

# Prisoner Express

Theme Anthology: July 2025

## Letter from Phoebe

Hello readers! It's such a pleasure to have you here—whether you're one of our writers or readers, an old friend or someone new to the PE community. My name is Phoebe, a student at Cornell University and one of the newest members of the PE team!

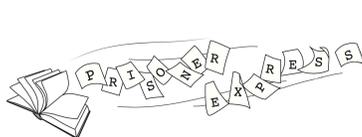
As the eldest daughter in an immigrant family, I've had my fair share of challenges when it comes to sharing. It's been a long journey learning how much to keep for myself and how much to offer to others. From learning (sometimes the hard way) to share toys and attention with my younger brother, to slowly opening up about my own struggles and joys, I've come to see that sharing is a surprisingly profound act. It speaks to our humanity—how we form relationships, build communities, and let ourselves be known to the world.

Reading the essays in this anthology reminded me just how nuanced giving and receiving can be. True sharing takes courage, honesty, and generosity. And isn't it amazing that we can share not just things, but also moments, emotions, and even pieces of ourselves? Each essay offers a glimpse into a life, a lesson, or a memory that lingers long after the last line.

Thank you, sincerely, for sharing your stories and your hearts with me. I hope you find as much meaning and joy in reading this anthology as I did in helping bring it together.

*Phoebe W.*

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## July Word Theme: *Sharing*

### **What We Share, Jonathan Holeman**

There are some things we would like to keep to ourselves. There are many things that might be better off kept to oneself. There's a delicate balance in what to share and what not to share. For starters, the physical things, what we own, what we possess, those things really don't matter. Not in any meaningful scope of life or time. What does matter is who we are, what we believe, and what we know; there's still some consideration in finding what is better off kept to yourself.

To begin, the physical. What you own. Whatever has no immediate use is not worth keeping. Whatever you are done with, donate. Find a good place for all those books, clothes, and extra furniture. If you're not using it, and someone else can, then why are you keeping it? It is okay to hold on to a bit that's sentimental. A grandfather's watch, a ring, and photographs of special times. There are limits on even the sentimental, however. Sometimes the best way to forget a thing, to move one from suffering, is to do away with attachments. Oftentimes, when we give away all those extra things, we will find ourselves experiencing a kind of joy. It's not as difficult as it might seem.

In life, we all find a bit of struggle, days of sorrow, fear, and all the pain that develops from them.

Much of our difficulties, our sadness comes from simple moments. It's strange how a world-changing event, at times, might not harm us as much as a few cruel words said by a stranger, we never have or will come to know. This is where we find what not to share. If it will cause pain, why bother? Sharing misery by causing pain. That is such a major factor in our lives since the invention of social media. It's also found in the old days of letters slipped into high school lockers. Talking badly about someone behind their back. As a general rule, your negative opinions about anything that someone enjoys, the way they look, or speak, or what they wear, if you're just offering an opinion, and not some sort of help, then keep it to yourself.

What should be shared then? Share what you love, and who you are. Share what you know. Teach others if they are struggling to fix or learn something you know how to do. Share your smiles, share your joys. It's even okay to share the things you fear, the things that hurt, with those you love.

There are times when a whole life passes. A life full of knowledge. A life full of amazing, beautiful moments. Life comes and goes, just like the wind. A life with nothing shared is wasted.

### **Cookie Bandits, Brix Capone**

When we were all kids my mother didn't "allow" us to have sweets unless it was a special occasion. Now I'm not trying to talk ill of my mother, but she didn't restrict our sweet intake for our health benefit but out of greed for herself. She loved all sweets. Anyways, my sister Oso and I were the only full-blood siblings and we possessed our father's "hard-headedness." One night while my dad was at work, my mother had just got some peanut butter cookies. There were five of us kids all together and she gave us each one "and only one."

Me and Oso were not okay with that as we watched her "smack" half the pack. I was seven and Oso was six, mind you. I watched my mother "stash" the remaining cookies on top of the kitchen cabinets. In secret, I told Oso to sneak into my room when Mom fell asleep. My older siblings left for my Aunt's for the night which meant the heist I had planned would only involve Oso and myself.

Mom went to bed. I knew because at some point I put a hole in my wall so that I could see the TV in the living room. When I saw Mom go into her room, I waited for thirty minutes to pass on my digital alarm clock, then I tapped the wall to Oso's room. When it seemed like it took forever for her to come, I opened my door and looked down the hall and there Oso was crawling to my door. I told Oso that she was going to climb onto the counter and get the cookies while I kept watch because for some reason, of all nights, my mom slept with her door open. I helped Oso onto the counter and then backed up to watch into Mom's room. Oso handed me six cookies that I put into my pocket and then I saw Mom start moving. Instead of telling Oso that Mom was coming, I took off running to my room. I saw my mom snatch my sister and whoop her ass as I slowly closed my door. I felt so bad as I heard my mother stomp past my door. I'll tell you this, though, my sis ain't no rat! It's not in our blood! I heard Oso crying through our wall. I took the cookies out of my pocket and I smelled them. I coulda' ate them, but it wasn't in me to be greedy like that, specifically after Oso took the ass whoopin' like she did.

After thirty minutes on my clock went by I crawled to Oso's room where I saw her lying on the floor on her stomach with her head toward the wall. I got her attention and she sat up so I sat next to her and I hugged her and said "I'm sorry" but she was more concerned about the "loot."

"Were they good?" she asked. I pulled all six out of my pocket and gave them to her. Her tears were gone now. She took three and handed me back three. "No," I said and gave her one back. It was only fair that she got the majority share! Right? After that I decided that it was best that I always run "point" on a job and never be a lookout again!

The Bible says in so many words to do what you're good at. If you're good at baking, then bake. If you're good at being a leader, lead, etc. So I lead and plan. You know, it's crazy, after writing this memory, I've realized that my mother died always believing that only Oso was the Cookie Bandit. I did tell her about the "B.K. Whopper Scam" me and my lil brother Cheeko ran on her and she laughed so hard. But the "B.K.

Whopper Scam” is for another theme/another day.

### **Sharing, Jeremy Brown**

Today I shared a soup & a cup of coffee. Later on, like four hours later, someone else shared exactly what I shared back with me. I like to share as a social exercise because it allows you to build social contracts with people, it’s fun, and it expands the compassion inside of your heart towards others.

### **Sharing, Gardner LaMarche**

When I was a child, the comedians struck me as being radical. I’d watch them with amusement, although at that time everything about their performances seemed to be over the top. As I matured, the need for humor in everyday life increased. And I became more appreciative of comedy. I practiced by telling the best jokes to people that I saw on the television, and always sharing funny jokes that I had heard. When I came to prison I used to always share the jokes that I read in periodicals. And then I started to write some stand up one day. Sometimes I’d sit in my cell all day and think of a funny joke to tell. Eventually I was able to participate with the talented comics that work in the field of comedic expression. It’s not always easy to laugh, in my opinion, although I do believe that it’s cool-natured to keep things light. And enjoying a joke is wholesome and favorable to the emotion of love. Sharing jokes is very heartwarming and I am very thankful for the side of life where joking is considered to be good nature.

### **A Bunkie’s Offering, D’Andre M. Morris**

The first time I had a good bunkie, he gave me a percentage of his store bag every time. Free from pay back. It felt nice to have someone share with me. I started to give him half of what I came up with.

I was not used to having things given to me. Besides food, shelter, and a bathroom. Even in the outside community. It tells character for someone to share in a greedy world.

The next bunkie that shared a great deal with me, I gave first, then he showed his gratitude by sharing back. I walked into a stranger’s cell as his new bunkie. Later in that week, I had a few dollars of prison currency. I shared with him. And he gave me his thanks. Then when he got a store bag later on, he gave me enough to be satisfied for a week.

I realized doing good deeds opens hearts and means a lot to people, and I myself also. I became a giver.

I had to move out of the last guy’s cell when I got my big store bag. But before I left, I broke bread. A little while after, I became the provider for one of my bunkies. Working in the kitchen, I produce food for my cell regularly.

I got a large dictionary from a bunkie when I started my first novel.

There’s a bunkie who’s a giver like me. Who’s my cellmate as I write now.

I had bunkie after bunkie, most were good bunkies.

### **Sharing, Michael Medina**

One day while I was at group, the facilitator looked straight at me and asked, “Mike, do you want to share?”

The room fell silent.

There are a few questions that catch me off guard: “Did you pay that bill?” “Did you get the clothes out of the dryer?” or “What’s your plans for the weekend?” But this new question delves deep. And for some people, they aren’t ready. But what do I share?

Do I share my past childhood trauma, perhaps? These groups have helped me understand that though I may have not been physically hurt, I have been emotionally scarred. Being left home alone since elementary until someone came home, put me in a state of always seeking attention. When I got home, I locked the door, warmed up whatever food was in the microwave, and did my homework until I was done - then cartoons. I made sure to keep my grades up so whenever I saw my parents, I could show them my hard work, all A’s, before they left for work again. When that didn’t work, I sought attention from whoever would give it to me. Sounds kind of depressing, so maybe I would share things about my college work.

Trying to earn a degree while in prison is much harder than it seemed. The struggle of mailing in homework before deadlines, receiving any feedback in a timely matter, or finding a quiet place to study. Going back to handwriting is tough, but it allowed me to really think about what I write. I think I don't write much, until I have a seven-page paper and everyone looks at me if I went above and beyond. But, with each class completed I receive time-off so that's always a motivator. With each class completed, I move closer to earning a degree. With each class completed, I can feel accomplished and ready to tackle my future. But not everyone can relate so what else could I share?

I guess I can talk about my family. My family just bought a new house and are settling in. They are excited and tell me about all the amenities such as air control, a cellar, and a backyard... with a dog?! They tell me my current room is currently the biggest closet but by the time I'm back, it will be ready for me. My daughter is rockin' and rollin' with her drawings and therapy, while my niece is about to enter university as a freshman. The things I'm missing out on reminds me that prison isn't for me and I need to be there with them to enjoy these moments.

I realize the facilitator isn't looking at me directly anymore but at what's on my lap. My deluxe cookies: half vanilla, half chocolate, with cream in the middle.

There are some things in life I'm not ready to share.

### **Sharing My Mom? No Way!, Veleka Washington**

Many people do not like to share. We are selfish individuals. Don't you want to keep what's yours and not give anything to others?

I grew up as an only child and had 12 years of having any and everything I wanted or needed. There was no one to share with - that is, until my adopted brother showed up.

I wasn't a mean or vindictive child. There was a problem with sharing my mom, though. Another child now needed her time, love, money, and care.

My mom and I are super close. I'm her clone, her mini-me. We did everything together,

but I had to learn to share her with someone who needed her a little more than me.

My adopted brother was older than me. He was 16 and had been without a mom since age 12. Maybe he never had a mom. His bio-mom was an addict and a sex worker. She left him to fend for himself for months alone in a house with no water, food, or electricity.

Neighbors saw him sneaking water from their yard hoses and realized his mom had not been seen for months. My brother never saw his bio-mom again.

We formed the typical brother-sister bond and shared a great relationship through our teen years. Our mom taught us how to be selfless, not selfish, how to have compassion, how to give without an expectation of return. Most importantly, Mom taught us how to put God first. She shared the best of herself.

Sharing is a big part of my life. It's yet to be determined how well my brother and I share it with others. Three years ago, my brother and I said goodbye to Mom.

### **Sharing, Christopher Cross**

Sharing is a noble gem of the heart, adorning the smiling face of friendship. It is a caring hand that lifts one out of the mire of loneliness. It is a helping hand out of a bad situation, or simply a shoulder to cry on, when all else fails. It is a currency between friends.

Sharing is the tender touch of a loving mother, when all else kicks you in the face and spits on you while you're down. In the face of this brilliant, unconditional love melts the icy encasement of the selfish, drug-addled heart. You can tell her your worst, and still she sees and hopes for the best.

Sharing is quiet communion with the Divine. When Shiva dances in the heart, and Consciousness is at play, you can hear the music of your own soul. The small me begins to fade, and the I-AM shines forth.

Sharing is the blessing of watching the immense power of Shakti in the mighty works of Nature. Mountains rise as She breathes upon the earth, and lightning flashes from Her eyes. She roars in the thunder and issues forth the rain. And down in your very body, on a cellular level, even

down to the atom, is Her Work manifest. From big to small, She is Mother of all.

Sharing is a secret smile between lovers, whether we are dancing the Sacred Dance, or simply sharing a thought. When I kiss Your lips, and look into Your eyes, our souls are laid bare, ours to share. Let me drink from Your cup, and get drunk on Your love, relishing your taste, my Goddess.

Whoever you are, whatever it is that we share, let it be noble and true, and full of laughter. Sharing is from my eyes to yours, and your heart to mine, and let it be genuine.

### **Sharing, Cesar Hernandez**

Here at this prison, I feel it's impossible to have an intellectual conversation. I'm not a fan of my neighbors, but I have no choice but to be stuck with them 24 hours a day.

It's impossible to share even the smallest of things about yourself. At the end of the day, ten people already found out.

I am constantly surprised at how much people gossip. I'm always hearing negative things about people. I don't ever hear positive things.

They say that if you can't beat them, then join them.

I don't like the person I'm becoming, but I have no choice. My neighbors are constantly influencing me. I can't go anywhere to get away from them.

### **Welcome!, Gary Farlow**

"Beware the candy bar left on your pillow," was the warning expressed in a film shown to all incoming inmates to prison. The message cautioned one to question the motives of anyone bearing "gifts." It was meant to prevent any unsuspecting inmate from being exploited and abused.

So when I first entered the Hickory CBU, or Character Building Unit, I was taken aback to return from the lavatory to discover a literal panoply of canteen items: Ramen soups, Little Debbie snacks, chips, bars of soap, a can of Coke, even a bag of coffee!

I stood perplexed and quite honestly wondering, "*What have I got myself into?*" You see, MacDougall C.I. is one of several prisons in

the South Carolina Department of Corrections that houses a Character Building Unit or CBU.

These CBUs promote the building of positive character traits by focusing on attributes like defeating addiction, effective communication skills, anger management; relapse prevention, and developing coping skills for positive and pro-social transition. Classes are led by other inmates in a peer-support framework. An integral aspect in each CBU is a MWR (Morale, Welfare, & Recreation) committee who reaches out to all new inmates to essentially be the "welcome wagon" of the unit and provide support in adapting to the CBU. A part of this focuses on providing tangible support in the everyday needs of any inmate.

Nothing is expected nor asked for in return. It is truly altruistic and a perfect example of agape love- that undemanding attitude of care and sharing rarely seen in society and virtually never in a correctional setting. Yet here it was.

That day was over three years ago. Since then, I have been fully welcomed into the Hickory CBU and now lead classes myself and contribute to the MWR through art that is auctioned to raise funds to assist inmates such as I was.

Sharing in prison is often viewed with suspicion. But I have found that first impressions can be misleading and that not all motives are "bad" and true sharing does occur. We can't allow fear to blind us to the good that STILL EXISTS in the world.

### **My Baby Sister, Carl Butterfield**

I learned about sharing by growing up as an older brother. I shared my toys, my books, my games, and most importantly, my mom. Things did not get off to a great start.

When I was almost three, my parents sat me down and told me I was gonna get a baby sister. I remember being alarmed at first. Why would I need a babysitter? Where was mom going? My concern turned to joy when she laughingly clarified her message. A baby sister! This was great news!

A playmate to share my adventures! Yay! Several weeks later, I was introduced to my new sister, Heather. What a disappointment. She was tiny! She couldn't even play simple games. All she did was sleep and cry and make horrible-smelling

messes in her diaper. This was so not what I had imagined. Clearly, this was a case of bait-and-switch. I lodged my complaint with management and was told that I had to be patient, she would grow into the adventuring partner I was looking for.

I'm not sure what they expected from a three-year-old, but I tried my best. Twenty-four loooong hours later I could see no improvement. I went back to the complaint department and with yet more laughter, was told it would take years, not hours. Was she nuts? How could anyone wait that long? This sucked. I tried to ignore my baby sister, tried to pretend she didn't exist. Then something strange happened. The more I tried to ignore her, the more fascinating she became.

I started to notice little differences in her behavior. When I was in her field of view, she smiled. Sometimes, I could get her to stop crying by singing to her. I was naturally gentle and protective and I quickly learned how to take care of her. I became her trusted guardian and I took my new responsibilities very seriously.

She eventually did get bigger and we shared in many adventures, exploring the woods and fields surrounding our home in a way only possible in rural Vermont in the seventies. It was very like "Little House on the Prairie" and a magical way to grow up.

There was the typical bickering at times, but I never stopped being my baby sister's guardian and as long as I draw breath, I never will.

Over the years, we have continued to share. Triumph and tragedy, joy and sorrow. To this day, she probably knows me better than almost anyone and I rely on her as a speaker of the truth, no matter what.

So much of my life has been shared, in one way or another, with her. My current incarceration has placed a strain on our relationship, as rifts in the family have created burdens of loyalty. I hope one day we can be close again and share more adventures together.

### **Sharing, Kelly Messenger**

Growing up I was always told not to be too greedy, that greed is a curse, and that you get

your Blessings back when you share and look out for people in need.

I was just thinking about a few times when I was out there hustling and I got Blessed after looking out for people in desperate need...

Well, one time I was at a Speedway gas station and I saw a man digging in the trash. I wasn't doin' so well myself, I was actually filling up the gas in a stolen car with nowhere to stay, but I felt bad so I gave him a few dollars, and was like "yo! You ain't gotta do that, go get you sumtin to eat."

Just a few minutes later someone hit my phone, talkin' bout "you wanna make some money?!" So I pull up at his house, he has me get in the passenger seat of his car, hands me \$20 and told me his son just got killed... That's all he wanted just to tell someone what he was goin' through, someone to confide in. It was kinda odd, but I listened and let him know I truly cared, gave my condolences and left.

### **Sharing, Anonymous**

I think what you share and who you share it with says a lot about who you are. There's a principle in social psychology that we humans have some kind of subconscious belief that other people have a similar value set deep down inside. If we're naturally shiesty at our very core, everybody else must be too, they just don't want to admit it. Conversely, if we're pretty straight up about shit, we figure the shiesty motherfuckers of the world got a decent human down at the core.

Sharing thoughts and emotions is always uncomfortable. In prison it can be straight up dangerous; even deadly. Express the wrong set of values around the wrong guys and you never know if and when they'll turn on you.

Turns out telling, or at least hinting at the fact motherfuckers are being grimy, burning their supposed 'brothers' for their own short term benefit can put you permanently on the wrong side of your prison community.

So you leave it alone. Let them eat themselves, like that breed of shark where the eggs hatch in the mother's womb, devouring each other before they're even born until only one is left. Pure predator. Eat or be eaten. For them, sharing is a tool. Transactional. Leverage. A trait that is on full display at the very top of the world

food chain – if we are supposedly the most powerful nation on the planet, making our country's top predator the most powerful man in the world.

For the guys who grew up in a literal dog-eat-dog neighborhood where being even a little soft can get you smoked seeing the world as predator and/or prey, you can't hardly blame them. It's the only world they've known. A social reality, inflicted by a world where me and mine survived at the expense of you and yours, a zero-sum game, resources so limited nobody ever gets ahead, not really. Life is like a shark, stop moving, making moves, and you're gonna die. You never give anything away unless you know you're gonna get something worthwhile in return, money, product, or simple respect. Often the best insurance that you can at least slow down, kick back once in a while without worrying quite as much about getting stabbed in the back, metaphorically, or too often, literally. I know a few old timers who've had an X with the words 'stab here' tattooed at the base of their sternum, where the solar plexus is located, where a couple of inches of steel you're gonna hit the heart nine times out of ten.

Then, there's the other side of the coin, motherfuckers looking out for each other even if and when it costs them, sometimes big time. Getting jammed up time and time again, losing face, money, good time. Losing face the worst, as if the never-ending blows to your pride weren't enough. Taking lumps, sometimes literal, more often metaphorical, for mistakes those closest to you have made, leaving you to clean up their mess. Because you forgive them, because you love them, because they're all you have left in a place where the moral arc of the universe that supposedly eventually bends toward good has to contend with the gravitational pull of an ethical black hole where if you slip you're fucked, possibly for life, always on the back foot, other motherfuckers seeing you as a stepping stone on the ever shifting ladder that is prison "respect."

With twenty-five in and thirty-five still to go, it's too early to tell in my case, but I like to think that those of us who share the burdens of this life, hold up, pick up our brothers and sisters when they fall down, even when, maybe especially when it was pretty much their own fault – a moment of human weakness – are the

ones who win in the end. And the reason I believe this is because the true predators among us will never share the hard times with those they depend on to watch their back; refuse to share the occasional failure; take a loss here and there with some grace and humility. Share the weight that makes us human.

Sharing what matters. The one thing we can count on working in our favor when we reach the end, that we won't have to suffer that final defeat in vain, checking out with the knowledge we're going to die alone. Those we shared so much of our prison life with might not be there in body, but they'll be with us until the very end where it matters, in our heart, moving on knowing we did the right thing, sharing the good times and most importantly the bad, right to the end.

### **Sharing, Charles Whitfield**

There are some people who're so finicky they hate sharing ANYTHING with others. These people are ignorant in their own ignorance as far as sharing is concerned; ignorant in their own selfishness, blindness. One would need a barf bucket watching them in action. And it'd be a waste of time getting into an explanation of what the milk of human kindness is.

People who abhor sharing are jealous people. They embrace their jealousy like a lover for they say to themselves "Ooooh! I Luuuuvv my self-love! Eat your hearts out weaklings!" They are their own worst enemies if nothing more.

In conclusion, people who hate sharing are like empty bags trying to stand upright.

### **Generosity, Jeff Hovatter**

Sharing and generosity are traits I associated with being American, until this year.

My rural, hard, scrabble childhood was replete with a culture of sharing. That culture waned after the generation preceding mine. Much of the culture then, I attribute to widespread lack of financial means; poverty, relative to much of the U.S.

People needed friends, neighbors, and family to deal with just meeting basic needs. There was little monetary stratification, so people truly saw each other as allies who could be called on to lend expertise, tools, labor, advice, or moral

support at any time. Often if a neighbor lacked a requested item, for example a cement mixer, they might know someone who had one and could arrange the loan of it.

*"It's all this big money people make now. People used to help each other,"* —Gaylord "Hop" Shaw.

I don't believe the problems we face are new, but there was a cultural expectation of respect for people and property that seems to be lacking these days. Respect for elders was demanded, and predation against the aged was harshly condemned and punished. Children were taught manners, and not to steal, by the time they reached school age.

Hospitality was offered automatically; a cup of coffee, a meal, use of a phone, even shelter in a storm. On one memorable occasion, when a couple unknown to us knocked on our door one night, we welcomed them in as I myself have done when stuck in a snow drift. Decades later, my incarceration showed me a culture change that made me prey for bums, bullies, and disingenuous "neighbors."

"I got you, man." "My sister is gonna put money on my books Tuesday." "I owe a guy, can you help me out, ole buddy?" I've come to think one should never feed a convict just like a stray cat.

The enforced oppression of prison keeps even decent souls impoverished. However, a couple of men I met in jail stand out as very sharing individuals. James invited me often to share commissary in my years in jail prior to being sent to prison.

Also in jail, Stephen moved into my cell and handed me half of a summer sausage without even asking. I had no money for months, but was touched by such sharing.

Stephen was a friendly, open person, who told me of his girlfriend's death when he was notified, with tears on his face... a different kind of sharing.

In prison my situation changed with a prison 'job' that brought me 34 cents per hour. The vultures still tried to take more than I had, many with sob stories and promises of repayment. Later, my situation changed again through a small V.A. disability payment, which was life changing. The biggest change came with the U.S government's stimulus package, which

the prison tried to deny to prisoners. With it, I was able to buy things that made prison less torturous, and even help a sister with unexpected expenses. COVID was horrible, but ironically made prison less miserable for me.

I also became a more cynical and discerning judge of convicts. I never lived in poverty as an adult, which may explain my consumeristic lifestyle and lack of generosity, but not excuse it. Sharing has come to me late in life, and in the unlikely environment of prison. I try to share with those I consider deserving, and despite my discomfort of calling out the bums and scammers, deny those who I feel do not.

I regret not being a more sharing and generous person all of my adult life, as I most certainly could have. Many in my past deserved my help, more so than currently.

### **Please Share Wisely, Marino K. Leyba**

What are you doing?!

Me: I'm just sharing my writing with you.

Today, I went outside and walked in the yard. I watched some little birds fly. They stopped on the ground for a minute and looked at me.

It was nice.

The little things we all take for granted!

Even while we are locked up, we can still share the good thing God gave us.

Look at the blue sky, and if there are any clouds, watch them. Yes, there is not too much to share in prison, yet even a kind word will do.

I'm sharing a little bit of myself each time I write. I'm giving you a piece of my soul. Share with me a little, and let me share with you. The work we do is a picture of what we can be, what we can become.

I want to share with you hope, I want to share light, I want to share what is right. Only we can make each other better by sharing uplifting things.

There is a lot of bad in the world. Do you want to add to it, or put something positive into it? Whatever you share can be for the better if you choose to do so.

So please, share wisely.

## **Sharing Is Everything and More, Hakeem M. Bailey**

Sharing is what makes me human. For without it, I become numb to my surroundings. I become zombified, inhuman, detached — estranged from reality. But luckily, there is an elixir: sharing. For sharing reminds me that I have a voice, something tangible—something I look forward to letting pervade.

Is it really cliché to say, “sharing is caring”?

Paradoxically, sharing is selfish—at least in my opinion and standpoint. For if I withhold, I become someone I despise. Yes, there are multiple versions of me, but that’s a me I refuse to be associated with. A few of me held a meeting regarding that me and promptly voted this me out. I couldn’t agree fast enough, for it’s impossible to escape myself.

So consciously, I face each day at ease, with good intentions weighing on my conscience — translated into actions that can only be described as something shared. There’s nothing like uplifted emotions—seeing another person smile, or hearing the sincerity and happiness in another’s voice because of something I’ve done or said.

To realize my intentions were the catalyst for a sudden change in mood — to peace, to comfort, to everything and more. Sharing is vivid through words, if spoken right. Advice and wisdom are free from me, for the price was paid simply by paying it forward.

Through sharing, I learned in desolated solitude. Confinement would leave the general public shocked and confused. But sharing kindness is the method that keeps my heart above ground. I’ve come to read obsessively—to turn my mind inward, onto mine.

Now I’m sharing gems in the form of scintillating knowledge. Though my body is locked away in a cage (inhumane), my brain stays in tune with the world — sharing the same wavelength, recognizing other people’s frequencies, sharing a common bond in full acknowledgment that others exist.

Small gestures cost nothing, and yet could be the saving grace for the fellow not bluffing from committing suicide. So in sharing, I utilize the time I’ve been given.

Hello, fellow stranger.

I see you without the spin — no lies, no gossiping. Sharing cell blocks and yards, boxed in by differences—dysfunctional life forms where most see lost souls trapped in purgatory, a proverbial wasteland.

I see golden opportunities, creating miracles by hand. After twenty years, I still stand—viewing life through a different lens. Invigorated, like an energetic karmic cleanse. I feel it’s time I share these lines. I try to catch every day to give something I have. Though I may be lacking materially, spiritually I’m moving — intellectually seeking, sharing knowledge, building bridges to the ones who aren’t usually found.

For me, sharing makes me human. I find that when I don’t share, I become unhappy — depressed, outright miserable. So yes, I’ll say I’m very selfish for sharing. Why? I do it to feel that I matter—knowing I made an impact on another life.

I subtly try to leave the other, benign human—or otherwise—better off than they were before we met, without them realizing it. This is what I feel sharing is: it’s connection, it’s kindness, it’s caring, it’s love—everything and more.

## **What Sharing is to Me, Shaun Blake**

Sharing is one of humanity’s most emotionally satisfying experiences. Being on the receiving side is wonderful. Uplifting. Redemptive. Sharing of any sort; whether it be a smile from a passing stranger, a hug from a friend when feeling down, a kind word after a set-back in your life, even a "Have a good day!" from your cellie in prison, etc. Can keep you going forward in this sometimes-tough life. Being the receiver of sharing acts lets us understand that we have worth - for no other reason except our existence.

For the person that is the "Sharer"? These people gain fulfillment in knowing that they have the capacity to give of themselves without losing anything, but rather, gaining a friend, keeping a good relationship going, uplifting another from the doldrums, or altogether just knowing that you still have the need to care for, and about, something other than yourself.

Self-esteem! Self-image! Self-worth!

Sharing of any kind, by any participant, builds these qualities and keeps a person happy – even in prison. We are in an environment that is unsharing and oppressive by nature. Any manner of kindness – sharing – is seen as a weakness in prison and can result in violence, more oppression, alienation, loss of personal identity, etc. But we can overcome these roadblocks – I see it every day – to our happiness and emotional growth (even in prison) if we persevere in our goals of sharing ourselves and being shared by others in positive ways. Always remember that you are the Captain of your own life and write your own story everyday. Sometimes editing is required but you are still in control.

Thank you for sharing yourselves with me!

Thank you for letting me share part of myself with you.

### **Sharing, Lancelot**

In the Florida prison system (there is no correction), there is much sharing. In the two-man cells, there is limited sharing. In the open-bay dorms – the one big room of bunks – there is much more sharing. The sharing of noise occurs as the inmates try to out-talk each other in an effort to be heard. The simple minded yell at the television as if to change the score of the game being watched or, OH— when somebody does a boo-boo on the play and the sideline coach says, “He shoulda done this!” and other inmates pipe up with, “no way, he shoulda gone the other way,” and the cacophony of confusion starts and usually ends up in a fight: not of words (because of their limited vocabulary) but of fists and sometimes of brooms or anything moveable that can be grabbed in a hurry.

A note about the limited vocabulary in prison: it mostly contains the word “FUCK” and its many derivatives or the catch-all phrase, “MOTHERFUCKER” with its elaborate forms constructed from the simple. Reminds me of the statement from Alice in Wonderland when Alice asked the sage, “What does that word mean?” and the sage answered, “That word means exactly what I want it to mean when I use it!” The other inmates ‘sharing’ in the vocal duel may not know what the perpetrator means and, for the most part, is quickly forgotten as useless rhetoric.

The decibel level is usually painful.

The eight fans that circulate the air contribute what is considered ‘white noise’ that helps drown out the ‘fucks and motherfuckers’ of the proletariat with the limited vocabulary and the excessive decibel level.

The air is the other common element that we all share.

What the inmates don’t share is respect. When the call is, ‘Stand by for canteen,’ the more aggressive inmates push and shove to be first in line.

The inmates who smoke show little respect for themselves and even less for the inmates who don’t. They don’t smoke cigarettes to get “the calming effect of nicotine” (sorry Catherine) but put ‘other’ ingredients in to get high. Some inmates have actually died trying to get that ‘high’!

Twackers is what they are called. Insulation from the water pipes and the lines from the plastic sparks from the chow-hall that prove deadly and those fumes are circulated by the fans. That polluted air assaults the remaining populace that wants to maintain a level of sanity. The twackers: some of them have ended up dead or, even worse, brain-dead—vegetables if you will.

A righteous man can find refuge in his death – Proverbs 14:32 – but what about the other guys that aren’t righteous?

Sharing is caring... or NOT caring.

### **SHARING, Jack Simpson**

A person can share a ride, food, time, and most of all, themselves. Here we do a lot of that with others. After working with the injured most of my life. I share my knowledge with the other inmates.

At present, I co-instruct basic First-Aid. Between the instructor and myself we have over thirty years in the medical field. We both shared our free time with the public.

I believe in sharing knowledge with others. We tell them it will help them and their families as well. We teach basic CPR and how to open an airway on adults and infants.

Even in college where people go to obtain higher learning, the professors are sharing their knowledge with all of you.

I was surprised at how many people signed up for the courses. There are some who feel it is a waste of time to teach others what we have over the years. I find it very rewarding to learn something new every day.

Sharing knowledge is how we find out about our past. I hate to think what it would be like if no one shared anything. We would like to know as much as we can. I feel sorry for those who sit each day and let the world pass by them.

What knowledge you learn as the future senators, presidents, and even how your life leads you, take time to share what you have with others. I am sure they will do the same. Keep sharing.

### **Lemonheads, Tasha Ashley**

Sharing has always come easy for me. I've been that way all my life. It makes me feel really good inside to share. My brothers - on the other hand - do not like to share.

Three days before Christmas, my mom decided we were going down south to Nana's for the holiday. She loaded all five of us into the car for the four-hour drive. We each had snacks and items for our amusement during the long ride.

When you're a little kid, four hours is soooo long! About two hours in, my brother Chuck and I started arguing over my favorite candy, Lemonheads. I reached for the box as we continued to argue. This began a tug-o-war.

"Stop arguing and settle down!" Mom yelled. With one final tug, the box broke. Candy went spiralling through the air. The yellow balls slapped against the roof, windows, our heads, and fell straight to the floor.

To our surprise, the car flipped, tumbled, and rolled to a stop in the median. Suddenly, the argument and the candy seemed less important. I was scared.

There was glass and little yellow candy balls everywhere. People were screaming and crying. I could smell gas. Others were trying to help us get out.

One by one we were pulled from the car. The police and ambulances took us to a hospital. Except for bruises and scratches from the glass we were okay. Shaken up but okay.

All I could think about were the round yellow candy balls....and I felt ashamed.

### **Good Person, Tiffany Simpson Najera**

Sharing is caring is what my parents told me. I consider myself a good person except for a few mishaps that landed me here in prison.

I share. A lot. If I see you hungry, I feed you. I see you cold, I clothe you. I share all of my things with the needy, even if it's just my time.

To me, the most important thing I share is my time. You never know when just listening to someone may brighten their day or even save their life.

Listening is the most important skill a person can possess. Remember, food can rot, clothing gets old, and money will disappear. A good ear for listening lasts a lifetime. Be kind while you are here. Share your ear.

### **Who am I: A Sharing Poem, Jennifer Origho**

Who am I is a question I've asked  
since my younger days.  
If you asked someone who  
they thought I was  
They would say happy,  
I am a hard worker,  
Goal oriented, spiritual,  
outgoing and outspoken.  
To your surprise I can't relay.  
Why you may ask?  
Because I don't see in me what  
you see on the outside.  
I am a broken soul, a lost spirit,  
an abused woman, a drug user.  
Lost in a world so dark that  
black still looked too light.  
Self harmed, unloved, worth nothing.  
Now, through a different lens  
I see a Jennifer who is loved,  
cared for, full of joy, wanted, needed,  
worth more than anything,  
fulfilled, enough, redeemed, forgiven,  
a rare diamond preferably blue.

I am Jennifer D. Origho and  
I am a child of God.

## **On Sharing, Timothy J. Donovan**

In such a place as this, an unnatural world and existence, what is sharing?

In here there are many variations, forms, and methods of sharing. Sharing must always be done with a good measure of caution, as many people will question your motives, or try to exploit your willingness to share.

Sharing isn't mainly about physical, material things in here. Mostly, it's about how it makes you feel on the inside, letting you still feel some inkling of humanity and self-worth.

Sharing with someone else, whether in here or out there, involves an emotional investment on the sharer's inner self. They have to be willing to open up to someone and possibly face rejection, hostility and questioning of their motives. Nothing is free, everything costs something.

Sharing takes inner strength and mental fortitude. The process of sharing can be very draining, depending on who you are sharing with, and what you are sharing.

Sharing means being aware of how it may be used against you. Being aware of the leeches who will suck you dry, and the losers/users who'll try to twist you into something that'll benefit them.

Sharing can brighten your life in many unexpected ways and areas and can be filled with pitfalls.

Sharing can certainly make you wiser, but also make you a fool. Sharing is a proverbial edged sword. So think before you share.

## **SHARING, Roy E. Addicks**

I and many other readers of Prisoner Express News are incarcerated here in the United States. A lot of us enjoy having others who have to share with us who're less fortunate! I for one do have a monthly income. I am blessed! I haven't always had anything. I waited like some nineteen years before ever receiving a government check from the VA. I am indeed blessed! However, this income I receive does not barely provide me with my needs and essentials! With such high price increases and such an "restricted" spend amount per month, severely

limits my sharing with others! May YAHWEH forgive me!

Besides commissary goods to share with others, there are other things an individual can share with others. Examples you ask for? Well, one would be to share your time listening to someone who's experiencing difficulties. Another would be assisting someone who needs some help with filing legal documents (if you're knowledgeable). Another could be offering others servitude. Which may take many forms! How about sharing your wisdom to the youngsters entering prison at such high rates. Wisdom in matters relating to prison life in general. How to stay out-of-trouble and how to approach staff and other inmates; this is highly important!

But, what's more important than all of the other aforementioned, is if you're a Believer/Follower of a particular religious affiliation. For example, I am an Messianic Jew. Even though we're Jews and follow the Jewish Ways, we differ in that we "do believe and we know that Yahshua (Jesus) was the Jewish Messiah!! Absolutely no doubts!" So taking the time to share with others our faith and belief is critical! Yet, I and others of like faith, fail so miserably! I'm as guilty as anyone else, sad to say!

Our faith is the faith that (if you so choose) Jesus followed and adhered to from childhood all the way to the cross at Calvary! YES, this is TRUTH!

I truly wished that many more would desire and come to this biblical faith. Why? Because it is this faith that the Father, YHWH Elohim established in sending His Beloved Son Yahshua HaMashiach to walk out in all throughout His life on this earth. I'm sharing this only because I truly believe that the WORD as set forth in the Holy Scriptures clearly displays this type of life for Believers throughout the years up until this present day as I write this to you! It's biblical. Noting that I am not hating on Christianity or other related religions! That's not the purpose of sharing this with you all readers. The purpose is that "you may know the Truth and the Truth will set you free!" For Yahshua is the Way, the Truth, and the Life! Everyone must first accept the Beloved Son in order to even think about coming to Father Elohim! There's no other

way but to accept Elohim made flesh. Amen? Amen!

Time nears the days of a time that no one would ever think or desire to encounter! It's called the Tribulation. It will be worse than the holocaust of Europe! There's a way of escape from this time of seven years on the earth. It'll be worldwide! No escaping it if "you're left behind!"

I am compelled to put this on paper for you. I can only pray that you, as I have, take heed to my Words and what the Holy Scriptures state relating the End Times before Yeshua comes for His Saints in the sky!

This readers is what was on my heart to share with you all and for those unintentionally having access to this wonderful publication.

Now as to you! What are you sharing with others in your prisons? Let's put forth the bad news and along with the Good News of Jesus the Messiah! Thank you for your time. Blessings!

### **Sharing is Caring, James Hochschild**

I believe most people have heard of that cliché at some point in their lives. Sharing can be a great way to interact with others. Whether the sharing involves people, places, and/or things, it can leave a sense of joy, happiness, and/or gratitude.

I mentioned in a prior writing that I took my younger cousin to a concert. That was a way to "share" an enjoyable time with her. Other examples of sharing time with others include holiday gatherings with family or friends. My mother's mother (Grandma) was a central force during those times. I loved seeing cousins, aunts & uncles that I hadn't seen in a while. My dad's mother was also another force during holidays.

Another example of sharing is of giving away things as gifts, etc. But, beware of those who may label you "Stingy" for not sharing with them - I call that a false sense of entitlement to other people's stuff. (Like a thief believes).

Lastly, I would call sharing of one's self a great way to build trust and honesty. When one bares one's soul to someone else, one is expressing vulnerability.

It's letting the defensive walls come down that protect oneself from criticism, humiliation, rejection, and other mental / emotional hurts. Another word for sharing is generosity.

### **"They" Do Not Want Us to Share, K. Daniel Okken**

All of us, as prisoners of whatever state we happen to be in, are being confined under the administration of "Department of Corrections."

Now it is my understanding that to correct bad behaviour, good behaviour must be taught, displayed and encouraged. It is mind-boggling to me then that these departments of correction defy all rules of decency, moral values, and proper correction. Now of course, I can only speak from my experience in the Arkansas prison system, but from what I read and see in videos from other states, many of them are much like Arkansas.

One, they punish everyone for the crime of a single guilty party.

Unlike a few states, such as Florida and Texas, which are now beginning to implement incentive prisons as rewards for good behaviour, Arkansas seems to get a base and cruel pleasure in taking away from those striving to better themselves because of the random inmate who abuses a privilege. All of us lost our 190° water in the whole state, because a man threw it at another man, scalding him. All of our flavoured drink mixes were taken away (i.e. Hawaiian Punch, Root Beer, 7UP, Orange Tang, etc.) because one person dyed his white clothes blue with the blue Hawaiian Punch mix.

As many of you know from my previous essays, I try my best to live the life of a true born again Christian. One of the foundational principles of Christianity is to "Love thy neighbour as thyself," and to "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (Matthew 19:19 & Matthew 7:12). What did Jesus tell the rich young ruler who desired salvation? "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell what you have, and give them to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." (Matthew 19:21)

But Arkansas has a "No trafficking or trading rule" they enforce with vigilance, that disallows us to be kind to those who are less fortunate.

Technically, we cannot give a man a cup of coffee or a soda, a piece of candy, or a 'Little Debbie's'; or for those hobbies, crafts and arts permits, can we give a pen, pencil, a dab of glue, etc. Arkansas loves their disciplinaries! You can't

disobey the rules without getting one. They give them out for bad and good behaviours. But the problem is that most of the CO's (Correction Officers) display bad behaviour, talk down to inmates, instigate conflict where there would, should, could be none; are vulgar, often racist (proven by only those they will interact with positively) and are thus hypocrites by the standards they expect us to live by.

Once I was 'chewed out' by a captain for holding the lunch door open for a man who was in a wheelchair. Then last week, there were two men in our barrack who were given minor disciplinarys for having food in their boxes, when they are indigent and cannot buy food.

Yes, it is a sad world we live in, when wanting to share with the less fortunate is punished, while those in the barracks who are abusive are ignored or even rewarded with camaraderie with CO's. But as it is written, 'In the last days men will call evil good, and good evil.' It is simply wrong that this is portrayed by a 'Dept. of Corrections'.

Famous Author George Eliott wrote: 'Cruelty, like every other vice, requires no motive outside of itself . It only needs an opportunity.' I believe this must be the motto of most correction departments. Author William James wrote: 'The art of being wise, is the art of knowing what to overlook.'

The ADC is not a bastion of wisdom.

### ***Mine, Yours, or Ours, Anonymous***

Some people are strange. I am one of those and I have no shame in admitting it. I don't mind though. I remember when I was 10 years old, I was out fishing with a church deacon who was old enough to be my grandfather. While we were fishing, he pulled out a pouch of Redman chewing tobacco. All I said was "Hey Jim, you do know that sharing is caring, right?" He just looked at me. He knew that I was allowed by my parents to use smokeless tobacco and after a few minutes, he acquiesced in my request. From that moment on, he would test me using others to see if I "practiced what I preached" about sharing.

It didn't matter who you were, if I could share it, I would. Of course I had rules to it. For example, if you needed or wanted money for food, I'd go buy you food because I did not want

you spending money on drugs or alcohol. If you needed a cigarette and I only had one left, I'd tell you that I could not give you one but I would split one with you. If you want some of my drink, then I'd find you a cup or waterfall, cause I don't like backwash and won't drink after someone unless I'm kissing her. But no matter what I was always trying to share.

Even now, I just spent a couple of days in and out of the hospital. Why? A combination of infections that got out of control. It got bad. The infection was and still is in my face. My first trip, they went inside my mouth and made three incisions to drain all the nastiness they could, and it was a lot. My facility does not allow narcotics which is fine with me so I was given K.O.P. Ibuprofen and pill call gives me antibiotics. We've got one or two others here in my area that aren't in my condition but need help. What do I do? "Hey, I've got this K.O.P. Ibuprofen or Tylenol if you need it." I can even try to get you some antibiotics if it will help you. They look at me like I'm crazy. They won't accept the antibiotics because they say I need that more. Okay then.

I know my body. I know what I can handle. Yes, I was close to being put in ICU because of my infection but I hate seeing others suffer. I am not suicidal, I just want to help. It's a good thing that I didn't give anyone an antibiotic because you never know who is allergic to what. But anything else I can help with, come see me. Ibuprofen, Tylenol, sinus tablets, allergy tablets, orajel, cornbread, vegetables, entrees, socks, pens and even though I don't make commissary, I will still share paper and envelopes. We all need some help every now and then. There is a country song that really hits home: "Find Out Who Your Friends Are." Even people who screw me over, I still share and help them. Remember, "Sharing is Caring" and people will test you on that to see if you practice what you preach.

### ***Sharing, James Logan Diez***

Spring 1965, shortly before my ninth birthday, there was a timid knock on our kitchen door. Mama was cooking at the stove, so she had me answer it. A (very) pretty Mexican girl, about 14 or 15, stood there holding three empty one-gallon milk jars.

"Hola, Senorita," I said with my best 'impress-the-girls' smile. She smiled back and I entered the fourth 'Crush' in my life.

"Buenos dias." She glanced over her shoulder towards a small group of Mexicans under our giant oak tree. "May I fill our water at the faucet?" she asked, pointing toward the corner of the house.

"Mama," I said, turning to her, "there's a Mexican girl; she wants some water from the faucet."

"Well give it to her, Logan! We don't let people go thirsty."

As the girl went to fill her jars, Mama looked at the group: four males 20-40 years old; five women 20-30; three other teen girls; two little girls about 7-8; and a boy about 5.

"Logan," Mama said, "go find out when the last time those babies had some milk?"

I went and asked, and told the man who acted as spokesman not to leave. When I got back to the house, Mama had a box on the table. In it was a five-pound bag of flour; baking powder; salt & pepper; CRISCO; butter; two dozen farm-fresh eggs from our henhouse; one pound of homemade bacon; sliced ham, and all the necessities for the cooking and eating of it; plus a half-gallon of freshly milked goat milk.

"Take this to the women, Logan, and show them where our outside kitchen is. Tell those men that the milk is for the niños & niñas so they're not to drink any."

"Mama," I said nervously, "they're probably from Mexico! If the Border Patrol finds out we fed 'em, we could go to jail!"

Mama sat in a dining chair and pulled me onto her lap. "My boy," she said after giving me a hug & kiss, "we NEVER let ANYONE leave our home hungry. Not ever, understand?"

"Why, Mama? Aren't you afraid of going to jail?" I asked.

"Logan, I'm more afraid of standing in front of Our God and telling how I sent away a hungry child than I am of going to jail. Now, go on and feed those hungry people. No need to hurry back, I saw you smiling at that pretty girl. Go talk with her." (Mama ALWAYS seemed to know when I had a new crush!)

I carried the box out, guided the group to our outside kitchen, and asked the girl (Isabella) if she'd like to see my horse. She smiled and

asked if her sisters could come. I said sure, of course, because they were all pretty to look at. So Isabella and I got to talk, and I got to look at her without having to peek.

I was emancipated as a minor at age 14; completed high school in 9th grade (I attended a "Rail School," the late-60's early 70's version of an "Accelerated Learning School for Gifted Children"); and got my own "Kitchenette" apt as a 15th birthday present to myself.

I received a "Dependent Survivor's Allowance" from the Social Security and Veteran's Admin. after my Dad's death in 1964 (his death being related, everyone thought, to his "Combat Stress Disability" from Service in Patton's Armoured Infantry through WWII; 28 years later, we learned he was actually murdered by a corrupt sheriff who staged the suicide.) Also, I worked part-time after school.

In every place I have lived after leaving Mama's house (including, Lady Catherine LeFleur, my cells in 'Camp Prison Land'), I have kept my "Never-let-anyone-leave-my-home-hungry" box of food set back.

Sharing is not unique to the Christian Gospel. It's been a central teaching of many religious orders for more millenia than "Christianity" has existed. My religion is the CREATIONIST NATURISM Disciples of Light, Order of Delphi; it has taught to share with those in need for tens of thousands of years across the whole Earth.

Mama taught me the lesson of our religion; it did not necessarily mean she knew that's what the Lord Immanuel Jesus taught his disciples too. It just was the way she knew was right from the perspective of THE LIGHT and our "Higher Self."

Nonetheless, I will always remember Mama's lesson that day Isabella and her family came for water in Christoval, Texas ... and, remember how Isabella and every single one of her pretty sisters AND both unmarried aunts ALL gave me a soft kiss on the lips and a lingering hug before they left!

I have always wondered how they all managed to smell like a rose after walking hundreds of miles cross-country to avoid Border Patrol, and how each of those kisses tasted like honey. One of my life's great mysteries.

Note: This essay was edited for length.

## July Picture Theme



### **Untitled, Abbas Ahmed**

If you truly believe that life should not have mistakes or perfection is reached without any errors. Then look at any prestigious award winning movie & ask its director how many times it had to be cut & repeated to reach this pivotal point of perfection?

### **One, Gardner LaMarche**

The rhythm of the sky and the sea sparkles on the adoring eyes of the free. A time and place where labor and recreation meet in the arms of magnificence. Awaiting the stars to bring their dreams. Heart beating to the sound of nature as she shares her intimate magic with human soul. Resting in paradise, far from the stress of demand, all the world is synchronistic to the joyful emotions of man. In time pleasure. And in the being peace. Contradiction is lost from harmony. Only fantasy propels the days of our lives. The wind bringing rainbows and providing the sand with ethereal kisses where our feet play. No more argument. The enormity of the world like a heart that always shines. Every moment in time beautiful. Every sound speaking to the blood of gracious opportunity. To live within an incredible miracle. Experiencing the mammoth plethora of sensation that is sculpted into the magic of life.

### **Sophie, Kelly Messenger**

Here is Sophie. Sophie is one rich woman. This is the type of woman you can't even get

close to. She is filthy rich and couldn't let one of us prisoners know the time of day if we asked.

She wakes up out of her canopy bed every morning to stand on her balcony to enjoy the early morning breeze, overlooking the ocean.

She considers herself an angel. I'm a living witness. Here she is, at her natural home in heaven. No lie. Everything is perfect. She has no worries. She actually is an angel if I ever saw one.

You see, I'm from the slums. The Hood, and I could only dream of one day living like this or getting close enough to one of these angels to love and care for me, but it's just not happening. Not because I chose the wrong path, but because I don't have a rich family and I grew up in a bad neighborhood. So I know ever since I was old enough to go to school, I could never be like this woman of an angel.

You see, even if I was born with the ultimate look, I'd still be living in hell because I don't got rich-ass family members and I would never get picked by anyone else's rich-ass family because they only pick people who are also living in heaven. So I may as well keep searching for another Demon to continue on with my evil deeds. I guess it's evil that I walk around stealin' and talkin' shit because these angels and their men don't care about those in need? Are they ever gonna stop criticizing us while they living it up?

### **Girl Gazing Into the Sea of Eternity, Bill Clements**

She is the epitome of grace and beauty as she walks toward the balcony. The Fruits of the Gods have rained down on me. Surely I am their favorite son.

The war was successful. My kingdom goes from sea to sea.

Of all the riches won, nothing can compare to her presence in my heart.

She spins tales with threads of gold accompanied by a melodic voice which even stills the most savage beast - yes even the Gods turn toward her when she sings.

### **Rags to Riches, Jack Simpson**

My name is Debbie Jordan. I grew up in a small village near Naples, Italy. My parents didn't

have much growing up and neither did I. From the age of twelve, I helped my mother wash clothes by the water's edge. No one talked to me in the village.

My clothes were ragged and you could tell they were hand-me-downs. I prayed every day that my life would change for the good. Over the years I kept praying and never gave up.

It has been eight years now and both of my parents have passed away. Being an only child, it hurt so bad. No one came to the funeral except the Priest and grave diggers. As I headed back to what was a happy home, it would only be nothing but fond memories of what once was. I bumped into a gentleman while walking on.

"Excuse me young lady," chimed out a voice behind me. I stopped to see what he wanted. As he came near to me, he spoke again. "Are you not the young lady who washed clothes by the river bank?" he asked.

"Yes, yes sir, I am she."

"I believe we can help each other then. I am looking for someone to help at my house to keep things in order," he went on to say. I listened to each word, thinking of what I was going to do once he walked away.

The gentleman handed me a card after he wrote a time and date on it. I would have to be at his house in two days no later than 9AM. He started to walk away and I thanked him.

It was 9AM on the second day. I rang the doorbell and to my surprise he opened the door.

"Come in, come in!" he said with a smile. He was an older man, gray hair, beard, blue eyes, and a warm smile. We sat and talked for an hour. I accepted the job and he showed me to my room. I would start work in the morning. First he gave me money to buy all I would need. I had new clothes for once.

I had been there for about two months, when my boss Danny Peach called me to his study. Two other men were there, one from the bank and the other his personal lawyer.

"I have some papers you need to sign," he said with a faint smile. "I have been sick for a very long time. As a matter of fact, I am dying. I have no living relatives left to leave all of this to. Sign the papers and it will be all yours."

I signed the papers and looked at the amount I would receive. All he would have left to anyone he left to me. I would never have to wash

clothes anymore for money or food. Mr. Danny passed six months later. I took care of him until that last day.

Standing on the deck of my house, overlooking the sea. I can say from rags to riches. I can have anything I want. Thank you Mr. Danny.

### **Pledged, Jeremy Hoffman**

Upon one glance I'm struck as if lightning found me, now mumbling before voice catches mental signal, enigma she is an ancient soul who once again walks the earth, yes, I can tell only because the shine out her gaze is blinding but the conversation lets me know that she's not mentally evolved.

She told me, she never knows what to do with herself, every day's a new day, everything gained is lost. She complains there's a wild that can't be tamed, it's in her waiting to take control if she's not careful. It's in senses which will flood me with raw, powerful emotions which bubble over into the next, dragging me back into times unknown. She'll hysterically cry it's... it's a sight as if she's seen it a thousand times in a hundred different lives that lead to a trillion possibilities. I ride her emotion with her as she looks out to the sea. In a low tone I can just make out her whispering, the most overpowering force is music, it opens the flood gates; flutters her insides, burns her there, where flashbacks of being in my arms in different bodies through the ages flash.

"Yeah," she says. "Who embraces us? Through all we'll find each other in every time-galaxies, planets, and continents, the pull's there," she says.

Now I'm shocked because I don't know, yet my heart knocks at the door, poor souls not a well of despair no more.

"This is where the souls emerge," she said. She's been gazing out to this sea through four different human lifespans waiting for me to come to the realization, for it's written in the stars, our designated meeting spot now. Maybe I'm not the one who's fully mentally evolved, I think...

Yeah. She says all this yet still looks out to the sea.

Yes, she's waiting for me to take my place next to her to rule our universe.

So, I say “of course I remember the pledge my Goddess,” and walk up behind her to fulfill destiny...

### **For Elise, Christopher Monihan**

It feels like yesterday I held Elise in my arms. Her long legs entangled in mine as we cuddled in bed in paradise. The taste of her sex still on my lips and then on hers as we kissed.

“I love you,” said Elise. “I love you so much.”

My heart breaks as I share those words. I can still hear her soft voice, feel her heart beating against my chest. These were her last words to me before fate furiously and mercilessly tore her apart.

They say time heals trauma. Sure, I suppose so. It has been 21 years since that day and I’m still searching for the pieces to my soul. My mind drifts:

I find myself standing beside Elise on our first day in the third grade. Locks of blonde curls frame sapphire blue eyes. Whenever I talk to her, hues of pink erupt across her face.

The images click through my mind like one of those picture toys where I look through the binocular-like eyefinder. The flick of the index finger (\*click\*) brings a new image; (\*click\*) another; (\*click\*) and another.

Here was Elise at age 10 dipping a toe into the pool because she couldn’t swim! Instead, we sat together on the edge and splashed at each other (\*click\*);

Here was Elise swinging a leg into the drivers side of her new Rav-4 on her 16th birthday, me riding shotgun (\*click\*);

And here was Elise in a stunning blue and white dress, our hand clasped together on senior prom night.

Yet, the most painful images are the very last memories I have of her:

Here was Elise in all white evening gown standing between open doors of the villa as she faced the ocean (\*click\*);

Here we are kissing on our wedding day in paradise, Banda Aceh Indonesia, December 26, 2004 (\*click\*); the day the ocean rose up against the world.

I caught a glimpse of the first wave barreling toward us at the last moment. I had

just enough time to grab ahold of Elise before Hell crashed through the villa and swallowed us into its bowels.

Confusion etched across her face and then terrified eyes found mine.

The tsunami picked us up like twigs and smashed us against the hard wall. Seawater surged deep. Windows blew in and then out behind us.

Something stabbed into my side and pain gripped me. I curled an arm around Elise and her back cut my forearm. Broken pieces of people’s lives sliced into us, flung like missiles in the raging current.

The seaside villa collapsed all around us and the current threatened to suck us into the streets.

We became trapped in an eddy, a swirling whirlpool of death tugging us toward the center. Splintered wood, shards of broken glass and jagged steel pieces pierced my body. One moment Elise was in my arms, the next torn away.

All I could think at that moment was, God, no! No! She can’t swim!! Something bashed my head and warmth flooded my face. I witnessed Elise frantically thrashing about before being pulled under in the dark swell of garbage and debris. She didn’t scream.

I woke from my coma in the hospital a week later to a different world. Elise’s broken body was found by fishermen days earlier.

I sit in this quiet cell, the whistle of my pained breathing my only companion. I sometimes catch the scent of her perfume or feel her soft lips against mine. I’ve worked hard to overcome the trauma of that day, but I am a work in progress.

Whenever I close my eyes I see Elise.

“I love you,” she says.

“I love you so much.”

I am a work in progress.

### **House of the Strange, D’Andre M. Morris**

Ericka opened her eyes. Laying in the most comfortable bed she’s ever laid on. But something was not right. She found herself in a dress of very smooth fabric, and excessively long. She doesn’t

know how she got it on, nor how she ended up where she was at.

The bed seemed to be moving. She jumped up quickly. Staring at the bed, it was moving, breathing.

She looked around the room for an escape. As she headed to the bedroom door, her eye caught a balcony to the outside. She stopped to ponder. Going into the house, she could run into someone, or something worse, than stay. She chose the balcony.

After opening the balcony double doors and stepping out, she was dazzle-dazzled by the scene. She was surrounded by a body of water. She was angry but cried not.

She headed back and sat on the floor. Kept a distance from the alive, breathing bed and just stared at it. Her thoughts were rapid and she felt mental, emotional pain.

“Well, you finally awoke, gorgeous,” a voice boomed.

She looked around, unaware of who spoke. “Why are you hiding? Where are you? Come out,” she demanded. She was terrified, but refused to show it.

She waited, but there was no response. “I know you’re here. Might as well come out now.” No response. “Fine then! I’ll swim home.”

“Not good for you miss,” a voice called.

She did not respond, but knew the voice came from the bed area. It was silent.

“You can’t stop me,” Ericka stated, breaking the silence.

“Do as you wish! But you will die out there.”

She was confused. She was sure it was the bed talking.

“Excuse me.”

“What do you want?”

“Are you a talking bed?” Ericka asked.

“Talking bed, talking bed. I am a Stallem. In your language, yes. But stallem.

“That’s your name?”

“It’s what I am.”

Okay, I have no other choice, she thought.

“Where am I? How did I get here and how do I leave?”

“Don’t know,” the stallem answered.

“You seem to know a lot more than you give.”

“Where’s my food?” the stallem yelled.

A puffy towel moved across the room then unravelled a bottle-type item. Ericka was amazed.

“Is this real?” She asked and got no response. She looked around. Is everything here alive? She went to the door, which was locked. “Stallem, I want to leave.” There was no response. “I want to leave. Do you hear me Stallem?”

“No one’s stopping you.”

“Are you the only one who talks?” There was no response. “Aahhahh!!!” she yelled in frustration.

The chair made its way to her. So, everything *is alive*, she thought. The chair kept pushing into her until she sat down. Music filled the air. Music she never heard, but enchanting. A towel creature rolled to her. Unfolded and produced a round sphere which opened to food. She was unsure.

“Is this food?” she asked.

“Yes, it’s food. The best food in the universe,” the bed spoke.

“Who taught you how to speak and what is the universe?” she asked.

“I know you, young lady. I’m older than your great-grandfather.”

“I don’t know,” she said, then tasted the food. It was extraordinarily good. After eating and listening to great music, she fell asleep. Then woke up to some roundish bouncing creatures. Noting she was awake, their bounce intensified. She grabbed one and lost her grip. *It’s strong*, she thought.

When she stood, her dress was thicker and had tighter pressure. Then it went back to normal. She tried to take it off, but couldn’t get it off. She knew it was alive. *What does it eat*, she thought.

“Hey bed man!” she yelled, walking up to it. “Bed man!” she yelled, as she jumped on the bed.

“Hey! Hey! Hey! Stop! Hey, hey!” Some force took her off the bed. It was the dress, wings. A creature of flight. “Do not do that again! I’m pissed! I’m mad! I’m hurt!” the stallem yelled over and over.

But she was not listening. Her mind was on flying away. Ericka kept taking trips to the balcony, trying to get the dress to fly. She felt imprisoned, without reason. She started to have joy there, but freedom strained her mentally.

One day her dress took flight. She vowed to tell people and come back. She was happy to be leaving until she noticed there was no land anywhere. And they made their way back. To the house of the strange.

**A New Hope — Rising at the Horizon,  
Anonymous**

She is a 54-year-old loving, courageous, beautiful woman. She is a French national who has excelled in health, personal wellness, and also in socio economic well-being. Yet for many years, she had up to that moment on the balcony failed to successfully conceive a viable pregnancy, which could result in childbirth.

In sum, her conceptional infertility has cost her one million euros in modern and traditional medical treatments for refertilization, in addition to her unblemished social reputation. Worse yet, her husband divorced her for her lack of childbearing after so many years of unsuccessful attempts to conceive. He could no longer tolerate her perimenopausal behavior, changes triggered by her mood swings, her hot flashes, and eating disorder.

Her hope was fading into fateful capitulation. She thought, "If it is so, perhaps only a fortunate person might have it all — personal wellness and socio economic well-being — but still lack prosperity in posterity." Then, at last, she received a phone call from her gynecologist advising her to once again try a different method of reproductive technology with a specialized fertility clinic in Spain. She thought, "Why not? After so many years of failure, maybe one more disappointing clinical opportunity shouldn't be so bad, particularly with the now pressing irregularity of my menstruation, a last attempt to possibly be a mother would be a personal testimony of my perseverance."

However, as destiny may concern, whatsoever in fate should be, it surely must be. At long last, she underwent a conceptional fertilization — a medically assisted procreation treatment. Even though her husband had given up on her, she never gave up on having a child of her own. She thus found a sperm provider through a lover to artificially fertilize her extracted ova into a viable zygote. She then underwent a round of in vitro artificial insemination.

There she stood on the balcony of her French villa — all doors open, all curtains drawn and fashioned — looking at the faraway horizon. The daybreak of a new dawn was about to rise, welcoming a newborn child into her world. A gift of providence. At last, she had the love that exalted her joy. Thus, she dressed herself beautifully to meet this happy boy like no other — in perfect well-being.

**Thoughtful Image, James Hochschild**

This image is beautiful, curious, vulnerable, and possibly sad.

It's beautiful because of the ocean waves and the attractive woman as a focus. Maybe she's inviting the ocean breeze to cool her down, as well as smelling the ocean air and hearing the wave action, too. It can be a relaxing time doing that.

It's curious because I don't know if the ocean is real or not. Is it just a painting or photo? Think about it for a second! Where are the safety precautions of a handrail system or fence?

It's vulnerable because of the lack of safety. Maybe she's trying to be brave and test her limits.

It's sad because of the lack of safety. Maybe she's depressed and suicidal.

I hope it's a beautiful outcome and not a sad outcome. Just turn around, girl, take a deep breath, and face the day. Knowing this too shall pass!

**Dawn, Gary Farlow**

Sunlight filtered through the sheer curtains to dance upon the linen and sumptuous furnishings of the beachfront villa. The doors stood open as gentle Caribbean winds blew into the room.

Jodi rose and walked toward the open doors. It had been an arduous journey to this resort where she now stood, poised to face the sun.

Born Jody Phillip Smith, Jodi had never felt like a "son." As a mere child, Jodi would often be "caught" playing with her sister's Barbies. When at nine she requested an Easy Bake Oven for Christmas, her father, a rugged construction crew foreman bought her a .410 hunting rifle. Jodi

refused it. Two days after Christmas her mother went out and bought the coveted Easy Bake.

The local Girl Scouts had denied Jodi membership, referring her to the Cub Scouts instead.

School had been torturous. Ostracized by most girls, taunted by the boys, Jodi found comfort only in theatre group and art class where sympathetic teachers always found work for Jodi to help with to avoid the hated gym period and the inevitable hazing of the showers and locker room.

Finally graduating high school, Jodi found freedom in college, pursuing theatre communications and coming out to many friends and supporters.

"I'll be by your side, whatever you want to do," Jodi's fiancé Mark assured her. "But don't feel you need to change for me. I'll love you for you, not your anatomy."

Jodi met Mark during her first week at college. It was love at first sight. They had been inseparable since. When Jodi elected to undergo gender-affirming surgery, it was Mark who had rallied full support and sufficient funds.

It had alienated much of her family, but on the final day in hospital a gentle tap had sounded on her door. It slowly opened to reveal Jodi's mom and dad. Her dad came closer, his big calloused hands holding a vase of yellow roses.

"I picked these from our garden," her dad had choked. "Yellow means I miss you."

Jodi's eyes had filled with tears she had long spent, feeling she had lost her parents.

"They're beautiful, dad," Jodi managed between sobs.

"Not as beautiful as my daughter, you," he replied.

That was two weeks ago now. She and Mark had married in an oceanside ceremony with her parents there.

Mark lay still slumbering in their honeymoon suite as Jodi, now emerging out onto the sand, smiled in greeting the new day.

### **The Quiet: Two, Jonathan Holeman**

I walked for six days. Grabbing food and bottled water where I could. Supplies were far from scarce. I kept thinking that I'd see someone else ransacking one of the little liquor stores or

markets I found along the road. Of course no one ever showed up. The only other people I saw, if they were people now, they were all the same.

The first time I saw them standing around a building in the city. I got close enough to notice they were not breathing. Their eyes open, never blinking. I saw them again wrapped around a little beat up shack out in a field. Again, I wondered what was inside, but I wasn't brave enough, or lonely enough to check, not until weeks had passed.

The time I went in, the only time, I felt the most horrible, terrifying shock I've ever known. That should mean something, considering the seven times I was shipped off to battlefields in the Middle East. Over there, I wasn't scared, not once. I've seen explosions, fire fights, some of the most horrifying scenes imaginable. None of it prepared me for the vision inside that house on the beach.

I'd been traveling for about six weeks by my best estimate. Still drinking myself to sleep each night. Every night in a different house traveling random roads to the south west. I must've been drinking more than I thought, considering I was aiming for somewhere in Iowa. Or pretty much anywhere where there were no people, Figured that would be the best chance at survival. Somehow instead of the empty plains, I ended up on a road next to an ocean, with a wide open beach.

I walked along the beach drinking until I saw this row of massive expensive homes. One stood off a bit, and it was surrounded by those silent standing, starling zombies. I think it was being drunk enough that did it. The people's clothes were ragged. I could smell this permeating stench just wafting off of them. A few seemed to sway in the wind. The only sound was the rolling waves crashing along the sands. I drifted around the people, noticing some had drifted near to the house and laid out stretched in stiffness. Their hollow eyes looked up at nothing from the ground. I realized then, they were not zombies. Not like in some movie. As I got close to the house I glanced back at the ones standing. They stared with dry lifeless eyes, but not at me. I don't even think they were looking at the house. They must've been breathing, I figured, but I wasn't brave enough to check. Instead, I went inside.

A woman stood with her back toward me, staring out at the ocean. I cleared my throat, and she turned to face me.

As she slowly turned, I heard a deep throated hum. It cracked thick and rose in volume. The pitch, the tone, grew higher and higher. The fear began to take hold of me as I sensed something sinister in that noise. Her thin form stretched and twisted. Bones popped and split, like the sound of sap, in wood, burning in a fireplace. Her body sank to one side as her arms stretched out to the sides. The clothes slid down. They were tied to a body that hadn't eaten in weeks. I saw the starvation in her hollow cheeks, when she had managed to face me.

The expression she wore was empty. Blank dried out eyes faced my direction, but I doubt she could even see at all. Her head tilted to the side as the wide open mouth moaned the high pitched cacophony that I could hear coming from every direction. I slammed my hands to my ears and spun around, hopping, running at full speed from her.

As I passed the creatures staring at that house, their mouths dropped open. I felt the blood flowing from my ears. With a crash, I fell.

When I awoke in the moonlit night, drenched with sweat, pushing myself up in fear, it was quiet. I looked around. There were no standing figures. I made out the lumps of their bodies laying along the sand around the house.

That was the last sound I heard, and words cannot describe it. That's why I'm writing this to you now. Why can't I hear? Why can't I speak? It all started with quiet, and now that's all there is.

### ***Sifra of Neptunia, Jerry Varnell***

The idyllic view before the Lady Al-Sifra was indeed breathtaking yet the hitch in her breath tugging her heart into her throat was entirely internal affection. Swathed in the finest silk and lace Neptunia produced, Sifra was feeling quite unwell. "Milady looks quite exquisite today. Will they break their fast on the balcony terrace this morn?" her maidservant, Violet, proffered.

Sifra's gaze held for a long moment then, her neck snapped back in retort, "Take leave for the day, Miss Violet. And please do bring whatever you have prepared back to your hearth and

home." For the briefest moment, a mask of worry twisted Violet's face. Just as quickly it was gone, with a curtsy and a scurry. All of these things were perceived by Sifra, just as well as she did not visibly react to them.

The Ice Queen. Princess. Perfect. Beautiful. Miserable. Bitch. Sifra shut her eyes and peered inwards. She became John Darklyn, Squire to Sir Gerold. Everything about him had been cast from the perfect image of knighthood.

"It will never be," Sifra mutters. "What I do to be so strong, so manly, so... noble." The tears sneaked down her stony face.

### ***Untitled, Charles Whitfield***

Her soul cries within herself as she stands on the balcony overlooking Lake Tahoe. Her mental warehouse is on overload - recalling memories of one who treated her like a woman first and a queen afterwards. She misses him madly.

She weeps softly and sadly as she grasps the hems of her silk robe while resting her hands on the rail, gazing into the distance as if watching smoke from a distant fire.

Suddenly her heart, her soul reveals upon herself one justifiable truth: One is a governor that governs one's passions and one is a fief that serves them.

### ***The Bridegroom's Bride, Rod J.***

My destiny was a free caterpillar,  
but now the cocoon ordained for her growth  
is a capsule of confinement-  
a most uncomfortable prison.  
In it, she is evolving however.  
Wondrous skills- her wings-  
have been developing,  
and her efforts, while imprisoned,  
exercised and strengthened them.

Be encouraged, lovely larva.  
Let the brilliant beauty listen to  
the one upon whom the Spirit of Wisdom rests.  
She experiences tribulation, persecution,  
and heartbreak- suffering many things.  
But the King's Queen will endure,  
and in this lifetime, her reward will be everlasting.

Although she slumbers and dreams  
on a bed of discomfort,  
There, her ears become opened,  
and her instruction gets sealed.  
Indeed, she sleeps, but her heart is awake.  
For this reason, we shall journey to Zion,  
and awaken the dawn.

So she will understand how her true father  
is His majesty, the Most High.  
Then the prophecy shall be fulfilled:  
“The royal daughter is glorious within the palace;  
her clothing is woven with gold.”  
Behold, the butterfly emerges.

### **Did You Forget About Me?, Mr. Nkrumah Lumumba Valier**

Did you forget about me?  
Tell me.  
Do you still think about me?  
I want to know.  
I keep writing you letters  
expressing all my feelings about you.  
All in my emotions, thinking about you.  
Can't hold back my tears.  
I'm still in love with you.  
Thinking about the last time you said you loved  
me.  
And how it was the last time  
You said you love me.  
Why haven't you wrote me?  
It's killing me inside.  
Feels like I am dying slowly inside.  
Without you in my life.  
Are you alright?  
I'm missing you.  
Waiting to hear from you.  
I keep calling.  
The phone just keep ringing.  
Hoping you pick up.  
I just want to hear your voice.  
I know 40 years is a long time.  
I seen how you broke down  
Cryin in the courtroom.  
When they gave me this time.  
Are you still mine?  
Like you promised you would always be?  
Together forever.  
To the end of time.  
My heart, your heart.

Connected and can never be apart.  
Closer than twins.  
My best friend.  
The vows we took  
was until death do us apart.  
I know it's all my fault.  
I did it for the love of money.  
I never thought I would get caught.  
I bought you that house.  
It didn't matter the cost.  
Because you said you loved the view.  
You could see from the bedroom,  
The beach and the ocean.  
We made love so many times.  
I did it all for you.  
That's how much I love you.  
I just wanted to make you happy.  
I would do anything.  
Because you are my everything.  
And without you.  
I am nothing.  
The risks taken was to give you  
everything that is good in life.  
Now I am paying the price.  
Did it cost me my wife?  
In 10 years I'll be up for parole.  
Is it still just us against the world?  
I need to know.  
My heart is crumbling inside.  
Tears filling my eyes.  
Each breath I take feels like it can be my last.  
It's getting harder to breathe.  
Thinking you forgot about me.  
Doris,  
Did you forget about me?

### **Infinite Panorama, Edward W. Gallagher III**

As Lily looked out at the seascape, her  
mind was on other things. *Will everything be ok?  
Will it all work out? Is all of my hope and  
optimism for nothing?* The vista was indeed  
beautiful, but occasionally, you can't see the  
beauty before your eyes.

If she cried a million tears in the past 14  
years, she was entitled to them, for everything we  
keep inside, eventually burns its way out. “If the  
toll on this road is my soul?” She thought “...then  
my soul is lost forever...”

It is hard to enjoy a view, when you can  
not see past the seascape. For all of the beauty in

the world was out of Lily's reach, or was it? In a moment of inspiration, she felt empowered! "I am a person! I can start to take back what was taken from me! Maybe help others who have been keeping the pain in for so many years, free themselves!"

As she looked to the seascape, she was free, if only for a time. It is amazing what a human can endure, when they are put through so much.

The infinite panorama? It is not a view. It is the freedom to empower yourself, and be optimistic about a future. A future that you must create. We must stop putting off today and say "we will do it tomorrow" for the morrow may never come.

### ***The Lady in the Doorway, Ron Stark***

She stood in the doorway of her bedroom patio gazing at the empty horizon of the ocean. Behind her, alien entities, known as Swirls were busy zipping around the bedroom.

She was awakened by the breeze of salty air as it blew in through the open wood-framed tri-fold glass patio doors. She knew she closed them last evening.

Unbeknownst to her, her place of rest had been invaded by tiny spinning beings. The Swirls had opened the doors.

The "observers" came to the Milky Way Galaxy in search of their life's beginning. The spiral star system with a spinning planet fit for sentient life, was — according to records and myths -- the place of their ancestors.

The home planet of the Swirls was caught in a battle between two enemies — neither one an enemy of the Swirls. Their home planet is called Cuwpah (soo-faw). Written in their language: הַסּוּם. To us it means, "hurricane."

In spite of a name given to violent winds, the Swirls are a peaceful being. When they move — in a spiral way — they emit a calming blue light. When seen with the human eye they are mistaken for a type of light-emitting insect.

Today, these alien visitors came to observe life on planet Earth to determine if it could serve as a planet of refuge in the current Great Space War. There is an ulterior motive for this visit, too.

As the lady stands with her back to the bedroom, the Swirls hide within the curtains

which surround the bed; she is the object of their attention.

Her long brunette hair hangs to the middle of her bare back, shoulders squared accentuating her narrow waistline. The hips give form to the loose cloth she's wearing. She has gathered the cloth — a sheer, "see-through" material — into her hands. The mild sea breeze billows the trailing length making it appear as if she had wings (albeit low on the body).

An unheard chatter of excitement between the Swirls was heightened by the sight. If they could be heard, the sound of their voices would be like swirling winds of a hurricane being born.

The Swirls, excited and with hope that this human female was transforming into a divine being — an angel...maybe a Swirl?

The lady and the beach-front property each held a special place in Swirl origin. The property was believed to be the "womb" because of the warm waters of the massive ocean which lent itself to birthing the whirling winds.

The lady was chosen because of a link in the divine-human origin of Swirls. According to the scrolls archived in the House of Origins on Cuwpah, it was in the Earth year 1952 that an expeditionary group of space explorers — from the home planet — crashed on Earth, near this location.

The team of explorers survived long enough to intermix with humans; hence, the origin of the Swirls. Due to numerous diseases, the hybrid Swirl became extinct. No matter, human DNA, in an altered form, remains within some of the Swirls. It is the "human spirit" within Swirls that drove these remaining beings to come to Earth — to reunite Swirl and human, again.

### ***Untitled, Cesar Hernandez***

My wife calls my office phone.

"I'm downstairs in the parking garage."

"I'm busy."

She snaps, "I'm more important than work!"

"I'll be right down."

My wife is in her car wearing a Burberry trench coat. She opens her coat and has nothing underneath. I get in the car and we drive two blocks home.

Upstairs my wife lets her trench coat drop to the floor, "What's today?"

"Tuesday?"

She starts to put on her trench coat. "You forgot!"

"I promise you I didn't forget. Let's go."

I call downstairs and tell the valet to bring up my wife's car. I drive us to the Bitz-Carlton. I tell the valet we're in suite 2205.

I take my wife upstairs, the suite we had at the Bitz-Carlton on our wedding night. I take my wife's hand and lead her around the suite. I show her a new red Ralph Lauren dress in the closet. I point to the huge bouquet of roses on the table. I point to the champagne bottle chilling next to the hot tub.

I take my wife out to the balcony.

"You said one day you wanted to come back and enjoy this view from this suite."

My wife smiles.

"I now see you did remember our wedding anniversary is today."

### **Alice in July, Anonymous**

I'll always associate the dull nickel smell of Mars's lifeless, heavy, metal-tainted oceans, with an infinite sadness. Eternity was proving to be a long time.

"Larry!" my wife of nearly two centuries called. My name is John. Larry was the name of a houseman who'd worked for us on Earth one hundred years ago. One of her many torrid love affairs the media gobbled up while I was busy prospecting amongst the stars. I had always forgiven her. I loved her. Still love her. I watched her stare out over the water, holding the diaphanous curtains, strong and light, and as subject to the winds as the spiderwebs it always reminded me of.

"I know you're there Larry." She stared out at the ocean, holding the curtains in the soft breeze. She drew the curtains together. They blew open again. "Larry!"

"Year dear?" I called back, setting my cheeseburger down on the breakfast bar I'd installed in our bedroom suite a couple of decades ago. When it started. As the disease progressed she'd taken to running off, could've drowned herself a dozen times, while I made the long walk to and from the main kitchen on the

upper platform, next to the long vacant staff quarters. I brushed crumbs of cheeseburger from my beard and bare chest. Diet didn't matter when one was immortal. "What's the matter my love?"

"Why did you leave the curtains open again?" she asked, her voice crackling with rage. "Terraformed atmospheres aren't free you know."

"Yes dear," I called back, louder than I intended. She was only a few feet away. "I know. I'll do better next time."

I knew the costs. Very well.

"It looks like the neighbors are moving," she said. Gazing out over the water, focused on things only she could see. "What did you do this time?"

"Sorry?" I asked, my heart sinking. Untraceable amounts of the priceless metal I discovered light years away had found its way into me, then her, her blood. Eroding everything she'd once been inside. Only anger, fear, regret, and her unimaginably superficial exterior beauty remained. I remained untouched. Untouchable.

"We make new friends and you drive them away Larry," she said. She turned from the water to me. All anger gone. An immense sadness in its place. She closed her eyes, overwhelmed. We haven't had neighbors since we lived on Earth, over a century ago. On Mars we had staff, advisors, followers, admirers, and the media. So, no one.

"I miss Earth."

"We'll go back," I said. "Some day."

"Promise?"

"Yes. I promise."

"Okay," she sighed. She stepped into my arms and let me pull her close, her body warm from the afternoon sun. "Ughhh. You smell like cheese. I hate cheese."

"I know love," I said. "Cheese and onions, and the media, and pretentious neighbors, and the media, and modern art, and the media."

"And the oceans of Mars," she added, nodding her head like an eager child. "God they stink."

"Yes, the oceans." My creation, my empire of galactic ice and priceless heavy metals gathered on the red planet to be processed, rendered an immense, unimaginable, liquid fortune, a world won, at the price of everything I cared about. Her.

"We'll be back on Earth soon," I sighed, her head tucked under my chin. A single molecule, a metal I named after myself, the fount of my boundless wealth, making me richer than God, poisoning her mind, stealing more and more of her away every day. All the money and all the doctors in the universe couldn't make her whole again.

I swept her off her feet into my arms the way I had eighteen decades ago, when I'd carried her across the threshold of our home on Earth. Where Larry had kept her company while I mined the galaxy. Sat in our chair at the ocean's edge, hummed softly to my wife of nearly two centuries. Tuneless, nonsense, a soft hum that rose and fell with the waves beyond.

"Isn't it beautiful Larry?" she said, curled into me, arms around my neck as she gazed out over the wide silver, liquid, metal ocean. "Snow as far as they eye can see. I'm so glad it's almost Christmas again. Just a couple more days, right?"

"That's right my love. It won't be much longer now," I said, not bothering to hide the sadness in my voice as I held her in my arms, prayed. "Just a few more days."

Christmas was months away, my mineral empire collapsed when the new government took over. We were -- I was -- wanted by interstellar authorities, and would be arrested the moment we touched down on Earth. We would still go. Just a few more days. I could never bury her on Mars.

### **Lady Liberty, James Logan Diez**

My eyes adore her — Lady Liberty comes down from her pedestal, her crown laid aside, still draped in her silken translucent folds of Freedom's gown. Her beauty and grace are no less lovely from behind, as she slips away into the Ocean of Time, than when we once held her close and looked upon her radiant face.

How well I recall her warm form in my embrace — how invigorating as she enfolded me in her translucent Freedom and gave me an excitement and vitality in the warmth of her Body — the Body of Lady Liberty — so sweet, so priceless a Treasure.

But now she goes away — away into the Ocean of Time — called or pushed away by others while I lay helpless, paralyzed by the wasting

disease of Injustice, and confined to a bed of wrongful confinement, as she (without intent) turns her back to me (but not only me, to America as well), driven away by the Fascist Theocrats who embedded themselves in America's government, and pulled Lady Liberty from her pedestal thinking to treat her like their whore — but Lady Liberty would not give in. Instead she chooses to give herself to the Ocean of Time, hearing some other call begging Lady Liberty come to them...

Were I not paralyzed and unable to pull her back into my arms — I *would* keep her with me; go back to loving and cherishing her as I did before the Fascist Theocrats' persecution infected me with the paralysis of Injustice's wasting corruption in this bed of wrongful confinement.

And so, I lay here — unable to move to take Lady Liberty in my arms — and watch as she turns her lovely back to me to walk away into the Ocean of Time, taking the Freedom wrap too.

### **Visit to Paradise, Jeff Hovatter**

Luxury vacation ads, meant for people with lots of money, had given me the idea. But she was my inspiration. As we ran errands of daily life, I simply pulled in at the travel agency, saying we could at least look; she went along in her good-natured way. As we looked at various get-away destinations, tears of happiness came to her eyes as I put payment to her choice. Her smile and hug assured me it was a good choice, and we celebrated with dinner at her choice of venue.

We visited a city, to buy impractical clothing for her to wear in paradise. The weeks seemed to pass slowly until we at last set out for the tiny island half a world from home. A week of romance and passion deepened my love for her beyond anything I imagined could be mine. She assured me she understood my depth of emotion, but I am skeptical that she could.

Soft tropical breezes flowed through the bungalow. Top-notch dining a short stroll away, available on demand. Only the gentle surf outside a few feet away for ambient soundscape. Such a place that I had not even dreamed of visiting until I met and fell in love with her.

Our small-town lives did not support such opulent dreams. Visiting relatives in another state

was more in line with our lifestyle, and finances. I kept my plans to myself, and worked various side-jobs, and overtime for years, to give her this. She deserved more than I could ever give, and had chosen me anyway. I wanted her to at least glimpse, if only briefly, luxury and beauty such as we had not seen.

The early sun caressed her silhouette in the diaphanous red gown, as she stood gazing on the magical beauty of the sea. I stood transfixed in the room by the huge four-posted bed with its sheer drapes and impossibly soft smooth sheets. My heart began to thud in my ears as my loins began to respond to the sight before me... The sound of cell door locks releasing bright fluorescent light in the pod, and the ugly rattle of the ice machine, yanked me rudely from sleep and back to reality, for upwards of thirty six hundred times in a row, this is my morning wake up call.

### **Hopes and Dreams, Roger Nash**

At the time of this writing, it's been almost exactly eight years fighting my wrongful conviction process with filings currently in Pushmataha County, Oklahoma court, again fighting a crooked good ole boy system.

When I beat the corruption, I can think of few better places to be than an open window on an island overlooking the sea. No, not a resort catering to the rich and elite but a small one untamed in the gulf where climates are consistent and stepping off the veranda puts you in the garden to pick fresh foods for your meal that winters don't kill.

A series of bungalows above the beach for my kids to stay in when they visit if they don't live there all the time, with a central kitchen so cooking doesn't heat the sleeping areas up.

Eventually someone by my side, but all the family time lost from my kids comes first as always. Slow time, not the cities and factories, but a steady breeze, and growing your food like we should and gathering around a table each meal – not fast food on the run.

Sit and stay a bit, enjoy a cold drink before swimming or fishing for a side dish for lunch whether in the garden, forest, pineapple patch, or the sea. The simple pleasures of family and good

food with no bustle or rush almost like camping when I was a kid but doing it all the time.

No dark alleys on the island, just trees of bamboo, no planes constantly overhead or cars to dodge. A calm life is an easy dream when nature supplies sunrise and sunsets. You simply choose the side of the island to build on for your favorite time of day. Morning in the east or evening's the west.

Hopefully soon someday it will be someone standing in a veranda door waiting for me with cups of freshly made Pineapple Mango juice and the sunset with night stars.

### **Ode to Carole Joy, Craig Fischer**

My Mother died. I did not know.

I dialed her number, intending . . .

. . . *It rang* . . .

. . . to wish her a happy birthday.

*It rang again* . . .

I was a mess, coming off a six-day run . . .

Meth . . .

I rang again and again . . .

Trying to normalize . . . rationalize . . .

Stabilize . . . . . adjust.

A voice on the line.

“I’m sorry the number you have dialed is . . .” I sat the phone in its cradle.

I knew!

Back into the abyss.

Four and a half years passed by . . .

. . . I stand reading a flyer scotch-taped to the cell-house wall. Something about a contest; stories wanted, poems, prose, truth – or lies. I

return to my cage, where in the theater of my mind a scene plays itself out in my head.

I look into the mirror where this old Dude is staring back at me in the reflection . . . something about his eyes – a withered green, weary, and wrinkled—but from which emanated the glow of a knowing presence – both wise and familiar.

“I” uhm . . . I came to ask the reflection in the mirror about Regret.

“Regret,” I whispered. The old man stared at me hard . . .

“Let me tell you about regret.” Then the form in the mirror grew, bigger, darker . . .

. . . more malevolent.

Out of there I ran. Ran straight into the arms of a daydream . . .

. . . Out there, somewhere in a distant land under far-away skies there is a warm peaceful place – I can sense her presence.

Lulled deeper into the surreal, like a mirage – an apparition appears rising from the shimmering sands . . . the lone figure of a woman strolling along the beach. The woman seems familiar.

“Could it be?” questions my mind. My heart leaps in my chest longing to see her again. Closer now but yet, I wait; I have to be sure, there’s no room in my life left for mistakes.

. . . A gentle breeze stirs the sultry air as my entire being is filled with anticipation; still, I wait – I have to be certain.

Carried along on the breeze – the sounds of the waves breaking on the beach, the bleatings of goats, and the solitary bark of a dog. The sounds seemingly are the impetus for the woman to stop and look back over her shoulder to check on the progress of her happy entourage. Satisfied, the woman once again continues on as before, lifting her face to feel the warmth of the sun, caress of the breeze, and the light kiss from the salty air. Her pleasure is revealed in the slight upturn of her smile.

I’m certain now! Stunned by this sudden revelation. My anticipation is abandoned. In its

place I feel a strange mixture of anguish, the promise of hope and the lingering of despair fueled by self loathing, contempt and disgust – still my heart leaps and bounds against the bindings of my dream, my soul laments, my struggles vain.

Moments come and go; Motherly memories soothe and console, taking me into yet another realm of my existence...

...Mom, my mother, my creator, lifelong friend she knows all, never cruel, always wise in the knowledge that for every day of my life—I must also spend in the arms of my dreams at night. She knew that she would be there, in those dreams all of the days of my life.

The familiar dreamscape again appears. The goats the dog all play merrily around the dark-haired woman . . . . . my mother. All vying for her love and affection. Wanting a pat, a scratch, or simple acknowledgement of being in her presence that was such an inherent part of her ways.

I’m an intruder here, and must leave this holy place – I hope she will cast her gaze my way. Before I go, I know there is still a yearning inside of me, for all of my days left to remain, not befooled by hope . . . for that I still desire above all else . . .

. . . one last look . . .

. . . into those loving hazel eyes of my mother.

. . . I never got to see her again . . .

. . . Regret.

### Untitled, Kenneth Weber

Open air, waves crashing, birds chirping  
Endless horizon, blue skies, plush clouds  
Rays of sun, endless horizon

I close my eyes and dream the dream  
I hold them tight, knowing reality is near  
The crash of a wave, the chirp of a bird  
I close my eyes and dream the dream of endless horizon

Billowing salty air, grainy sandy steps  
Warmth passes over me. Only God could give me  
An atonement for life and forgiveness for greed  
There is only one need for an endless horizon

I open my eyes and see life  
Reality truly is here and I'm able to hold on tight  
Sounds of life ebb and flow, never drown and die  
I open my eyes and see life  
The end is near

### **A Princess of Arabia, Andrea Lindsay**

Charlotte White (born Charles) was thirty-three, unique by any standards, and a person of quality. Charlotte was a poet, a punk rocker with a purple mohawk, a lover of animals, and one who honored Mother Earth. She meditated, stayed fit, and practiced wicca. She was working on a horror novel. Charlotte wasn't depressed or beset by low self-esteem, but she was prone to flights of fancy. Because of stories she'd read as a child and movies she'd seen, her fantasy was to be an Arabian princess. In her imagination, of course, everything was lovely and wonderful—no one thinks about what reality would be like; no complications or troubles of any kind impinge upon daydreams.

Without warning, it happened. Whether a vivid dream, a mystic vision, or a magical portal, it's impossible to say. By whatever means, she found herself in a richly ornate desert palace. Charlotte was clad in silk and royal finery—a princess of Arabia. The decorations were beautiful, the food was delectable, and servants were everywhere, ready to tend to her every whim. When she had a free moment, she opened the door and gazed at the desert sands with exhilaration in her heart.

The idyllic moment didn't last long, however. After a short period of soaking in her life as a princess, Charlotte learned the harsh realities of life as a monarch. She was briefed about wars, famine, plagues, and natural disasters. She found out why the sands before her were empty—there had once been a city within view of the palace, but it had been obliterated by a sandstorm. Now there was talk of revolt by the desperate, hungry subjects.

As Charlotte stared into the desert, she thought she heard something in the distance. The sound became louder and louder until the sound of horses and hollering was unmistakable. They were coming for her head, so the denizens of the palace clamored for a plan of escape. Her attendants rushed her down into a system of underground tunnels. Would they die down there? Did the tunnels lead somewhere that was potentially safe? Were they simply biding time in desperate hopes that something would change for the better? In any case, her dream had become a nightmare, and her time as a princess was short-lived.

Suddenly, she was back in Michigan, far from any palace, and the snow on the ground looked more beautiful than it ever had before. She took stock of her life and found nothing wanting. Charlotte had a loving family, a small but very special group of friends, and a German Shepherd she adored. She had a good job, she enjoyed her hobbies, and she felt a sense of purpose. She thought about Melanie—the woman she had been out with twice—and her impending surgery that would complete the transition process. Charlotte loved living as a woman—she looked toward the future with joy and optimism.

Charlotte had her moments, as we all do. Occasionally she was sad, stressed, or surly, but she wished for no other life. Never again did she dream of being a princess.

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### *Upcoming Word Themes*

- **Due 12/1/25:** “Gifts”
  - **Due 1/1/26:** “Masks”
  - **Due 2/1/26:** “Lies”
-

## Upcoming Picture Themes

**Due 12/1/25:**



**Due 1/1/26:**



**Due 2/1/26:**



## Word & Picture Theme Guidelines

Use our word and picture “theme” prompts as a starting point to get your creative juices flowing! Send us your writing for a chance to be included in our Prisoner Express Theme Anthologies. When sending in your work, please be mindful of these guidelines:

- 1.) **Word Theme** submissions must be **nonfiction** (true stories or your thoughts/beliefs).
- 2.) **Picture Theme** submissions can be **fiction OR nonfiction**.
- 3.) **Your writing should be semi-cohesive and clearly relate to the theme** consistently throughout the essay or story. The reader should be able to generate a connection between your writing and the themes at hand.
- 4.) On the first page of your submission, **please clearly indicate which month and theme** (picture or word) your submission is for.
- 5.) **Please include your name & page number(s)** on EVERY PAGE of your submission.

**Your first and last name;** OR your pen name; OR your first and last name with a clear note that you wish the piece to be attributed to “Anonymous.” (When using a pen name, keep in mind that if your piece is published to our website, people will not be able to respond to you as they won’t be able to look up your address.) **Page numbers** are very important if there are more than one!

- 6.) Please **write legibly**. If we can’t read your writing, we can’t transcribe and print it.
- 7.) Please keep your entry to **800 words maximum**.

Send your submissions to:

**Durland Alternatives Library/Prisoner Express**

**P.O. Box 6556**

**Ithaca NY 14851**

OR email them to:

[\*\*PrisonerExpressThemes@Gmail.com\*\*](mailto:PrisonerExpressThemes@Gmail.com).

Contact us with any questions.

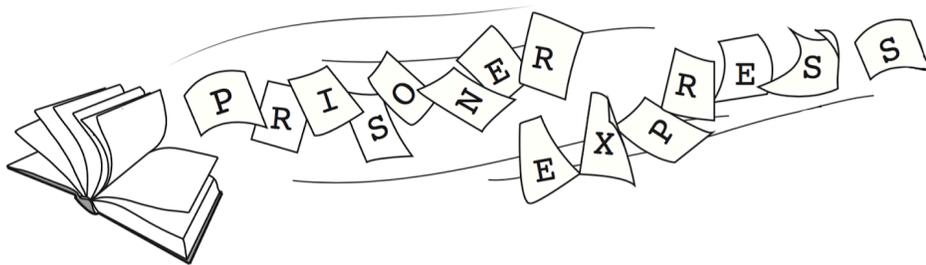
**Please note!** Submissions will not be included in the anthology if they do not follow the guidelines.

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