what's right  
The more they take away  
The more I yearn to fight

## As I Watched a Juror Sleep During My Trial: A Poem

By Robert Viveiros Jr.

Sleep juror in the first seat, it's surely fair  
if you can't in your bed, then you should in your chair.  
Full of amazement as I watched you drool,  
how your ignorance made you look a fool.

Sleep juror in the first seat, as a slumber lies,  
it was a horrible sight to my eyes.  
With a made-up story, my life they were taking away.  
So sleep juror in the first seat while you may.

Sleep juror in the first seat, with head and eyes closed,  
how principles fade and the truth slowly decompose.  
I was the one with sleepless nights  
as they move to abolish my civil rights.

Sleep juror in the first seat, and dream of a time  
when you needed evidence to prove a crime.  
When law-enforcement way on stand lying  
my innocent soul inside was dying.

Sleep juror in the first seat, it will all be over soon  
how could you be tired, it was only afternoon?  
Questioned by the judge, "I was not," was your plea  
at the end, without thought, you found me guilty.

*Note from the author: This poem is based on true facts. During my trial, I witnessed a juror in the first seat sleeping. I elbowed my lawyer, he called a sidebar, they spoke among each other. They called that juror back and asked him if he was sleeping, he said no, and the judge allowed him to stay. I argued with my court-appointed lawyer that I did not want him as a juror. But my lawyer never mentioned it. Ultimately, I was found guilty of a murder someone else committed. I am now in the appeal process and this will be one of several arguments we will use to try to overturn my case. I just figured I would give you the background of this poem.*

### Lull

By Claude Kelley Kirk

Grey sky came  
blackened, threatened  
then thrashed  
the iris down  
purple  
like a bruise

In a lull  
came the sun  
and I, still  
caught your scent

now I know  
now I know

## The Great British Baking Show

By Jason Centrone

Before the final shock  
treatment – a quick-fisted double boom,  
it's big-boot galumphing  
up the metal stairs – flecks in the tread  
clinging casually, dislodge, flutter down  
through the lattice. No one hangs  
in the stairwell snow. Why would they?  
If there's no smoking– do I pine? Menthol 25s?  
I'd wish–  
if there weren't bigger wishes  
to fry. Some—not all, but a few of the guards  
I don't think realize quite the wallop  
a banged window puts to terrarium air. Eyelids twitch.  
But here it is. 4:15  
in the Saturday PM and no light. For count,  
same time every day count, LIGHTS ON,  
ON YOUR BUNKS count. Nothing novel. No blame  
to go dispersing down the tier. My wristwatch  
has three alarms,  
and who—at this hour, who can sleep—something's crept  
up & over the state's ordinarily unchallenged  
ascendancy— crowds shuffle in  
off a late-August yard and here it is, in the fresh  
quiet, in the radiant slab-heat,  
a little weight still moving on the pile—one more snippet.  
Buoyed in on a Sunday breeze—strangers  
talking ganache, a good spine. How very near she came  
to winning with that apple pandowdy—dude,  
a minute underdone. Tsk tsk.

### Up Comes

By Jonathan E. Cantero

Someday I'll remember  
What walking used to feel like  
What eating, sleeping, and breathing  
What working, lying, and stealing  
What brothering, sonning, and friending  
What dreaming, hoping, and hating  
What smiling, laughing, and crying  
What dying used to feel like  
Loving holds no memory  
Neither ancestrally nor currently  
Loving's not a memory  
I could fold in time concurrently  
A mosaic of papier fantasy

**ArtKnows**-We are expanding our art program this year. We have two talented and artistic students, Gabriel and Nadia who will lead the way in creating interesting projects for you all to join. On top of that we have Treacy continuing to create our ArtKnows publication. For those of you new to the program Treacy has been writing newsletters about everything art for the past 10+ years that are distributed through PE. When you sign up for Treacy ArtKnows newsletter you will also hear from Gabe and Nadia and their plans for future PE art exhibitions and art programming. Here is Treacy sharing her vision for the next mailing

**Art corner**---Hi! I'm Treacy and I have been part of Prisoner Express developing art projects since 2011. I studied art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia and since graduating have worked in my home studio in various mediums. These include printmaking, painting, drawing, and sculpture. As some of you know, my husband is also an artist – Gary Weisman. We are both currently on the faculty at the Lyme Academy of Fine Arts in Connecticut. This art school, like the one I graduated from, is based upon the fundamental skills of drawing with an emphasis upon the Old Masters of the Renaissance (although I guess I'd be criticized for using the gender of "master" in describing these artists who have taught us so much about drawing.) Regardless, if you want to learn how to draw, these are the artists who will teach you how to draw. You know, those guys like Michelangelo, Da Vinci, Del Sarto (my favorite), Bellini, and many others. If you have a chance go to the prison library, look up these artists from the Renaissance and get acquainted with them.....and find out about those artists I didn't name.

This past week, I attended a week-long workshop on drawing the human figure at the Lyme Academy of Fine Art (hey! Learning is never finished....even for faculty). It was a grueling class in which each day began with a three-hour lecture. Three-hour lectures are not my thing so it was hard to keep focused. I'm used to "doing" and needed to be drawing while the teacher was lecturing – no luck. There I sat trying hard to look attentive.

In the afternoon, we had a three-hour time for sketching the model. This class was very analytical, by which I mean the student (me) was asked to figure out things by careful observation tempered with intellectual understanding. I was asked to access the "triangulation points in the figure (?!)", the terminator of the shadow (I couldn't get beyond Arnold Schwarzenegger), or the occlusion shadow (!).

I took this class with the regular day art students and can only imagine my authority as art faculty has been tarnished. But alas. While my drawings are usually considered accomplished, I don't approach drawing with such intellectual analysis. Instead, my drawings are aggressive; an excavation of what I see in a sense of chaos. However,

like this analytic drawing class, my drawings emerge from intense observation of the living world, but it is a visceral response, not intellectual – I feel the forms and execute those forms on paper.

In the fall 2024 ARTknows edition, I want to focus upon the drawing of trees (hey maybe there are triangulation points in a tree and a terminator of the shadow). Like the human form, trees come in so many shapes and sizes. But the question is – how do you draw a tree with thousands (millions?) of leaves? Your eyes do not see these millions of leaves. No, your eyes visually organize the tree in a way that enables you to "fill" in the infinite parts – feeling its multitudes of leaves without actually seeing. Below left is a drawing of an Italian umbrella tree; and under that is my drawing of a Del Sarto painting that I did when visiting the Uffizi Museum in Florence Italy (notice my lines are frenetic)



Whether you already love drawing and do it non-stop, or if you used to draw and remember that it can be uplifting, or you have never felt drawn to draw, why not give art a try now. Letting your insides come out in drawing, letting the words go but the feelings and emotions out can be a form of meditation, therapy or play. You choose. We love receiving your art, and submitting a piece of art is a good way to connect with folks on the outside.



action items, and discussion topics. If you're interested, I encourage you to sign up!

**Metal Music** - I often ask students to tell me about their interests. In speaking to Isa who led our book packing team last spring I learned she loves metal Music. She believes there are many such folks out there and I invited her to create a packet about something she loves. I am old enough to remember when "metal" became a term associated with the music on the radio. It always seemed to me that metal started with Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath, but it certainly exploded in the late 70's early 80's and now has become a part of our musical culture. Come join Isa in exploring this artform. Read her introductory Ode to metal below and see if you feel drawn to explore this world with her.

*To start off, I want to start off by explaining why this packet is about heavy metal, of all things. As subscribers and/or writers of Prisoner Express, all of you know the importance of a creative outlet for unfettered self-expression, whether that be in the form of literature, poetry, music, art, etc. Though reading and literature have been invaluable mediums for my creativity, music has served as my primary catharsis and default for alleviation of frustration.*

*My journey with heavy metal began around 2020, at which point I did not consider myself a "music person." It was not as though I was completely detached from music as a whole—throughout my childhood and adolescence I enjoyed playing violin in school orchestra, but never came close to mastery of the instrument. During my first couple years of college, I found it difficult to find motivation to practice orchestral music independently, and instead found myself gravitating towards high octane punk/pop punk bands: Green Day, Bad Religion, Propagandhi, Ramones, to name a few.*

*Metal was still too much for my incipient hard-rock mind to handle, until I discovered the L.A.-based Armenian-American band System of a Down. During the drive to Thanksgiving dinner at my grandma's house a few years ago, I popped in my wired earbuds and hit play on their 2001 album Toxicity and was subsequently dumbfounded. As dual vocalists Serj Tankian and Daron Malakian shrieked and yelled about the corrupt U.S. justice system, mass incarceration, and legacy of the War on Drugs on the opening track "Prison Song," I was rendered speechless. Tankian's diatribe about "another prison system...for you and me to live in" roared in my ears with a wild, frenetic energy hitherto unknown to me. Even for seasoned metalheads, System of a Down's style is weird, but I was entranced, nonetheless. In the following weeks my ears devoured their other albums, ranging from their raw, intense 1998 debut album to the 2005 ballad-filled hard rock album "Hypnotize." They have only five albums to their*

**Building Healthy Relationships**- Earlier I spoke about how having meaningful activity is a pathway for me to find peace and satisfaction with my life. I'd like to add that having meaningful relationships is just as important to me. I understand that while incarcerated the system is rigged so that it can be very difficult to find relationships that strengthen, nurture and support you. Ace, has taken it upon himself to craft a packet on creating healthy relationships. I think he got the idea from reading many of the journal entries that focused on how alone an individual can feel even while surrounded by so many people. If you'd like to learn more about what Ace is creating read his intro below and sign up for his packet.

*Hi all! My name is Ace, and I'm a volunteer with Prisoner Express for the summer. You may know me from the journal project or the climate change packet last year. Reading journal entries, I heard from many of you that you struggle with loneliness and find it difficult to connect with others - whether they're other prisoners or people on the outside. While you may have limited options in prison, there are some things you can do to strengthen the relationships you do have. Too often, we take relationship skills for granted. In truth, they are skills that must be learned and practiced like any other. The "Building Healthy Relationships" packet aims to help you with that.*

*Social connection greatly affects our mental, social, and even physical well-being. In this packet, I outline concrete steps to improve your relationships. From identifying your needs and wants in a relationship to practicing empathy to improving communication, this packet covers it all. It includes simple explanations, examples,*

name, but I sought more, which led me into other subgenres such as nu metal, thrash, classic, death, and melodeath. Metal had opened up a realm of possibilities, exposing me to an entire world in which I experienced a veritable sense of belonging.

Skeptics, such as my parents, routinely ask what it is about this particular genre that is appealing. To some, the harsh vocals as well as the velocity of the drums and chugging, distorted guitars abrade their eardrums. "There's no beauty in this," I often hear, or, worse, "Where's the melody?"

Discovering the beauty in this genre requires open-mindedness and a willingness to engage with and appreciate unorthodox styles of music. There's a reason why metal amasses so many devoted followers, and why it enjoyed an influx of mainstream popularity in the 70s, 80s, 90s, and early 2000s. It means different things to different people, but my passion for the genre is fueled by its ability to serve as a vicarious release of turbulent emotions, its raw, visceral essence, intricate melodies, and the skilled musicianship involved in its craft. In spite of its reputation as angry and primitive, metal often provides healing and a healthy way to vent frustration for listeners. When I am feeling despondent, angry, or annoyed, nothing cheers me up or cools me down quite like Metallica, Trivium, Judas Priest, or Children of Bodom thrumming on my car speaker.

For all of those reading this, no matter what variety of music you enjoy, I want the message to be the power of music in healing the soul. It's such a powerful and ineffable force that we take for granted on a daily basis but can provide so much relief from life's challenges. Live concerts elevate this phenomenon even further. I know that many of you may have limited access to music, but music in any form (even as basic as lyrics scrawled on a piece of looseleaf paper) can and does function as a form of resistance, liberation, and self-expression. As you read through this packet, I hope you keep that in mind.

**Anime-** This summer Astro came to the library to help pack books. As everyone who ever works in our book program soon came to realize, we never have enough

books about Anime and Manga to support the demand. It is always frustrating when you ask for books we cannot supply. Luckily for us Astro jumped on this need. If you received a book package created by Astro this summer, chances are you saw that they illustrated the letters with anime drawings. I noticed how devoted Astro was to sharing art with you and asked them to create a packet on the subject. To all of our delight they agreed. This will go a little way toward making up for all the manga books we did not have to mail you. If you'd like to improve your drawing or just understand the concepts behind anime and manga this is the packet for you.



Hello All, I'm Astronaut, a summer volunteer working with the PE (Prisoner Express) Program. Over my summer I've mainly been reading letters and writing back to people who've requested book packages.

Over my short time reading through book request letters, I've noticed that there are many who are interested in manga, anime, art, and how to draw. I thought it was a shame that this demand often couldn't be met due to the library's lack of books on those topics, and I was thinking if there was any way to try and meet this demand without having to have a bunch of books donated or bought. That's when Gary told me about being able to make packets on topics, we're interested in sending out to you, so I

planned to make just that. I realize that anime and manga may not interest everyone who wants to learn so I've tried to make a lot of skills very applicable while also including information on how to stylize and some science behind certain concepts so that everyone interested can learn something hopefully applicable.

I understand that learning a skill like art through theory and jargon alone often isn't ideal, so I've tried to include images to help better illustrate what I'm teaching as well including exercise prompts related to the skills I cover. I encourage everyone to submit their attempts at the prompt and their art regardless of whether it's related to the prompts or not and someone will compile some of them for everyone who submitted to see how others might have interpreted the same prompt.

*A bit more about myself, I wouldn't say I'm a professional artist in any way and I mainly learned how to draw through self-study over the pandemic and only dabbled in a bit of freelance work online. So, I hope this makes this packet seem like it comes from a more relatable place as I was once in a similar place .*

**Chess-** For many years now PE has been offering a packet every six months on everything chess. It's origin is a bit like the anime packet above. We have so many people writing and asking for chess books and when we have a book about chess in the book room it goes right out. By creating this chess newsletter, we are able to support many people in their love of chess. As you may know, our volunteer population is transitory. Students are always coming and going. Over the year there have been 10 or so different people who have created chess packets for you.

Raheem created the last 4. . He graduated from Cornell last May and I have yet to find someone to create the next chess packet. I am resourceful and I am looking. We will find a way to get this done. I think playing chess is the best metaphor to describe the idea behind PE. When you are playing chess, you could be in a park, home or in prison. Location doesn't matter so much when you are creatively focused on

what is in front of you. It is almost like a bit of magic because the trappings of confinement might disappear for a bit while you put all your focus on the next move. We want to create programming that is so engaging that the confines of prison melt away while you are in the middle of some creative venture. If you are interested in chess strategy, puzzles, history and great games of the past this newsletter is for you. If you have any suggestions on what you'd like to see in our chess program write and let us know. Write chess on the outside of the envelope.

**Meditation-** For many years Tara has been leading our meditation program. While her main focus has been Buddhist meditation she explores meditation from a variety of spiritual traditions. I know from reading so many letters over the years that many of you find meditation to be a valuable tool for coping with all the distress prison life brings. I can testify that in the free world there is also lots of

stress and being able to sit quietly and do nothing has such beneficial effects far beyond what one can describe in words.

Along with Tara's mediation wisdom, this mailing will include a book donated to us by the Pema Chodron Foundation. Pema is a practicing Buddhist nun who has written many books on meditation and spirituality. We are excited to offer "Comfortable with Uncertainty" by Pema Chödrön (Soft Cover) This book offers short, stand-alone readings designed to help us cultivate compassion and awareness amid the challenges of daily living. This book offers a progressive program of spiritual study through essential concepts, themes, and practices on the Buddhist path. Readers will learn practical methods for heightening awareness and overcoming habitual patterns that block compassion.



### **Rattle magazine**

*Rattle is a premier poetry magazine for the people. We offered a poetry writing program a few years ago. Elizabeth , the volunteer who coordinated that project shared your poems with Tim Green, the editor of Rattle. Tim was more than pleasantly surprised by the great work coming from PE members. Since then, he has donated 500 copies of an edition of Rattle 2X per year for us to send to you. Even better, Tim writes a letter and creates some*

interesting assignments from the edition we send you. Tim reads thousands of poems for every edition of Rattle, and he is a fount of knowledge about poetry. I love that he shares it with all of you. Even better, Elizabeth the volunteer who introduced Tim to Prisoner Express, has retired from her day job and is interested in creating poetry with all of you, so along with Tim's letter and the edition of Rattle you can expect to hear from Elizabeth, who is a published and noted poet in her own right. We also have various volunteers who help with this, and they create even more content for this mailing. Rattle is poetry for the people, and I believe you'd find inspiration in its' pages

From Rattle's website homepage—

*Rattle's mission is to promote the practice of poetry.*

*We feel that poetry lost its way in the 20th century, to the point that mainstream readers have forgotten how*

moving language alone can be. As a result, most people learn to find their feelings in music, movies, and novels, while poetry languishes on its lone shelf in the bookstores, waiting only for the occasional cameo at a university workshop.

But it shouldn't take a scholar to be moved by the written word—great literature has something to offer everyone. All our lives are compelling, full of joys and burdens and profound experiences we should be sharing—and poetry is the most intimate way to share it. When you read a poem, you become the medium; the poet speaks in your voice, paints the canvas of your inner eye.

This connection is more direct than any other, and it doesn't take a Hollywood budget to do it. Read the poems on Rattle.com for free. Write a poem on a napkin and share it with a friend. Keep a journal and send us a page. Participate. The pure love of language is one of the most important experiences in the history of human culture, and somehow most of us have forgotten about it.

More than anything, our goal is to promote a community of active poets. That means we care as much about submitters as subscribers. Lawyers, landscapers, homemakers, and Pulitzer Prize winners are all treated the same—and we've published them all. Many literary magazines cite a percentage of content that comes from the "slush pile," meaning work sent in unsolicited. In most cases this percentage is less than 50%, meaning more than half of the content was solicited, meaning you never had a chance. At Rattle, almost every poem we publish starts in our "slush pile," and has to rise through the same process of careful consideration. We don't ask for or publish the standard credit-listing bios; we don't even read them. If we like your poem better than the Poet Laureate's, we'll publish yours. That's what makes Rattle so readable.

**Puzzle Packet** - Last cycle we put out a pocket of puzzles to help you exercise your brain. Use it or lose it is a popular refrain for many activities and I believe it applies to thinking and reasoning. Our lives depend on our ability to synthesize information and come up with a good assessment of the situation as well as solutions to the many problems life reveals to each of us. These puzzles are designed to keep your brain muscle oiled and lubricated through the head scratching process of figuring things out. Caroline is searching for interesting and challenging puzzles for you all to solve. She describes the program below,

*Hello everyone! This is Caroline and I created the previous puzzle packet. I received positive feedback on the packet so I am happy to announce I will be creating another!*

*Do you enjoy logic games like Sudoku or brain teasers and riddles? How about crossword puzzles and mazes? If you said yes to any of these, consider signing up for the Game Packet! This packet will include an array of fun*

*challenges across every difficulty level. Whether you're a beginner at Sudoku or a long-time lover of logic games, there is something for everyone in this packet. Plus, this is a great way to stay sharp and keep your brain active.*

*I am reaching out to ask for any requests for this packet. Is there a logic game that you specifically enjoy that I didn't include last time? Or maybe there is something from the last packet that you liked or didn't like. Please respond soon and I will gladly include your suggestions in this next packet.*

*Additionally, I have some exciting news. I am graduating early! After December of this year, I will have my bachelor's in Industrial and Labor Relations. While I get to start a new chapter of my life, this also means these next couple of months are my last here at Prisoner Express. I started volunteering here as a freshman and became an employee in my sophomore year. No words could encompass the sheer gratitude I have for this program and for you all. It is during my time here that I solidified my passion for working in the prison reform sphere. My future is uncertain, but I am hopeful that I will attend law school in the coming years.*

*This also means that I may be less responsive as my time ends. I apologize if I am not able to respond as quickly to your mail. I will do my best to be as timely as possible!*

*All the best-----Caroline A.*

**Misc Essay**--the Miscellaneous Essay project just sort of happened. So many of you send us writings that have nothing to do with our offered programs. For years they sat in a pile, and I did not know what to do with them. Last year a student, Dayanara, read through all the recent writings that we had considered Miscellaneous Essays, and she put together a packet of the writing she liked best. Dayanara also graduated last May, but as the students return to campus, I will find others to take on this task. This packet is sort of like the grab bag game we played in school. On holidays we'd reach in and grab a small bag that held a treat without knowing what would be in the bag. When you sign up for this packet know this is a random assortment of writings chosen by student workers to be shared with all who sign up. I guess it's the collective rumination of many that gets captured in its pages. If you are up for a reading adventure this packet might provide you with what you are looking for.

**Chemistry**--Life is chemistry. Biology is chemistry. Every thought we have and every action we take is ruled by chemistry. We are a living chemical stew enclosed by our skin. All life is. Even what we don't consider alive, rocks, the earth clouds are their own unique combination of

elements. Kiara, a new PE volunteer has offered to put together an introduction to chemistry. I know many people avoided the sciences when in school, but now you might find that science can be fun and stimulate thinking in ways that expand your horizons.

*Hello! My name is Kiara and I am volunteering with the Prisoner Express program. I am a chemistry major and would like to be a professor in the future as I am very passionate about education. I hope to share my knowledge of the subject with others and inspire the next generation of scientists.*

*From household cleaning products to prescription medication, to our internal bodily processes, we are constantly surrounded by chemistry. The laws of chemistry govern our world, so understanding these principles allows us to better appreciate many aspects of our environment.*

*Are you interested in learning more about chemistry, but unsure of where to start? Look no further! In this packet, I will guide you through the basics of chemistry in an easily digestible manner. We will explore atoms, the periodic table, different types of reactions, and many other topics to build a chemistry foundation to prepare you for further scientific studies. No previous experience is required!*

## **Paper Folding**

**2--**Last cycle we had a most excellent lesson in Origami created by Kai. Kai has been volunteering in the program for a while and many of you journal program participants may have received letters from him in the past year. It turns out the Kai is a master paper folder, and he is back to show you some of the paper folding secrets he has uncovered. Come find ways to express yourself and create art through these paper folding techniques.

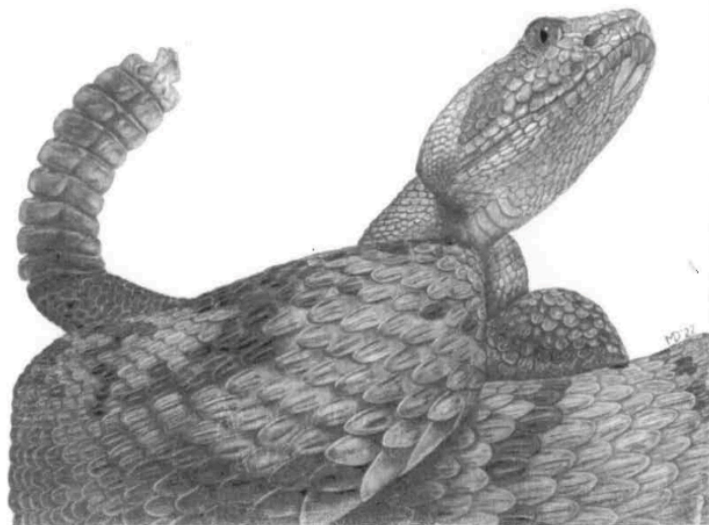
*Hello! I'm Kai, excited to share another packet of origami, the Japanese art of paper folding! Origami is an art that has been practiced for centuries but has evolved rapidly over the last few decades, and I think its blend of ancient and modern techniques makes it really interesting to learn about. I think that folding is a creative and inspiring use of time, and I hope you'll find the same.*

*A little bit about me: I first worked at PE over the summer a couple of years ago and have been volunteering since. I started out reading journals, writing letters, and transcribing essays, all of which I found meaningful, but I think I've discovered that creating these instructional packets is more my thing. I made my first origami packet in the spring, and if you read it, I hope you enjoyed it! I really appreciate all the feedback you've shared with me. If you missed the first packet, though, don't worry! I'll include a quick recap of everything that was covered there, including basic folding techniques and instructional diagrams, so you'll be able to learn from this packet even if you've never done origami before.*

*I spent a lot of time in the first packet discussing the history, culture, and practical applications of origami, and while I'm still planning to include some of that in the second packet, I'd like to focus more on teaching new techniques and models. I want to devote time to improving my digital diagramming skills so that the diagrams in this next packet are as high-quality as they can be. I'm still receiving feedback and suggestions from the first packet as I write this, and I'll try to incorporate as much as I can into the second packet! Someone has requested a dragon, which happens to be something I love folding, so you'll definitely be seeing at least one of those. I also want to include some*

*purely geometric designs to complement the plants and animals from the first packet. It's often a bit difficult to find diagrams that aren't protected by copyright, so I might be somewhat limited in what I can share, but I'll do my best to find interesting models! I might even include some of my own designs.*

*Thanks for reading this, and I hope you'll join me on another paper folding adventure!*



## **Human Ecology** - We

are fortunate that Aisha is offering her time to create this packet in human ecology. This is a field I am curious to know more about and look forward to reading her packet. I note there will be a section on biomimicry. I have heard the term and just looked it up to see what it actually refers to. This is what I found.

Biomimicry can be defined as “an approach to innovation that seeks sustainable solutions to human challenges by emulating nature’s time-tested patterns and strategies. The goal is to create products, processes, and policies—new

ways of living—that are well-adapted to life on earth over the long haul.”

### A Few Ideas on The Principles Of Biomimicry

The central idea is that nature has already fixed many problems society is facing. Animals, plants, and microorganisms are experienced engineers. They know what works, what's appropriate, and most importantly, what lasts on Earth. The main belief of the biomimicry approach is that after 3,8 billion years of research and development, what did not work is now a fossil and what is around us is the secret to survival.

Eventually all that we know will be part of the fossil record, but for now I am curious about the solutions biomimicry can provide humans in our attempt to solve the problems that threaten our existence. Aisha's full description is below

*Hi! My name is Aisha and I am a volunteer at Prisoner Express. I have recently found an interest in human ecology, the study of how humans interact with their natural, social, and built environments. Areas of study of human ecology seek ways to improve our world by helping people, such as the development of artificial intelligence (AI) that has a human-centered design. For more understanding, here is a brief list of studies related to human ecology:*

- *Design, development, and evaluation of protective clothing*
- *How populations adapt to social, economic, and political environments*
- *Children's perception and use of their everyday environments and the socio-environmental factors which influence children's behavior and well-being (including the impacts of neighborhood type on children's community play and design of natural and built play)*
- *Effects of population density on health, social organization, and environment quality*
- *Design of healthcare facilities with an emphasis on mental and behavioral health settings*

*This program will cover three topics: human ecology theory, biomimicry, and the ecological importance of plants. There are also quick activities to go with the topics!*

**Supreme Court Bulletin** -Here's something new even for those who have been participating in PE since its inception. I was talking with law school students who were looking to get involved with PE..In trying to figure out the best way they came up with the idea of sharing the Supreme Court Bulletin with all of you who want it. The students let me know that decisions made by the Supreme court can sometimes affect the cases and appeals of some

of you. They thought it might be especially useful to some of you who enjoy doing paralegal work. Understanding the law is like understanding a foreign language. Perhaps reading the bulletin can help you understand new options in a case you are considering.

*Hi! We are Cornell's Legal Information Institute (LII), Supreme Court Bulletin Team, and for over 30 years we have reported on Supreme Court cases with the goal of creating resources that are useful to anyone who has an interest in the law. This is the first year our team is offering the LII packet through the Prisoner Express Program and we are really excited to give you updates on important U.S. Supreme Court cases and their impact on the country. If you are interested in receiving previews of the most important cases from the 2023-2024 Supreme Court term, sign up to receive our LII packet! Our packet will be a compilation of case previews. Each preview includes a case background, analyzes what rights are at stake, and explains any legal terms or concepts that are helpful to know.*

*Here are a few cases that will be featured in the packet:*

*Trump v. Anderson: A high-profile case addressing whether the state of Colorado could exclude former President Trump from its presidential primary ballot. This case raised significant questions about election law, specifically presidential candidate eligibility.*

*Starbucks Corp. v. McKinney: A case examining the level of deference to afford the National Labor Relations Board's investigative determination—that Starbucks employers illegally retaliated against their unionizing employees. This case touches on labor rights and impacts corporate practices nationwide.*

*Brown v. United States: An important case determining whether, under the Armed Career Criminal Act, certain state drug convictions classify as "serious drug offenses" which carry higher mandatory-minimum sentences. This case addresses sentencing guidelines, recidivism, and criminal justice reform.*

*Food and Drug Administration v. Alliance for Hippocratic Medicine: A case exploring whether medical associations can challenge the FDA's process of approving mifepristone, an abortion-inducing drug. This case discussed how the FDA's restrictions affect healthcare regulations and medical practice.*

*US v. Rahimi: A contentious case—with significant implications for gun control and domestic violence prevention—debating whether a federal law prohibiting individuals under domestic-violence restraining orders from possessing firearms violates the Second Amendment.*



it. Cornell has a school of architecture, and Riley wants to take a deep dive into understanding all that is happening to you and how the architecture of prisons is felt by all of you. She hopes to use your expertise to better understand how to create environments that help transform individuals rather than focus on punishment and retribution. She can use your help in gaining that understanding. If you can take some time and share your responses to Riley's inquiry you may be part of a movement that eventually transforms the incarceration experience

*What is it like to live in isolation? Share your story to receive a free copy of Prison Life, a publication documenting gripping accounts of life behind bars written by incarcerated individuals across America.*

*Describe your experience. You might choose to write about safety, privacy, noise, comfort, cell conditions or if there is access to daylight, community, and outdoor spaces. Or you might choose to write about other aspects.*

*How does the physical environment affect your thoughts, beliefs, habits, and imagination? What are the benefits and detriments? Given your perspective, how would you design such a facility?*

*Help the public understand your struggles with your everyday environment and gain insight into lives in similar circumstances.*

*Your response can be of any length and should be sent to Riley 1031. All selected pieces will be published anonymously, though you may include the amount of time you have served, the type of facility, and the level of security.*

*Prison Life is initiated by me, Riley, an architecture student at Cornell interested in how the physical environment of correctional facilities impacts social dynamics and mental health. Thank you for considering participation in this project*

## **Undiscovered Country- Voices Over The Wall**

This special offer is for anyone who is in prison in NY, lived in NY, or has family and friends in NY. This summer, at a play put on by formerly incarcerated men and women where we also exhibited your art and writing, I met Michael Rhynes. Michael was exonerated after serving 39 years in New York prisons. He approached me with an idea: to have actors read the writings of incarcerated people on the radio. I could see the beauty of the project immediately, and I'm writing to encourage you to participate. **Please write Undiscovered County on envelope if you submit for this program**

## **Call for submissions:**

Michael Rhynes was exonerated after serving 39 years in New York prisons. He has joined forces with WRFI Community Radio in Ithaca, NY to launch "The Undiscovered Country: Voices Over the Wall," a radio program featuring the voices of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people in New York.

If you are in New York or have friends or family in New York, please submit your poetry and short essays to be featured on the program. Your works will be read by actors in the re-entry theater troupe where Micheal works. By submitting your work to this project, you are agreeing to have it broadcast on WRFI Community Radio and published on the station's website and public media channels.

## **Theme Writing Project**

Now that all the introductions have been made and the programs listed, I get to my favorite part of the PE program, and what I believe to be its most treasured contribution to your well-being. It is your voices shared with one another. I tell this story too often and I will repeat it here as well. PE began as a free book program. We were sending books all over the country and all the thank you letters we received basically said the same thing. In shorthand this was the message. **I am going Crazy. I hate everyone around me, especially those who are different from me. I can never tell other prisoners how I am feeling as displays of my true emotions and feelings will be seen as weakness and leave me vulnerable.**

My solution to those comments was to start the theme writing program. At this point I had no intent to start a newsletter like the one you are reading. I sent out a list of theme topics and the only instruction was that it was to be a true story. A few folks wrote each month, and their writings were compiled into a packet and sent to all the authors. After a few months I noticed all the people getting books kept writing the same things bolded earlier in this writing while the people getting the theme writing packets had a very different message. Folks wrote exclaiming their surprise that other authors wrote about the same things they were feeling. It was an easy leap for them to realize that they were not going crazy but were in a crazy making place. They also realized that the people they thought they hated because of differences in race, gender, ethnicity or sexual preference were writing things they related to strongly and that they all had more in common than they had differences. Many wrote how they appreciated the bravery of those who shared stories from their heart, and how it inspired them to write about their experiences and vulnerability. I had not expected this result, but now it seems obvious that the incarceration experience is marked by a divide and conquer

mentality and even though you practically live on top of one another communication and sharing is discouraged. It is actually crazy making to live among people yet feel and be separated. Reading each other's writing and realizing you are not alone in your feelings and experience is the first step in gaining perspective and putting together the tools you need to get through the prison experience with minimal scarring. Your words have the power to heal one another across great distance and through the bars and walls that keep you separate. Every month we will give you a word cue to write on. If you send in an essay [limit it to 800 words please], and make it a true story, not a piece of fiction] will we send you a compilation of all that was written on the theme. **Since this began we have added Picture themes as well and those stories can be true or fiction, your choice.**

Many Of you do not participate the theme writing project and I am sorry that you are missing out on the camaraderie and shared stories that are being seen by the folks who do. I am impressed with how folks who regularly participate feel close to the other writers and consider them part of their community.

Not to worry though if you are not participating because we began the newsletter you are reading to share some of the stories we received on topics from the previous 6 months. Instead of a whole booklet of stories on 1 topic, you will get a few stories from 6 previous themes. To get the whole packet you must put pen to paper and create your own story to be shared. [you can always write and ask us not to share your story and be eligible to receive the packet, but you must share a story]

. I hope you will consider contributing in the future. One last note about the theme writers. If you enjoy the programs of PE you can thank the theme writers. Once they collectively realized that they weren't going crazy but were in a crazy making place, I felt compelled to create the various distance learning programs as a chance for something meaningful to do to stave off the mind-numbing boredom and deprivation often found in prisons. Their collective writings inspired the program to move forward, grow and become an instrument for you all to tell your stories.

Following is a list of the upcoming themes and then a selection from past topics

## Upcoming Theme Topics

<b>Standing up</b>	<b>Due 10/1/24</b>
<b>Moonlight</b>	<b>Due 11/1/24</b>
<b>Silver Lining</b>	<b>Due 12/1/24</b>
<b>Good Company</b>	<b>Due 1/1/25</b>
<b>Lost and Found</b>	<b>Due 2/1/25</b>
<b>Great Minds</b>	<b>Due 3/1/25</b>
<b>Good Sport</b>	<b>Due 4/1/25</b>
<b>Holding Hands</b>	<b>Due 5/1/25</b>

Here is the selection of themes from the previous cycle of writing.

### Scars

#### Can't Hurt by Demacian Middleton

They say I'm weak because the scars that I've accumulated over the years can't be seen by the naked eye. Because I haven't been shot, stabbed, or severely burned, I am not worthy to claim difficulty in life. Unlike the two scratches I still have on the back of my left hand and across my right arm – courtesy of my angry Chihuahua – my internal scars have yet to heal. These are the kind of scars that deepen with time, being infected with hate and causing disease within my soul.

I'm constantly bleeding out wherever I go, severing friendships and absorbing bacterial acquaintances. I constantly search for something to patch these wounds; anything that'll cure me of this infection. Substances brought me to a blissful path of escape, and the more I had, the better I felt. Down times, however, say those scars reopening; they became worse. I knew I had to somehow eliminate reality from my daily life if I wanted to see the scars disappear. Drugs, sex, technology, and then passing out.

The days blurred together, and the scars seemed to erase themselves – I was becoming a new person. I could dictate what happened in that reality.

And that's when I realized how much I loved to hurt people. Whether through breaking hearts, severing ties with true friends, disappointing family members or simply causing physical pain... It gave me some sort of feeling of relief that people would feel what I've felt.

They thought the scars they couldn't see can't hurt, and it was my job to prove them the opposite. The pain causing philosophy landed me with a fifteen-year sentence. Scars are both internal and external, and how we heal is a part of the growing process. Will we continue to disassociate from reality, hurt ourselves, hurt others? Or will we find that sweet remedy that heals us for good?

It can't hurt to try.

## See Scars by Jennifer Sparks

Scars are proof you survived.

Scars mean many things.

Some are visible.

Some are not.

People carry around scars  
like a badge of honor.

Others can't stand  
to look at them.

Some scars are on the inside  
those are hardest to deal with....  
I can't escape them.

## The Eye of the Beholder by Catherine Lafleur

Soundtrack: Short skirt, Long Jacket By: Cake

My first permanent scar came from childhood inoculations.  
A circle with mottled white skin inside. "Alas", my mother  
lamented, "This child will never be a beauty". Her own  
unsightly vaccination scar was on the underside of her arm.

As a toddler, I was bitten in the face by a dog. Plastic  
surgeons waved a magic scalpel and made me almost  
perfect. There is a permanent beauty mark on the right  
cheek next to my lip, as if I've been dotted with a fine point  
sharpie. I appear on the verge of a perpetual smile. My  
mother always bought ointments and creams which  
promised to fade scars. I hated having this on my skin. This  
began my aversion to wearing makeup.

Fortunately, mother got reined in because we were  
members of a weird religious cult that banned vanity. This  
meant I was taught not to gaze into mirrors. Sure, I could  
brush my teeth, hair, and generally use a mirror to make  
sure my appearance was neat and tidy.

Contemplating my reflection? never!

I've long since discovered the joys of Elizabeth Arden,  
Clinique, and Sephora. There isn't a woe that can't be  
alleviated by a little red lipstick. Most of the time I'm  
content to remain in toad mode. A clean face, sunscreen,  
and neat ponytail flip are my daily soccer mom regimen. But  
I feel self conscious around strangers.....

Well scrubbed and virtuous isn't enough. Break out the  
beauty accouterments. It's full foundation, blush, smoky  
brown eyeliner, and lipstick. As I draw everything on my

face, mother's voice intrudes. " You look like a ten dollar  
hooker!"

I purse my lips for kissing. " No, at least twenty!"

My mask is in place.

I sally forth to change hearts and minds about prison reform.  
Engagement with the Frederick Douglass Program means I  
attend chat sessions with the public who have been invited  
into the prison to meet the incarcerated. The eyes of  
strangers are upon me!

All this glam is a budget buster. Make-up usage is  
expensive. How difficult it must be for beautiful women to  
age inside prison. No Botox, no nips and tucks. Just a long  
slow slide with inadequate beauty products to disguise  
time's scars.

Ms. Helen is quite lovely. Her pale candy floss hair,  
periwinkle blue eyes and delicate stature keep me checking  
her back for fairy wings. I dare not inquire her age though it  
is safe to say she is the longest lived camper in Prisoney  
Land.

Yes, she is still coifed.

Yes, she still wears a little lipstick.

Yes, she glows beatifically.

How does one spend so many years locked up and remain  
virtually unscarred by the experience?

Perhaps, fellow campers, I will find out. But first I have to go  
scrub this mask off.

I was also “scarred” from birth as a result of my mother taking thalidomide shots for morning sickness. Part of the rim of my right ear is missing. Though that was a physical scar, it was still caused by someone other than myself; yet, I have had to carry the scar of the action of another person all of my life. Does it bother me? No. Do I think about it often? No. Not unless someone asks me about scars.

But there are other kinds of scars that come from another kind of wounding. These are from the wounded spirit, emotional wounds, and psychological or mental trauma that comes from abuse. There is physical abuse, and sexual abuse, and I have suffered both of these. But the scarring that makes the greatest lasting impact is the emotional scars that are left from not only both of these, but even more so from knowing one isn't loved properly.

A child can even be told “I love you” every day of his/her life, but if it is continually only receiving whippings, beatings, switching; and “make up for it gifts,” then what real love is, is never learned. No one ever showed me what real love was, so I did not know how to express it myself. So what did I do? I grew up to be hard, harsh, and bitter just like my parents who were hard, harsh and bitter like their parents, who were hard, harsh, and...; okay, you get my point?

Sometimes children are able to grow up saying “I'm not going to be like my parents were,” and actually accomplish it. But the majority, even if they say that (like I did), never overcome the scars of childhood, and end up being just like the worst of their parents' character. The emotional abuse I suffered as a child, that which I was never able to talk to anyone about, that which I stuffed down into my emotional rucksack, I have carried for the rest of my life...until prison. Only after I had suffered the ultimate emotional abuse of being rejected by my family, my church, society, and the state, without them even trying to listen to my story, and even see my need of emotional counseling, did I realize that nobody really cares about my needs; but only are interested in themselves and their own. Yeah, maybe I was that way too somewhat.

But when I came to prison, I found someone who truly cares for me; one who does not think only for what he can get, but how he can care for others. He bears some very visible scars too; ones made by wicked hands; and he holds them out saying “See, this is what I suffered so that you could be set free from the pain and suffering that sin and sinners inflict.” I met my Savior, Jesus Christ, and he set me free from the pain of my past. He is the real Comforter and Counselor; I hope you will find him.

### **Scars By William Earl Hill**

For much of my life, I have always thought of scars as simply the remnant of a healed wound on the skin. My body is adorned with numerous examples collected during

### **War wounds by Shaquille Davis**

I look in the mirror at all my scars, remembering how I got each one. Bike wrecks, fights, my dad's belt. I wear them proud though, like they are war medals, knowing that I've been through stuff and am still here today. Knowing that I might be hardheaded but I don't give up.

What doesn't kill you makes you stronger which is how I look at each scar covering each part of my body, some now covered by tattoos but still show through. Being defiant not to be hidden, no, my scars want to be seen because they deserve to be. They are not just imperfections in my body, they are stories.

### **“Scars of Life” by K. Daniel Okken**

Scars. They are the result of wounds. Most generally we think of scars as the result of flesh wounds. I have never had to have surgery performed on me; I've never had many major wounds that left scarring on my body that would be obvious to anyone. I do have some small scars though. I was riding my bicycle and not watching where I was going when I was a kid and hit a fireplug. I flipped over the handlebars, the hydrant, and landed on my back in a yard about 10-12 feet away. I knew I was minorly hurt, but I couldn't help laughing, for when I landed I was looking into the air, and there was one of my shoes just peaking its arc about 40 feet in the air. It came down in the street about 25 feet away! Somehow, I suffered a puncture wound on my left calf muscle, and we never could figure out what caused it.

I have a scar the same size as that one caused by ringworm from when I was about 9 years old. Many years later, while working in trees, I cut my finger on a chainsaw when a limb I was cutting snapped prematurely and knocked the chainsaw out of my hand. Then, when I was about 54 years old I cut my knee with a circular saw, caused by my holding the guard back with my finger while using it.

my fifty odd years of life. These cicatrices scream out in silent testimony to my many bad decisions and poor judgements — such as times my brother and I recreated the gunfight at the OK Corral with pneumatic nail guns, or my ill-fated attempt to ride a bull.

In addition to those scars that were the direct result of my own bad decisions are those inflicted by other people such as the stab wounds from prison shanks during riots. Technically, I suppose choosing to participate in riots could also be considered an example of bad decision making.

In addition to those scars that the entire world can see are the invisible mental wounds that I have accumulated during my almost three decades of incarceration. One truth that is almost universally acknowledged amongst the inmate population is that our families are doing time along with us. Knowing that my actions have ramifications on my loved ones only adds more layers of scar tissue.

After my arrest for murder, I knew that my mother would be devastated at the news so I, in my wisdom, decided that I was not going to contact her. To my way of thinking, I thought she would be better off without me in her life.

While reading a book in my cell, I was surprised to hear the officer say that I had a visit. Knowing that I had not told anyone of my arrest, I figured it was my court appointed attorney coming to see me. I was wrong.

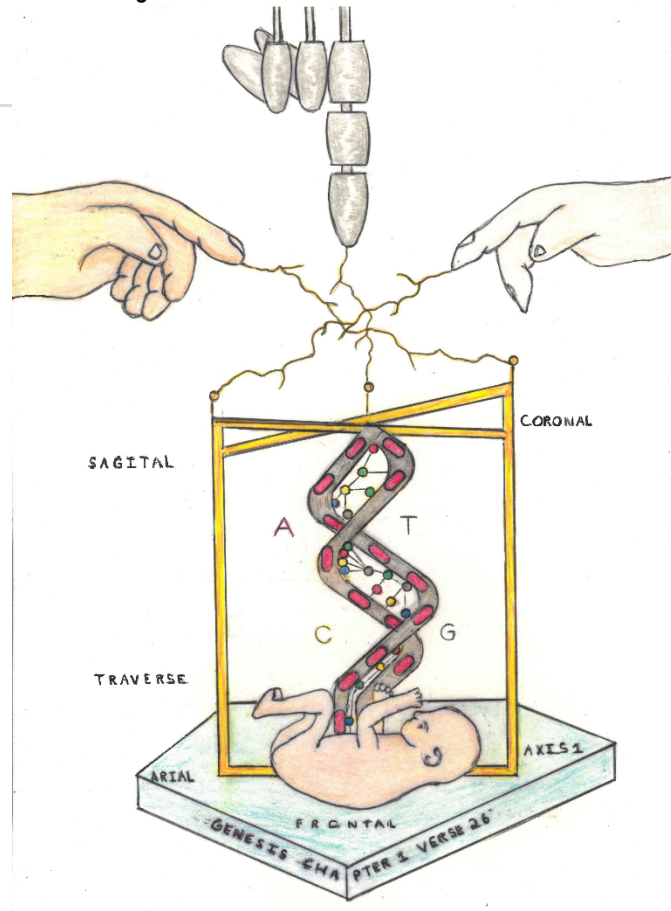
Instead of escorting me to the room where attorney/client visits were conducted, the officer led me towards the inmate visitation room. Entering the room, I saw Mom sitting on an uncomfortable plastic chair on the other side of a plexiglass divider waiting patiently. The sight of my elderly mother sitting there with the weight of the world on her shoulders was enough to make me want to turn and run. Only two things stopped me: the innate desire of a child for his mother during times of crisis, and the shackles ratcheted tightly around my ankles restraining my steps.

Sitting down with my head hung in shame, I picked up the phone that would allow us to talk to each other. She spoke only one word, "Son," but in that one syllable I could hear all her love for me and the heartbreak she was experiencing because of me. That one little word broke down all my defenses, and I began to sob like a newborn baby. Some of my tears were for what I had done to my life,

some of them were for my victim's family who were dealing with the loss of a loved one, but most of them were for what I was doing to that sweet woman whose only crime was loving me unconditionally. Even after almost thirty years this wound still has not healed completely.

While incarcerated I lost both of my parents. Grieving the loss of a parent is never easy, but when you add in the isolation, stress, and depression of incarceration the process becomes even more unmanageable. The passing of my parents is compounded by my self-condemnation for not being there for the only people in the world who were always there for me.

They say time heals all wounds and that is true, but it is equally true that every wound leaves a scar. Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, the 19th century German philosopher once said, "That which does not kill me only makes me stronger." I think that I agree with him because my scars remind me that not only am I still alive, but that I am stronger than the person I was.



### Sunday Golf by Gary Farlow

Easter Sunday, 1967. I was 8 years old and dressed for church and the big egg hunt. I, and two of my older brothers, Bruce and Phillip, asked if we could go outside until it was time to leave for church.

Cautioning us to not dirty our new Easter clothes, we three went to the backyard. Unable to do much, for fear of staining the Spring colors of new clothing, we decided on knocking around golf balls. Our young minds deduced that here was an activity surely safe and free from dirt or grass stains. Right? Wrong!

Bruce, being the oldest, had to be first. Phil and I backed up, but thinking Bruce was going to putt online, I stood just to his right.

Bruce swung back like Arnold Palmer at the Masters, now, to be honest, I didn't realize what had happened. I felt a slight sting as I munched jellybeans from my Easter basket.

"Ow!" I said mildly. "Why'd ya hit me?" I asked, My hands were on my head and I looked to see both Bruce and Phil, now wide-eyed, backed slowly away from me as if I had just become a "walking dead". Phil finally found his voice to say, "Gary, look at your hands!"

When I brought my hands down, they were dripping red with blood from a gash just above my left eye. Another quarter inch and the golf club would've dislodged my left eye.

Blood now drenched the child-sized seersucker suit I was wearing. Phil grabbed my arm and ran me inside. Bruce hid, fearing he had killed me.

Dad and another brother, Gene, who held a compress to staunch the bleeding, rushed me to the emergency room. Sixteen stitches and several hours later I returned home, more upset that I had missed the egg hunt than at getting nearly blinded.

I needn't have worried. Bruce, who Mom and Dad did not punish, knowing he didn't hurt me on purpose, had gone to the egg hunt for me, explained to our pastor what had happened, and brought home to me an enormous chocolate bunny.

That was over 56 years ago, and to this day a faint scar remains just within my left eyebrow. Life's bumps and bruises may leave scars but looking back this one equally bore the love of a brother.

### **Scars by Daniel A. Troya**

I'm sure that we all have scars, some of them physical, some of them mental and some on our hearts. Every one of us has scars from the things we have done or things done to us. But one thing we all remember is we are more than the sum of our scars.

Some of my emotional scars are so deep and hardened parts of me until I realized there are not stones around my heart but steps to a better way. When you're so wronged and have also done so much you/we must use what we think is hardened within us and turn them into steps to climb out of a bad place and to leave these scars behind. No one "needs" to see the scars. They are yours, and you choose when to reveal them if ever at all. I bare all only to my wife. I wanted someone to know, to fully and truly understand how these scars got here. Why do they matter? It's a road map to who I am. But only a small sum of me, so be proud to be who you are. Scars and all. There's a person out there for everyone. Pick one who can see beyond your scars.

### **Her Scars Pay by Michele Lochridge**

I sit next to her sometimes. Even when I'm first in the room, I manage to find my way to the chair next to hers. I Can't explain why, there are no assigned seats and I'm sure somewhere in my self-conscience it's proly on purpose. I believe that she is perfectly aware of her beauty. I mean it can't possibly be a surprise or a secret to her. She wears

the look of one of the short hair forest fairies I am famous for sketching. Somewhere in my locker is a fairy I drew before I knew her, that people swear is her. Her sandy hair and tiny little freckles splayed playfully across her nose that go unnoticed unless you are really paying attention. She is perfectly built, beautiful, and has a warm smile with nice teeth. The attraction isn't like lust or wanting, yet I'm drawn, and I can't figure it out.

Don't get me wrong, again she is beautiful. I just don't entertain a perversion for her, there's just something about her... Halfway through our class, the realization tears into my chest like a bullet as I listen to the piece she has written. She pronounces each word painfully and slowly. It's her scars, I can't physically see them. However, they radiate in her words. I can almost feel her wounds open again...right there in front of me. She pauses for a moment to inhale and let out her air. It seems as though she is trying to remove him from her pores.

His name is never spoken, yet in her description I can see this vile jerk off inside. My angry brain is violating her all over again. The memory rips her apart, tearing at her like she is quietly being devoured by hungry wolves desperately scavenging for a meal. I can feel each blow he delivers and taste her terror.

He has failed miserably in destroying her. While she uses this crumpled paper in her hands to get it out, her shoulders slightly, just so very slightly and delicately slump. It's so subtle until she decides to stay stubbornly rooted. Her refusal to flee like a victim shows in her defiant stance. She sits up straight, throws back her shoulders and declares war on her ghost. Her silent strength has me mesmerized. I'm still shell shocked when we stand up, put our high school chair desk combinations back into structured rows from our circle. It's difficult to impress or even faze me.

I try so hard to leave here inside that room as I pass through the doorway. I find that her image will invade my mind. I can not unsee the pain in her voice, eyes or the way she nervously runs her tongue on her bottom lip as though she is trying to convince herself to just continue.

I don't actually know her name. I'm vaguely aware of a nickname that reminds me of the sun somehow. I don't have any idea of what her favorite color is. Maybe I'll ask her. I don't actually know anything about her except the most painful things and the depth of her scars and that she won't eat syrup so she gives away her peaches to the disobedient diabetic sitting across from her at lunch.

### **Far Away**

#### **Far Away by Frank Olms Jr.**

Far away always seems to be...so far away. Sometimes when I think about what I want to do in the future, the results appear to be so far away and almost unattainable. But with perseverance, the goals are attained,

and then the starting point seems to be...so far away in the past.

This leaves me thinking about the three dimensions of time—like a cube but different, linear—seen only by the mind as past, present, future. Is my future far away? Only in my mind's plan.

### **Far Away By Karla Wooten**

The State of Florida DOC sent me to Wyoming on 9/09/2020. People say that NO GOOD DEED goes unpunished and that it is true to a certain extent. The State of Florida sent me as an Interstate Compact Inmate that is also a PREA-Prison Rape Elimination Act Federal Witness, to the State of Wyoming to destroy me but God sent me to Wyoming to restore me.

In 2020, I had an Inmate ask me to Mail a letter that she had written to her lawyer, which I did not knowing the envelope contained the DNA of 2 Male FDC Staff that was drugging her and raping her while a Captain was the Look out. I was thrown into solitary confinement for 7 months with Florida Death Row and then sent to the State of Wyoming as PREA Retaliation. PREA Retaliation is illegal. The Inmate that was the Victim was released from Prison and she and her Attorney received \$420,000.00, and I was sent to Wyoming.

What is PREA? It is the Federal Prison Rape Elimination Act Laws that were put into place to protect Inmates from Rape, Sexual Assault, Sexual Harassment and Voyeurism as well as other types of Sexual and Predatory behavior by both Staff and Inmates. I was housed at Lowell Correctional Facility which is one of the most Notorious and scandalous female prisons in the United States-Google this Prison and read all of the articles that are in the Miami Herald about how the Feds and the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and the Media are always showing up at this Prison due to women being beaten, assaulted, raped, murdered and killed by Florida DOC Staff.

I survived 13 years in the Florida DOC before I was sent to Wyoming. When I arrived, I was shocked to discover that I was 1 of 2 inmates that was African American at this prison, since I have been at this facility the staff has tried to repeatedly bully, discriminate, harass and intimidate me.

What is funny is that I came to Wyoming as a Federal Witness for four US Attorneys and the US Department of Justice and as a former Law clerk and Paralegal that for ten years Florida inmates had nicknamed me as The Warrior and The Lawyer.

Florida did not tell the State of Wyoming, that I used to write five hundred grievances a year as a law clerk for Florida inmates and that I was also a Legal Advocate for many inmates that helped them to get their prison sentences reduced and that also helped people to get Emergency released and I came to the State of Wyoming as

a published author. I was well prepared to file Federal Civil Rights Complaint, lawsuits, write letters, etc.

I may be Far away from home, but I have been able to make it by remembering the lesson that I was taught as a child which is that God is with me wherever I go and that I am never alone.

### **Far Away By Jeff Hovatter**

Physically, I am about 150 miles, or less, from home. Which is much less than the approximately 10,000 miles to Australia, where I lived for a time. Perhaps incarceration would be less painful if further removed. I feel sympathy for prisoners that actually lived in close proximity to this prison.

Emotionally, I have been banished to a world of strangers who lack such things as courtesy, respect, and empathy. This is an existence of frustration, futility, and depreciation. The forced removal of good emotions has been terribly demoralizing.

Socially, I have been assigned to a low caste, ie. "untouchables." I am assumed to be guilty of any possible crime from jaywalking to genocide. I am routinely punished for any "crime" that may occur in this prison, by being locked in my cell, for any period, from hours to months due to behavior of other prisoners. In the 8 years I have been locked down, literally, many hundreds of days, but never written up. Staff always put on prophylactic exam gloves if they must touch a prisoner or his possessions.

Friends and family completely ended all contact with me, only prison rumors have brought even words of death among my previous friends, or even family.

Prison is the most "far away" I have been in over six decades of life.

### **Far Away By Cesar Hernandez**

The outside world is so close yet so far away. I think this prison was the first thing built in this town. Everything else seems to have been built around the prison. I think City Hall is two blocks away.

When I first got to this prison, I thought it was so crazy that the outside world is two feet on the other side of the wall. Now I don't even think about it. It took me a long time to notice where the front door was. I would pass by multiple times going to and from my cell. The front door is thirty feet away, yet it might as well be thirty miles away.

From my fourth-floor cell I can see over the wall. The world is just outside the window yet so far away.

### **Seems so far away By Shaquille Davis**

When you get a double-digit sentence, it seems so far away. I got 20 when I first started this time, it seemed so far away. Like an eternity, honestly, like it was going to take forever to hit that number. But I'm halfway through and it doesn't even feel like it. My time has gone by so fast at times and so slow at others but one thing I know is each day is one step closer to freedom.

I learned if I just sat miserable, it would make my time drag and if I stay active, I mean workout, paint, write, college, etc. Practically doing so much that you don't have any free time and don't notice time flying by. Because when you are thinking about your next project, you aren't thinking about your time.

### **Far Away By Nate Lindell**

My thoughts feel, often, far away from those of those whom I am surrounded by, both guards and those guarded.

When I walk past a guard, I typically hear them discussing their planned fishing or hunting trips. This is not an exaggeration, as I too was, prior to these 25 years living in concrete and steel, an avid outdoors person. This is what most guards talk about, not the elephants they are paid to keep in rooms. (No doubt they do, with more care, spend many words gossiping about us captives...) Some staff, those a bit more concerned about relating with us subhuman, will discuss sports, a subject that many of my fellow captive's care about but which I care nothing about.

Their thoughts, not mine, are far away from the reality that we are all stuck in.

Am I "better" for pondering this immediate reality? No, that's not what I'm saying. I do feel, usually, alone, for caring so much about this immediate darker reality; but I don't think that it makes me in any way "better" or more superior to those lost in the sauce. It's just that I would rather not feel so far away in my thoughts, have more people whom I can relate to, who think deeply, who question hard and are trustworthy.

There have been a few people whom I can feel closer to, fellow litigators and/or writers and/or artists. You can tell that I don't feel far away when around them because I'm smiling.

Reading the essays, some of them, of my fellow captives, especially the deepest thinkers, the sassiest, the funniest (Ms. LaFleur, don't be so egotistical- I'm not talking about you...okay, I am & congrats on that PEN award!) make me feel "closer," not so far away. For that, thank you, all of you volunteers at P.E. who made it happen.

As revealed by the record number of bars on one street in my home city of LaCrosse (look it up), escaping reality is possibly the greatest pastime of humans. Alas, in this yet another poorly crafted essay, I challenge those who prefer to remain far away to come in close to our reality to at least, maybe as Dave Chappelle does, at least mock it, poke fun at it - I'll feel closer to you then!

### **Far Away by Daniel Troya**

I read this month's theme word and though this is a prisoner's word, I'm gonna assume that many/majority of the people who choose to write will write about being far away from home, But I am gonna choose to write about the freedom I have found being far away from the BS the distance from where I am from to where I am at is vast. But it has allowed me to get far away from the group. I think it allowed me to get far away from gangs, it allowed me to get away from the constant flow of drugs that comes through the south and it allowed me to be far away enough to where I can truly appreciate my family. Being far away allowed me to try new things like reading all kinds of genres instead of just "hood books." It allowed me to grow in my art and in my prison even though I was sentenced to death. Being far away gave me life and through this life I plan to lead from the front, to show the gaps that exist in the street life, to deter those who will come walking in my steps behind me, I've stopped all the youth in my family from walking this path by telling them not some fantasy nightmare like the short "scared straight" used to provide. I teach these young men and women about the law and how easy it is to get into a world of trouble. A few years ago in a fantasy place of my home state of Florida, my sister was at a baby shower with my little cousin's child's mother and when he heard I was on the phone he asked to speak to me and to my surprise thanked me for saving his life by talking to him and showing him how vicious the law can be and how unforgiving it could be. How the "game" owes you nothing, how far away the truth can be about love and loyalty can be in street life. Being so far away was the best thing that ever happened to me even if it came with 2 death sentences, 5 life sentences and 180 years.

## **Far Away by Alana Duncan**

Being here in Prison, everything used to feel so out of reach. My family, my life, my freedom, my forgiveness. It was all beyond these walls. - Hugging my kids. Driving me to Chemo treatments. Going on dates. Taking a bath. Going to the mall. Using metal forks and spoons. Not living with 63 other women in the same dorm. "Is time measured by the length of your sentence?"

Is distance measured by the size of your feet? When I Started my incarceration journey 4 years ago, I thought my life was over. After my first year, I had completed It in county jail, and had had enough. I was Ready to move on. Despite how hard I knew Prison was going to be, jail was not the place for me anymore. 3 days after I got to Prison, I got my tentative Board Hearing Date: January 2033. My heart sank. I didn't think it Could get much worse than that. The girls in the county told me. I'd See the Board in 3-5 years. Not 12 years. It was too much. Couldn't wait that long. My plea deal was 15-life, but the reality of my situation hadn't Sunk in yet. I was still in denial.

Because my sentence is longer, does that mean I Warrant more sympathy? Or does my crime lessen your empathy? What seems far away to you may not seem so far to me. I am ashamed to admit that I have scoffed and rolled my eyes. at the girls that paroled 3 weeks ago and come back on their 5th PV whining about having to do 9 months. After I got my tentative, I did the math in my head. By the time I see the Board I will be 49. My Oldest will be 27 and my youngest will be 24. I'll miss braces. first loves, proms, drivers' licenses, graduations, college, weddings and babies. I felt sorry for myself. My life had never been so far away, so out of reach, so untouchable.

That lasted about a year and a half. Luckily, I pulled my head out of my butt, got myself together, and not only are my youngest and I closer than ever, I am. on my way to getting my Associates Degree in English. I've lost 50+ lbs and I work every day to make myself a better person. Sadly, my oldest is very upset at me and isn't Really interested in talking to me, but It's a work in progress and I haven't let go of the rope yet! Every time we talk, I pull it closer and Closer, pulling us back together.

A step forward is a step in the right direction. Every day that the sun rises is a blessing and a new chance to do better. My grandmother's favorite saying is "Attitude is Everything." And It's time. Once I changed my attitude, 12 years didn't seem so far away. Changing my Relationship with my son lets me be more involved so I feel like I'm there with him. It's still a work in progress, but life is much sweeter, be well my friends!

## **What Is It To Be Far Away? By James N. Teal**

To really think about being "far away", it is not always a bad thing. I do get this deeply as I was sent far

away from my family for all my time in prison. For twenty years and six prisons that I had been through in NY. My father passed away five years ago. Never seeing him or being able to hear his voice for fifteen years. That also includes my sister. So yes, being far away is hard and it has been hard for me.

There are way more reasons for me than those two. My own children, I have been even further away from them. Not hearing a word from either of them throughout my time here. There's so much hurt that is put away inside of me. As the years have and still are rolling on, passing by all of us. Never fully knowing when the faraway will be close to being fully close.

The way of being "far away" as a good thing for me is through my writing. As I have written three novels and am working on my fourth, once again. It is my visiting my own imagination to take me far away. I visit the places and people that I have made. This world of my own fantasy really takes me far away from the confines of my prison life and all that goes on here.

It is my safe way to get out of prison and not fully think about my own situation that I'm in. For so many others that are here in prisons, they can focus on going home I wish I could say that. The reason I say that is that I am stuck here past my CR date. That was way back on Feb 18, 2021, and passed my max date of Dec 30, 2022. Not having an address to go to, I'm in a dorm with 25 other men, in the same situation as as myself. We are doing our Post Release in prison, far away from where we should be. We should be back outside, but we are not.

We 26 men are not the only ones in NY State prisons that are in the RTF. Our facility, from what I have been told, has the highest population of RTF states men than any other facility. In other words, there are more than 26 men in one dorm in our facility.

To work on my book or story, I go everywhere my imagination can bring me to. To write about and even picture in my mind the situations. Being far away in a past that never was and lives only in what my imagination can make up can fill my mind. It is fully fun for me to write about some faraway places. The fantasy world is so fun to so many out there. Reading about, drawing, and for me, writing about these created worlds brings enjoyment. Others enjoy reading about our created worlds. Using their own imaginations can help them picture what is going on.

So, to think of being far away can fully sadden me or be pleasing to me. So, which one is it?

## **Leaders**

### **Leaders by Sam Sudduth**

Before my incarceration, I had great leadership roles with my last employer. Based on previous experience(s), I was able to be directly hired as a store

manager. I have such a ridiculous work ethic that most of my superiors have to tell me not to work so hard. I just can't help it though; my standards are high for both me and any employees.

It was those things, along with sales quotas constantly exceeded, audits surpassing company standards, inventory loss well below policy standards, employee retention through hiring and training procedures, and going above and beyond customer service goals required that brought recognition. It was a good feeling to get recognized and rewarded for this hard work. I always made sure to pass all this along to my employees, too. I was quick to do so because without them and all their hard work, I couldn't have succeeded. I loved keeping smiles on their faces, too!

My hard work was quickly noticed by my district manager (DM), who had twelve additional stores to attend to. Occasionally, she took me on her one-a-day store visits to assist some of the other managers in daily operations via company policy and procedures. I took this as a compliment in my abilities and opportunity to shadow my DM as well. I took great pride in being chosen for these jobs, so I amped up my work to shine brighter. I also loved helping and training my coworkers.

After some time, my DM promoted me to assistant DM. This was such an honor, but it placed so much responsibility on my shoulders. She had apparently been singing my praises to the regional manager (RM – her boss) and both saw great potential in my contributions to the district, region, and company as a whole. That's when I was given five of the thirteen stores within the district to oversee. Boy was that a test and a heavy weight to balance on my new shoulders, but I rose to the challenge. Three of the five stores actually improved in all areas across the board. Yey!

In two short years, my DM and RM felt I was ready to be promoted to have my own district. One actually became available, which happens very rarely, in the northern part of my state that required a move. It consisted of eleven stores, had extensive traveling due to the spacing out of the stores, spanned into the southern part of the state north of mine, and included a store grossing over one million dollars (another rarity requiring special care).

In short, my district pulled in high numbers exceeding several quotas in many areas. At one of the annual company meetings, I was awarded "Best New DM" and "Best Store Over \$1 Million Dollars." I was ecstatic! All the stores showed great improvements, and I had a great management team. Now, that's not to say I didn't have downfalls, bad sales months, or some management turnover(s). But part of being in any type of leadership role is meeting those challenges, turning them around, and handling them in the best way possible. This definitely helps you grow and learn to become a better leader.

Even through all these positive life moments, I still got myself wrapped up in this bad situation. I lost everything! This proves even great people doing great things can fall and fall hard. I've learned a lot from this, and other leaders incarcerated with me. I still try to lend my leadership skills when I can in here, but I still look forward to getting out and hopefully back into some semblance of the leadership roles I once had. Time will tell, but the Lord knows I still have the drive and yearning to hit the ground running.

### **Leaders by Jeff Hovatter**

Leaders are born; not made, not appointed, not elected, and certainly not promoted.

The true lack of leaders stems from all the bad of human nature.

Anyone who wants to be in charge should never be put in charge.

Being in charge does not make a leader.

The traits of greed and ego are anathema to being a leader.

Leaders rise to the occasion of a specific situation.

Leaders can be good or bad, but bad leadership only appeals to the bad traits of human nature.

Leaders recognize and acknowledge ability and performance.

Many examples of bad leadership come to mind, but few of good, as I write this.

Committees are terrible leaders.

### **Leaders by Cesar Hernandez**

I arrived at this prison earlier this year. When I was waiting to get my cell assignment, I was surprised by an inmate. He recently went home after about thirty-five years in prison.

I was surprised that JJ gave us a five-minute motivational speech. He gave us lots of great advice and urged us to help each other.

I'm trying to work on not being so indifferent. I have a hard time taking an interest in people. This prison has 1,022 people. I would estimate I have not ever spoken to 900 people.

I know I'm not perfect. I'm constantly trying to be a better person every day.

I've noticed there's two types of people here. Those that encourage you and those that discourage you.

It seems every time I try to talk to someone, their default mindset is to discourage me.

Some people default to motivate others. I overhear conversations and they are motivating one another.

My co-workers do motivate me so I am grateful to them for helping me become a better person.

I need to work on taking an interest in others so I can motivate them to become better humans.

## **Lead with Purpose by DeAuntee "Avenue" Poe**

All of my life, I've been told that I possess leadership qualities or have good leadership skills. I'd guess it's because I've never been quick to follow behind another person. If so, one has to have admirable characteristic traits within themselves. However, I've never followed behind anyone, for the sake of wanting to belong or be accepted.

Contrarily, coming up in impoverished neighborhoods, communities, and inner-city ghettos, we led and followed with misdirection, misguided compassion and adolescent ignorance. This is why most of us join(ed) gangs, commit(ed) crimes, and are in prison. We either followed behind the wrong people or led with insignificant purpose or out of pure ignorance.

So now, I sit in captivity with close to 2 decades of enslavement to scar my psyche. During my years on these plantations, I've educated myself to a degree. I've studied the teachings of righteous leaders like George and Jonathan Jackson, Minister Malcolm X, Angela Davis, Harriet Tubman, Martin Luther King Jr., Hannibal, etc.

All of these people led with purpose. They fought with strategic penological and common interests of the people and for the freedom of our people.

Therefore, I've analyzed the key quality I've learned about being a great leader is 1) to become SELFLESS. 2) A great listener. 3) To have purpose. To be selfish, self-centered, and aimless is counterproductive to anyone who wishes to lead a group of people. No matter how large or small.

Herein, I challenge any and everyone reading this essay to dig deep to identify the leadership qualities within themselves – then ask yourself: "How can I utilize them for the greater good? To substantiate a meaningful purpose?"

It doesn't matter if it's being parent, brother, sister, friend, comrade, neighbor, politician, Christian, Muslim, Crip, Blood, philanthropist, strategist, or organizer and advisor. The idea is to lead with a meaningful purpose!

We all, in these concentration camps, have had it hard. Even our loved ones and fellow civilians in society face hardships and adversities. This does not mean we are here for nothing. This does not mean we should not focus our energy on something positive to better our lives or the lives of those around us.

We cannot allow our adversities and shortcomings to define our legacy or lead us astray. Nor allow for the opinion of others to deter our focus from our life's mission.

We must "Lead with Purpose or Purposely Die Without Knowing What Our Purpose Was."

## **Leaders? By Leo Cardez**

Prison Guards in general, and the prison's highly trained Tactical Squad (aka Goon Squad, Orange Crush) especially, are supposed to be trained and expected to be

leaders. Inmates, their wards, are tasked with following their orders and trusting that they have their best interest and safety in mind, but in reality, that's rarely the case.

I wasn't upset by the Orange Crush officer. I decided to no longer be afraid of the cops (how we refer to the prison guards). Orange Crush was Machiavellian with their bat-size batons, black hockey-goalie helmets, half body shields meant to make me feel scared, guilty, and criminal. In the past, their mere presence would send a fear signal shooting through my body and sticking in my throat. When they appeared behind me or in my line of sight, my heart rate accelerated, my breathing quickened, and my muscles contracted. I became acutely aware not only of what I was doing but also of what the cops might think I was doing.

But I had decided I wouldn't allow myself to feel intimidated by these under-educated, over-paid adult babysitters. Why? First, because I am middle-aged, college-educated, and generally law/rule-abiding. Second, because it occurred to me that they believe they are better than me and these fear tactics are part of the psychological control they attempt to impose on me. And third, I had worked as a successful communications executive for over two decades before my arrest. I paid my taxes- taxes that help pay their salary- so in many real ways they were my employees. I was tired of feeling afraid of them. So, I'd decided to imagine the cops as someone simply doing their job as they have been trained for better or worse. I refused to take it personally. They didn't know me.

And so, for the first time in my life when this guard came to my door, I looked him in the eye and asked him as gently and sincerely as possible what he wanted. "Shut up, turn-around, strip," he told me, "That's what I want." Then asked, with a wry smile, if I had any drugs or weapons on me or in my cell? When I told him no, he asked again, "You don't have any contraband in here? It's better for you if you tell me now versus if I find it." Again, I looked him straight in the eye and shook my head.

The rest was a blur. I was strip-searched and man-handled and sent off to wait in the Chow Hall with a sharp jab in my gut that doubled me over. By now, I was already cuffed and could do nothing to defend myself. I looked up at him and asked if he thought that hitting a restrained man made him tough? "That's prison life" was his only response. I took a mental picture of his young strange white face. I wanted to remember what men are capable of.

This day was another setback in my effort to mature and rehabilitate. As much as I didn't want the guards to control me, mentally, in the blink of an eye this man had brought back all the anger, hate, and fear associated with prison guards. That's the nature of prison, one step forward, two steps back. Even for those of us that want to better

ourselves, the system is not built to rehabilitate inmates. It is simply mass human warehousing.

For more insight into what happens when decent human beings are tasked with securing those identified as cons I recommend reading *The Lucifer Effect* (Zambrano). The book highlights the results of a famous 70s Stanford University study that pitted students against each other as "inmates" and "guards."

\* Machiaveli believed keeping people in a state of fear made them more easy to control.

## **Leaders by Frank K Olms, Jr.**

Some people are natural leaders. They are assertive, compassionate, thoughtful, and thorough. They see a need and fulfill that need.

Two of the best leaders that I have met in the prison environment were both the presidents of the two gavel clubs I've been members of. Their combined efforts, demanding drive, ebullient attitudes, and outgoing enthusiasm has brought success to many of the club's members.

Other leaders are more subdued. They are more accepting of their circumstances, but when duty calls, they rise to the challenge. Their motto: lead, follow, or just get out of the way!

As a self-employed, self-starter, I also had to be a leader to accomplish the goals I set for myself and my company.

I've designed products that I saw a potential need for and filed for patent protection on one. Good leaders are also beneficial to the people and organizations they lead by offering guidance and encouragement.

## **Parents**

### **So Unfair By Shaquille Davis**

In this world, so many people want to be a parent, including me. But a lot of people don't get lucky enough to get a chance to be one. But the unfair thing to me is when you see so many people that do have a kid. Usually multiple, don't even care about them. Be out there doing whatever they are doing, pretending that they don't even have kids, until they see a use for them.

Then there's the ones that do unspeakable things, it feels like almost every other day I read about a parent killing their child. Who could possibly do something like that to someone they help to bring into this world. It's just so crazy that the universe allows these people to be parents but not the ones that really want to.

### **Being Parents by Howard B. Brown**

What does it entail, being parents? Reflecting on my parents, I say lots of S-words. Being parents entails sharing love, selflessly giving, setting examples, serving

home-cooked meals, spending time together, shopping, singing lullabies, solving problems, etc.

My sentence began in 1973, at the age of twenty. In 1988, I got my first of MANY denials of parole. I went from Work-Release to a medium, behind walls. In 1989, I reflected on my life to realize: a) I may never get out of prison; b) I may never get married; and c) I may never experience the joys and heartaches of raising children.

I decided to do something about it. At the prison library, I searched for magazines. I found the Foster Parents Plan of Rhode Island (now called Childreach). I wrote about seeking a teenage girl in India. I wanted a teenage girl so she could exchange letters. Help her build her self-esteem. Often foster parents start out with a young child, then in time for various reasons, cancels, so I stepped up. I've heard about the hardships for girls in India, so I wanted a girl to get an education. I think hearing sitar and Indian drums in the Beatles' music influenced my interest in India. In high school, I had three Nehru shirts thanks to selfless parents.

Soon, I received a packet with photos, reports, and information. There in black and white stood Pushpa. She lived in abject poverty in Bombay, Maharashtra, India. I gladly wrote my first letter. That started monthly letters from Pushpa. She wrote about her home village, stoning jackfruit down from a tree, bathing in the Krishna River, getting school supplies and uniforms, and celebrating festivals.

Her native tongue was Marathi. Although her letters came with a translation, I wanted to read what she'd penned. I bought "The Formation of the Marathi Language" (FMC), Molesworth's Marathi and English Dictionary 2nd ed revised and enlarged [MMED], and other Marathi and Sanskrit books.

I figured out how to read and write Marathi and Sanskrit. I figured out how to turn up words in the dictionaries. That's part of being a parent. I learned Pushpa means a flower.

Over a couple years, I had a three-ring binder full of her letters. I studied her Marathi letters and looked up the words in MMED. The sentence structure is different. But, I knew the translations were accurate. Then I got a packet informing me that her family moved away so her sister could go to college. Tears on my cheeks spoke of the joys and heartaches of raising children, being parents.

Also received were photos, information about Kalpana, so parenting continued. Kalpana means a thought, notion, idea. It's the same name as Kalpana Chowla, shuttle astronaut. We exchanged letters for a couple years. Then, she went to live with her uncle on a farm. Sangita came into my life.

Being a parent involves teaching a child, yet often a child teaches a parent. I developed a fascination with things of India. I notice along with books, in this cell are other products from India: Quill #2 pencils, Cool Wave gel toothpaste, Skullcandy headphones, and sometimes

cookies. I used to listen to Hindi songs (sometimes Marathi songs) on the radio. It was "Jhankar" hosted by Nupur Kohli. Last known she streams online. Music transcends cultures.

Right now on Johnny 5, my emotional support SCORES tablet, he's playing "Mere Sapne" by Karita Krishnamurthy off "Mitr My Friend." She's my favorite. The word Mitr means friend in Marathi.

Being parents, the first born naturally holds a special place in their hearts. Favorite. For me, Pushpa is that child. But, I did enjoy fostering Kalpana, Nagkanya, Ganesh (Nagkany's brother), Sangita, of Bombay. My mother sponsored Nagkanya. When my mother died, I continued the sponsorship.

The youngest girl was Urma of Rajasthan, India. I was like other foster parents until I canceled for lack of funds. That hurt.

The prison lost my property, except my books, so little remains of the letters and photos. Sangita wrote wonderful letters. In phonetic translation here is what she wrote: *Ātā āmhī sarv jan welewar shālet jāto. We attend school daily.*

Over many years, I wrote a Marathi manuscript and two Sanskrit, on how to write Marathi and Sanskrit and directions on how to turn up words in the dictionaries. The Marathi is "Marathi Garb" by Howard B. Brown, TX U 2-322-067, Registration 01/07/2022, in Library of Congress. That resulted from being a foster parent.

In May, my FMC, MMED, MEMD, Sanskrit-English Dictionary by Theodore Benfey and "Jnaneshwari" by R. K. Bhagwat was lost by the prison. The books were part of my life for many decades. I miss my books, but not as much as missing being a foster parent. I'll keep my memories, as Kavitasings in Marathi. I'll close with what Pushpa often wrote: "I felt joy that knew no bounds."

## Parents 2 by Jeff Hovatter

The single most important job of any one's life is to be a parent. Unfortunately, our society expects so little of people in the biological reproductive stage of life, that preparation to become parents is ignored in favor of pop culture of the moment. Lost as well to the vagaries of the ever changing pursuit of success, as defined by who can gather most money, preferably by appealing to a large segment of the population by seeming "fly", "sick", "cool", "gangsta," "hip", "groovy," or whatever callow young people lacking experience and perspective call it on any given day, is the extended multi generation family that includes people with decades of life behind them that allows them to offer wisdom and guidance.

It takes a village to raise a child. Youth culture allows the creation of children but expects the raising to be done by grandma. Expressing the sentiment of how your baby is the priority of your life, while you sit in jail and grandma and your baby mama struggle to feed your kid, or

kids, is beyond inadequate. The concept of being responsible and accountable is so foreign that youth culture has a name for such actions, they call it "adulthood."

The problem is a multi-generational lack of preparation to be parents. Although quite responsible throughout my life, I was an extremely poor parent. I failed horribly at being a good parent despite my best intentions. I was law-abiding, hardworking, a good provider, but totally lacking in perspective and nourishing skills.

Parents are expected to do the most complex job I can imagine without any standard of training. I now believe that much of what is taught in public schools should be or should have been replaced with intensive training to create parenting skills in every young person. It should start upon the beginning of school attendance. "My dad said " is not enough. We must acknowledge the fact that he was not offered the accumulated knowledge of science and experience, but instead was presented with ignorance and prejudice handed down to him. These days, it is likely to be "my grandma said " because so many fathers are absent, having provided only the biological means to create a child and feeling no need to provide beyond his own gratification.

Grandma cannot provide all that is needed. She was no more trained than anyone else but does what she can from instinctual love.

The myriad failures of our society are blamed on parents lack of courtesy, integrity, work ethic...right up to homicide or suicide. The failure belongs to society as a whole, and only top level governmental change of agenda has any chance of making a difference. Problems of society cannot be remedied as individual issues, they are symptoms of systematic failure, which I theorize could be made better over a long period of years, not an election cycle, but a culture shift to prioritize parenting over wealth, self-gratification, or any other criteria.

## Title: At Least I wasn't Eaten by Wolves. By Catherine LaFleur

Soundtrack Don't You (Forget About Me) by Simple Minds  
" Mom, dad! Wait!"

But it's too late. My eyes well up with tears as they drive off without me. Again.

My parents gave me food, clothes, and shelter. They took care of me when I was sick. No one ever raised a hand to me or inappropriately touched me. My parents did not let wolves eat me. But....

They kept leaving me. Always the last kid picked up from the church nursery, there is a photo of me sitting on an ABC rug playing with an Etch-a-sketch. All the other toddlers are gone and picked up on time.

My parents were enraptured by each other and with God and her work. How many times did they drive off without me? Too many. God's work requires intense focus. Revivals, visiting churches to fund raise, working at the

Waterfront Mission and the soup kitchen. I've been left behind in all the best places. Most memorably, in Guatemala, my parents got into separate Land Rovers to leave the tiny village to which they brought supplies and the Word of God. They drove off down the mountain. Two hours later I was found to be missing.

Happily, I was still up the mountain with the local pastoring family Luz and Jorge. Unfortunately it was raining buckets, and the road was too wet. Driving back up was not going to happen any time soon. This was before cell phones. Fortunately, there was a radio. I got to talk to my parents twice a day. The rain came down for days. Strange, I don't remember being upset. I was thrilled to be with Cardoza's kids.

Did my parents see only each other? Were their eyes watching God?

For a long time, I didn't realize they were forgetting me. I suppose it was my subconscious protecting me. When I turned 17 my grandparents took me away. To France. I lived in Reims for about 2 years. I had to be rescued and deprogrammed by expensive psychiatrists. My grandparents did not forget me.

Our religious tradition eschews medical treatment. Exorcists, herbalists, and faith healers are the only approved health care providers. My father got sick. Oat Cell Carcinoma of the lungs. Metastasized. By the time he went to a real doctor it was too late. They did radiation to shrink the tumors, performed surgery, and a round of Chemo. I needed to go home.

At the miniscule Pensacola airport, I picked up my luggage from the baggage claim carousel. No longer am I wearing my modest Little House on the Prairie clothes. A cream scoop neck cotton sweater skims my shoulders, and a calf length pencil skirt hugs my hips. Stockings, beige pumps, and a tiny handbag complete my ensemble.

Mother walks right by me.

I am so tempted to keep going right out the sliding glass doors to the taxi stand. Instead, I turn back. "Mom." She keeps walking.

"Mother!" Still she can't hear or see me.

I grab her hand from behind. "Virginia! I'm home." She blinks confused at the adult me. As I stand there in front of her, I can see she is struggling. My name isn't readily available. "Fifi! I've missed you so much!" Mom pulls me into a hug. Our poodle's name is Fifi but I'll take it.

At least I wasn't eaten by wolves.

### **Parents by Earl W. Cox Jr.**

My parents raised five children; my two older sisters, myself, and my two younger brothers. The five of us siblings are as different as night and day. My parents, themselves children of the 1930s, had an auspicious beginning.

My mother was raised a Roman Catholic, though her own father didn't actively spend any appreciable time in any church until the last ten years of his life. Being the only girl with three younger brothers, she was always "a daddy's girl," until the day she decided to marry my father. When the newlyweds asked for a little help, her father told my mother, his daughter, "you made your bed, you lie in it." Yes, he was a stern man.

My own father, a child of Episcopalian parents, was briefly involved in, that is, a participant of, a pre-arranged marriage to a young woman he didn't love. Six months into their unconsummated marriage, my father met my mother. He obtained a divorce and annulment from his first wife, then married my mother at a "Justice of the Peace." About 36 years later, his eldest son would like to do wise things with his own wife.

A traditional middle-income white family, usually my mother stayed at home taking care of the children and house, while my father worked to provide an income for his family. During their 18 years of marriage, of which I witnessed the last 12 years, I only know of one time in those 12 years that my parents ever had a serious fight. Truthfully if neither had been drinking, the fight most likely would not have occurred.

Regarding discipline, I remember one time my father told my mother, "If one of the children misbehaves while I'm at work; you can discipline them, then don't expect me to come home from work and discipline them again. I'm not going to do that." Adding, "however, I will support whatever you choose to do. If you are too upset or angry to discipline them, then I'll handle it when I get home, and may God have mercy on them."

Like my maternal grandfather, my father, also on occasion, was a stern man. Though, unlike my grandfather, my dad was also outwardly extremely loving. Usually, three to four times a month, we would go to this restaurant for dinner. He believed dinner time was family time and expected all of us to be present for the evening meal. Several months of the year, he played in a bowling league from work. These were family events. Dad bowled, mom cheered, children played together with other managers' children.

During the summer months, we would travel to a large park and swimming pool, have a barbeque and playing gleefully. We would also take trips to the west coast to visit relatives. Oftentimes mom and dad would pick different routes to travel, stopping often so that we could see the sights. One of my fondest was going through Oklahoma to visit Dad's brother and his family, giving us good reason to stop at Indian Reservations. I remember once Mom's brother, my Californian uncle, taking my younger brother and I on a coastal drive. My parents were very upset with him, as he shot a deer and brought it back, while we were with him. My parents definitely didn't like guns. Any guns.

I remember once my younger brother and I found our dad's prized coin collection. Boys being boys, we were overwhelmed when we discovered a "treasure trove." My dad, however, wasn't so gleeful when he discovered we had been "spending our inheritance." His "discipline" included us not receiving bicycles for Christmas and having to earn most of the money to buy them. Third, our dad decided that the hole necessary to set up our new above ground swimming pool would be dug by both of us boys. Even though this task was "punishment", nonetheless we wanted to make our parents proud of us. My father attended catholic mass every Easter Sunday and Christmas Day with my mother and us children, until his death in 1969.



Otherwise, it was just the rest of us every Sunday. We four older children also attended Catholic schools until 1967, when my parents decided it was too expensive. Except for my oldest sister, who graduated from the Catholic high school she attended—a choice of hers agreed upon by our parents.

After my father died, our mother raised us with the belief that we should go on living life to the fullest. She encouraged us to turn our dreams into realities; and to never be overwhelmed by any challenge, no matter what it was. She also raised us to always be able and willing to discuss anything with her, no matter what it was.

### Dad's Advice by Leo Cardez

This is Leo Cardez, your loyal war correspondent, reporting from behind enemy lines, inside the wire. These are the convict chronicles:

When I left for the army my dad's only words of wisdom: "Don't risk getting some disease from a hooker, use your hand instead." When I left for college: "Keep the partying to the weekends, go to class, and remember, C's get degrees." And finally when I came to prison. "Believe people when they show you who they are, and if you have to fight, hit first, hit hard."

My dad reminds me of the old trainer, Mickey, from the Rocky franchise if Mickey was an old-school Mexican. My dad is five-foot-six, one hundred and fifty pounds of refried beans, futbol, and the Virgin Mary. He doesn't say much, holding his cards close to the chest (like many of a

certain generation), but when he does open up, people freeze in place as if Jesus himself was speaking.

He's in his 80s now, looking more fragile with each passing year. I have to help twist open his pop bottles on his monthly visits. I try not to think of the inevitable - I will mourn him from behind steel and concrete. I soak up every minute we share, encouraging him to tell me more about his life,

what he's learned.

I ask, "Dad, what's your number one life advice?" He thinks about it while slowly chewing his vending machine hamburger. He looks up, takes a long sip of his Diet Coke and finally says: "lean into the pain."

What does that mean? (More slow, deliberate,

pain-staking chewing.)

Everyone wants life to be easy, fun, and happy, but that's not really living. Can you imagine how boring that would be? You would never learn anything, never appreciate anything, never see what you are really made of. I don't regret any of the challenges and difficulties in my life. They helped me to get to the good stuff. So, I've learned, you have to embrace pain with a full heart knowing that this is your test—this is life.

I admit. I was left speechless. Firstly, that's more than he's said at one time since he yelled at me for leaving our car in neutral in our driveway when I was 16. We found it in the neighbor's yard the next morning. But also, because I expected something more cliché like, God will never give you more than you can handle. Instead, he gave me a Nietzschean philosophy. Nietzsche believed that in "the love of your fate" - living life by embracing all of it equally, the good and the bad. But a part of me wondered if he wasn't just saying it for my benefit, due to my circumstances. Was he trying to give me hope? To change my perspective?

As if reading my mind, he adds: "Look at you. You were a fat, lazy deadbeat drunk. (Jeez dad, tell me how you really feel). I have no doubt you'd be dead by now or worse if you hadn't gone to prison. (What's worse than death? I wonder.) Look at you now! You are healthy, you are in college, you mentor these young inmates. You are a loving caring son, brother, uncle, and dad. I'm proud of you."

Hard stop. He's never said that before. I feel my throat clench. I can't speak. A warm feeling washes over me

as if the sun shines on me from all sides. An eternity passes, my father and I in our own personal bubble.

"Visit over!" the guard yells. Our bubble pops and the reality of prison life comes rushing back.

We got up from our table to share an awkward hug—I'm gentle, afraid of hurting him. He grabs my arm, leans in and whispers, "the other advice still stands too, 'use your hand.'"

"Papi!" is snorting. He winks and smiles as he shuffles out the steel sliding door, never looking back.

Lean into the pain, I repeat to myself. Okay dad. Okay.

### **Shout out to mom and dad by Dale Wakefield**

I was blessed with a natural talent for music. I believe that getting involved with music at an early age aided in my earliest developments even when I was still in my mother's womb. Research and studies suggest that the brain is prewired for music from infancy and can learn music as quickly as it can speak. Because of my mother's and father's tendencies to speak to me in imaginary ways as a baby, I was born with a musical brain because music provides a special communication channel between parents and child. Getting that small acoustic guitar from my parents as a child and then taking guitar lessons as a young teenager seemed to have excelled and maybe even boosted my IQ and provided me with some neurological beignets. I always like music, art, and literature. I also have a broad range of musical tastes and I can appreciate so many different musical instruments, styles of music, and artists. All of this comes from my parent's taste in music, which they played throughout our household on my mom's record player, or on the radio out in the garage. Even when we would take family road trips down to Georgia, I was influenced by what I was hearing on the radio or from my dad's vast collection of cassette tapes. I really appreciated what they opened me up to musically throughout my childhood and teenage years. I have so many layers now. First and foremost, I am an emo pop-punk artist, but also a classic rock guy, a metal head, and also a blues and country artist. Shout out to you mom and dad, you deserve your own songs.

## **Prison Hobbies**

### **Busy Beaver by Shaquille Davis**

They love calling me a busy beaver because I'm always doing something. Working out, painting, writing, college, and a few other things. One thing I learned about doing time is to have prison hobbies. Because when you stay busy, it makes time go by.

Then there are the benefits to it too, learning new skills. I came in knowing how to do nothing, but now I'm considered a prison MacGyver, able to fix

almost anything that's broken, with next to nothing. And turn an uncomfortable position into a bearable one.

### **Everything has been my prison hobby by Marino Leyba**

My prison hobbies...

I have had many, I have played basketball. I have hit the weights. I've made origami. I have run the yard for an hour straight every day. I have done so many things that I consider hobbies. I have pen pals. I have written songs. I have written short stories. I have played every board game that is allowed.

I mean everything has been a hobby for me while I've been locked up. Education, talking on the phone, reading books, watching movies I thought I would never watch like "Harry Potter" (rather good actually).

I think I have even become a nerd in a lot of ways, yet that is Ok, we should grow and evolve in life. We should always expand our horizons. "Expanding My Horizons" a poem I wrote many years ago when I first started off writing as a hobby (Prisoner Express Anthology volume 20).

I am not quite the same as I once was. I think I know that in a lot of ways I have become a far better person because of the hobbies I have adopted. I believe I have grown substantially as a human being.

Almost everything has been a hobby for me. You see in prison there is nothing really but time,. I recommend that you try to find at least one hobby.

I mean in the end, it is so much better than just staring at the wall all day, unless of course that is your hobby? Lol.

### **Prison Hobbies by Cesar Hernandez**

By default, my prison hobby is listening to podcasts every day. That's all I do all day long. I did not think I would ever have wi-fi and a tablet in prison. I didn't think I would ever be able to download things.

Right now, my tablet is 98 percent full of 531 podcast episodes. That's 186 hours and 44 minutes. I listen to ninety percent of educational podcasts and ten percent entertainment podcasts. I listen on speed 2.0 so I can listen to a one-hour podcast in twenty minutes by skipping the advertisements.

It seems like every time I listen to ten episodes, I end up downloading twenty five more episodes. Recently, we had no wi-fi for six days. I had plenty downloaded. I think I listened to four hundred episodes. That included all 135 episodes of Revisionist History. Episode 1 was from June 3, 2016.

### **Title: Ebony and Ivory by Catherine LaFleur**

Tis' I, your faithful correspondent, reporting from Camp Prisonery Land where peacocks and pigeons abound. There is more to life than pets. There is music!

Growing up in the commune, we were all required to either sing or learn a musical instrument. Neither alto nor soprano, I was given piano lessons. Our instructor, Mrs. Petrov, was a stately Russian Nigerian lady with very intense gray eyes. No slouching! Pick your fingers up! Arch your wrists! She would stand behind a child tapping them on the shoulder with a conductor's baton over each infraction. Woe betide any student who could not keep the correct tempo. The metronome of shame would be placed on top of the piano as Mrs. Petrov curled her lip. A host of tiny child fingers would tap out the beginners exercises, put-put-put goes the little speed boat

I had perfect posture with my braid hanging clipped with a bow, wrists arched, and best of all a bit of talent infusing a large measure of dedication. From the moment I graduated from Minuet in G to playing Bach's Inventions I was swept away by the thought of becoming a concert pianist. After more than a decade, I attained a level of technical proficiency but sadly I'm not an expressive player.

Fast forward to my incarceration at Camp Prisonery Land. We have guitars, drums, keyboards, a dulcimer, and a piano. Bliss!

It's a battered studio model but the old man still has plenty of giddyap in the old strings. There are many singers and dancers here but not a lot of musicians. Out of 650, I'm the only player. The chaplain allows me into the multipurpose room several times a week. Since I quit that cruel mistress, the law library, I have time to devote to my old hobby of music.

In prison, My playing has developed an emotional quality I never had as a citizen. Whether whipping through a fizzing Prokofiev or playing standards from the hymnal, I feel joyful and relaxed.

I remain your faithful correspondent.

### **Prison Hobbies by Bryan Boldt Jr.**

Prison life can be very long and boring if you don't have a hobby. Many people spend their days playing chess, dominos, working out, watching tv, or playing on their tablet. For me, my hobby is education. I'm enrolled in Lee College for business management and welding. Before I was locked up, school was the last thing on my mind. For one, I didn't like math and I did not like to go to school for 4 years and then wonder if I might get hired for a job. Fast forward to now, I am craving knowledge and want to push myself to new boundaries. I don't always get the grades I pursue, but I give it my all. Next semester will be my last semester before I graduate with an Associate Degree in Business Management and then my next journey begins in welding. Keeping your mind occupied and challenged will not only

keep you out of trouble but it will make you stronger in knowledge and wisdom.

### **NEEDFUL THINGS by Paula Grieve**

When I stepped off the bus, I shielded my eyes from the September sun and looked out at the trees, flowers, and shrubs surrounding the buildings. I had just left behind the most desolate wasteland I'd ever encountered. Barren of flora and fauna, the place I had been delivered from personified the term concrete jungle. As I searched for my straw hat, I noticed two species of pigeon and two more of dove, frolicking in the grass by a gnarled Royal Poinciana. A cool breeze lifted my hair before I pulled the hat down squarely. I took the familiar walk to the intake area, submitting to the requisite procedures, before retiring to my dorm.

The following morning, as I headed to the classification department, I saw a peacock peering at its reflection in the large window of the beauty shop. To be honest, I did not immediately recognize it as a peacock. Missing the brilliant eyed plumage denoting a full-grown bird of the species, this bird was quite obviously still an adolescent. A friend of mine told me that its name was Kevin and that if I crouched down low and offered my extended arm, it would eat from my palm. She handed over a few pieces of dog kibble. At first, the peacock shied away, most likely because of the straw hat. Once I took the hat off, the bird came tentatively over and with its wicked long beak, pecked all the dry kibble from my palm. I was instantly enamored. I made it a point to take a bit of dog kibble with me wherever I went.

In October, a pigeon named Pepe, with a badly healed wing, was delivered to the front of my dorm by the maintenance workers who had cared for it during its convalescence. Several times each day I would pass by Pepe on my way in or out of the dorm. At first, various women would toss bread or crackers to it. Eventually a Jello cup with water showed up. What was lacking was a regular cleaning of the pigeon's droppings. One morning when I went to get water for coffee, I noticed that Pepe was puffed up and shaking. On my way back, coffee in hand, I noticed that the concrete walkway leading to the dorm was full of bird poop.

I had never owned a bird. At home I was a devout cat person. Simple, independent, low maintenance pets were the way to go. While other women here kept newly hatched turtles, small lizards, and even giant snails as pets, I eschewed the added responsibility that came with caring for illicit creatures. I didn't know much about caring for birds, but I was pretty certain that bread, crackers, and ramen noodles were no healthier for a pigeon than for people. I watched the pigeon shimmying and shaking in several piles of excrement. I figured Pepe had most likely ingested something bad. I grabbed a broom and soapy water to clean

away the mess, resolving to share some of Kevin's kibble with Pepe.

Now, three months later, I spend a few moments most mornings cleaning the walkway. I refill the Jello cup. I rinse the salt from a tablespoon of sunflower seeds. I mix it with a few pieces of kibble and place it beside the root of a tree by my dorm. A tree with long branches which Pepe will never be able to fly up to.

Today Kevin met me at the front door as I walked out to work. He loped beside me, inquisitively asking with each turn of its head, "Where is my breakfast?" I stared back at the captain who was walking behind. She looked at me, then looked at the peacock. "I've never seen this peacock a day in my life," I said out loud.

Under my breath, I said, "Shoo, Kevin, you're snitchin' on me!"

I walked off, smile on my face, looking at the rain-soaked grass, lush and vibrant, then at Pepe and Kevin, grateful to have something to care for, something that depended upon me.

### **Prison Hobbies by Martin Vicario**

Hobbies in prison depend on security issues, e.g., will security be compromised. The bigger the Unit, the more it is likely that there will be more to do. God's favor has been upon me for the last 31 years, and I think it isn't going to end any time soon. The Units I have been on have all had Band and Gospel Band programs. The facility I currently reside at had nothing to offer when I arrived. Units like this one need creativity and drive from the prisoners. This Unit is in a for-profit prison, and prisons like this one are not going to invest a lot of money in prisoner activities, only the minimum. This prison

has been open for 9 years, and the Band and Gospel Band programs that exist depend on the generosity of donors to contribute musical instruments. Other organizations that help tremendously are Prison Outreach Ministries. If you ever come across a chaplain, any chaplain, thank him or her, for their time and the work they do. Other organizations like Kairos and St. Dismas promote the practice of fellowshipping, providing a Free-World meal that most of the guys have not tasted in a long time.

The volunteer organizations bear most of the expense pertaining to the activities they bring to the Unit. Since my days in grade school, and throughout my travels in the military, music has always provided an avenue for me to get away mentally, and now especially from the prison setting. Band programs bring a wealth of literature, history, sounds. The thing is, when you have words and music together, you are going to have something happening...something profound and social. You have people coming together, hands up, and enjoying that moment for a couple of hours. It is in those moments that people realize how much they have in common. Words and Music!!! After 9 years in this

Civil Commitment Unit and being involuntarily incarcerated (a violation of civil rights ... double jeopardy, and inhumane treatment), the prisoners worked consistently to persuade prison officials of the benefits music programs bring to the Unit and how they contribute to the facility including staff personnel. Music ignites a power and fire into the spirit of man to continue forward in this complicated world we live in. However, music doesn't stand alone in hobbies, there are leather trades, jewelry crafting, painting, and wood works. All these disciplines work the minds and give hope to the incarcerated. And from a different angle, reading, writing, and studying the human sciences and humanities...and available courses that Prison Express graciously bequeaths, open a gateway to curiosity and the desire to learn. Having hobbies available in prison points to the initiative taken by the men and women behind the iron curtain. But never forget that the public is also needed to bring positive change...forget me not.

### **Gratitude**

#### **A Few of My Favorite Things. by Catherine LaFleur**

1. People move to Florida and pay millions of dollars to live in a gated community. I'm getting it for free. Ha ha suckers!
2. Being licked on the palms and soles of my feet by Golden Retrievers is much more enjoyable than the Old Testament would have you believe.
3. Lying down with dogs....specifically golden fluffball puppies, and I never get up with fleas. There are pills for that.
4. The Free Traders Market. No, I don't want the usual contraband, just red lipstick, hair clips, sewing needles, embroidery thread, plums, mangoes, yogurt, grapes, salads from Publix Supermarket, greeting cards, and seasonal USPS stamps. Money buys everything in prison.
5. Ducks, cats, turtles, pink spoon bills, Egyptian geese, hawks, egrets, peacocks, rock pigeons, parrots, parakeets, woodpeckers, owls, grasshoppers, dragonflies, purple martins, butterflies, gray cranes, a stork, buzzards, giant land toads, and very large Godzilla lizards.
6. Kind and interesting writing friends: Marina Bueno, Vicki Hicks, Michele Lochridge, Paula Grieve, Jennifer Sparks, Cheryl White, Eulie Polanco
7. Other writers who inspire me: Kwaneta Harris, James Bauhaus, Nate Lindell, Vinicio Garcia, Leo Cardez, Rolf Rathmann, Sheila LaBarre, and the inimitable Karla Wooten, who is remembered fondly by many readers in FDOC.

8. My faithful family and friends: Uncle Dirk, Ellie, Rus, Joyeaux, and Hero.
9. Having more teeth than my older brothers and sisters did in middle age. Finally, I beat them at something!

10. Meditation practice and the ability to live and say my mantra

May you be happy  
 May you be healthy  
 May you be safe  
 May you be at ease

The cancer of complaining can be driven out with gratitude.  
 I remain your faithful correspondent.

**by James Hochschild**

Gratitude is one of those things that is great to express. And it can be confused with appreciation.

Appreciation is mostly a mental state of mind and/or an emotional feeling. For example, I can appreciate the work that others do to make other's lives simpler or easier. I can appreciate it when it doesn't rain, etc...

Gratitude is when one performs an action to demonstrate the appreciation felt. For example, I will say "thank you" to someone when they are helpful to me or others. I also write "thank you" letters if I can't speak to them in person. If that's not possible, then I will mentally think "thank you." Another way is to "Pay it Forward" by helping others in the same way.

One of the suggested self-help activities is to make a "gratitude List." If one is having a hard time with it, use the category approach.

- A. Family
- A. Friends
- A. Co-workers
- A. Strangers
- A. Professionals (medical, Service, etc...)
- A. Animals
- A. Lastly, enemies

The last one, Enemies can be difficult for a lot of people. That's a long topic of its own. But it's one of the great ways to develop compassion, patience, tolerance, and empathy. As well as forgiveness. At least mentally, thank them for it.

**By Karla Wooten**

What am I grateful for?

I AM GRATEFUL THAT I AM ALIVE AND SANE AND THAT GOD IS GOOD.

What does that mean? It means that I thank God that I did not lose my mind in Prison because the State of Florida made sure that I was placed in one of the most heinous and infamous Prisons in the Nation-Lowell Correctional Facility in Ocala, Florida where they have a gun tower and Florida Death Row, on 12/27/2007, as a Non-Violent White Collar Offender, for a White Collar Mortgage Fraud Crime to serve 25 years in Prison.

I was wrongfully convicted, illegally sentenced and over sentenced.

Jennifer Porter, a former schoolteacher, did a hit and run, where she hit 3 children with her car, killing them, Tampa, Florida -Hillsborough County-Prosecutors gave her House arrest, after they could not locate her or her car-the murder weapon for 45 days.

I am grateful that I am still alive and sane. GOD IS GOOD.

Tampa sent me to Lowell. In that Hellhole Florida DOC Staff have been convicted and arrested multiple times and on the News for murdering, raping, assaulting and killing female inmates on a regular basis.

Please GOOGLE the Florida Department of Corrections and Lowell CI and read the many Miami Herald archived horror stories and articles for yourself.

I survived Lowell 13 years into my 25-year Prison sentence, on 9/9/2020- I was transferred to the State of Wyoming as a Florida DOC Interstate Compact Inmate, meaning that I am housed in Wyoming, by the Florida DOC yet, I have committed 0 crimes in the State of Wyoming.

The State of Florida tried to destroy my life. Florida sent me to Wyoming to destroy me but God sent me to Wyoming to restore me.

Prior to my arrest, I was the sole support of my 2 Sons, my Mother, my brother and for many years I did not see my family, my sons came to see me 7 years after I had been in Prison, in 2014.

I was extremely grateful and happy that although I had left them when they were 9 & 15 years old, that they still loved me, my 15 year old son remembered that I was a good mother to them.

My sons remembered that I loved them more than my own life. I still tell them to that to this day what I would tell them as children, that I would gladly die for them and their daughters, my 2 Queens, that the LOVE that I have for them is for life beyond Eternity, that I love them without

reservation, without hesitation and that even when I die that I will still love them.

My 2 sons used to send me encouraging letters while I was in the Florida DOC Prisons telling me that I was their Mother, their Father and their best friend, that I was still shining as the brightest star, like the sun in the universe and that they wanted me to keep my head up.

My eldest King (son) would say Mama, you are still a Queen, I want you to walk around that Prison with your head held up high, because not only are you a Queen, but you are also an Empress and that makes you a Queen of Queens.

I was very proud of my 2 sons, that while I was calling them the "Young Kings," that they understood and recognized the fact that in order for them to be Kings, that their mother had to be a Queen.

I cried when I received that letter because I needed to have someone to tell me to be encouraged, I needed to know that someone felt that I was worthy of love, that my Kings felt that my life was valuable.

I am grateful that my children still had a great love for me even though they suffered and were at one point hungry, homeless, without lights and water at times, they experienced many difficulties going from a lifestyle that was middle class and wealthy to abject poverty, their grandmother was not able to care for them properly.

I was grateful for the "Young Kings" kind words especially since I had days when I believed that I was the ONLY SANE PERSON living in an insane asylum, prison is an insane world that people who are free can never imagine.

The Florida Department of Corruption has 100,000 inmates that are incarcerated-7,000 of the incarcerated are women, inmates fighting daily, pulling razor blades out of their mouths to cut up other women's faces for daring to play cards with and speak to their girlfriends.

I lived in an insane asylum at Homestead Correctional Institution aka. Homestead Correctional Plantation, the ONLY sane person in the asylum.

At Homestead CI, we had riots with 4 women fighting in the dining hall that contained 300+ women, while the Captain pepper sprayed the entire dining hall, with the mace affecting the innocent and the guilty.

I am grateful because the worst did not happen to me, I am alive and still sane, despite every wicked thing that has happened to me.

I will admit that I was not an Angel while in the custody of the State of Florida DOC-from 2007 to 2020, the inmates used to call me "The Warrior", the Officers called me "The Lawyer" because I would write 500+ Grievances per year, for myself and other inmates because it was our Federal 1st Amendment Constitutional Right to do so, on the Staff for verbally, mentally, emotionally and physically abusing the women that were supposed to be safe in their care, custody and their control.

I would quote both State and Federal Laws, the State of Florida's Laws, the Florida DOC Employee Code of Conduct, Florida DOC Administrative Code Chapter 33, FDC Policies and Procedures, etc.

I was quite the Hellion. I am still a Hell raiser but, now I consider myself to be a Child of God.

I did not play games before I came to Prison, and I still don't play games with DOC Staff.

I am NOT the one. I am a Warrior. I am an Activist. I am an Advocate.

I will stand up for myself and those who are too afraid to fight for themselves.

I would also write Legal Motions as a Law clerk & a Paralegal and help the inmates to get their sentences reduced, I would help inmates to go home and to get emergency release from Prison.

I would write to letters to the ALL Feds- the FBI, the US Attorney General Department of Justice, the US Department of Homeland Security, the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Governor, State and Federal Courts, State and Federal Judges, the Florida DOC Probation & Parole Board, State Classification Officers for early releases, Medical Parole, Florida Senators and Florida State Representatives and the Media and get them to show up at the Prison.

I would go to jail and write grievances to get Disciplinary Reports thrown out for other inmates who were in solitary confinement with me and I would get them out of jail and I would get their Disciplinary Reports thrown out and mine too.

Federal Judges would email the Prison, and send faxes to the Warden asking if I was alive and safe and they would come to the Prison and tell the Warden that he had better provide proof of life that I was still alive as a Federal Witness for 4 US Attorneys from the US Department of Justice-Office of Civil Rights, because 1 time I was able to

get 15 Feds to show up to the Prison from the US Attorney's Office.

I was quite the Badass and I still am.

In August of 2023, I was able to get 10 Fraudulent Disciplinary Reports that were written on me and 10 other Inmates by the WWC Commissary Staff thrown out.

I AM GRATEFUL THAT I AM ALIVE AND SANE AND THAT GOD IS GOOD.

I would fight for the State and Federal Civil and the Constitutional Rights of the female Inmates and the inmates protected me, I have never had a fight with another inmate.

I have had inmates that have wanted to fight me, but the Lifers would say leave WOO-WOO alone, she is our Lawyer and our Advocate, don't touch her.

I have never had a fight with a Department of Corruption Employee, nor have I ever had a Staff Member execute a Use of Force or been pepper sprayed by Staff

#### **by Daniel Troya**

April is my birth month. I feel blessed to have made it this far when I was a kid, 13, 14, 15—I never thought I would see 18. Then prison saved me, and I see 18 and BC I would be out at 20 I didn't think I would see 21. Every birthday since then I never think I will see the next one and later the sobering experience of watching 12 of the 13 people executed during 2019-2020, I feel nothing but gratitude to be here. I'm so thankful and filled with gratitude for having an amazing family and being allowed to be involved with assisting my sister raise my nephews. I have gratitude for my wife coming into my life 7 years ago.

#### **by Marino Leyba**

I have so much gratitude towards Gary for starting Prisoner Express.

It has truly been an outlet to me, it has helped me grow as a human being, It has made me a far better person, I have a better understanding about the world now and about myself. I can't quite put it into words, yet my gratitude is truly a lot.

I am also so grateful to each and every volunteer that has, does, and will ever help, and work at prisoner express. When I needed it the most, I found Prisoner Express or I mean it found me.

Prisoner Express has been there for me in a major way, in a major part of my life, actually it is the main reason I've expanded my horizons. You may not know it but I still remember the first poem I ever submitted to P.E, it was

titled, "Genesis" (it was featured in the prisoner express poetry anthology volume #18) (I think a lot of the state prisons at the time it came out banned it.)

Anyway, that first poem was a turning point for me, a portal if you may, it allowed me an opportunity to not only explore more of myself, yet an opportunity to explore more of the world around me and more of the people around me. Prisoner Express gave me hope, an outlet to express myself, A place to be Creative. As time has passed by I have realized I am now a part of something much bigger than myself.

Prisoner Express has made a huge impact on my life.

Vicky Hicks is also another person I am grateful for. I just love her writing; it is always so honest & captivating. I feel like I know her a little. Thank you for your writing, Vicky and for being a hell of a good writer! I am grateful to all the other beautiful writers who write in Prisoner Express, the ones who are not afraid to be open, to be vulnerable.

I wish I could shout you all out by name, yet I can't, but I do thank you and I am grateful to you all! I know we all share the same struggle, our life in the concrete jungle. I know it is hard to have gratitude in your heart while in prison, yet because of Prisoner Express, because of Gary, the volunteers, and all of you Prisoner Express Family, I do.

Thank you all, I truly mean it!

#### **Gratitude by Kelly Messenger**

I was once told not to dwell on my pain, it only makes it worse. "You have to fight negative energy with positive energy, or you will forever wallow in your misery." I sat there and thought real hard about this life. No doubt everything is wrong, I don't have one good thing going on right now. Then I remembered a book I read called "The Secret." The memory came to me almost like a whisper from the most beautiful angel I could ever imagine.

"What does she say though?" She told me about gratitude and how it works every morning as the author of the book explained to me, I need to wake up and remind myself it's not so bad. There are actually people out there who are worse off and that could be me, so I need to be grateful.

First of all, I can see I can walk, and I still have youth left in me. I do not have life here, but by the grace of God, I will make it out of here one day. I have friends and family, got enough education to write and even though I'm in prison, I have food, heat, and electricity, and it's all free. I could go on and on with this list. I wake up every morning and tell myself to think like this and it makes me feel better. When I'm sad I remind myself of these things and you know

what? I realize it is not so bad and I also tell myself things will get better. I trust and have faith because just like the typical argument with a friend or significant other, more than likely it will blow over and I'll feel better.

### **Gratitude by Craig Holtz**

My deepest gratitude goes to our furry canine friends. I'm talking about the service animals I had the privilege to help train in the dog program. Two of the prisons I was at had the program and I was involved both times. I say a privilege because those animals have helped me become a more civil human being. They are not only a service to the special needs people who ultimately receive these dogs but to us trainers as well. The dogs didn't know it but they were about to have an impact on many people's lives.

The day the puppies come is anticipated like the day before Christmas. We are all impatient with goofy grins on our faces waiting for our new wards to enter the room. The senior members of the group have knowing smiles watching us fidget and fret until the door opens and in runs a half dozen wiggly fur balls all tails and tongues. The pride that washed over me when the facilitator handed me that leash ran deep into my soul. We spend 24/7 with them from 8 weeks old till they are about a year. I was now responsible for this little life that would depend on me for the next 12 months. Our journey together had just begun.

As these little puppies transition into dogs, growing up before our eyes, they learn so much. However, as they are learning they are teaching us as well. And I was taught love, patience, and kindness which is evident in my everyday life. Watching all their personalities blossom as they turn into adolescent dogs was one of the most vibrant joys of my life. The work us handlers put in training pales in comparison to the effort these dogs put in trying to please us.

By the time these service animals are ready to be paired with the recipients there are literally hundreds of hours invested by man and beast alike. The precision in which these dogs perform their duties is expressed in the countless thank you cards and letters we receive. It was impossible not to get emotional reading the tear-streaked paper about how much our dogs have made their difficult situations more manageable. The gratitude expressed by these people made every minute spent training and caring for these wonderful animals a blessing I will never forget!

### **Gratitude by James Bauhaus**

Not much gratitude here, on my end, until lately. An altruist found me and added me on [change.org](http://change.org). The trick here is to gather enough signatures to make a torch-wielding, pitchfork-toting mob corner the culprit gov-crats and make them explain why several cops and two coroners and an FBI lab tech would deliberately ditch 9

samples of the killer's blood? If you see the answer, please go to [change.org](http://change.org) and sign my petition. I'd be gratified, immensely.

### **What do I have to be grateful for? By Scott Cascone**

8 years of my life are gone. Nearly 3,000 days separated from my family and friends. Honestly, throughout my first 2 years, I thought that I had absolutely nothing and I mean NOTHING to be grateful for. I was in a bad way, a terrible frame of mind. I was still attempting to process just exactly how I found myself in this situation, angry, bitter, and jaded! The antithesis of what I've become now. Looking back, I had so much to give thanks to. My family, for one, sticking by my side during this entire ordeal...never giving up on me, still supporting me, even now. My friends...not so much from the outside, but being in here or wherever I came from, prior to my current residence...I've met good people. Those that only attempt to help lift you up and make one's time easier. Those who always, or almost always have something positive to say, or something inspiring to share and that allows me to do the same. Honestly, these places suck! So why would I ever want to make somebody's time harder? Why wouldn't I want to reach out and lift somebody up? Don't get me wrong, I've met a ton of negative people. Those whose sole purpose is to drag someone down to their dark, shadowed levels. Attempting to fill you with hate, animosity, and hopelessness.

They are intent on infecting everyone around them, so that you eventually become them. What crap!!! Well, I've learned to avoid them and all of their ICK! I was, as I said before, bitter, angry, and jaded, but I never tried to make anyone feel like I did. I mostly kept to myself and avoided anyone I could, as much as my surroundings could let me.

But there was no point in doing so. Isolating oneself from living or making the attempt to have or carve out a better existence for myself, was not helpful or healthy...eventually I had to escape myself and reach out. I had to join the proverbial band and actually start to listen to and seek out those few positive speaking outlets. I did, ever so slowly, I took good advice. Becoming the man, I am today by trusting the people in my life again, my family mostly, who I resented in the past for trying to help me with my issues. I only had everything to gain by doing so and absolutely nothing to lose. I also listened to the advice of those individuals that had served multiple years in the places I went. Those who had experience with this flawed system showed me how to navigate its often-treacherous waters. Thankfully, I never got into a fight or had gotten stabbed or worse yet. Then again, what's worse than being stabbed?? I've been robbed, but indirectly—nobody has ever ganged up on me and taken my commissary or possessions (radios, pens, notebooks). It's always been through the ignorance of jailhouse staff, that my things went missing (no details). Anyways, I am a better person for it. All those

things I lost were just those—THINGS. Nothing important and nothing irreplaceable.

I had my family and my friends. Eventually, I had the DAODAS drug and alcohol program. That taught me so much about the way I thought, as well as about addiction and how it went beyond drugs and alcohol. I was in and out of that program 3 times, because I was not dedicated to my recovery and there were a lot of things about myself, I did not want to face. Fast forward to the last time I was in the program...3 1/2 years It lasted, pretty much up until the time I was sentenced, then transferred. I received some excellent letters from the 4 counselors I had, and a head full of knowledge that has helped me every day since. I feel like I'm taking up too much time or space here, so I'll try to be brief. I am grateful for the improved relationship I have with all the members of my family...the trust I have slowly, but surely regained these past 8 years.

I am grateful for every answered phone call and visit that I am blessed to have. I am grateful for their continued love and support, and I count myself lucky when so many people have no one.

I am grateful for the past that led me here...I was stopped for a reason. For all the programs, I was fortunate enough to be a part of. For every certificate and accolade I received during my journey that made me feel that my time had not been wasted. For the few friends I made in Charleston County and Ocilla, GA...and now here in Sunny Coleman FLA. Thank you for not judging me...for helping me out and allowing me to help you in kind, whenever I could. For sunny days, fresh air, and beautiful sunsets...for something to eat (as terrible as those somethings are). For TV, radios, and tablets, for commissary, journaling, and my ability to draw well enough to make some kind of profit. For poetry and the written word. For books of all genres. For family pictures of days gone by.

Hell yes, I am grateful...and I look forward to when all this is over, to see what I am grateful for, once I am free!

### **A Falling Star, that may have not known how bright they glowed by Nate Lindell**

I Was in Wisconsin's Supermax prison, no longer called a "supermax" but that is exactly what it was. The fine people at Prison Literature Project sent me some issues of American Scientist, the official publication of a scientific honor society, heavy -duty nerd shit. At the time I was mulling a purely material theory of consciousness and its ramifications regarding the impact of solitary confinement on all of our fragile minds (minds are fragile--1t's known as "plasticity"). So, when within one of the issues, I saw an article by a co-author for the ethical guidelines for the Society for Neuroscience, and noticed his address at the end, I decided to write the guy.

In my letter I mentioned some of the texts that I'd studied (e.g. The Mind's I and Consciousness Explained)

and that I was looking for a Neuroscientist to support my claim that solitary confinement was causing physical damage to our brains (if our brains were plastic. if they remodeled themselves based on our environment , then a toxic environment must cause toxic remodeling, thus explaining, in part, the observable increase in symptoms of mental illness in those held in solitary/ Seg/RH units...). Dr. Zigmund promptly replied to that letter , and I suspect that he was surprised that someone in prison could rap on the subject as I did.

Dr. Michael J. Zigmund was studying the effects of restricted environments on brains. He was eager to act as my expert, so he said, and so he was.

That was a bright ray of light shining in my barren solitary confinement cell. I did not even grasp how potent that light was.

I ended up being stabbed in my head (yes, ironically). I settled for over 100,000\$. Dr. Zigmund provided an expert report supporting a separate lawsuit that challenged the impact of the barren conditions of that Supermax, which was dismissed on a technicality.

That litigation took some years, during which Dr. Zigmund and I became good friends. He accepted many phone calls from me, and I was as blubbering an idiot as a 13-year-old scoliotic and brace-wearing girl just forming breast buds meeting her idol Taylor Swift: "I'm your biggest fan!!!!"

I was a convict with horns tattooed on his head, who'd been stabbed and who'd stabbed, yet this eminent emeritus Neurology professor regularly accepted my phone calls and funded my litigation. (Had he not funded my litigation I would not have won over 100,000....)

Dr. Zigmund was amusingly humble for someone who traveled the world to lecture on Neuroscience, who taught in China and other countries, and had professorships at universities in multiple countries. But, at heart, he was a mouse doctor, did many studies on mice, and his personality fit that work, just a very humble, kind man.

Dr. Zigmund read two of my poetry and song collections, read many of my essays, and my partially completed autobiography. He studied trauma too, and respected mine. I wish I knew someone like him as a developing child and young man. I encountered him as a man in his 40s.

Dr. Zigmund did not easily volunteer that he was diagnosed with ALS, a neurological disease that, with double irony, he knew little about. It slipped out in a conversation where I busted his chops about not taking care of something that he promised, as if he owed me anything. ALS progresses quickly when diagnosed at an older age... I had some months with him to make farewell phone calls, after which I cried about the forthcoming loss of such a bright star in the universe of humanity, at least bright to me.

I'm not a crier, yet I'm not ashamed to cry now as I write this, as they are tears of love for a humble, kind man who should be remembered for more than his academic accomplishments. "You have marked my life forever, in ways that will help other people," I was able to tell Dr. Zigmund in one of our final phone calls. The choke in his voice let me know that he understood how sincere I was.

When I help others with legal work, whether they deserve it or not, I think of Dr. Zigmund's help to me, which I didn't deserve.

### **Gratitude by Jeff Hovatter**

Lacking any belief in god, or gods, or any omnipotent being or force, I consider myself to be pragmatic. Believers seem to profess gratitude to their god for even the most mundane things or events. Reverently declaring the poor marksmanship of a would-be assassin to be a miracle! Declaring themselves to be, at all times, fabulous! I am not fabulous, or even content, as a prisoner sentenced to a slow death; such declarations of personal grace seem like self-delusion, or disingenuous. To insist that I share the opinion, or pretend to, is arrogant and offensive to me.

I can, and do, respect the opinion of believers enough that I do not attempt to insist they must share my opinion.

I am grateful for many things. A day without pain. A good meal and full belly. A good book. A letter from my pen pal. The small stipend that I receive for disability from the veterans administration. I'm grateful most, perhaps, for the honesty and respect given to me.

Gratitude is an emotional thankfulness. I don't feel it each day and feel no need to demand that others feel or express it in the same way I do. It need not be shared, especially forcefully shared, to be real and be felt. Gratitude is personal, and like respect, is given, not demanded.

### **Picture Themes**

A picture is worth 1000 words, but in this case we ask you to shorten it to 800. Along with word themes which are to be true stories or essays, the picture theme is a chance to let your imagination take you where you want to go. Of course, you can write a true story if that is what the picture evokes from you, anything goes! Below are some selections chosen for you. If you want to receive a complete packet submit a story. New picture theme topics are posted at the end of this section



### **Visitation by Gary Farlow**

Sunday afternoons always passed in a blur. The other days all seemed to drag endlessly as Tammy waited impatiently for the hour to finally arrive. The hours when she and Tyronne, 11 and Tasha, just 4, would make the two-hour drive to the state prison to visit Curtis, her husband, the children's father.

Tammy tried to make the ride a pleasant one for the children. Tasha could be easily distracted but Tyronne was at that age where children, especially a boy, wanted answers. With no father, and only her as an income bearer, Tammy despaired. She had to hold down two jobs just to keep the house, pay the bills, but it required her to leave the kid with her neighbor, old Mrs. Webster, who Tyronne would simply leave and had taken up with a group of teens who were rapidly becoming a gang of delinquents.

She knew it was becoming a real problem when police paid her a visit to report her son had been caught shoplifting from the Korean grocery. Old Mr. Loo had always been kind to Tammy and the children and refused to press charges, so the police suggested she get the boy some "help." Help? She needed help.

All this ran through her mind and with a heavy heart, she shepherded the kids into the prison visitation room.

Tammy settled the two youngest then went to the overpriced vending machines and purchased sodas and snacks for all then waited for Curtis to appear.

When Curtis entered the visitation room, he smiled as Tammy stood to be taken into his arms Little Tasha was bouncing in her seat callin "Daddy, daddy!" Tyronne wouldn't mee his father's eyes, just sat staring at his lap.

After kissing his wife and daughter, Curtis sat looking at his son who would still not meet his father's eyes.

"Hey little man," Curtis said. Tyronne did not answer. Curtis' eyes went to Tammy questioning, what gives?

Tammy's own eyes filled with unshed tears. Little Tash talked non-stop, filling the uneasy silence with her chatter. Curtis drank his soda, his eyes never leaving his son. The boy had not touched his soda or candy when just recently, he would have wolfed down any sugary treats and begged for more.

Having exhausted herself, Tasha crawled into her mother's lap and was soon sound asleep.

"She went to school last Monday and for show and tell, told her class she visited her daddy in prison," Tammy told Curtis.

He frowned.

"Her teacher sent a note requesting a conference, but I was puttin' it off," Tammy said.

Curtis sat watching his son. The boy had remained quiet and still. Curtis and Tammy exchanged looks. Tammy finally said, "I'm going to take Tasha out to the car. Give you men some time. See you next Sunday, baby." Tammy left toting Tasha.

When Curtis was alone with Tyronne, he asked his son, "Wanna tell me about it?"

A slight shrug lifted the boy's slight shoulders. Finally, he lifted his head to several tear-stained cheeks.

"Why are you crying?" Curtis asked his son.

"Mama's trying to take care of everything Daddy."

"I know."

"But she cries every night. She can't do it all." Tyronne said.

"Your mama told me you've been in a bit of trouble?"

"Yep.

"What happened?"

"Some guys in our neighborhood, they was takin' stuff at Mr. Loo's. Daddy, I didn't. Honest!"

"I believe you son." Curtis told the boy.

"You do?" Tyronne couldn't believe an adult finally believed him.

"Yes, tell me what went down."

"I went to Mr. Loo's to ask him for a job, you know, to help Mama so when I went in, I saw a group of guys my age and a little older. All with that dude, Derek. They were swiping candy bars while they had two keeping Mr. Look busy so he wouldn't see..."

"What did you do?" Curtis asked.

"I pushed Derek and took all the candy and was putting it all back when they all ran out and Mr. Loo was standing there. He grabbed my hand, took the candy, and told me not to come back."

"So how did the police get involved?"

"Next day, Derek and his bunch tried the same trick, so I allowed 'em. When I stopped 'em again, Mr. Loo thought I was back stealing but wouldn't listen to me and called the cops."

Tyronne sat there, spent.

Curtis watched his son. "Tell your mama everything you just told me. Tell her I said to go to Mr. Loo, take you and tell him. I'll call your Mama tonight. Come next week and tell me how it goes. I Want to hear from you and see you as you tell me."

The next Sunday as Curtis entered the visitation room, he immediately noticed a difference from last week. Tammy and Tyronne and smiles of megawatt nature.

"Hey daddy, guess what?" Tyrone said, before anyone else got Curtis's attention.

"Tell me," Curtis smiled.

"I got a job!" Tyronne said proudly.

"A job?" Curtis asked.

"Yep! I work Mr. Loo after school and on Saturdays!"

"Don't let your studies suffer," Curtis cautioned.

"Aw, daddy, I won't."

"He's doing so good now. Thanks Curtis."

"Hey, he's my son too, remember?"

"Oh, he's just like you—he says he's the man of the house," Tammy laughed.

"Just til you come home, daddy," Tyronne said.

"Then, I'll be your wingman."

They all laughed.

"Remember son, always do the right thing and you'll never see the inside of this place. I'm proud of you."

### **I Made it to the Gate by Teddy Lewis Jr.**

O.K. O.K. so the day finally comes and after all the misery, the trials and tribulations, the department of corrections has decided to let you go home.

Ater grabbing and assorting all of your property, including your human body which the courts rule is also a form of property...its back to the streets where after all the time you did, you can sense what society is really like now, determined efforts in many things can innovate and cause success for the believer, who is I.

Don't be afraid to start wherever the bus stops at and lets you off probably 40 ST and 9th Ave, right across from parole but so what? Remember the former incarcerated and current are concentrated energy, capable of great things. Despite the odds against you, you made it to the front gate for a reason.

Peace.

## **Convict Chronicles by Leo Cardez**

This past Valentine's Day night, I lay unable to sleep (again!), my monkey brain swinging from branch to branch, thinking of love which, of course, brought my thoughts to my ex, Dea. I lay there staring at the ceiling of my 6x10 concrete box imagining different futures where we were still together, where I still felt the gentle love of a woman. Dea was the One, or so I thought before my arrest. She was a stone cold 10; I was an aspiring 7...at best. I called her Tiny because even in her high-heeled boots she barely came to my chin. But her aura, a mix of sexiness, intelligence, and innocence, more than made up for her miniscule frame. When I told her I was going to spend over a decade lost in a human warehouse, I remember thinking how rare it must be for someone to look so beautiful and unhappy at the same time. She wanted to stick it out-God bless her-but I let her go. It was the least I could do. It was the right thing to do. But not a day passes that I don't hate myself for it. Desperate for a distraction, I got up and turned on my small personal TV. An infomercial huckster was pitching holy water packets as a miracle cure. Like a modern-day snake-oil salesman, he promised it would make everything better. When everything else failed, when you had nowhere else to turn, water packets would save the day. In that moment, I wished it were true. I would buy a case. My swinging mind grabbed at another branch, and I remembered an essay I once wrote for a World Religions course. I had argued that many religions share similar traits. They often echo the message of the TV huckster- when you feel all is lost, we have the answer- and they lean on the importance of love. Sitting in front of the tiny TV, I had a light-bulb moment. But first, some context:

Prison was my rock bottom. I lost love from others and for myself. I felt two inches tall. My friends deserted me, my family was ashamed, and my career was destroyed. Society said I was unworthy and dangerous. I was labeled subhuman. I lost everything (even hope and purpose) and failed to recognize myself in my own reflection. I turned to religion and returned to my Catholic roots. But soon I began to dabble in other faiths including Seventh-day Adventist and Born-Again Christianity, before landing on Unitarian Universalist. I was a cliché jailhouse convert, but I could be forgiven. I was desperate for something I couldn't quite articulate. I had nothing and no one left. I was unmoored and drifting out to sea in the darkness of a moonless night. I needed an anchor or a compass- I settled for a captain in the clouds. Cut back to me in my cell. That night, alone with my thoughts and searching the secret chambers of my heart for clarity, I realized what I had been searching for those many years ago was simply love. Not just any kind of love, I needed the metaphorical unflinching love of a mother. No child has ever fallen deeper into a well than when outside the reach of their mother's love. When the world shuns the

inmate, when the steel doors slam closed behind him, when his friends disappear, when no one deems him worthy of mercy or sympathy, when the world has moved on, the mother's love endures. She stands by her child against the world. She visits him in the concrete jungle. She searches for him in the crack houses. There is no place a mother's love cannot reach. No cave too dark. No well too deep. That kind of love is the kind promised and personified in so many of the holy books. But it's not just about receiving love, we must also give it. Real love is a two-way proposition. We are social creatures by nature, built to give and receive affection. We've always known this, even in the Vedanta scriptures, which are thousands of years older than the Old Testament; we are commanded to share our love with others.

Love your neighbors, it demands - and we are all neighbors because we are of one spirit. Until we embrace this exchange of love among all of humanity, we will never cross the divide or fill the void, and we will continue to see unnecessary pain and suffering. Human laws and politicians have failed to address this critical aspect of our existence. These religions, for all their differences, fundamentally recognize that what the world needs is simply more love. Okay. I hear you, Universe. Right then and there, I decided to live my life full of love-love for others, of course, but also love for myself. And that meant forgiving myself and letting go of the past. The next thing I knew, it was morning. I felt as if a weight had been lifted. Was there something supernatural at work that night? I have no doubt. I don't struggle to fall asleep anymore. I rarely think of Dea anymore. When I do think of her, I don't long for her affection. Instead, I close my eyes, send her my love, and hope that she has found new love. Then, I fall asleep like a baby in its mother's arms.

## **Camera Through the Fence by Chrome**

"Look this way for the camera."

Lashauna turned her solemn, tired gaze over her smooth, glossy dark shoulder. It said something that the sheen of light from behind her mixed so well with the dark shadows near the chain-link fence, so he took multiple photos.

"Jermaine, can you not do this right now?"

"But this is the best time to do it." "How is this the best time to piss around' wit yo stupid camera?"

"Cuz real emotion is what the camera craves."

"Don't talk stupid like that in front of daddy,"

Lashauna said softly while turning back to the fence with great difficulty.

"Dad'll be happy to have photos commemorating this victory."

"Ha," she sighed. "Some victory."

"You've got to frame it as a victory if you want to feel happy about today."

"... did you just make a fuckin' photography joke?!" she said gripping the fence, so it rattled.

"Huh? Oh. No. Wit da 'frame it' thing? No, no. I just meant you gotta look at it the right way."

Lashauna leaned over, pressing her face into the fence. She seemed unable to relax her grip on the chainlinks. "I don't think there is a right way to look at it."

"Well, I think it's right that we're here to meet him. I think it's right that he'll be able to support mom through chemo in person."

"I dunno," Lashauna's voice cracked. "It's been so long. When daddy went away, I was just a lil' virgin girl with enough plastic in my braids you could hear me walk a mile away."

"Neither of those things lasted long."

"Shut up before I smack the dog shit ouch yo mouth! You don't know. You was young 'nough for me to still be wipin' yo ass for you."

"Look at it this way," Jermaine said fussing with the camera lens. "Dad ain't 'coming back' cuz he was never really gone. He didn't leave us. He was still there for us; but now he'll be here for us."

Lashauna slowly, quietly let go of the fence.

"Yeah."

"Just look happy when dad comes out for the photos."

"Thanks, Jermaine," she said with a sideways glance.

Just then, the doors beyond the fence opened. Jermaine stood at attention and aimed his camera through the fence.



### **An Excursion by Alan Piowar**

"Wait for me!" I screamed. Sarah and I would go on those weekend excursions, adventures, really, into the nature that surrounded our little area of life. When she wanted to escape the hustle and bustle of city life, and when I needed a getaway from my mundane life as "Alan: super-cripple extraordinaire," we would go mostly to the beaches and sand dunes of Northwest Indiana, and

sometimes further. Sarah was a paralegal, and the daughter of an Irish Southern Baptist Minister Father, and a Korean dressmaker mother. I was the only son of a single mother who tried her best, and the brother of an evil twin sister who for a while I loathed, but now love more than ever. When we took this particular adventure, we were both nearing 30 and both unaware of the changes our lives would soon take.

At 21, I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis. I had to learn how to walk all over again, use a cane, and adjust to life sleeping in diapers cause my bladder all of a sudden developed a mind of its own. Sarah was a swimmer in high school and always kept herself in shape. So, there I was 50 feet behind Sarah, nearing the top of this sand dune we were climbing. We had driven this time from our south suburban area of Chicago a few hours into Michigan to Warren Dunes state park to celebrate our favorite holiday at the time: 4:20! I'd finally make it to the top of the hill, and Sarah and I rested for a minute before heading into this wooded area on top of the huge dune we just scaled.

We find a path and head into the wooded area on top of the dune and hike on for about 200 feet when Sarah decided, "O.K., this looks like a good spot!" I look around and she is standing in a small clearing in the forest that is covered with these curious bright green vines sprouting up, across it. I take a closer look. "Sarah," I say, "didn't you ever see that episode of the Simpsons where Lisa Simpson says, 'leaves of three let it be?' I'm about 95 percent sure that you are standing in the middle of a patch of poison ivy."

Sarah, being like the 2nd or 3rd in our high school graduating class, having put herself through paralegal studies at Robert Morris, and being able to type 99 words per minute accurately, responds to me – the high school dropout who went back to get his GED, but didn't finish college, "Alan – if this was poison ivy, would I do this?" Before "this" can finish on her lips. Sarah pulled up a handful of the bright green vines, crinkled and rolled them in her hands like she was preparing to apply a lion, and proceeded to put this lotion on the exposed skin of her body: her face, her neck, her hands, and her arms. "There," she continued, "nothing!"

"Alright," I say, "but I'm going to sit over here, outside of the poison ivy!" So, she sits in her poison nest. I sat 5 or 6 feet away from it, and we pack a bowl and toke up. We sit and chat for about 4 to 5 minutes, pack another bowl, and the entire time we sit and shoot-the-shit about life, it's meaning, and where we are headed, Sarah continues to pick and dissect the leaves of this green viney plant, ruining the ground in the clearing she chose to sit in until we decide it's time to go.

We walk back in the direction from whence we came and break out of the trees and stand at the edge of the sand dune we had just climbed up an hour or so earlier, and Sarah says, "Let's roll down the hill!" The inner child in me agrees and after making sure all of our belongings are

safe and secure inside our messenger bags, we throw them down the sandy hill before we throw ourselves down and begin rolling. Rolling stoned down a huge sand dune when you're nearing 30 takes you back to being a child – if only for 5 to 6 seconds. For those of you seeking a time-traveling device, this is the closest I've ever come to it.

We reach the bottom of the sand dune, brush as much of it off of us as we can, and head toward the car to say goodbye to the Michigan shore of Lake Michigan.

On the way back home, we decided to stop at our favorite Applebee's outside of our neighborhood to eat good. Over the spinach and artichoke dip appetizer, Sarah says, "I can't wait to get home and upload these pictures." I say, "Me neither," and Sarah and I enjoy dinner and then she drops me off at home before heading back to her apartment on the North shore of the city.

I get in the house after smoking another bowl, decide a nap is in order since it could be a few hours til Sarah gets in, showers, gets ready for bed, then uploads the pictures of our excursion.

I wake up around midnight and check social media. Nothing from Sarah yet. Maybe she got side-tracked by her friend Matt.

Still nothing from Sarah at like 3 am, so I decided to go back to bed. The next morning, I wake up and check for notifications.

Sarah has posted.

"This is probably the only time I will say this, but I should have listened to Alan," her post reads. Following the post are not pictures of us at the dunes, but pictures of my best friend Sarah looking like a nightmare Tamagachi balloon at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. Her fair complexion held out as long as it could against the "it's not poison ivy" ivy, and then not only was she itching and scratching, but the poor also dear had to go to the emergency room to have steroid injections to help the swelling. Sarah had once told me the terms "hobak" and "Mal-song" were very insulting to Korean people, meaning pumpkinhead and horseface, but there was Sarah, the epitome of a pumpkin head. If she ever reads this story, she will probably laugh, then want to kill me for having it published. But to this day, I've never thrown it in her face. I miss you, Sarah!

### **Searching by James Pierce**

She had sat at the table in the restaurant studying the ancient map familiarizing herself with every road and trail. But somehow, she had strayed off the path and over a barely seen trail overgrown in grass and now she was facing a clear path through the mountain range. The sky above her was spotted with fifty clouds as birds filled the atmosphere with their melodious music. It was her favorite song. It was one she had never forgotten ever during her

incarceration; she was destined to find peace and solitude. She had to find herself.

She continued along the path, enjoying the silence, listening to her own thoughts. There weren't any clanging bars, foul languages, alter egos, and no one was in control of her life. She came upon a huge boulder having a flat surface and climbed on top of it, removing her backpack from her shoulders, laying it on the boulder's surfaces, opening it and began removing a few contents when she came across her journal. She unlatched it, opening it to her latest entry and began reading ...My heart has been incarcerated for all those years. My love has been locked away. I am physically hidden among so much hatred. I am searching.

A gentle breeze fluttered through the air, carrying the sweet aroma of exotic places transforming her natural world into a miraculous Eden. A whistling of a love song. She closed her eyes, imagining a world without chaos and craving a gentle peace from within her soul. In the distance, footsteps could be heard walking through the garden. Was it Adam or Adonis: she was searching.

She opens her eyes, noticing her surroundings. She was finally experiencing true freedom. She noticed the trail continued to wind its way through the mountain range like a life. A never-ending river of promises and she had to follow her dreams, desires, fetishes, and hopes, or whatever led her to one desirable thing she had been searching for all those years. It was something or someone incarceration could not drown or kill.

As she sat cross-legged, she began writing in her journal. "The sun's warmth crosses my face, bringing a smile to my face but a loneliness still stays within me. I'm searching for someone or something to feel the void left behind those who have abandoned my heart." She glanced upwards as if she was expecting an angelic answer and before she closed her journal, a single tear fell onto the page. She stood and stared down the trail.

Daylight had begun fading to nightfall. She began climbing down the boulder and proceeded down following the trail searching for a clearance to set up camp for the night. The stars looked down upon her like a guardian angel. She felt safe, alone singing in nature. She was unafraid. She was experiencing freedom and enjoying life within her mind and soul, yet she was still searching. The grass beyond her foot felt like smooth carpet as she walked along the trail. She arrived at a clearance removing her backpack from her shoulders.

She stood staring across the horizon as if she was searching or ever waiting for some superficial event to occur. Maybe even all angelic serenades. She knelt, opening a packet into her backpack, pulling out a bottle of water and twisting off its lead. She turned it, gulping down the cool liquid. She had felt her safe haven for the night. She removed her sleeping bag, laying it out then stretched

out lying on her back, staring upwards at the stars...searching.

She slipped inside the sleeping bag into a fetal position and began losing consciousness, falling into a deep sleep and began searching through her dreams. And as she slept, crickets surrounded her, bringing her back to a time long forgotten. She shifted inside the sleeping bag as a slight breeze sifted through her hair.

A little girl stands outside on a sidewalk looking over a small white wall fence at the beautiful three-story house with its green lawn. She places her right hand on the gate and in her left hand, dangles a key. As she pushes open the gate, stopping inside, crossing the lawn heading toward the house, she stops glancing around, searching for someone to help her make sense of everything, especially whose house she was about to enter—or whose life she was about to enter or whose heart she holds the key to.

The forest trees began wildly thrashing in the wind. Thunder clasp. She jolted awake, glancing upward at the darkening sky. She began grabbing and stabbing her things back into her backpack. She anxiously looked around. She was miles away from any shelter. She knew she would be soaked. She had no chance but to follow the trail. She began rushing along the road, searching for a safe haven. Rain fell like heavy tears. The deities were sorrowful tonight. She had become exhausted, and her body was at the point of surrender, then she saw a cave.

She hurried toward it, hoping there weren't any wild animals inside. She arrived at its entrance and glanced inside, searching for some form of life. But they had been abandoned long ago. It was dark and dense and absent of life, she dropped her backpack, collapsing onto the ground. The silence felt creepy. Her heartbeat echoed off the stone walls. She let her eyes adjust and then glanced around, searching. She whipped her backpack and fumbled inside it, located matches. She lit one searching for food, finding a fern branch and built a fire. The cave was now illuminated with light.

She pulled out her journal and began writing..."In your darkest times, there will always be a light that will guide you down a trail to a safe haven to everyone whose heart you hold the key to. If you are alone and searching, then I am your friend."

### **Stepping into the Unknown by Jason Lee Bayles**

What a sight! Kissed by the morning dew, the landscape projected such a sweet fragrance that would caress one's senses.

A song that echoed through the land with winds, chirping crickets and a faint trickling stream, brought comfort to her solitude.

Touched with the early morning spring chill, Elizabeth took in the breathtaking sight of miles of freedom before her.

Just then a memory flickered through her mind of a time, when, in her dreams, she escaped the hell she lived in, just a year ago.

Cancer had tried to take Elizabeth's life, astonishingly she received treatment that cured her.

The sickness, the emotional torture of dying a horrible death and the thought of leaving her loved ones, were unbearable at times. Elizabeth endured, keeping her suffering to herself, staying strong, not resigning to the idea of death claiming her.

Back to the present....

This winding trail, stagnated landscape, jagged mountains and an endless sky, enveloped with a morning fog; clouding the distance before her, was a minor image of her past.

Just as this natural science surrounds her, so is life filled with winding trails, mountains to climb often leading to despair, and clouded vision...yes, this journey into the wild represents her life. Elizabeth knows it well and will relish every hardship along the way, becoming stronger, because a journey is never easy going, but that journey defines us.

With a smile...Elizabeth tackles her first step into the unknown.

### **Life's about the Journey, not the Destination by Shaquille Davis**

The best thing about life is the adventures we go on. Even if the end result isn't what you thought. But the journey is always better than the end result, to beat obstacles, to see what you're capable of. To be able to grow as a human and be able to push yourself to the limit.

Like climbing a piece of rope, life is so short but fascinating. A person can climb Mount Everest and would talk more about the trip up than actually the top. Just because something is difficult, doesn't mean don't do it. It means have fun and enjoy your way on the journey.

Because that is all life is, a journey and the end result is death. All the people are going to talk about at the funeral is the journey and the fascinating things you've done in your life, so love it to the fullest.

### **Paths by Todd Broxmeyer**

I walk this well-worn path

There are challenges that lie ahead

Some obstacles can be seen

Appearing like mountains in the distance

Others will remain hidden

Perhaps lurking around the next bend

Either way those are in the future

This moment on this well-worn path

I can bask in the silence

Interrupted only by nature's soundtrack

I can feel the light because

That is not quite a chill  
I can be lost in thoughts  
About nothing and everything  
I walk this well-worn path  
Where many have traveled before  
Being utterly alone like I am the first.



### **Silver Seed by Steve De Loge**

Year: 2110 PAE (Post-Apocalyptic Era). A pall of fine dust hangs over the barren moonscape, a byproduct of the automated 3-D printing machines. These massive, track-mounted fabricators are nuclear powered, and they toil non-stop to create the infrastructure which sustains life on the crust of this inhospitable rock. They not only convert the lunar material into structural components, but also power the settlements formed in their wake. I look out from the viewing portal of my housing pod, observing the forever altered form of Mother Earth, rendered mostly uninhabitable after the Lithium Wars, when the wholesale use of fusion weapons completed the breakdown of humanity's ecosystem.

My crime was having been part of a group that hijacked an unused frequency on the lower spectrum of the SW band to broadcast messages. We were charged with unauthorized communication, punishable by life internment and/or termination. The Supreme People's Court didn't consider the crime heinous enough to warrant termination, but serious enough to be sentenced to the LC, or Lunar Colony. In a way it saved my life, because it got me off the planet before the toxins could finish me off.

I've been confined as a Drone in my compact node of geodesic curvature for the last twenty- five years, my only companions a string of ever-changing Ovulators, cycled in and out of my living unit. Ovulators only stay with Drones until conception. They are then moved to the Pediatric Units until the fetus is weaned. There are only three classes of people here: Overseers, Prisoners, and Transfers. The Overseers administrate the lunar operations and select which Transfers will be sent to the Martian Colony following graduation. Only they're not true elites, or they would have been granted asylum. Rarely do they redeem themselves

before the cut-off age. No one over age thirty and absolutely no Prisoners are allowed to immigrate to the MC. All Prisoners are breeders, tasked with seeding the MC with human replacements. They live only to procreate for the Overseers and are terminated if they fail to produce specimens with unadulterated genes. They must maintain their bodies in optimum physical condition, are subjected to DNA manipulation, and there is no parole; you produce until you cannot, and then you become fertilizer.

The Transfers are nurtured, educated, and indoctrinated until neuroplasticity is deemed Stage IX, then screened for compliance with the stringent requirements of MC citizenship. There is no variance or compromise. Those who fail for personality reasons are re-classed as Prisoners. Those found to have physiological defects are terminated. The fortunate who qualify will be aboard the shuttle to the future.

Jealousy, I watch full transport ships launching, empty ones returning, and I reflect. Ours is a strange existence, void of empathy or mercy. But I can't argue with the logic. We've exhausted our options, and this is the only way to preserve the species.

### **Space Baby by Leo Cardez**

In the year 2270, prisons, as the world once knew them, are obsolete. As the demand for intergalactic mining workers surges (during the 23rd Century version of the Gold Rush), huge corporations have taken over the housing, caring, and security of convicted felons.

All inmates are transported off-earth to space penal colonies to serve their sentence as workers in the mines of Mars and the Moon. Demand for new workers is so high, corporations have been successful in lobbying governments to increase the number of criminalized acts and lengths of sentences. For example, walking your dog without a leash: 1 year sentence; Without dog tags: 2 years; Forget to pick-up after your dog: 3 years; God forbid your dog bites silicone, you could be looking at Life without Parole.

Rebecca, who's all eyes and fire red hair, rides the prison transport toward in-processing; ready to serve her eighteen months for cursing in public. She subconsciously crosses her arms against her stomach, protecting the life that grows inside of her. She worries about her unborn baby. She knows that babies born while in custody can become the property of the Corporation. What she doesn't know, what she couldn't possibly imagine, is that Darius, her ex and baby's father, is riding in the next caravan.

Darius, broken and broken-hearted, joined the Carp, as a Galactic Guard trainee after their break-up. He needed to get as far away from Rebecca as possible, but fate had other plans.

Rebecca and Darius are on a crash course that will not only change their lives, but the lives of everyone in the

world. They will soon learn just how far a parent is willing to go to save their child.



### Sturdy Kids by Howard B. Brown

In my hometown I attended West Brookfield Elementary School (see Wikipedia, West Brookfield, Massachusetts). Going out the hall doors I'd step out onto the black top driveway that ran around to the back of the school. In the back was a black top play area.

Seen first was the Jungle Gym. It's a bunch of pipes put together in a cube shape. My hands gripped a pipe, biceps strained to pull up the kid. Feet helped make the climb up higher, I'd climb the Jungle Gym, despite having a fear of heights.

The next apparatus seen was the tall Swing Set. I may be a bit confused, having seen others, but I believe the Swing Set had long thick chains down to a wooden seat. I don't think the seats were straps. Anyways, I recall pumping legs hard, pulling on the chains, holding tight to swing higher and higher. It was fun to reach the point of the arc. The chain slackens so I'd fall back into a jolted swing down. That was fun.

Once around the side of the building a Merry-go-round was seen. Kids would sit around on the bench seats as some kids grabbed the pipe to pull and push the Merry-go-round on its circular journey.

Over in the back, to the right of the Swings was the Jungle Bars. It has a few rungs like a ladder for climbing to an open spot. From there, arms reach up to grab a rung. Rungs run parallel to the ground. Think of a ladder laying down, but up in the air. Like a monkey we'd reach out to grab a rung, on and on, swinging and hanging by our arms. Once reaching the other side we'd climb down that ladder.

The final piece of play equipment was the Seesaws. That would be a leg exercise. Back in the day, the seesaw was a plank with a T-handle near each end. No safety features then. In comparison, the Picture Theme has Seesaws with back rests, so the rider doesn't fall backwards. There are i-shaped bars to grasp. And looks like a circular piece of wide rubber under the board where the

rider sits. Seeing the down boy, I'd say that the rubber absorbs some of the shock against the ground. Makes me think that kids were tougher back in the day, which leads us to another story.

On the Brown Farm, the family car was a dark green 1953 Chevrolet four door Deluxe.

That Green Chevy most likely is why I prefer Chevies. Although I loved Dad's 1943 Ford dump truck. Like most cars in that era, the Green Chevy had a sturdy steel frame, big heavy-duty bumpers, steel fenders & steel body. The cars were constructed like tanks. The interior had bench seats, no seat belts and a painted metal dashboard. The AM radio provided news and music, in mono, from a speaker mounted under the dash. If you needed to cool off, you cranked down a window. A big steering wheel provided torque to turn the front wheels. No power steering in that Green Chevy. Need to lock or unlock a door, you pushed or pulled the door lock button. I guess as a species, humans were considered hardier, sturdier back in the day, or expendable.

Before going on a long trip, to visit relatives, Mom would rise early to pack her big basket full of goodies. Dad would check the fluids, tires, wipers, horn and lights, then the jampacked picnic basket got loaded.

Dad would be seated behind that big steering wheel when Mom, Ronnie and I piled in. He turned the key. Faithfully, the Green Chevy roared to life.

Dad said, "We're off!", cried the monkey."

The Green Chevy was filled with laughter.

In comparison, consider the features of modern cars. Cars may have unibody construction, small or no bumper, front end designed to crumble for absorbing impact. The interior has seat belts; shoulder belts, airbags and padded dashboard. There may be a digital FM stereo system with speakers sounding as if you're in a concert hall. If you're hot, you turn on the air-conditioning. Power windows go up and down by the touch of a switch. A small steering wheel easily turns the front wheels because of power steering. Power brakes may be assisted by an Automatic Braking System/ You touch a switch to activate the power door locks. Little ones are secured in a booster-seat.

Guess either seesawing or in a modern car, as a species humans are considered weak, fragile, or valuable.

### What's "Normal"? by Gary Farlow

"Are too!"

"Are not!"

"Uh huh!"

"Nuh uh"

"You ain't got a mama!"

"So?"

"You got two daddies!"

The other boy sat quiet on the seesaw.

“My mama says I can’t play at your house anymore.”  
 “How come?”  
 “Mama says y’all ain’t mormal”  
 “What?”  
 “Mormal!”  
 “You mean *normal*?”  
 “S’what I jus’ said dummy!”  
 “Why she say *that*?”  
 “She said y’all might turn me gay!”  
 “That’s stoopid!”  
 “Take that back!”  
 “You can’t *make* somebody gay, they either is or not.”  
 “Your two daddies is gay.”  
 “So?”  
 “Your two daddies is gay.”  
 “So?”  
 “So, you gotta be too!”  
 “No I ain’t! Jus’ cause my daddies are don’t make me gay.”  
 “S’not what my mama says, he taunts in a sing-song voice.  
 “You ever seen me kiss a’nuther boy?”  
 “Oooh! Yuck! No!”  
 “So’s, I ain’t gay!”  
 “Ain’t never seen you kiss no girl neether!”  
 “Don’t prove nuthin’!”  
 “Mama says y’all are *generate*.”  
 “Whas that mean?”  
 “Don’t know, but it ain’t good!”

Silent tears drop down the one little boy’s face. His friends had been his friends since pre-school, and in “kid years” that was a lifetime ago.

“I don’t care if you cry. See! You are a sissy, jus’ like mama said! I’m going to play with some *real* boys!”

The other boy was left alone on the playground, his cheeks tear-stained, and now friendless.

### Brothers Playing by Earl W. Cox

January’s picture sure brings back a lot of childhood memories. Wow! Looks just like my younger brother, Stephen (now deceased) and myself. Every summer, Mom would cut our hair, which would last until school started in the Fall. Afterwards, we would head to our tiny neighborhood park to play. Mom would always admonish me, saying, “Keep an eye on your little brother.” One day, I remember her reading the following Bible verse she’d copied down at my grandmother’s, to us:

*“Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him, and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” [Ecc 5:9-12 KJV]*

Of course, our seesaws [also called teeter totters] didn’t have back boards or rubber tires on them. Also, though our park wasn’t very large, it did have four things not seen in our picture. These included lots of trees to climb; a creek full of worms and frogs to explore; a merry-go-round; and a set of swings. Usually the first two were boys’ territory, while girls played the last two.

Indeed...from early spring to late fall, and of course, both throughout the scorching hot summer months and even the cold winter days, Mom could be heard saying, “You boys go outside and play.” The girls (our two older sisters) could stay inside all day long; but from sunup to sundown, us boys were told, “Go outside and play.”

I remember one spring day in April 1968, our Dad decided to buy us an above-ground, four-foot-deep swimming pool. He figured it was an investment; something that we could enjoy for many years to come. Our only task was to dig the hole for the pool; a task which would take us boys about three months. Not just any hole, either; oh, no.

The hole had to be twelve feet in diameter, and perfectly level. An arduous task, considering the thirty-degree slope of our backyard. In 1968, I was ten years old and my little brother was nine years old. A seemingly monumental, arduous task, indeed. For three long months, at first after school, and then for what seemed like countless hours every day we dug our pool hole until we could finally “go play”. Of course, we also had to weed Mom’s flower gardens and operate our grass cutting “business”.

Yet, our two lives were about to be changed forever. For on the day Mom read that scripture verse to us in May 1968; was the day Mom told us she was pregnant, and expecting a third son. My little brother would one day become my younger brother.

My brother Stephen and I were “thick as thieves”, doing everything together. Oft-times he would sneak into my bed, as we slept on bunk beds, telling each other stories and discussing plans for the next day. I remember one day he stopped a rock with the back of his head, falling to the ground where he lay for a moment unmoving. When I reached to lift him up, he laughed. Exclaiming, “Wow!, as he felt the goose egg on the back of his skull. Naturally, no matter how much or how often we had “fights” all the neighborhood boys knew if they messed with my little brother, they would surely answer to me.

Whether at the community swimming pool, or while digging the hole for our pool; or even pulling weeds or cutting the grass; my brother and I always enjoyed playing on the seesaw most of all. We found if he leaned way back, while I leaned forward, he could bring it down with me dangling in the air. He waited anxiously for me to come back down, so that he would practically fly off the other end. Or the little “squirt” would suddenly roll backwards, causing me to come crashing to the ground. Ouch!!

I remember how broken-hearted he was the summer before when I went away for a week with my Webelos Scout troop to go camping. Unfortunately, that camping trip would create a rift between us that would never heal. Though we still played together more times than not, there was definitely a rift, an undefined separation, that would grow year after year. Indeed, between our youngest brother's birth and our Dad's death, Stephen never joined the Boy Scouts; never went on a week-long summer camping trip; no matter how often we continued to play together. Nevertheless, I loved him always.

### **See Saw by Jack Simpson**

What is a true friend? It is someone who shares your good and bad times. Mike and I shared recess each day on the see-saw. It really helps that we both are around the same weight.

Needless to say, I was the runt of the family growing up. As you would guess it, I am afraid of heights. For some reason the see-saw I wasn't afraid of.

"Alright Mike", I know what you are thinking, as I went up in the air. The grin on his face told me he was about to jump off. No sooner than I got it out than the ground landed on me with a jolt.

He laughed a funny cackle. Then he sat back down and started all over again. You would think I wouldn't give in so quickly. I am a sucker for having fun.

It won't be long before we have to go back to class. Once school was out, we both went our ways.

It has been well over sixty years since we both shared those memories. We met this year. Talked about old times when we were young, How both of our lives landed us in prison.

You can take my health, my youth, and my freedom, but you sure can't take my memories. Here to the days of youth. As I sit in the warm sun, I see it as if it was yesterday. That old see-saw and my friend, Mike.

### **Seesaw by Nate Lindell**

My mind is on litigation right now, so it's hard to flip my brain to fiction. Hence, this:

Yet another regret, the childish ape I once was, and the other ape youths whom I negotiated the schoolyard with. Us young male apes had a game that we played on the schoolyard's see-saws. We would get them up high, then jump off and try to get the other young ape to slam to the ground and bust his butt.

How sad, I now think, the petty games that we played to try and put another down and thus be on top by default.

The games are still going on, in prison.

Now in prison and out, it often involves many young apes, not organizing to lift themselves up but,

instead, eager to drop the "other" young apes to the ground and thus be on top by default.

I'm not referring to black people when I say "apes." Humans are apes, just, supposedly, the most intelligent apes. (I think that a more accurate distinction between humans and other apes is that we are "more sophisticated," as in we do the same things that other apes do but while wearing clothes, while using more refined tools.)

Je suis desolee for this truth, rather than some fiction sugarcoating the same truth. My hope is that those reading this will be more mindful of the apeish games that we can slip into, that make the playgrounds we find ourselves in less...pleasant places than they could be.

I never saw girls on the playground jump off so the other girl busted her butt.



### **Welcome to America by Bryce Huber**

Welcome to America, the American dream.  
Land of the free, home of the brave,  
But what America really is.. is afraid!  
Afraid of the other side, afraid of the rage!  
Mass incarceration, industrial living graves,  
riots in the streets, defund the police.  
But that's not the answer, I promise you that,  
because everyone around me rides around strapped.

Please, people, open your eyes,  
try on some empathy, see if it feels your size.  
What you see on TV is not reality.  
Selling fear on the news, a country without unity.

Welcome to America, the American dream.  
Land of the free, home of the brave.  
But what you see on TV is not reality,  
Unless you're watching the news, a country without unity.  
How come murders in Chicago are something we don't see?

If those were white kids, it'd be national TV!  
Just like school shootings and gun control issues,  
leaving parents of the dead holding wet tissues!

Why'd it take a pandemic with nothing to do...  
for people to understand what Kaepernick knew,  
Would George Floyd's death, with millions of views...  
Open the eyes of the ignorant, too?

### **What Happened by Shaquille Davis**

Remember when the flag used to mean something.  
People used to respect it. So much has changed, even the  
word American lost its power. All the politicians and ignorant  
people, watering down what it means to be an American.  
We all know the dark past, but it's about the future. On how  
we can come together and move as one.

Because that is not where we are in America, we  
fight and kill each other over the stupidest stuff. Like our  
enemies in other countries that want to kill us ain't bad  
enough. Greed rules now, being about who has money, has  
power. While the ones that don't can't even get proper  
healthcare.

It's time to come together and fix America and bring  
back what it means to be an American.

### **An American by Vicki Hicks**

Ask anyone who knows me and they will tell you I am an  
American through and through. I bleed Red-White-Blue. I  
decorate my home in Americana with flag plaques, curtains,  
and wreaths. a huge wooden American flag is attached to  
my front porch.

Now that you know, without a doubt, just how much I love  
our flag, I want to tell you a story about our great flag.

I work for P.R.I.D.E. Industries in one of their optical labs  
here at Homestead C.I. There is a dry erase board hanging  
on the wall next to the office. I created a calendar with thin  
strips of blue masking tape. Each day, I am tasked to record  
how many jobs we ship and our percentage of breakage.  
When there is a holiday and we are off, I decorate the  
square to correspond to the holiday. Note there is a civilian  
supervisor who jokes around and adds numbers or erases  
things from the board.

This past November, we observed Veteran's Day on Friday,  
the eleventh. I drew an American Flag in the square. The  
next thing I know, Mr. Jokester had the eraser and markers.  
He turned our beloved flag into a Puerto Rican flag. Now,  
there is nothing wrong with that flag. I didn't think it  
belonged on Veteran's Day.

He meant it as a joke, but I took it to heart. I began to cry in  
earnest, the kind that makes your whole body shake. To me  
it was defacing the symbol of our freedom.

My son fought in Afghanistan to protect the very freedoms  
and rights we take for granted every day. So this act truly hit  
home for me.

I went to my supervisor and explained why I reacted the  
way I did he apologized and all is well."

### **Do You Feel Proud? by Rolf Rathmann**

That was the question I was asked by my cousin as  
we strolled by the American Embassy in The Netherlands.  
The year was 1983. I had just graduated from High School.  
Mom had scrimped and saved on her meager salary to send  
me to Europe as a graduation gift in order for me to get to  
know her family. The U.S. flag - *Old Glory* - hung limp in the  
unusually hot summer afternoon.

"Does seeing the flag make you proud?" he  
repeated in his perfectly clipped British-English. He was  
asking with complete and honest curiosity. No sarcasm. Not  
disdainfully. At the time - America was revered in most  
"Western" nations - seen as "the good side," no doubt  
thanks in part to President Reagan's "The Evil Empire"  
speech.

I diplomatically (no pun intended) considered my  
response, then opted for a casual shrug of the shoulders. I  
was of the mindset that I wanted to "fit in" as much as  
possible into European culture. I wanted to be Dutch! And I  
was acutely aware of the obscene fervency in which  
Americans boasted overseas. I was NOT going to be THAT  
tourist.

To be honest though, I had never given it much  
thought - what the flag represented. It was the flag I said  
allegiance to throughout all of Elementary school. It was the  
flag that Francis Scott Keys poignantly wrote about. An  
enduring symbol. But pride. I took it for granted. "I guess." I  
replied. Blasé.

Pride can be a touchy thing, sometimes a  
nebulous, pie-in-the-sky ideal, other times an emotionally  
charged, or even sinful word, (if you are going to a  
Conservative Christian church service in prison.)  
At the time I was asked that question, we'd barely come out  
of the Seventies, having cumulatively gone through four  
years of the Iranian Hostage crisis, an oil embargo,  
President Jimmy Carter, and finally the 1980 Winter  
Olympics in Lake Placid, New York-with the U.S. Ice Hockey  
win over Russia. Pride was up-and-down, a fleeting  
concept.

But, through the prism of age and education and  
discernment, I can look more accurately and honestly at  
what has happened under the Red, White and Blue.

We are the only country to drop not just one, but TWO Atom bombs, killing tens of thousands. Yeah, it did end the War, but I guess one wasn't enough of a message? And on the European front, we as a nation, despite reliable rumors of the mass killing of Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, and any other "undesirables", stayed on the sidelines until we were affected by war. To be fair, it just wasn't us as a Nation. The Vatican didn't take a stance, and much of Corporate America, as history has now shown, stayed silent.

We dined off the backs of the gruesome slave trade - okay, so did most "civilized" Western Nations - (using the word "civilized" with extreme irony). But just taking a look at how that affected our country long term - the vestiges of which still reverberate with stunning effect for people of color in our Nation. Shouldn't we have evolved past the point of "Firsts" in popular, sports, and political theaters? The first person-of-color to (win an Oscar for..., obtain a Gold Medal in, become CEO, of..., nab a Grammy for..., walk the moon, be nominated for the Nobel..., invent a..., deliver the Inaugural poem..., become President...) I'm tired of living in the times of Firsts; I eagerly await our evolution. Growing up in Southern California, my education was VERY white. All of these are systemic problems that were born from our "original sin" of slavery.

And then there was the Trail of Tears, God Lord in Heaven. I don't even remember learning about that in school. It wasn't until prison that I learned from a buddy of Native heritage about that horrible forced migration.

Pride, what a luxury. What a thought. The thirteen stripes, the fifty stars.

But give me the Olympics, wow, do I ever become the biggest flag waving sports fan of even the most obscure sports such as Curling and Skeet Shooting; even sports I don't typically watch, such as basketball, I'm all in, "U.S.A! U.S.A!" I will scream at the television, counting the numbers of Golds we win opposite the Germans or Russians. Glean in pride dripping with patriotic fervor!

9/11 brought out a collective Pride-in-America. I soaked up the warmth overseas, the empathy shown the world over towards this cataclysmic terrorist attack - (long sigh) - until Abu Graib happened. That luster lost its warmth. Quickly.

I know I'm actually more patriotic than I give myself credit for. When we as a nation all sat transfixed to the boob tube watching in stunned silence the January 6th attack on our Nation's Capitol, I actually wept. To see a Confederate flag being waved in Statuary Hall - I couldn't believe what was happening to our country, and in the very Halls of Democracy. Of Freedom. The very essence embedded in everything the American Flag has come to represent.

I do love *Old Glory*. And here's the bottom line - for me it represents the ideal of Freedom of Speech. I know that I can express myself on these pages, (so long as I'm

not spreading falsehood, slander, or inciteful comments), without the fear that if government leaders do not like what I have to say, I will be hauled away never to be seen again. I love that freedom. It may be a sometimes-tenuous freedom, but it endures.

I am grateful to a military that has fought for that flag and all it represents. And I am grateful, in spite of the many problems we have yet to resolve as a Nation, to be living in a country folded up in the United States flag.

*(It occurs to me, Prisoner Expressers, that in my usual rambling, freewrite style, I brought up a lot of weighty, meaty topics such as systemic racism. In re-reading my piece, I certainly don't want to minimize the role for which Systemic racism played - and I have partaken in it. In pointing out long standing structures in place, I was not as artful as I would have liked in succinctly grasping for concrete examples of existing problems. Additionally, my Mom, in her matter-of-fact honesty, did remind me, as I told her about this piece, that it was the Americans who saved her country in WWI, all in the name of what our flag stands for. And so, as I write this piece on Veteran's Day, I say thank you for fighting for our freedoms, for your service - so many of you fought for the very right that all of us here at Prisoner Express enjoy - the Freedom of Self-Expression.)*

### **Old Glory by Jack Simpson**

The day I went into the Army was one of the proudest days of my life. While stationed in Virginia, I met a young fellow who only stood a little around five feet tall. As a group of soldiers, we were asked one question, "Who is willing to carry our flag, "Old Glory", when we march? Our Commander asked. No one wanted to do the job. It was on my mind.

The young fellow stepped forward and stated, "I would be honored, sir." Now, at around five feet, a lot of thoughts went through the others' heads. Would he be able to hold the flagpole while marching?

Our commander spoke up, "Look at this man. We have one who is shorter than anyone here who is willing to carry our nation's flag. I find him taller than any man here." "What is your name, soldier?" he requested.

"Sir, my name is Private Ross. Sir" "Then you will carry our flag. I'm proud that you stepped forward," our Commander stated.

When Ross led our platoon on a march, everyone knew when we came by. Our flag waved proud and strong. Smiles could be seen on all of our faces. Our voices let everyone know that we all were proud of "Old Glory."

### **Indivisible: impossible to divide or separate by Dúng Nguyễn**

I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible to liberty and justice for all.

The Pledge of Allegiance comes to mind when I look at a picture of Old Glory in Prisoner Express' Pic Theme for December. I apologize if I got any part of the Pledge of Allegiance wrong. I mean no disrespect. The last time I said the Pledge of Allegiance was in 7th grade in junior high school in 1987. From 1st grade, 1980, to 7th grade, everyday in class I would stand next to my desk with my right hand over my heart repeating aloud after the teacher. Never once did I ever give its words or importance any thought. Truthfully, I haven't thought about the Pledge of Allegiance all these years until today when I decided to write the December Pic Theme. I asked four people what comes to mind when they see the American flag...racist, narcissist, patriotism and broken promise. Their answers come right from their living experience in America. To me, the American flag represents everything my parents hoped for when we, along with other Vietnamese families got in a fishing boat leaving war torn Vietnam in 1977. My family and I arrived at San Francisco Airport in 1980. From 1980 to 1987, we lived in San Jose, California. In the start, seven years living in San Jose through hard work and government assisted programs (welfare, Section 8, food stamps, Medicare) my parents saved enough money to buy a food truck and go into partnership with another family opening up a Pho restaurant in Modesto, California. Growing up, my parents used to always tell me, "We left Vietnam and worked hard so you and your brothers and sister could have a better future. All that we accomplished will be yours. Once you finish school." My answer was always, "Yes, I know." My parents sold their food truck and restaurant in 1992 when my mom got a brain tumor and a stroke during surgery to remove the tumor. By then, I was married to a beautiful woman with a baby girl and also a full-blown addiction to crack and crank. Along with my drug addiction, I was also a violent criminal. Me and my wife had another baby girl, sadly I don't even know the date and year she was born. In '97, I met Katie and lied to her that I was not married. In '99 Katie got pregnant with our first child and that ended my marriage to my wife. In 2000, Katie was pregnant again with our baby boy. By now, meth and violent criminal activities consumed my daily life. In '00, during the act of armed robbery, I willfully killed someone I knew after I took his money so he would not be able to call the police or my parents to tell them that it was me.

In 2001, I was rightfully sentenced to life without the possibility of parole for charges of first-degree murder and armed robbery with Special Circumstance. America and my parents gave me countless opportunities to succeed in life. I passed it all away because I didn't know how to ask for help with my insecurity. Instead of asking for help, I used drugs and violence to mask my insecurity. I love everything about America for what she stands for....freedom, hope and opportunities. My love for her is indivisible until my last

breath, regardless that I am incarcerated for the rest of my life because my actions put me in prison, not her.

### **Amerikkka, The Land of the Free by DeAuntee Poe**

As an African American who was born and raised in this country, I will never say that I am proud to represent it. How can I, when my fore parents were forced to inhabit this soil. Kidnapped and slaughtered, beaten and broken. Manipulated with trickery. Terrified and terrorized into hating themselves and our own, in the name of survival and fear.

Many people, both of color and our white counterparts may wonder why blacks utilize racism as a crutch so often, or even tell themselves that they tire of hearing the same ole complaints from blacks about "The Man" keeping the black male/female down. That we are in the condition we're in because we're lazy, or "We chose to be" or "We want it easy" or the dozen of other racist comments I've heard throughout my life out of pure ignorance and supremacy.

However, in a sense, I AGREE. I agree from the perspective that we are not doing enough as Blacks and people of color to help rectify the injustice and misdeeds done to us for over 526 years and counting.

What I refuse to agree with is, we are in this place in Amerikkka's society because we chose to be. Do you think White Amerikkkans are gonna allow for the people they've taken damn near a thousand years to conquer to overthrow their reign without war?

Amerikkka, do you not realize that anyone who hasn't gained their sovereignty in this country is, by law, a slave to the United States government?

The paleness of our skin doesn't make us a candidate for white privilege. For the hard working citizens in this country who have never gotten a traffic ticket in their lives, that pay their taxes on time, every pay period, but still happen to live below or a smidgen above the poverty line. Have you ever wondered why you still are labeled "impoverished", "white trash" or "lower class"?

Amerikkka's economic system is set on racism, capitalism, bigotry, sexism, and classism, all for the profitable gain of those in the 1%. So how can we be proud to be an Amerikkkan? Amerikkka was built on the blood, lives, lies, and enslavement of others. And she blatantly tosses her triumph into her citizens' faces by celebrating all these fictitious and fabricated holidays. A holiday is supposed to be a celebration of something Holy and Worthy of its peoples' praise.

How can Amerikkka celebrate a man who stole a country from its Natives (Moorish, Indian and Blacks) slaughtered them into submission, then praise his crimes as if he discovered this land and did something great? Christopher Columbus Day.

How can we celebrate past presidents who owned and bought and sold slaves, or implemented indoctrination that oppressed a specific genre of its citizens by law?!

How can we praise a country that continuously slaughters people of color on national TV? How can we be proud to represent a country with the highest incarceration rate in the world, when mass incarceration was built and orchestrated by Ronald Reagan and company to target people of color?

Herein, I ask Amerikkka, how is this the land of the free? Where people have to fight to express their sexual identification. Do we have to be word conscious when speaking or fear civil retaliation, when freedom of speech is protected under the US Constitution?

What is there to romanticize about this flag when countless of my black leaders have been assassinated and exiled for the fight for our peoples' liberation?

So, in my eyes, the red, white and blue represents the blood of my people that was spilled to build this country, the corrupt policing, and white supremacy it takes to control this country. And the fifty stars all represent the fifty states that have gotten away with this shit for the last six centuries.

### **Our Flag! by Jim Bauhaus**

Another thing to fight over. Years ago, people burned this flag, yet had almost no effect upon the politicians running the Vietnam War. It burned again, to no real political effect, against the draft, seatbelts, helmets, etc. The new sellers played this up as important.

It's just a flag, and burning it merely signifies mild displeasure with the politicians. They couldn't care less, but they made it a huge crime to dishonor their flag. Their cops see you do it, they abduct you.

The scariest thing to a politician is an educated voter. Best for politicians is to let taxpayers escape education. Political magic works best on a dull-witted, mal-informed, overly-trusting, attention-deficit working class. Fire excites them, but can't teach them effective citizenship.

Competition between flags does energize progress. But the best for everyone is to invest in human resources rather than let citizens elude serious education at an early age. Knowledge, being in power, is not easy to get.

The only thing holding us back is our leaders: our tricky, cunning, born-rich Gluttons of Privilege and Power. They make education expensive. When it was nearly free, in the USSR, the Russians put up the first satellite. We slobs of the working class are business creators by being consumers. We are given a colorful piece of cloth. We watch it flap in the wind and think patriotic thoughts. Meanwhile, the hereditary rich, the advanced classes and corporate boards buy and sell our politicians as easily as we drink ourselves stupid and buy lottery tickets. They plot international crimes, start wars and pump out whatever

narratives it takes to convince us to go steal, destroy and murder for our politicians' benefit.

Like Winston Smith at the end of Orwell's 1984, I watch the flag flap and listen intently to the static TV in my home that has no off button. A tear squeezes out of my eye at how beautiful it is, and how well our glorious leaders are conducting the never-ending war.



### **Breakfast Ride by Jeff Hovatter**

Morning fog hung stratified high in the hollers. The last week of August often saw the first cool nights of summer after weeks of sweltering days and sultry nights, bringing fog.

Sometimes the fog lay so dense in the bottoms that any speed over twenty-five m.p.h. was asking for trouble. This day, although no sun reached the damp road surface, visibility was good in soft diffused light. The air was cool and still, and the dense green foliage was visibility damp but not dripping.

The first fifteen miles or so of cool morning air passed at my usual pace. Excellent riding on small secondary county roads, with only a couple cars out this early on a late-summer Sunday. Slow through the tiny unincorporated towns, then roll on throttle and up through the gears to cruise at seventy.

Having driven and ridden this route at least five days a week for many years, I knew every pot-hole, frost-heave, and blind turn. The familiarity allowed me to cover the twenty-five miles in about thirty to thirty five minutes. Sunday morning rides to breakfast were my favorite. A big country breakfast with bottomless coffee, topped off with apple pie with ice cream, then a fresh tank of gas, and a full day of riding, steep, twisty roads represented the best of my life.

The mountain rose perhaps seven or eight hundred feet in about five miles of good two-lane highway. Lots of high-speed turns, from kinks to esses to long sweepers, and a couple so tight as to force a ten m.p.h. Speed.

Transitioning left, right, left, dragging pegs at about fifty, then hard on the gas up the steep hill on a half mile straight. The landscape becomes bright, as the crest of the hill is higher than the clouds hanging above the valleys. Beams of sunlight streak through the trees, lighting vestiges of clouds that hang a half mile ahead and slightly lower. Thirty seconds later the sunlit crest is behind me and I'm back under the clouds, speeding steeply down another few miles to a leisurely breakfast.

**Not Quite a Fairytale Endin** by Catherine LaFleur  
(Soundtrack: Avalon By Roxy Music)

George Two Bears was the first man I decided to marry. After graduation, we packed up our things and moved to his hometown in Arizona in the Verde Valley. Our wedding was scheduled for Autumn. Tina, my fiancé's sister, found a tiny house. It was just big enough for my future mother-in-law's eclectic cast off furniture, my upright 1938 Sargent piano, my grandmother's antique Chinese dining table with the carved dragon head legs, and my elderly miniature poodle, Fifi. I would teach school while George worked for the Public Defender.

An idyllic fairytale lay before me. Love would be the happy ending to my escape from the black hole of a childhood enmeshed in a bizarre Christian cult. Except George drove off for an errand in Phoenix one morning and never came home. He was killed in a car accident.

The wedding was rewritten as a funeral service and a honeymoon exchanged for a burial plot. My Vera Wang bridal gown hung on the back of the closet door, a reproachful witness as I lay in bed day after day. George's family worried and fluttered until I stopped answering the doorbell and then the phone.

My fairytale had turned into a sojourn back to the dark sunless forest. A month passed, then six. I only emerged for furtive trips to the grocery store. Fifi needed food. Finally, Tina used the wedding invitation list and phoned two of the four guests listed for my side. I hadn't planned to invite any family. Only these few childhood friends made the cut.

A fist pounded the door. I tried to ignore it. Fifi went into a frenzy of excited barking. Clearly, she recognized the intruders on the other side. "Open up, Catherine!" I heard Rus yelling. Hero accompanied her, "I'm ready to break a window if you don't open up in five seconds.

Stunned, I unlocked the door to see my friends, who despised each other, standing on my front porch. They had flown to Phoenix from the opposite coasts, rented a car, and

driven all the way to my house. I had to let them in, I belong to them.

We were survivors from the commune system of our parents crazy religion. Rus now worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Art In New York while Hero was stationed at a military base near San Diego. Both had conspired to take leave and come retrieve me after a frantic call from Tina.

They took measure of the house and me, and then started cleaning. I was forced into the shower while Hero ran laundry. Rus opened cans and boiled noodles for an improvised supper. After a full belly, I lay on the huge Mission style couch as Rus combed my hair and Hero rubbed my legs and feet. We drank shot after shot of Johnny Walker Black Label and I listened as they talked and talked. We fell asleep in mid conversation the way we used to when we were kids camping out on the beach.

The next morning. We sat on the patio while Fifi moseyed around the backyard. Hero produced George's barber kit and trimmed my straggly hair. He and Rus laid out three options for me. San Diego, New York, or my mother's house in Pensacola. I was silent, considering my options. "I'm going to Jacksonville," I announced. "North Carolina," Hero asked, "You're enlisting?"

"Florida." I responded. "A private school offered me a job as the NCAA Compliance Coordinator. Maybe it's still open."

Which is how I ended up being driven by my friends out of the dark forest and across the country in a U-Haul with a geriatric poodle, an upright piano and an antique Chinese dining table with dragon head legs.

**Untitled By James Bauhaus**

The morning light sheets between the pines as soon as the sun clears the mountaintop. Lori and I burrow deeper under the covers to avoid being suddenly blinded. It's cold, but we have to get packed and hitch-hiking further north. Grateful Dead were playing Seattle and Eugene, for the tree-sitters, though they denied this when asked. We camped out, following them to each concert. Afterward, tree-sitting turned into vandalism so bad that the FBI had to infiltrate + clean out all the tree huggers, lab rat lovers, bear-bile tattle tales, and other anarcho-enviro terrorists. The longer we lived there, the more the Dead regretted having envirosentiments. Lori stayed to go to college with many of the friends of earth and the animal liberation front. These were the first to be shuffled off into cages for research animals to leave. Then they go to the vandals who were destroying the forest-processing machines, last to get caged were the anarchists; giddy people who imagine that a peaceful society could exist without the control of laws.

Then the glare between the pines erupted again, but this time it was intense enough to burn the trees. It was just another law enforcement operation.

### Country Roads by Howard Brown

Finally, Clara Boyd took up roots in Readsboro, Vermont. Her Gypsy van was on a plot of land on the Sokoki Reservation. The land being a gift from her tribe.

Clara's Gypsy had been purchased when a caravan of Gypsies rolled through Vermont. Clara used to get strange looks when camping on the side of country roads. She responded with a prideful smile. She was proud to be a Sokoki, even though she had no roots. Yet, the land had once belonged to her tribe. Now, such camping, staring, and wandering is a fading memory since she settled on her plot.

Readsboro is her favorite town, not just because she lived there. The country setting offered a geological variety to please her eyes. One moment she'd pass Green Mountain National Forest. The next moment, like today, she'd be driving her old green Chevy along a country road. Her young daughter Ada rode gazing out the window. Both smiled at the scene seen as the country road curved left. On the left is a hill that had been cut into to make room for the road. Evergreens still stood on that bank. The country road had been cut through a forest, so evergreens stood on the right. Yellow sunbeams streaked through gaps in the trees. Clouds could be seen around the bend. Perhaps clouds as a warning sign of a storm brewing.

Clara loved driving down country roads with trees on the sides. Along with that joy, she was happy to be on the way to visit her brother. Memories of their youth came to mind. James Boyd was twelve years her senior. She looked up to him for guidance.

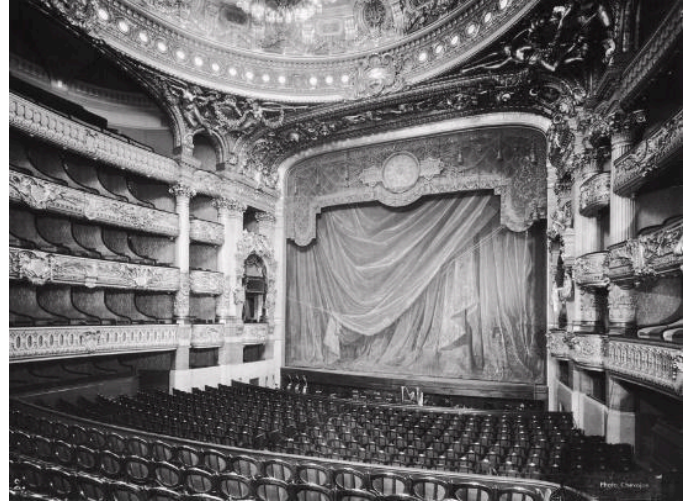
However, James had frequent spells of breaking things. Once he got mad at Clara, so her precious ragdoll became limbless. Stuffing hung out. Despite her heartbreak, she loved James. He was her favorite of many siblings.

While driving she thought of the violent spells James had, spells were warning signs just like those clouds ahead. Unfortunately, the warning signs weren't needed. A spell storm had broken out. That's why Clara rode with Ada on the way to visit James. He is serving ten years for manslaughter.

Clara continued down the country road. She planned to have a talk with James about warning signs. A talk about how life is like a country road having curves, side roads, that may take us in different directions. The driver must accept responsibility for the roads taken.

### Upcoming Picture Themes

Due 10/24



Due 11/24



Due 12/24



**Due 1/25**



**Due 3/25**



**Due 2/25**

**Final Notes**-I hope the newsletter did an adequate job of explaining who and what PE is and what we do. Many people write with all sorts of requests and while in our hearts we want to help everyone, if we try to be all things to all people we will fail. We have resources to do what we advertise and on occasion we stretch to accommodate requests that are not part of our regular offerings, but mostly we just keep moving forward on our initiatives. If you are reading this any time after November 15, 2024, chances are the programs we are advertising in this issue are already in the mail. You have missed this round of mailings. The good news is that if you write you are added to our mailing list and you will receive our next newsletter, "**Winter 25**" when it is mailed. Then you will have a chance to sign up for the programs listed in that issue.

Many times, people write for programs that have already been mailed out. Money is not unlimited, and I feel a need to conserve the resources we do have so we can continue the programs we offer. I am always sorry when I cannot meet an individual's need, but for the good of the program I prioritize completing our programming cycle. No matter when you read the newsletter you can always join the journal program by dating any entries you write and sending them to us. You can always send in your poetry and request a copy of the next anthology. Of course, you can send in theme writings as you please but try to stay within the deadlines if you want your essay included in the monthly compilation. In this issue we have word and picture cues through May 2025

**If you are able to send in a donation, be sure any check is made out to CTA/PE.** The bank will not accept the check, unless it is made out to CTA/PE. Remember, we ask for a \$4 donation to help defray postage if you are to get a book package. Many of you write asking for books without sending in the money or stamps needed. Sometimes when we have extra funds, we waive that requirement, but then the word goes out and we are inundated with requests that we don't have the ability to fill. We do our best with the resources we have and all the other programs except the customized book packages are free. We must raise all the postage and photocopying costs to keep the program going. As the program grows our need to fundraise keeps increasing.

If you are responding to a letter from one of our program volunteers, please include the volunteer's number on your envelope. Please note the difference between programs you must sign up for vs the initiatives you can send your submissions to directly. **It would be great to see contributions to Josie's Invisible Hands Project, Riley's Prison Life Initiative and The Undiscovered Country Radio broadcast Michael is putting together.**

The longer PE operates the more connections we make with other folks interested in providing you with platforms to express yourself. We are all in this together,

and by uniting on a common purpose we can do more good for others and ourselves in this world. I ask you all to be kind to one another, share what you can and heal your wounds through generosity and kindness. It is my pleasure to be sharing with all of you, and I hope you can find some respite from the hardships of prison life through participation in our programs. Your words matter and your voices are valued by your fellow prisoners and the free world readers who read your writings and view the art you generously share with our program. Please keep productive and we at PE will continue to provide meaningful opportunities for creative self-expression.

I care and wish you success and satisfaction.

I appreciate your feedback and suggestions on how we can deliver programs and services that would help you.

Be well -Gary



Jose Aguilar

**What a long, strange trip it's been—Grateful Dead**

**Sometimes the bad things that happen in our lives put us directly on the path to the best things that will ever happen to us. --Paul Millsap**

# Fall 2024 Registration Sheet

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

**Expedited Book Mailings** – Check with the administration of your facility to be sure you are allowed to participate. If yes, please send a check for \$4.00 or some other means that is allowed at your prison to cover postage. Books are free, but the mailing cost is not. List types of books you want, and we will make the best match with our existing collection of books. **Checks should be made out to CTA/PE.**

Please fill in this if you order expedited books:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Number of books allowed  
\_\_\_\_\_ Softcover only  
\_\_\_\_\_ Hardcover and softcover both allowed

## Permissions Form

**I grant Prisoner Express the right to publish, in its newsletters and website, any work including essays, artwork and journal entries.**

**Please check boxes if you wish us to display your work in public]**

that I have sent to Prisoner Express in the past

that I will ever send to Prisoner Express in the future, unless I clearly indicate on the work that I do not want it published.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name/number \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

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

**Poetry Project** – Please send me the next Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology Vol. 30. I understand that to receive the anthology I am required to submit a poem for consideration in the anthology.

**Art Knows** – Come explore the world of art with Treacy. This packet will include instructions for our next art projects

**Building Healthy Relationships** --Learn communication skills to create meaningful relationship with others

**Metal Music-Come join Isa and share in the joy of all things metal:**

**Anime Drawing** – Astro has put together a packet for all you who are or wish to become an anime artist

**Chess Club** – Yes, I want to receive a packet on how to improve my chess game, including strategies and challenging chess puzzles.

**Meditation** – Send the meditation packet including a copy of Pema Chodron's book "Comfortable with Uncertainty".

**Rattle Mag** – Send me a new issue of Rattle magazine [Note: Limited to first 500 responses.]

**Puzzles** – Send me a booklet of puzzles and brainteasers.

**Miscellaneous Essays** – Come explore this selection of writings that were submitted to the program, and were chosen by PE staff to share with you.

**Intro to Chemistry-** Join us for an introduction to Chemistry. Learn about the building blocks of our material universe

**Paper Folding** – Learn to create animals and other shapes by folding paper.

**Human Ecology-** Yes i want to know more about how humans interact with their natural, social, and built environments.

**Supreme Court Bulletin-**This packet for all of you who want to better understand the law and how it can change over time

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# Prisoner Express News

## Summer 2024

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

*Subscriptions are free to prisoners.*

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