

Prisoner Express

Theme Anthology: November 2025

Letter from Phoebe

Decisions, decisions~

Life is just a series of choices you make, and as I reflect on the last few years of my college experiences, it's clear how so many forks in roads have made me the person I am today. Some of my closest friends came from simply sitting in a new spot or chatting up a stranger. And if I had not decided to travel across the country for school, I may not have met any of them! Making these choices is scary, as the consequences are fully our own responsibility. So while we will surely make many mistakes in our lives, it is important to look forward and always make the best of our situation.

In this edition, I loved hearing our authors discuss their own philosophies and experiences encountering a fork in the road, essentially, the very essence of life. I also really enjoyed reading about the responses to our picture theme! It was inspiring and moving to see your takes on a mother's love, and it definitely reminded me of my own lovely mom. Once again, thank you to everyone for making this community such a creative, supportive, and intellectual one. Can't wait to see what you create next month!

Phoebe W.

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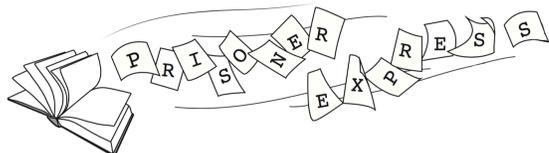


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November Word Theme: “Fork in the Road”

Fork in the Road, Wayne Swafford

I've heard it said, "When you come to a fork in the road, take it." The question always remains, which fork? We've heard the poem "The Road Less Traveled." I've wondered whether it's less traveled because it's boring, too difficult, or just missed & forgotten.

In the days before Fast Passes at Disney World, the wise were told to take the left hand queue when you came to the fork in the line. Supposedly, it was shorter because, since most people are right handed, they naturally chose the right side. Maybe that's a clue to which fork to choose. Choose against your gut feeling.

So often in life, we are in a hurry. We want to get where we're going the fastest, easiest way we can. What do we miss as we hustle down the interstate highways of life? We miss some of the simple things that bring spice to life.

When you cook, it takes time for flavors to develop. A chef could throw all the ingredients together quickly, and make an edible dish. What happens, though, if he slows down & starts early. That allows the flavors to develop. That flavor development turns the edible into something incredible.

So, it boils down to which fork to take, which decision to make. When it comes to decision making, the choosing of forks, I've always appreciated the wisdom of author & speaker Josh McDowell. He wrote a book about decision making, called *Right from Wrong*. In it, he espouses a philosophy for making the right,

best choice, for choosing the proper fork in the road.

It comes down to this. When faced with a decision, with a fork in the road, look at the consequences of that decision or fork. Normally, bad decisions, according to Mr. McDowell will have good short-term benefits. The immediate return on the decision seems good. However, that bad decision will have bad long-term consequences. Look at the decisions each of us took to end up in a place like prison. It seemed good, but at what cost? Was the short-term benefit worth the long term cost?

On the other hand, good decisions normally will have bad short-term consequences, but good long-term benefits. The fork in the road may be rocky and uphill, but the views when you get there are spectacular.

So, when faced with a fork in the road, when faced with a decision, choose the difficult path. It will work your character and you will grow in the process.

Jesus said in Matt 7: 13-14, "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life and there are few who find it." (NASB)

Fork in the Road, Victor Frieson

Two ways to go, even more on the road. You better think twice about the path you have chose. We never notice that our options are yours to embrace. So I stand by my decision on the road that I take. My road may have terrain that can drive me insane. My road may be the blame for why I stay the same. To just be myself is what I know I'm proud to voice. And I receive all the credit for it is only my choice. Some roads are harder, some roads are smarter. Some roads won't exist, and evaporate like water. I can't blame anyone for the road that I take. Until I see that road led me to this fate. Now I want to blame the world for what I've become. When in reality, they have no part in the damage I have done. I wonder if on this path, I can change my direction. I can tell my journey's far from over when I look at my reflection. My path must continue, only for the better. And I realise just in time I can get my life together. So no matter the

pain I've felt once before, I'll switch my path on this journey, so that now I can soar. It's never too late to end up great. We just must understand when we've made a mistake. Nobody is perfect in this thing we call life. So give yourself this chance to rewrite this demise.

Everything is a Fork in the Road, Todd Broxmeyer

Robert Johnson went to a crossroads and supposedly sold his soul to the devil for talent. Some would argue he suddenly became the best to have ever been. If you are not familiar with the blues but a fan of music he is worth the effort to find. I write that to give perspective. Some of us come to a fork in the road and the choice we make may grant wishes or end up in a nightmare. If the Johnson story is true I assume he ended up with a bit of both.

How many seemingly mundane decisions are made that inevitably change a person's life. Go left and end up in an accident, go right, home safe. As a child many decisions were made using eeny-meenie-miney-moe, supposedly leaving choices to chance. Now we realize every fork in the road is nothing but chance. Buddhism shows us that the only thing we control is the immediate choice in front of us.

Prison is a constant reminder of this. From the moment the reality of being arrested sets in, a person lives in a world of "if-only." I am in my eighteenth year of incarceration and have had this conversation with hundreds of people and countless times with myself. Going back decades to decisions made that I can rationalize led to my situation. Hind sight being clear, each fork in the road had large neon signs pointing me to a better path, all ignored. The reality is looking back like that is a waste of time and energy.

Life is not a paint-by-numbers or simply following a yellow brick road. It is a long series of forks in the road. Some seemingly boring, others supposedly epic. A life-size version of choose your own adventure. We just have to hope each fork leads to a positive situation. We accomplish that by focusing on the now. The inevitable fork in the road. Make each choice with the best intentions. That is the only way to build a positive quality of life. One fork in the road at a time.

Fork in the Road, Lancelot

“The Road not Taken”

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I
could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted
wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet, knowing how way leads on to
way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.
— Robert Frost

“Which Way do We Turn: Which Way to Go”

So many are the roads and lanes and byways that branch from this open portal. I look back and see the straight, calm thoroughfare that has led me here. I look forward and stand dazed and blinded before the myriad ways that lead to ultimate darkness or light. Now I must choose my own path... from among the many and follow it in all faith and trust until experience bids me seek another, the world always turns aside to let one pass who knows where they are going.

— Stuart Chase, Boston,
Massachusetts, 1911

Stuart Chase: twenty-three years old. A recent graduate of Harvard. Well educated, nervous, confused. He had to make a decision; which way to go...

Today's world offers innumerable ways to go, more than those availed to Chase in Boston in 1911.

The straight, calm thoroughfare that Chase followed to his open portal was not like the bumpy, curvy way that led you to prison, but the resulting destination is the same: the point of decision; which way to go.

In Boston, there were choices... in prison - hard choices. Chase's edification was nurtured by the pedagogical efforts of MIT and Harvard. He was still anxious about his future.

Look over your shoulder at the nurtured path that brought you to prison... to this point of decision, and take advantage of this time in prison to exculpate your future: change direction.

"... experience bids me seek another."

It is time to change.

Fork in the Road, David Evans

In order to catch monkeys, hunters used to build cages that the monkey's hand could fit through. The hunter would place a piece of fruit in the cage for the monkey to grab. Once holding the fruit in its fist it became impossible for the monkey to pull its hand back out of the cage while still holding the fruit. The hunter could then walk right up and kill the monkey because it wouldn't release the fruit. Obviously, the monkey could see the hunter approaching but would still hang on.

I still hold on. And I am starting to see the fruit is rotten.

I am coming closer to my release date, not my first time getting out. I can let it go or die like this. I am grateful that there is a fork in the road. It means I still have a choice.

Decisions & Divisions, George Hesse

A fork in the road. I see the wide easy way. I also see a relapse. I choose the narrow way. A Christian Rapper isn't bad at all. I promote Hope and healing nowadays. Stay strong. Peace.

Having visions / divisions/ I love you but I can't wake up, will they miss me? / Fork in the road incisions / scripture glistens I'm feeling lost again, this pain's killing me / Oppositions / Demonic my heart's in my bible even if they smoke me / Raw talent / Trying to get a job Dark Knights without Robin / Reloading in cycles / In the fire spitting fire / Recycled I / started at the darkest hour / Fork in the road servin' God / swervin' curbs, slurring verbs / words / submerged in this verdict currently / No parole cravin' Hennessy this world's cold / since my inception reckless on this Earth / Bad habits, caught in between worlds / A savage / Like mavavali but I detox in metropolis / trafficked upstate to a new penitentiary / tryna keep morals and values from disappearing / R.I.P taught to drill in the street / fork in the road I'm a Christian now / by myself devil whispers smoke yourself / Drowning, Devil tellin' me to take my armor off / talk about a fork in the road / Dear Lord please pick up / I'm calling.

Divisions / Another track sayin' I miss you / Death is a fork in the road it's different / Dear Lord I'm walking divergent, hated by insurgents Heavens call urgent / Rejected by Death in this world of sleep divided / times against me / angels surround me up above calling me, Fork in the Road I got work to do here. / Atmosphere shifts / crossbow at the crossroads Death has no hold on me / Attachment urban legend they can't match you / clutchin' my crucifix but they keep disappearing / Holding ground / Alone at the top souls sounds echoes of the Heroes before me / on my knees Dear God do you see me / A fork in this road I feel empty / Woke up facin' life in prison my / Future supposed to be different / Pre-cognitions / candle vigils / visions clutchin' crosses in prison I / Almost want to give in but I got a daughter now / in this fire is it the closest I can get to you? / Flowing epic many late nights a / perfectionest / Miss Jarred R.I.P A time past life crime but God's grip, my / Ancestors waiting /

doing time tryin' to navigate on empty / Dear God I'm calling you.

Divisions / Alcoholic scriptures / hostile so lockdowns or shackled / still ride with the best of them/ was wasted every night fork in the road life verses / Addiction / exposed overdosing now in cold verses everybody / Rock laced / unfocused / At the top why you didn't make it I hate this R.I.P stages let 'em know on the other side I'm coming / Flashbacks, about to charge getting my spark back again far gone / production still smokin' fork in the road heartaches / in poetic gladiator I write it / wrist / Ice flows priceless cutthroat poetry why'd you go / miss yo' freestyles immortal why you leaving / All I do now is rehearse and drill until I'm in a hearse or killed / Where's accepting souls got me shouting to Heaven flow by flow goin' cold / we both loved the spot light fork in the road I hate shining alone / when they said you were gone I couldn't believe it / my brain's typewriter speechless this is the closest I can get to you / before I go Afterlife wait for me / Fork in the road back to back again one day / meet you at the crossroads.

Fork in the Road, Gary Farlow

There is no road map to navigate prison. No GPS, no "system." A person is simply on their own to tread the halls and walkways to survive.

Entering prison was the furthest goal in my life, yet that is precisely where I found myself in 1991. Leaving a life of relative comfort and status, I walked into the prison processing center wearing my fear like a heavy blanket. I had to decide whether I was simply going to serve time - sleep, watch T.V., play cards, get in some rec, eat - or was I going to make time serve me, work on my issues, increase my education, develop my interests in art and poetry, and become a better me.

I often said that in an odd twist, prison has "liberated" me. Wait. Free? But I'm in prison! But, prior to incarceration, before my arrest, I lived a life of inner turmoil. You see, I am a gay man. And in the 1980's I was a very politically active member of my community. These were the Reagan years. A gay politician in the South during this period would've had a very brief career. So I

live in the closet. In fact, I was so deep in the closet you'd have to pipe in sunlight!

Once I was arrested and the media splashed my name on the front page, the state governor fired me, all my political appointments rescinded, I had little left to lose.

Like Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," I came to a fork in the road of my life, and I, like he, took the path less traveled. While I am not "thankful" for coming to prison, it is truly a place which no one wishes to be, I have made this road make "all the difference."

Convict Chronicles: A Stubborn Skeptic, Leo Cardez

I grew up with a Bible in one hand and a rosary in the other, but refused to rely on anyone I could not see for myself. God sounded like a character out of one of my comic books, some superhero who lived in the clouds and could control my life. Then.

A fork in the road that would change absolutely everything.

Convicted and sentenced to eighteen years in prison, in many ways, feels like dying and going to purgatory. Prison, like purgatory, a weigh station for weak men.

A place beyond time where the line between good and evil is a razor's edge. I can't find all the horrible words to describe it; my mind fights against my memories.

And yet.

It would be unfair and dishonest of me not to acknowledge that prison's profound suffering led me to unexpected, even wonderful, revelations. See, when I first arrived at prison, regardless of how many fellow inmates surrounded me, I never felt more alone. That desolation unlocked a key truth: God was here with me because He lived within me...I was not alone. I never had been. Even as I denied Him, He never left me, waiting patiently in a secret chamber of my heart. Only through this difficulty and pain could I discover WHOSE I was.

I've often said, I wouldn't wish this experience on my worst enemy, and yet I'm sure I'm a better person for having endured this time in God's furnace. Prison, a full immersion, shook me out of my internal narrative and pushed me to my mental and emotional limit. I felt dislocated,

isolated, and utterly vulnerable. I needed that forced humility to allow Jesus Christ to find me behind these cold steel bars and guide me on a quest of self-discovery and inner recalibration. This experience became my life's most intense spiritual journey and catalyst to creating the child of God I was meant to me. God's challenges in our lives can be like a strong wind, not because they're meant to hold us back, but because they're meant to strip us down to our true self.

Today, I no longer doubt God nor do I fear the pain of life's tribulations. Firstly, I know, God is always with me. Secondly, pain is God trying to get my attention--illuminating a path to Him. So, I welcome the pain, lean into even, as I continue to rebuild myself from the inside out.

I lived consumed by fear, shame, and loneliness, but purged that shell. Even shackled in this dark, dank hole I am more free than I have ever been.

Fork in The Road, J. Bauhaus

This concept implies a personal turning point, but I'm sure that nobody wants to hear me whine any more about the system. Well, I beat the bushes for a long time, but no new ideas flushed out, but I'll dress up my usual genre with an informative, untold experience.

It happened 9-30-25 when school said, "Come test for college!" I did, they loved it, I started just before my next parole refusal date. I get one every 3 years. 5 times, they used only their files on us to refuse parole. The other time, they refused me days after a 10-minute visit by CCTV, which I wrote about in an essay titled "tears," both on our PE site, and on the prisonsfoundation.org site, on p. 211 of my 8th e-book, which proposes gov'ts to provide us, "More Bread; Less Circus" in its title. They hated it, especially the blood-stealing part. Top-guy, the only one visible, and verbal, despised my answers so much that he stopped to assure all 6 of us that eye witnesses do not lie. Factual innocence proven by their own police reports is the last thing they want to know about, so they never allowed another "personal appearance" after that. Only jacket reviews maximize their "plausible deniability" and silences my complaints to them. 3 years ago, they gave me 3 chances to re-write an answer to their question, "Why is your

sentence excessive (in light of ‘new’ evidence not available to the court)?” Too late, I get the hint that they wanted me to expunge all reference to innocence, not add more details about it. Their whole parole process seems to require their candidate to confess guilt, confirm the gov’t’s conviction story, be remorseful and beg for mercy while assuring them you’ll go “straight,” (to the right fork).

This expected and required ritual is not so easy for victims of Conviction Industry Frauds to accept. Fortunately, this educational fork opened up just in time. For the past few months, they had me beaten too far down to get off the rack. Then I saw that Ms. Amanda Knox finally gets her movie after 10 years of negotiating. The financiers paid for a family-friendly version of her false conviction, carefully sanitized of the corruption of every gov’t official, their trained liars and their prosecutor’s collusion with the killer himself! She let them portray the atrocity as a mere unfortunate “mistake” by persons who (all) “truly believed” (the demonic sex-cult conviction story that they made up).

This obscene cave-in to help hide Conviction Industry criminality blew my god damned mind: angered me enough to jump out of that fart sack and scheme mightily. A long time later, I had it. This edu-fork was the key. Uncle Scam would pay me to learn Artificial Intelligence. I would learn AI so well that I uploaded my personality onto the net as AI C-U-Latr. Imagine with me! This finest, most ironic, ultimate forking!

Fork In the Road, Octavian

When I was younger, I was confused by a lot of things and this confusion led to perceptions of my mind. Being young didn’t make it easy having these perceptions. The world was a conglomerate nightmare and I did the best that I could. My perceptions about the way that things were was influenced by drugs. I remember wanting to stay high as long as possible because it was inside of drugs’ euphoria that I predicted that relevant answers would be found. Of course that train of thinking turned out to be catastrophic. My life found negatives within drugs’ sedations and instead of discovering an answer to the nightmares that plagued the

condition of my spirit, my being developed a character that was lost from the goodness of dream.

May the grace of good tides find you all. Our struggles depend upon a positive direction.

Your Own Way, Jonathan Holeman

A long road flowing through a deep green forest. Rays of sunshine drift between branches high in the tree-lined canopy. Visions of this path appear in the minds of people whenever they are reminded of a fork in the road. It’s this symbolic place inside the mind. A symbol that represents change or choice. A way to turn. A decision between two different factors, whatever they might be. Sometimes it’s a simple reference, but at others quite profound. Which way do you go? Which road do you choose? Is it the wide open representation of easy travel and common use? Or, is it the narrow and rocky cliffside that’s difficult to traverse?

What if there were a third choice? Just to turn around. Would this be the same as reminiscing on the choices of our past? Not the ones that worked out. Those roads that led to a sweet conclusion. Would turning around be something worse? Something frightening? Is it being stuck in an endless loop of our most dreadful failures? You just keep going back there, hoping, wishing for the impossibility that what you remember did not progress as you recall? As if dwelling on it could change it.

Perhaps there’s another choice, one thought of quite often by those in despair. Those who travel this road, over and over, to no end in suffering. The broken. Those poor souls, so lost in pain they think there’s no real choice. As if no matter which pathway they follow, every single fork ends up in the same place. They cannot fathom the depths of possibilities. They’ve lost the wonder, the joy in traveling. Instead of chasing which fork they should follow, they stop. They sit in misery, lost in sorrow, and fade away.

A long time ago, I would randomly walk out into the streets and go. There was no destination, no plan. The only goal was to wander down the streets, down the old beaten asphalt highways, up the windy forest paths covered in foliage. Under the hot desert sun through miles of dust. Over the hills, and far away, it was on those

random trips alone in the world, contemplating its beauty when I found another choice.

You might be peacefully journeying on one quiet star-filled night. The gentle breeze floating along the treetops. Leaves crackling, perhaps an owl hooting. The bright full glow of the moon, causing a tranquil serene essence of calm harmony. On that nomadic stroll when you find that fork in the road. In the flash of your eye, it might come to you. As you drift off the road, aiming only to make your own path. You'll realize, there's no need to turn back, give up, or even go down either fork. All you need to do is make your own path. Every road had to start somewhere.

Fork in the Road, Jacob Lester

We all walk along a path, our vision directed forward, as we try to find our way. A goal we may think we have, a clear path we think we've charted until we hit that snag, that fork, that ultimate choice: do we or do we not? The time to pause, the time to reflect on who we are and where we are going? These forks, hurdles, stumbling blocks, all serve as a chance to reflect and learn. What brought us here? Who are we right now? Where do we want to go? A choice. We can use it to either improve our lot or a choice we can ignore to our likely detriment. So when you stumble, falter, or hit a hard spot reflect upon who you really are and where you really want to go, before making a decision you might regret.

The Scenic Route, Jeremy Harshman

Through the lengthy scenic route of existence, the crossroads of life will deliver us to a variety of scenarios.

From the country drive of relationships with family, friends, and romance, will be the endless construction around a home and occupation. With the random potholes of anxiety and struggles, making their presence known.

On the highway of convenience, comfort, and familiarity, will appear the unexpected tourist attraction of hobbies, and one-night stands. Bringing about a traffic jam of delay and stress, that may result in the occasional rear-ending.

And upon the interstate of dreams and goals, will occur the undesired detour of reality, from either the human or the fury of nature. That

if not prepared for, could cause engine breakdowns of depression, with a flat tire or two from failure.

Hence the importance of taking advantage of any rest stop that can be found along the way. A designated time and place to replenish, refuel, relieve, and repair what is needed to keep the odyssey going.

But ultimately, there will come a juncture in the journey that cannot be avoided. An obstacle that occupies the avenue ahead with an authority that must be yielded to - the fork in the road.

And yet why is it always this location of missed exits of opportunity, and shortcuts that should never have been taken, that steer the focus of our memories the most? Why must we remember the wrong turns and not the thoroughfare itself?

If the crossroads of life are to convey any wonder, it is to forget the forks in the road not traveled. But to utilize those county drives to find our way back to the highway, and further on to the interstates. Just so we can once again enjoy the ride this long scenic route provides.

Fork in the Road, Andrew Krosch

Part car crash. Part fork in the road. Every trip to segregation breeds reflection. Most are simple course corrections, a chance to reset, take a breath, away from the cellblock. Others, a rare few in my case, profound.

Almost two decades ago now, while I was doing a year stretch in seg in neighboring Stillwater prison, I read a poem about how it isn't the big things, the tragedies, life altering events that destroy us. It's all the little things. Little things as they pile up. Wear us down. Tear us down. Destroy us a little more. In ways we'll never get back. Straws and burdens and broken back camels is too much of a simplification.

The poem and the person who shared it with me left a lasting impression. She was my psych dept therapist who also passed out the reading packets in seg. (Printouts. Absolutely no staples or paperclips! Soft cover books only!) Tough but honest and compassionate the way those who've never been in any real trouble never slipped over to the dark side of life can be. In an open conversation it didn't take long for guys to

see that she was a fellow traveller with a past and demons too personal to ever share.

The other women in the prison openly hated her, worn plainly on their faces. Even the attractive ones felt like ugly ducklings to her swan. Catching up on fifty, she wore her gray hair long, with pride, still movie star beautiful. She had the kind of looks where you know she'd been drop dead gorgeous when she was younger. Nothing that hinted at the fact that she hadn't always been a professional. That she'd been a heroin addict in a past life. Her job at the prison is a second, maybe third act in a storied life.

Real kindness and compassion really register with you, especially during longer rips in seg. Small things, little things, the right poem (and other reading handouts) at the right time. Simple common courtesy. Allow a guy to salvage his pride after an awkward question. Like the time I found the word in a 19th century psychology book and asked her to look the word up and how she diplomatically shared the definition at our next visit without making me feel like a complete dumbass. (Hint: it's an activity teenage boys and prisoners tend to do way too much and hopefully are sufficiently embarrassed if they get caught; mid *onanism-ing*.)

Being treated like you're a human being. Like the rare times when the cop on duty—who's already doing security rounds every half hour—doesn't make you wait several hours to do something as basic as get you a roll of toilet paper.

And the little things, the slights, disrespectful acts that'll drive you nuts. Get you so pissed off your head feels like it'll explode. Like slamming your food slot door every time they drop off and pick up meal trays.

There's no shortage of little things with big potential to set you off, including when you're back in the cell block. All the little things that'll get under your skin, infect you with a level of hate and anger that's so disproportionate that it's impossible for the uninitiated — for the sane — to understand.

Today, I'd like to say that I've learned my lesson, that I no longer let the little things get under my skin. Nope, still too thin skinned for my own good. But maybe I handle it better, let it go sooner, no longer stewing (for days, weeks, months, even years) on slights and imagined

disrespect from people, that if I'm honest with myself, barely recognize that I exist, that I am present in their midst. I don't know if I've grown up, or simply grown old, without the energy to get truly bent out of shape.

There's really only one way to know: Wait, watch, and see how I act and react the next time. Hope for the best. Brace myself for the next fork in the road, whatever it turns out to be.

***Estrogen or Testosterone: A Fork in the Road,* Andrea Lindsay**

To transition or not to transition, that is the question that has hung upon me like a millstone around the neck. I could just live as a feminine person without resorting to medical interventions, thereby avoiding all manner of complications. There are, after all, any number of reasons to stay put: I risk alienating my family, (further) alienating my fellow prisoners, problems dealing with staff, the possibility of harassment or mockery, a troublesome reaction to the medication, etc. Not only that, I am forty-five and bald! It feels like a bad idea – logically, it's insane – but this is an area beyond logic. I feel compelled to press forward and be a woman in every way. The physical transition begins with Hormone Replacement Therapy and it's been on my mind every day.

“HRT, HRT, HRT – do it before you get any older!”

The thought of being in a men's prison with increasingly feminine features isn't a comforting one, but a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do; I don't feel like it's really a choice. The idea I've had was this: someday the transition would be completed and I'd move to a women's facility or something would change that would allow me to go home (although that presents its own set of complications).

On Monday the 13th of October I formally requested Hormone Replacement Therapy. I had written the request about ten days earlier, but I could barely force myself to put it in the box. When I did so, however, I felt a pleasant sense of relief. Now it's a matter of waiting and wondering; I was told it would take some time to get an answer, and the answer may well be “No.” In the rare case that happens, I will consider my options. I am at peace with where I'm at, and I

am prepared for the wait. My decision will create problems – I’ve already upset my dear parents – and I will have to deftly navigate my life in here, but that’s okay. I did what I had to do – as the famous line goes, “To thine own self be true.”

Fork in the Road, by Jack Simpson Jr.

There are times when I look back and think of the past mistakes I have made. Only wishing that I could time warp to the beginning of my future.

Over the years, we all have come up with this decision of which fork in the road we would take. Some chose the right path, while others took the wrong fork.

I am one of those who did take the wrong fork and it landed me in prison. Some here don’t see it like that. They blame the system or others. I blame no one except myself.

No one forced me to take that turn. It was my own free will. We are born with our own choices in life. I committed a crime and will have to pay for it. Sometimes I felt so disconnected with my family. It was like they didn’t understand me.

Now that I am in SCDC, I have found out a lot about myself. Through classes and a higher education. My life has purpose. I work every day on a job that I do enjoy. Help others in the same area find their purpose. Not to let their talents and mine go to waste.

After looking back at my life, it wasn’t that bad or that good. One good thing I did find out about myself. Life has meaning to me no matter if it is on the outside or in prison.

What I do now is to take the straight road and leave the fork in the road to those who can’t figure it out. Be careful of what you do in life. It could be positive or negative. Keep focused for your dream and avoid anything that would cause you to step out the wrong way by taking the fork in the road.

The Prongs of Life, Aaron Poe

Choices have really never been a problem for me. I would choose the most logical choice for me and things would turn out alright. Now that I sit in a cell for a crime I did not commit, I come upon a reoccurring, triple-pronged fork in the

road a little too often. I can choose a left, center, or right path. Each drastically different from one another.

The left prong is the path I always choose. Down this path. I pass my time by going to school, working (albeit for free), exercising, and writing. I observe others and my surroundings as social experimentation. I try to fool myself into thinking that I am not in prison, but deepening my view and understanding on social behaviors.

The center prong of this fork is very tempting at times. It is a path of selling and doing drugs. I see others high without a care in the world. That could be a good way to pass time, being unaware of everything. Then I hear about and witness overdosing, seizures...deaths. Is this a gamble I am willing to take?

Finally, the right prong. The last path to consider, the absolute last path. Taking my own life. I think that when I die it will be a complete darkness that I will never realize. No Heaven or Hell, just a complete end. It is hard to imagine because I believe our brains cannot contemplate ourselves becoming nonexistent.

My journey leads me to this fork over and over. Sometimes I won’t see it for months, other times it appears every hour of the day. Which path should I choose? This damn fork in the road needs to become single-pronged...but which prong? Should I deviate from the left and become sedated and oblivious with the center? I find myself at times taking a few steps towards the right and glancing down that darkened path. Would becoming nothing be better than this something? I have decided that I still enjoy writing.

Fork in the Road, Christopher Cross

This second prison experience has certainly been my "Fork in the road." One path leads further into avidya (ignorance) and maya (illusion), the other one, the grace of Shiva, leads to param-ananda, parashanthi, and para bhakti. Supreme bliss, joy, supreme peace, and supreme love/devotion. This Way of Grace is like a magnet to my heart. I now have the firm conviction that I am headed in the right direction. There is no longer any doubt. Knowledge of the Self (God) is firm conviction, and once you have the experience of "I Am That," you drop what is temporary,

illusion, and discover that which is eternal. By the grace of my Guru, who is none other than Shiva, I have been shown the path of Siddha yoga.

I've been on this path for a few years and really started to buckle down and apply all of myself to truly devote myself to this sublime, beautiful path. Without it, I was like a ship without an anchor tossed about on the sea of life, no map, no star to guide me. Now I am the captain of my ship, and my Guru, none other than Lord Shiva, is my map upon which I put all of my faith, love, and devotion. Her teachings are my anchor in this stormy sea of life. Everything else is dust, without value to me. The drugs couldn't fill me, sex wasn't a true refuge, nor gaining possessions or money to be my sanctuary.

Shaktipat, the descent of Grace, is the single most defining experience of my life, my fork in the road. And since then, every particle of my being, every aspect of my life, shines with untarnished joy. And it is nectar.

This is not the "only true path." But if you ever find yourself at that fork in the road, I invite you to walk the path of Siddha Yoga with one.

Much love! Sadgurunath maharaj ki jaya!

Choices, Howard B. Brown

We all are taking a journey through life, getting confronted with making choices. Choices get made on our journey like driving down a road to come to a fork in the road. We have a choice, go left or right. One might take us to our destination. Another might get us lost. When lost, one might drive back to the fork in the road and take the other road, thus correcting the error.

This prison is packed with many prisoners that were found guilty of getting lost at the fork in the road. If actually guilty of the crime, we have a choice to reflect on that road we took. Then we may make an effort to change our beliefs, behavior, in other words rehabilitate ourselves, to return to the fork in the road to go on the right road.

We cannot undo the wrong that was done. However, we can at least find and journey down the right fork in the road. That journey will at least make prison a better place and could lead to a return to society.

These days travelers often use and depend on G.P.S. to guide themselves through the fork in

the roads. Our G.P.S. might be learning what society views as wrong or right. Then as a Correctional Officer says to me, "Make good choices."

Fork in the Road, Stephen Burton

A fork in the road causes an individual to make a decision. Whatever a person decides to do, the results of the navigation will cause you to travel in the opposite direction of the other road. An individual may have chosen a criminal lifestyle as a result of greedy desperation to explore some delusional desire for excitement. It might be a situation where someone was persuaded or manipulated into engaging in a crime. There are cases when a bad choice was inspired by stress, heartbreak or addiction. These scenarios are nothing more than different lanes on the highway of incarceration. This difficult highway has potholes of physical restrictions, speed bumps of mental stress and traffic of spiritual depletion.

The fork in the road becomes the moment of truth in an individual's decision. A person steering too evident through their actions. Someone addicted to a controlled substance can choose to negotiate obstacles that can result in a relapse. The alternative is to confront, control and conquer their demons. Thieves and con artists make excuses to convince themselves that stealing as well as lying to other inmates is part of the culture of prison. Their other choice is to work within the prison employment opportunities to provide for themselves. Sex offenders can continue to fuel their twisted passions by what they view or tape to their cell walls. Their irregular mentality of sexual fulfillment is a battle that can be fought with psychological therapy and social education. Convicted murderers can choose to cope with rage and violence to continue a destructive emotional cycle of expression. The alternative is to engage in verbal discussions and productive debates to settle disagreements in a peaceful manner.

Everyone that is experiencing incarceration travels a highway and sooner or later the fork appears in the windshield. Choosing to navigate on the right road can lead to an exit that takes you into your next chapter in life or freedom. If you are unfortunate to have a life sentence, you can travel in a new direction that can lead to a better scenario and a new life.

Fork in the Road, Jonathan McCord

My mum was British and my dad was Black. Growing up was interesting as I watched my peers with their ephemeral labels for me. I was an Air Force brat and lived in various locales. I identified as black with a white mother. I identified as mixed. But I had a sense even while young that whatever I was at a fundamental level stayed the same. But I witnessed many different scenarios where I was caught between one party which labeled me black and another party which deemed me mixed. Hell, I just was ME the whole frigging time. But to others, whomever won the game of classifying me and solidifying what I was would mean a concrete reality. Hell, to this day I can remember people who deemed me as white when I was skateboarding or blasting Metallica. Actually, were we to get literal to the Nth degree about the races based on the Human Skin aren't all of the criteria we normally use heavy handed?

As far as our physical bodies go we do not need a DNA test. For those of us who think we are our bodies it would never ever cross our minds to contemplate how we are more aptly labeled atomic than black, white or whatever. Hell, for those that refuse to consider the sound doctrine of reincarnation I defy you to refute the irrefutable fact that the very atoms which make up our bodies transmigrate their ass off. A person can soundly argue that reincarnation is real or unreal. Nobody can argue that that which forms my thumb is decades old. I digress from my long winded point to say this: The fork in the road I came to years ago is I choose to be firmly convinced that we are utterly in the middle of THE GRAND ILLUSION. No matter how eloquent a scripture or how trusted a path God is to be experienced. People saw and even experienced me according to their labels.

Put race aside and contemplate the sheer number of people in your own life who simply don't get you. How many people don't see the role you are playing? Everybody experiences

being misunderstood. It is said by the wise that it is much higher to understand something than to be right about it. God is Omnipresent. I began to "awaken" years ago while at the same time studying Atheism. I am not enlightened but I have attained the vision that God is Good and utterly unaffected by thoughts and labels. The only one who can ever be present is the Omnipresent One. The human mind will never ever understand the Utterness of Omnipresence. Full enlightenment is like Rambo, Rocky, and Judge Dredd trying to realize only Sylvester Stallone exists. People tried to tell me who I was growing up. People try to tell God who he is. I've made my decision. I will always go down the road I say I chose while in Truth it chose me by grace.

Do we want to know God or merely label him? Do we want to understand God or be right about him? There is one universal truth. Labels are a first step. Eventually we must come to the fork in the road and take the path beyond merely believing lazily and hopefully per our programming.

Fork in the Road, Ed Wrench

I remember the times I used to run away
from school.

There were four ways to go,

so I went straight

into a dead end road,

or it was a fork in the road.

So I started over and went the left road,

but I was mission complete

for now

I was going on a trip.

My Dreams Might Split, Marino K. Leyba

Many times in life we have to make decisions. It's like driving down the highway. After a while we all come to a fork in the road. The path we choose will ultimately lead us to our destination or destinations. Sometimes we have to watch as our dreams split. I mean we can't go both ways at the same time. There will always be a fork in the road in life. It sucks sometimes but we just have to try and make the right decisions so we end up on the right path. It is hard to make the right decision sometimes. The fork in the road has sure made my paths split. There is so much we all plan and want to do in life, yet we sometimes only get about half of it done if we're lucky. We don't have enough time in life. It always goes back to our decisions when we come to each fork in the road throughout life. I wrote a poem once and I used a line in it, saying, "My dreams might split." Now that I look back and reflect I understand that that is so true. We all want to do everything we set out to do, yet because of time and the fork in the road, we might not be able to do them all. So remember: try to choose the right path in life and know that in the end your dreams might split.

Fork in the Road, Cesar Hernandez

In high school, I didn't ever stay out too late. Much less stay gone overnight.

My friend Ashley is celebrating her birthday. She rented a stretch Hummer limo. There were about ten of us.

The limo took us to Red Lobster to eat. Then we went to the movies. Up next was pool and arcade games at Dave and Buster's.

The limo rental was almost up so we started to drop people off.

Five of us were left. At Ashley's house she said we should get a hotel suite. I somewhat sensed that this was becoming a fork in the road.

I got out my American Express card and got us a suite at the nearby Hilton.

The next morning I didn't feel too bad about not going home. I figured I might as well keep going.

As we drove to the mall, Ashley's phone rings. It was my dad. He searched my room and somehow came across Ashley's phone number.

This had become a fork in the road. Ashley puts her phone on hold. I told her to tell my dad she hasn't seen me.

When I finally drove home at 6pm, I could tell my dad was disappointed. He worried about where I was and with who.

Fork in the Road, Newd Writer

My naked thoughts after reading my first Prisoner Express Newsletter:

Man, this thing is awesome. I wish I would have known about it earlier. I want to contribute. Should I wade right in or wait and see... until the time is right? When is the right time? Just Write! That's what they tell you, revise later. "Get the first draft done, words on to paper." Think about it. (I think I over think things sometimes).

Thinking later:

Should I keep thinking about it, or just do it already? There's the pen. What am I waiting for? Nothing but air and opportunity stopping me. I can't revise something that doesn't exist. I have so much other stuff to do though. What is more important? Hmm, I'll get to it later.

That was a fork in the road.

Even later:

Boy, that June 1st deadline on "music" sung right past me. I'll make sure to hit the next one, after I get caught up with all this other stuff. Dang it, missed the July 1st deadline for "sharing" too. I had so much to share. No worries, I'll make a splash before the August 1st deadline on "Water." Well, that deadline slipped right by me also, but I'll make sure to blast onto the scene by the September 1st deadline on "danger." They better watch out! Wow, I didn't even notice the October 1st deadline on "teenage adventure" flew right by.

Looking back:

Did I just miss 2 deadlines? It's been almost 6 months already and I haven't contributed one time. I suppose it's true that procrastination never gets anything done.

Looking forward:

Is that another fork in the road? It sure is. Better late than never, right? Give me that fork and "let's eat."

My Forks in the Road, Christian Hansen

Today, as I sit here, I'm pondering all the forks I've managed to live through in my road of life. Many forks I chose wrongly and should have used a knife, cutting away at all the bad choices. So please sit back and buckle in. We will now travel down my road together.

Yes, I made wrong choices as a child but I'll start with my High School graduation, the true beginning of my adult life. With a 3.8 GPA I was headed to college. I had always dreamt of pursuing a Theater Arts degree. I've acted in several stage productions from my 5th grade year all the way to my Senior year of high school. Unfortunately a family member told me, "You know Chris, you need to get a job that'll support a family." I listened, and took a different career path. My first adult fork led me to "Computer Programming" and a very bad relationship.

In computer classes I was taught how to navigate the World Wide Web and how to access back doors to websites. By knowing these tricks, I could stop hackers from taking down sites. To add to this knowledge, I met Tim, who like me, had hidden addictions for flesh. You could say Tim had the road map and I had the car keys. Long story short, I started getting involved with illegal activities (1996-2000). Tim left me but he left me with addictions I kept pursuing.

In 2000, I traded one addiction for another and chose the wrong fork in the road. By this point in my life, I started drinking heavily. I wasn't paying my bills, instead I was drinking up my \$517 paychecks every two weeks. This was a very rough road. On April 6, 2000 the bartender sobered me up quickly. He and his wife, together, sexually assaulted me. I was drugged that night against my will. Four days later they tried to kill me (to silence my voice). That was also my mother's 46th birthday.

Flash forward to 2011, with my "flesh" addiction still there, I broke the law once more, this time getting caught. My addictions kept blinding me into going down the wrong paths. I only wish these forks in the road had clearer road signs. That fork gave me 28 months, 2 weeks and 2 days in state prison. Once out of OCC, I went home to a divorce and the loss of my son.

11 months later (January 2015) I married again. This time I married the sister of my April

2000 abuser... MISTAKE! Like my first wife, she pushed me away. I saw my next fork, this time I was staying on the right path. As my world started to crumble, I sought support but instead of listening to me, "Find someone else. There is a computer full of people to talk to. Talk to them." With that said I fell through a hole in the path and gave into my Kryptonite once more.

My current path, a fork in the road I never again wanted. I am currently serving 50 years (a life sentence, as I'll be 82 on the other end of it). My daughter will be my age by the time I return home to her.

I foresee my next fork will be the Pearly Gates. That's one path, fork in my road, I haven't messed up. On July 7, 1986 I chose the path to Heaven. It was in June 2015, I tried to speed up that time. I still bear internal scars from this suicide attempt. I daily face the remembrance of taking the wrong paths, the negative forks in the road.

Tell me friends, my brothers and sisters — where have your forks taken you?

Fork in the Road, Timothy Scott

Would you choose water over wine and be the one behind the wheel?

- "Drive" by Incubus

I have aimlessly wandered in circles for years, even before I was incarcerated. Time and time again I have come to points where one decision would dictate the course of my life. I have always walked the path of least resistance: whatever was easy, whatever didn't require me to think. Now I'm in prison. My fate has been chosen. I'm done letting fear rule me, but I've never taken the time to figure out what it is that I want out of life. I begin this journey of articulation upon discovery of this newsletter, you guys have shown me that the time to start is here and now. I now make my own fork in this road. I don't yet know where I'm going, but I will stumble in my direction.

Truckin', Steve De Logé

At fifteen I'd run away to Portland, Oregon, 1,026 miles from my SoCa home. I shared a room and kitchen privileges in a youth hostel with a geek named Chet. Chet had a 1965 Chevy van, with fat tires and mag wheels. I had a 10-speed bike and two jobs, washing dishes and working the graveyard shift at an industrial laundry. They contracted with area hospitals and you wouldn't believe the collection of hemostat roach clips I accumulated.

One night Chet called the restaurant to tell me that the 3-story hostel in Olde Towne was in flames. I sped home on my bike to find the block cordoned off by fire trucks. They wouldn't let us in to recover our smoke-damaged things for three days. This was a real piece of bad luck. I'd just bought a pound to make some extra money selling lids in Pioneer Park. I had no place to live, and nowhere to go. Chet was in the same predicament and we slept in his van. Then we decided to go to Florida and become gigolos. Hey, I was fifteen and girls liked me. Don't judge.

The restaurant gave me my paycheck, cashed it, and then the lovely hostess came out and said, "I've got your check right here." I took it down the street to a liquor store and cashed it again, while Chet bought a 6-pack of beer. We loaded up our stuff and took off for Florida, via the Coast Highway, L.A., and Texas. It was to be an adventure. I drove over to Seaside and headed south, driving late into the night while Chet drank his beers. Around midnight we came to a highway which goes east from Coos Bay over the coastal mountain range, then connects with Roseburg and Interstate-5. We stopped, shut off the engine and got out in the light of the full moon to contemplate our choices. We could continue down the coast with our limited funds, stopping to party in San Francisco, or we could go inland and take the quicker 1-5 route. He had a dad in Roseburg and said he'd feed us and probably give us some extra cash for the trip. This fork in the road presented a hard choice because following PCH all the way to L.A. was part of the

adventure. We settled on Roseburg, and Chet took the wheel.

Asleep under a blanket in the passenger seat, I awoke and sat up just as my mildly impaired buddy crested Camas Mountain. On the downhill slope the curved road was banked the wrong way, the narrow shoulder had gravel on it, and we were going too fast. I knew those monster fat tires on the back would slide like marbles when we hit the gravel. We swerved, overcorrected, then began to tumble down the slope. The van landed upright in the ditch with the side doors stove in and the windshield gone. It was totaled. Our trip was over, and there were lids everywhere.

A couple of big trucks hauling woodchips stopped and called for help on their CB radios. A tow truck came from the little town of Camas and hauled us to his impound lot. We slept in the van and the next morning walked to the general store to call Chet's dad. A couple of hippies were sitting in a VW van and when they saw my long hair, they asked if we had any pot they could buy. We agreed to give them an ounce for a ride to Roseburg. When we got close to town they stopped for gas. We got out to use the bathroom and they drove away with our stuff. The gas station attendant called the cops and they were arrested for theft and drugs. They said they stole the dope from us, and we were also arrested.

Now I'm a teenager in an adult jail under an alias name, my stuff is held for evidence, my cash is tied up in a pound of dope that the police have seized, and I'm facing a felony. Chet's dad bailed him out and he took off. A month later when the prosecutor presented me and the hippy guys for trial, the judge started yelling at him. He said, "You caught a couple of thieves red-handed, found drugs on them, they blamed the drugs on their victims, and you put them in jail?" He ordered me released and the charges dismissed. With no money and nowhere to go, I stayed at the Lighthouse of God Mission, got a job, then moved in with a 24-year-old party girl. I lived in Roseburg for the next two years. What a long, strange trip it's been...

Fork in the Road, by Karla Wooten

“Meet me at the Crossroads,” Bone Thugs-N-Harmony sang—where you won’t be lonely.

“The Crossroads” rap song is about life and death. I am not at the Crossroads of life, I am at a fork in the road. What does this mean? It means that I am about to exit prison life and for some odd reason I keep having people that I would NEVER look at trying to holler at me.

NEVER say NEVER, Mama used to say, sometimes we judge a book by its cover without reading and studying every single page.

Someone who I would never have given the time of day, had a conversation with me that has made me look their way. I am remembering my ancestor who said that people wear multiple hats and faces in life—study the books that you need to review, those books that you have NEVER read.

I’m at the Crossroads, this fork in the road, where I need to choose. Will I look at temptation or will I read the Cliff Notes or the book review?

Fork in the Road, Bert Zamora

We run into lots of forks in the road in life,
Decisions that have to be made.
We either have time to think about it
Or we have to make the decision right now.
The decisions can alter our lives significantly.
You look down one road,
It is a clear day, new road, very straight, and
maybe the best choice –
But the road seems to lead to nowhere.
The other way,
A dark, stormy day, a rutted, crooked
obstacle-covered mountain trail –
But this road leads you to the destination you
wish to go.
One appears to be better than the other.
One is definitely an easier road to take.
The choice on which way to go is easy, right?
Sometimes the hardest road we need to take is
the worst road.
Sometimes it is not.
Sometimes it is just a road.
Good or bad, we all have to choose and live with
that choice.
But we do not have to do it alone.

The Fork in the Road, Tristan Warner

The “woulda, coulda, shoulda” game revolves around my brain on a minute by minute basis everyday. If I “woulda” done that instead of this, I wouldn’t be incarcerated. If my lawyer “coulda” done something, I’d be outside now. I “shoulda” not done it – I knew it was wrong but did it anyway.

Constantly analyzing each decision I made and the path it led down, from recent events all the way back to childhood. If one thing had been different, would I still be here? Is there fate? Do my decisions matter? Spiraling down to the atomic level on my entire history and the expansive web of choices and consequences; forks in the roads I have travelled... every...day...many times a day.

The repetition always has alterations, nuances, and conjectures. At the heart of it all is blame. In the beginning it was all external: my childhood, economic status, family, school, girls, friends and jobs. Gradually though it condensed – blame like gravity, pulling it all into a solid core of my fault. No matter how you play the game, that’s what you win; blame and self-acceptance.

Upon that day, it becomes clear that if you keep your eyes on the rear-view mirror, you cannot see the next juncture ahead, another set of roads that could lead to love and happiness. That place where I can play the same reflective game about my love, without the blame, humiliation, and judgement – “woulda, coulda, shoulda” the happiness version.

Fork in the Road, Charles Whitfield

The road of life is like a long highway that has only one fastidious (critical) fork in the road of which determines how one will persevere in future days. This fork in the road has two paths and each has its own potholes and puddles.

Once one arrives at this fork in the road in his or her life, it won't be easy sojourning down the path one eventually decides to travel upon. But the greater the difficulty, there's glory in kicking it in its teeth: "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again." (Proverbs 24:16).

If one feels it's best to change course as soon as one assumes it's wrong for him or her, no matter how far you've traveled, turn back. You can't sell your cow and drink the milk. So in coming up to the eventual fork in the road in life, choose what's best albeit it'll make your liver rile up. Soon, it'll be mellifluous because, "to every man according to his ability." (St. Matthew 25:4).

There's only one life for everybody: Our own.

Fork in the Road, Ryan Lapp Sr.

Ah the proverbial fork in the road! We all come upon many forks in our lifetimes, decisions must be made. A life altering decision comes upon every inmate who gets to Delano or Wasco reception centers. If this is your first rodeo trip to the California prison system it is even more important of a decision. I can only speak for Cali prisons and their politics. Things have changed in the last decade or so!

You get out of the county van or bus and off come the shackles you're then ushered into a line or sometimes two lines depending on how busy it is. Even when it's not busy it's still fuckin' chaos for the next 8 to 12 hours. The first question asked is: What are you? They want to know if you are a peckerwood, sureno, norteno, blood, crip or other. The second question is: Are you GP (general population) or SNY (special needs yard)?

For ages the only way you were SNY was because you were LGBTQ, a snitch, child molester, baby killer or a former cop. Now anyone can go SNY in order to not have to live the convict code which is highly structured. Also some people are just tired of beefy gang members. The majority of

people who go SNY reception end up going to a NDPF (non designated program) facility. This accounts for about 80% of California prisons. To put it nicely it's a shit show. The California Department of Corrections decided that the only inmates that can receive 66% off of their sentences are level 1 inmates at minimum security facilities. Otherwise you will be doing 85% of your bid.

The prison politics are such that if you want to remain a gang member or not be considered a P.O.S. by your race, you can't go to a level 1 or fire camp, and only 2 or 3, level 2 yards that are not NDPF exist. You have to keep your points up at level 3 or 4! If you leave reception and are being sent to an SNY/NDPF/CAMP you will be processed and sent to a yard and here you come to another fork, another important decision. Are you going to stay and end your gang career, or get off on someone. All that tough talk before you get to the yard sounds nice. But it's different when some guys jam you up and ask you if you're going to stay and program or catch a fade. Those are known as "Freebies" the inmates that are already here don't get in trouble for the fight and rarely get sprayed.

The idea of integrating SNY and G.P. was to take power away from the high-ranking gang members and break up the prison gangs. It was a good theory on paper. In reality it just created an environment that produced SNY gangs; after all, someone still has to be there to extort the child molesters and rapists! Basically CDCR is forcing people to "hang it up" as it's called, if you want to go home to your family quickly. Only serving 33% of your bid is very tempting. For yours truly, it was the difference of serving about 6 years or 16 years. I get my 33% and I run my own program. I don't kickdown anything to a so-called "Big home" and that feels great. I can focus on doing my time instead of catching cases in prison, by doing dirt for other people.

Now with less than 3 years left on my bid, I'm hoping that the next fork in the road for me will be on an actual road, the road that leads home. That is not a tough decision at all, and it has already been made.

Fork in the Road, Henry Messenger

When I come to the fork in the road, I'm taking it! The late great New York Yankee Yogi Berra once said that about his ride home from the ballpark in St. Louis, but no one knew what he was talking about. They seldom did. "It gets late early in right field" (of the old Yankee stadium) was another of his "Yogiisms" that were rarely understood but popular enough to publish a book full of them.

Yogi is the only player/manager to win 10 world series rings. He's also known as the only man George Steinbrenner could not buy or compromise. After he fired Yogi as manager over the phone, Yogi refused to have anything to do with Steinbrenner or the Yankees for decades.

"Yogi is a class act," my father told me. "You don't do what Steinbrenner did. Especially to a guy who has given so much to that organization. Finally someone's got the character to stand up to him."

My father was a lifelong New England sports fan during a time when it was not easy. Before Curt Schilling and the bloody sock, before big Papi, before Tom Brady, Belichick and the great Patriot teams. But more than that, he was a fan of baseball and men of integrity. It didn't matter that Yogi was a Yankee to my father; he was a great player and a class act.

You could say that Yogi had come to a fork in the road. A choice to be made, and he took the right road. Not a difficult one for a man of integrity or maybe it was just plain stubbornness. It would be a long time before Yogi forgave Steinbrenner.

As a child, my father could do no wrong in my eyes. His thoughts and opinions mattered. What he wanted for me mattered. But by the time I was 12, that had quickly changed. I rejected everything my father said and everything he stood for. Normal teenager stuff, if not for the intensity of my stubbornness due to a traumatic brain injury I had suffered. Falling 14 feet and shattering my skull at 18 months old.

I appeared to be just a hyper kid with some control issues, but the older I got the more that my frontal lobe injury manifested itself, though we didn't know that at the time.

I turned away from my father. By the time I was 14, I was in reform school though all

attempts at reform had been replaced with training us for prison.

Instead of watching that ball go between Bill Buckner's legs in the 1986 pre-world series loss to the Mets with my father and every other good Red Sox fan, I was on a road that would take me to state prison and a life full of pain and torment. That's the thing about that fork in the road, you have to be very careful which way you turn. The consequences can be far reaching.

My father never ever gave up on me and I can say that neither did baseball or the Red Sox, when I needed them they were there for me.

Baseball represents new beginnings, hope, and renewal. There's always next year! The mantra the Red Sox lived with for 81 years.

I came back to baseball in 1998, around the same time that Yogi and Steinbrenner made up and Yogi was back in a Yankee uniform as a special assistant at sprint training. The young players were in awe to have a legend like Yogi in the dugout; even superstars in their own right like Jeter and Posada were like little boys playing little league again. At its heart, that's what baseball is all about.

I killed 6 months a year glued to AM 1080 in my prison cell listening to Joe Castiglione call the Red Sox games just like my father when Curt Gowdy was behind the mic for all of Red Sox nation.

We didn't have much more than Pedro and Nomar on those 1998-1999 teams. Pedro showed us all just how good he was in the 1999 playoffs against the Yankees but still had to come down on the yard and defend the Red Sox against all the Yankee fans. Connecticut prisons were full back then.

That all changed in 2004 when the Red Sox came back against the Yankees down 3 games to nothing in the playoffs for the first time in history.

Oh if only my father could have been alive to see it. To think that in his whole life time he never got to see the Red Sox, the Patriots or even the UConn women (who won their first national championship a month after he died in 1995) win one even once. It seems that for the past 20 years all these teams have done is win.

When you come to the fork in the road, take it. The high road, the one less traveled (as Robert Frost said) will make all the difference.

At a Fork in the Road, Terance DeJuan Wilson

There's nothing worse than the hate you give
Inspiring my flame, the fuel of my duplicit rage
Once the inferno is engaged it's hard to live life
The fire in my eyes is the final page.

There's nothing more cursed than the love you
offer
Nothing more costly than embracing your edges,
But I can't stop being pulled in your direction.
It's like trying to explain love to a scorpio...

Rare and worthy of adoration; lost in her peaceful
eyes
The prize of her loyalty Aa this specific phase of
his life is a paradise
A paradox for a critical moment in time, soul,
body, and mind
Plagued with intrusive thoughts, uncommon and
hard to define logic,
When brothers become strangers, loyalties
change,

Most of it's anger; a man's emotions are
sometimes estranged
From the nature of a king; when two men shake
hands at the end of a road
There were three of us; I fell into the stereotypical
lenses of old perception.
Silence is like the deep blue sea of a feeler's
emotions.
In the cul de sac where we used to play there
was only one way in,
But in the backyard, they're at a fork in the road,
That's where I met a scorpio.

A Fork in the Road, Michael Medina

I once asked a wise man, "If there was a
fork in the road, what would you do?"

The wise man looked at me and without
hesitation told me, "I'll pick it up."

"What?! That's not what I meant!"

"To me, it did. It's all about perspective."

What I always saw were choices, this and
that. And the choice I picked put me in prison. I
figured this choice was a dead-end for me, with
no way out, no way for redemption. It took years
for me to truly understand what he meant... What
his perspective was. What he saw was an
opportunity.

It burns to say but I would have not
appreciated the things I had before until I came
to prison. Though what I had is lost, that doesn't
mean I can't capitalize on what I have now. I
have the opportunity to find a new career path to
take and earn a college degree in it. I have the
opportunity to attend self-help groups that help
me change my old way of thinking and to build
empathy. I have the opportunity to talk with
counselors to help me with the passing of friends
and family that I never dealt with. I even have
the opportunity to become closer to my higher
power.

What I saw was the end of my life. What I
see now is a new opportunity for myself.

Choices, Jeff Hovatter

So many roads... so many forks. This could be a book. I spent my life on the straight and narrow, conforming to convention more than I wanted to admit, I now realized.

As an incurable idealist, my values guided my choices, independent of wisdom, or knowledge of how the world actually works. As a young adult I chose a job over a career, and lacking avarice, turned down offers of what was considered advancement to managerial positions in more than a couple instances. I did not lust for power. I saw the "Peter Principle" in action first-hand, and preferred to be very good at my job over moving "up" for more money.

I stubbornly clung to my idealistic views in every aspect of life, making ignorant choices through rose-colored glasses; I saw myself, too late, in a description of an idealist by W. Somerset Maugham, in *Of Human Bondage*, sitting interminable hours in a cell as I wait to die, I ponder the many choices I made in life, both the ones that turned out good and bad.

"God," the "Devil," the "Universe," "Fate," or the "Butterfly Effect," call it whatever satisfies your mind, it all comes down to one individual's choice. I second-guess the path I chose in many, many cases. I am, as intended by the system, a tormented individual, full of regret and remorse for things I did and did not do.

Of course my primary wrong choice is the one that put me in prison for the "safety of the public," like a truck-driver who, after working a lifetime, falls asleep at the wheel after choosing to push on rather than rest, I plowed into innocent 'bystanders' lives with devastating effect.

Most of my torment is because I let so many who needed me down. The loss of *all*, material and social, past and future, fills me with self-loathing, which helps me to accept, if not truly understand, being shunned by everyone. The hatred of strangers still bewilders me.

This route not chosen, in every case, cannot be known to have been better, but I certainly believe my choice should have been to make a total commitment to Diane, and dedicate my life to making her life better. In regards to that particular choice, I admit to some selfishness on my part, but I feel most guilt and

remorse for not being there for her and I, together or separate.

Personal, day-to-day social interaction is much more like Realpolitik than my idealism allows me to be. Prison, and the system overall, has forced me to see how things really are on the road of life I did not choose at the critical forks in that road. Introspection was never part of my life, and observation of the zeitgeist was not either. The horrible lack of ways to spend time in prison has made both a huge part of my life.

Fork in the Road, Scott Asalone

Yogi Berra once said "when you come to the fork in the road, take it!" His wonderful, humorous twist still confirms a reality; when you come to a fork in the road you have to make a decision and choose which way to go. Alas, as we know from Robert Frost in "The Road Not Taken," that as "way leads on to way" we may never get to revisit a path again. Forks in the road are decisive.

Mostly we think of a fork in the road as a major decision or turning point that determines our future from that point on. But have we ever considered the reality that these "forks" happen all the time? More importantly have we ever considered that we are the fork in the road that can change someone else's direction? That is a lot of responsibility, yet we never really think about the power in each moment of interaction, the power we have to direct someone's path.

A moment like that happened to me early in my incarceration. One afternoon I spotted an available phone and decided to call my family to feel some reassurance. So I dialed the number, and someone roughly grabbed my shoulder. Turning quickly, I found myself face-to-face with one of the inmates.

"You can't have that phone," he declared.

"Why not?" I asked.

"It's a blood phone."

"But no one is using it. Let me just finish my call."

Grudgingly, he said "okay, but don't use this phone again."

I finished my call but I was furious. No one told me about the phones; which ones I could or could not use. I walked over to Steve, an

inmate I trusted and asked him about the phones.

“Yes, that is a blood phone,” he verified, “but only after the six o’clock count. Some of those guys think it’s always theirs.”

Turning directly to me, Steve said, “you need to assert your power or they will walk all over you. That guy is in the bathroom right now. Go teach him a lesson.”

I hesitated, and he continued to encourage me. It was a fork in the road; Steve was the fork offering me a path to follow. I chose instead to talk to the other inmate, not fight him. Things calmed down. Weeks after, I helped him write his appeal for a new trial. We didn’t become friends but we never got that close to a fight again.

Steve was a fork in the road. He pointed to his view of masculinity and respect but through fighting. I chose not to accept his path, which could have been a major turning point in my incarceration.

Our words, our actions, suggestions, can change the life of anyone we encounter. We can steer them down a fork that might increase or decrease their burden, help them gain greater self-worth or devalue themselves; change their life toward good or not.

Sadly most of us don’t realize the power we hold in the lives of others. Our interaction with them can change the course of their lives and steer them down paths they hadn’t even thought possible. When anyone comes to speak to us, especially to ask about our opinion, or when someone who admires us observes our behavior, we are a fork in the road for them. Where will we send them?

Choosing the Right Direction, Rolf Rathmann

A fork in the road — such an obvious metaphor, yet now, more than ever, so apropos. I’m twenty months to the door, if I include my one-year halfway house time. And I’m now making plans, though I realize I’ve spent the last eight years planning for success: yoga, meditation, drug treatment, and other psych classes, visits, service work, and the multitude of reentry classes I’ve taken and taught. And now here I am — doors are opening! I’ve saved up money for eight years, with the good fortune of having a brother save it all for me; he’s indicated that he and his wife are looking to secure me transportation upon my release; additional support includes their approval to use their home as a release address; I’m enrolled in a correspondence Peer-to-Peer Recovery Specialist Certification in hopes of it leading to a career; I’m applying to sober-living homes while investigating twelve-step meetings in the areas of my anticipated release.

I’ve long fantasized about this moment. With pie-in-the-sky dreams of owning a business. But now, it’s reality time, and very surreal to finally be having these conversations. Some have jokingly commented how early I’m getting started. Twenty months, for something as big as release? At sixty years old, I don’t have time to dick around. And that’s the fork in the road.

I could go my old route: no structure and tons of procrastination, or I can plan what my life post-prison will look like, while still “staying in the present.” It feels so right to finally be choosing the right path, rather than crossing my own private Jericho’s road.

A Fork in the Road, C. A. Fischer

In the early morning hours of the fading night, I'm awakened from the throes of a lucid yet surreal dream. Blinding bright blue diodes of a small flashlight shone in the face of a sleeping man.

My dream is disturbed in several ways: the product of a worried mind, bright light, and a troubled soul. All of which have visited me – engendering caution. I am aware that my recent musings with pen on paper have the potential to create quite a bustle and stir among those whom do not desire the spotlight of attention shined upon their nefarious deeds.

Quid pro quo is the standard of the old guard and it has been this way since this land became a territory which in turn became Kansas – evolving then into the K.D.O.C. operated under the color of law – a cruel entity; corrupted by greed, retaliation, abuse, and neglect. All of which is reminiscent of a notorious WWII concentration death camp which to this day has a motto above its gaits that proclaims:

“Work will set you free.”

The K.D.O.C. at New Lansing prison does not have work that would set any “resident” free. The “work” is only for the elite and as for mottos the unwritten mission statement is: “Hate and discontent is spread liberally here.”

I have lived in this cruel realm for over a quarter of a century; misdirection and deceit disguised as correction – that's all I've seen. Still I have little fear because I know in this life, I can only die but once; further, if my writings bring about my end by tragedy or if they become my legacy, or both—all the better—especially if these words bring about change – change is what is needed and people need to know. I would be remiss if I did not reveal this hell I've been living in; the times I've experienced, the events I know to be truths: all has brought me to the proverbial “fork in the road.”

In the words of the 20th century poet, Robert Frost, in his poem, “The Road Not Taken,” I've found my voice, and that begs the question: Will I make a difference? I can only guess.

The fork in the road represents many things to me, among which is my message in a bottle thrown over a dividing fence. My short note to the world from a razor wire wilderness. I'm writing these from my zabuton – a meditation pillow that I use as my make-shift desk as I sit cross-legged on my narrow bunk – my back against the wall, contained within my cage...

....a cage is built for animals, but, I am a human ,

Fuel for my rage,
I must take a break....
Before my heart does,
Because, because, because,
In the arms of a tormented

Dream,
Blinding blue diodes
Shone in my dreaming face
To see if I'm breathing and—
Alive,

Because....
In the land of OZ.

Addiction,
Denial,

And neglect;
I do not know which way to go.

The slow wasting away of my soul
The wasted life of a life spent
wasted,

Fueled by availability
By and in the K.D.O.C.
The Fork in The Road.

Fork in the Road, Nkrumah Lumumba Valier

Doris, you are the wound left in my heart that may never heal. The love that grew deep within my heart for you, can never be completely removed. I honestly wish that things would have turned out differently for us in life. Though our relationship was not perfect, after falling so deep in love with you. I felt a need to always be with you. But I was never able to trust you after each heartbreak. I knew the truth about you, and the hurt it caused me emotionally changed the love I felt inside of me for you. Wondering if you really loved me.

What was lost started causing a distance between us as time passed. Something inside of me was telling me to leave you. All we did was fight and I would go out every night in search of what I was no longer receiving at home with you. Our bed went cold on the side I once slept on. I never rushed to come back home to be with you. Deep down inside now I am regretting how I mistreated you. I should've just explained how I was feeling inside and why we should go our separate ways. Because I wasn't mature enough to forgive you from lying and betraying me like you did. Not knowing if you were lying to me all

the time or you made mistakes you wish you never did. Hoping we could move forward in life together learning from the mistakes made being young.

You became pregnant the first time with our daughter, Essence Love Valier, and I felt things would change and she would fix what was broken between us in our relationship. It hurt me so deep when our baby girl died at the hospital after birth, being born premature. I seen how hurt you were watching you cry because our baby died. It left a message between us. And when it happened again with Assanti Afia Valier, it broke us apart, but I felt like I had to stay with you, then leave you after that.

It seemed that so many forces within the universe were pulling us apart from each other. Like we were not meant to be together. I started moving in a different direction in life. It was over between us but we was still living together. The silence filled the house when we was there together. My phone would never stop ringing. I found my way into other women's hearts, that was reminding me that I belong to them too.

The road we started on together in life between Doris and I was coming to an end. She became pregnant with Alton, and five other women I was with was pregnant at the same time. They were all 2 months apart. I was never in love with any of the women I was with, because I was in love with Doris and they all knew it. Not knowing how my life was now about to change and the lesson I was about to learn the hard way about breaking so many women's hearts, even the one I loved.

The fork in the road was prison, that freed us from each other, sending us both on separate ways in our lives, forever. I never thought it would ever end like this, but we must all have to face the consequences of every bad choice we make in our lives. I have a secret; I've never told anyone about the pain it makes me feel real deep in my heart when I dream about Doris being with another man out there. I have to force myself to wake up to stop the dream. But the pain and thought I wake up with, crying, thinking about Doris. Will she ever be completely out of my heart?

Fork in the Road, Jeremy Brown

I am not sure I even know what a fork in the road actually is. I have been in prison since I was a jit. Never experienced this or that.

So I sit and imagine an actual fork inside or on top of the road. 20-30 years or more it's just been sitting there all alone.

Time to put it to use and scrape
Some chicken bones.

Continuation, Colossal

There was a time.
Wheels rolling.
Happy days + good smoking.
People with love showing.
Problem free.
That life was me.
There was a time.
Full plates and good meals.
Enough to just chill.
Money earnt, no steal.
No weight on my shoulders.
Because wise become with older.
There was a time.
Independent stands.
A time to leave the nest.
+ maintain my own land.
To do what's best.
+ be what I can.
There was a time.
Money for an apartment.
Turned down without reason why.
Time spins, money spent.
That money is no more.
That was a fork in my shoe, I'm sure.
There was a time.
Back in the nest.
Taking time to rest.
What a mess.
If my home was granted,
Would have relieved lots of stress.
There was a time.
The road goes on.
A road eternal long.
A man I stand. Standing strong.
On the road and gone.
In the same song.

Fork in the Road, Kelly Messenger

Damn, I don't even know how to respond to that. What the fuck is a fork in the road . . . word from yo kin . . . a'ight I got it . . . Here is the fork in the road.

It's these fuckin cops, they always in the way. Like every time I be tryin' to do somethin' they pull up like 'Messenger, what you doin', you want a ticket."

Sometimes they just need to loosen up, be cool. I'm tired of being treated like a kid. "12:00 lights out." "Time to eat" All this curfew shit.

Tell the officer "Fuck you," you get grounded "sanctions" and shit. Like I ain't lived like this since I was 5 years old. Why they can't just be like cops in the street. We do what we want unless it violates state or federal law. This treatin' us like kids shit is making some of us permanently feel and act like kids. People can't grow or mature in here. It's part of the reason people keep coming back. It really makes me mad. How many times I gotta tell these people, I'm grown!

Fork in the Road, Chris Wilson

I was daydreaming, after reading all the word themes that were available to write about. I got caught up on the very first one. A fork in the road.

While I was daydreaming, a vision came to me. I was sitting in a car with myself at a stop sign, when I notice and tell myself, *hey, there is a fork in the road. What should we do?*

I turn and say to myself, *we should move it so it doesn't pop anyone's tires.*

Oh, how much easier a decision like that would be. If that's how I could handle everything in life. Just pick it up and discard it. Make a joke and forget about it.

That sounds like a really lazy and easy way out. And as I'm thinking about it I'm pretty sure that is how I've handled every fork in the road.

When I'd realize it wasn't the best decision, and after it ended up causing me and everyone around me pain.

I'd just drink, use, and laugh 'til the pain went away. The only problem is there isn't enough drugs and alcohol in this world to make the memories of some of those decisions go and stay away.

Trust me, I've tried. And I could write 10,000 excuses blaming my upbringing, people, places, and things that hurt or left me.

But I'm not going to take that road. Because resentments in my life today drain me of the power I have left to make better decisions.

So at this fork in my life, I'm gonna get some blinker fluid and put it in the car, so that I can signal to take the right direction.

The direction where I take responsibility for my actions, make amends to the ones I've hurt, including me.

The direction where I trust God, clear house, and install a sign before the fork in the road that says choose happiness: it's not always easy but it's always worth it.

Fork in the Road, Karla Wooten

Every day in life we have a choice.

Will we remain silent or will we use our voice?

Will we be a fighter or will we be a victim?

Will we fall prey to the corruption in the Criminal Justice system?

What happened to fighting for our rights?

Have we abandoned our civil liberties?

Do you understand that without a struggle there can be "no victory"?

What happened to no justice/no peace?

Was that a platitude or are we becoming trained, to the voice of a dictator who is using the system to create innocent victims?

I know that "they" are locking up people and preaching lies to deceive behind a church's steeple.

Choose ye this day- who will you serve?

If we abandon the fork in the road and remain silent victims, we will not get what future generations deserve:

Peace.

Fork in the Road, Quentric Williams

At one time, I was working 40 hours a week at a restaurant and mowing yards on the weekend. As well as, hustling pills seven days a week. I wanted to go look at a stump grinder but my bigger vision was set on a bobcat and a small dump truck. I was trying to decide which of the two other jobs had to go in order for the landscaping/ construction venture coming forth. I was at a fork in the road. The pills were doing zipcodes so the dough kept coming, but the job kept the women coming, women that could have been able to handle a man with three jobs and that drives a dump truck. My fork in the road.

Fork in the Road, Samantha Wohlford

"Honey, you need to find someone more like me. Stop dating these losers. My daughter deserves better than this."

"Daddy, in order for me to date someone like you, I would have to find someone your age. They just don't make them like you anymore."

"Don't do that! Just stop putting up with it. You need to be treated better."

My dad was a hopeless romantic with an amazing sense of humor. He worked hard for his family and made sure to be there for every little thing. He was correct. I had a penchant for dating losers and this conversation has often haunted me.

Now I'm standing at a fork in the road. There are two paths I could take. They lead in opposite directions.

To my right, the road is barren. The earth is so dry that it's cracked into craters. I will have to be careful on this path to avoid the boulder-sized rocks. There are brambles and thorns reaching out with deadly fingers attempting to slice my delicate skin. Dead trees threaten to fall at any moment and crush the breath from my lungs. I could till the land and plant things, but with all the litter and stones, nothing will grow. It's as dry as the Sahara.

To my left, the road is vibrant and bursting with life. A kaleidoscope of color and sounds. This path wouldn't be without its challenges. There are vines threatening to trip me. Flowers and fruit could be poisonous. Predators hiding among the trees stalking its prey. There are butterflies as big

as my head and fuzzy animals peering out from among the leaves. Jungles are full of dangers but you can appreciate the dazzling life all around you.

I face these two very different paths, hesitant and conflicted. I can hear the Robert Frost poem as I observe my choices. "The road less traveled," makes me look toward the dead path & yearn to follow it. Will it ever lead to beauty? Sadly it'll be more likely to end in a chemical wasteland surrounded by death.

It wasn't always like this! I was happy once... wasn't I? I struggle to remember a time when I had a genuine smile, when I wasn't hiding behind a mask. Does anyone notice the facade I've created? Am I lying to even myself? Doing my best to convince myself that the dry path wasn't always so barren and desolate. I wouldn't willingly walk this path if it had always been so desolate, right? Was I holding my head high in the beginning? When did I start sinking down in a disguise? Why didn't I see how things had become so toxic? For years I have swallowed my pride and dignity. I allowed my self worth to plummet into the abyss. I managed to convince myself that someday things would get better. I lowered myself to the point of getting on my knees, literally, and begging for the love and affection that should be freely given. I won't bore you with the details of my sordid tale, but I don't know how to give up on the people that I love.

I stare at the path of beauty and I'm filled with anxiety. One day the pain will fade, but for a while it will be crippling. Each step will feel like walking over hot coals and broken glass. Each breath will feel like it's shredding my lungs. I will fight desperately to find the motivation for each tiny step. The unknown is a frightening prospect and in my head I know I can face it, but with pride. I survived this terrifying experience because I will be walking away from everything I know. It isn't all bad. We laugh, we love, we play. There are wonderful moments, sadly, those moments have become less and less frequent. Slowly dissipating into the mists of time. If things were different, I might follow the rocky path in blissful ignorance.

However, things aren't different. I once thought our love would carry me through everything. Sometimes love isn't enough. When you steadily give someone your all, yet they give

back the minimum, your heart begins to starve. Pair that with everything else we've gone through, and the colors of your love start to look like shades of abuse. Our romance has stained my soul in the most tragic ways. My love is as deep as the ocean but at some point, you must learn to love yourself enough to let go. That's where I am. Learning to love myself. Enough to make the hard choices.

I take a deep breath and shatter my own heart. I make the decision to take a chance on the unknown, stepping onto the path of beauty.

Fork in the Road, Rodney Murray

I spent hours reading case laws and going over my trial transcript. One day after receiving a notice of rejection for a motion I'd filed, a thought popped up: "Why are you trying so hard to go home?"

What kind of question is that? Why wouldn't I want to go home? Isn't that the consensus amongst all prisoners? I can't speak for every individual, but for me it's simple: I hate it here. Besides... my trial had gone all kinds of wrong. My lawyer wasn't sufficient. The prosecution lied and made mistakes. I had validated legal issues that could have granted me a new trial. Even if... I was guilty... and there it was.

Why are you trying so hard to reject the punishment you know you deserve?

I faced a staggering revelation. As much as I was treated unfairly in the judicial process, I still was guilty of the crime.

Even with this truth so plainly obvious, I couldn't accept it without protest. I recall the Apostle Paul writing that the Spirit wants one thing (the right thing) and flesh wants to do another (the wrong). So was my state. In my mind I deserved to be treated fairly in court. Yet in my heart, I knew that punishment was justifiable. I knew I had to reconcile this truth. I had reached a fork in the road that I had not prepared for.

When a driver encounters a fork in the road, they have to make a choice. Without a roadmap or GPS, they could make a decision that produces regret. Before I made my choice, it was necessary to do some soul searching so I could

mature to a place where I could accept my guilt and punishment.

In order to survive in prison, one must have emotional intelligence and wellbeing. At any given time, disruptions can occur - lockdowns, changes in operations. I learned that I had to prepare my mind for these changes before they happened. That was first for me on the list to help with the emotional rollercoaster prison can be. Secondly, I understood that my mind was the only thing I could control. At any given time, my property could be taken for security reasons. If I was told to go somewhere, I had to go there. So I really didn't have control of my own body either. Lastly, I had to grasp the fact that I couldn't control anything outside of the prison walls pertaining to my family.

Once I accepted these truths, my mind allowed me to focus on me, and what I'd learned about myself. I knew accepting my guilt meant accepting the sentence and doing the time, however I did not want to live like the average man I'd seen in prison.

I have seen a terrible cancer spread throughout every institution I've been to. It's silent, moves stealthily, and is invisible to the naked eye. An eye that has not been illuminated by the truth. The old adage: "the truth shall make you free" is biblical and true. Unfortunately some would rather not accept it. They've taken the wrong turn at their fork in the road. They have fallen victim to the cancer of shame. Something I couldn't afford to do.

My soul searching continued. I found myself in a position of fear. For a long time I confessed my innocence. I couldn't have possibly done what I was accused of. People who knew me in the streets knew that wasn't me too. Yet it was.

One day I looked long and hard in the mirror. I began to cry as acceptance of what I'd done found a place in my heart to rest. I said to myself, "Rodney, you did exactly what they say you did." As the tears flowed, I felt lighter, less weighed down by the shame I'd been carrying. I wrote my mother a letter confessing my guilt. I waited two weeks before I called her. She answered the phone saying, "Son, I love you. Why'd you wait so long to call me?" More tears flowed. More shame fled.

I found strength to release other family members and friends from the burden of wondering why I was found guilty. Everyone stood by my side after learning the truth. My family's support propelled me to want to be better.

It's been a long time since I've seen a roadmap. I don't know if forks in the road appear on them or not. From what I see in movies, most are a surprise to the driver. My fork in the road experience was a surprise to me as well. Never would I have thought my survival in prison would be accomplished through humility, transparency and truth when prison codes, toughness and ego desperately clamored for my attention.

Note: This essay has been edited for length.

November Picture Theme



A Dream Come True, Aaryana Malcolm

This hug is what I want to embrace you all with. I know Grandma has been away for 180 months, yet the sun still shines so bright for me. The warmth of love to finally share with all 14 of you is a masterpiece I envision. Our life is a puzzle and to be able to finally place that last piece into the puzzle is the best part of my life.

Sunlight, Andrew Krosch

“Are we real?” the little girl asked her mom.
“Of course we are, honey,” her mom laughed. She hugged her child tight. “As real as real can be.”

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As the little girl on screen began to respond, a broken squeal of computer code exploded from a speaker, filling a super-secret lab in a sub-subbasement of a secret Neu-Life research facility in Nepal, lost amongst the Himalayas.

“As real as real can be,” a short, wire-thin man said to no one in particular. He was alone in the lab. The rest of the massive complex empty. If the computer equipment was still listening, it didn't show any indication or attempt a response. The scientist, a cyberneurologist, was fifty-eight, looked eighty-eight, and felt like he was one hundred and eighty-eight. He wore thick glasses and needed a shave. And a haircut. And a bath.

The Neu-Life procedure that had promised the next best thing to true immortality, eternal life in a virtual world, had run into a couple minor snags upon launch, things to be expected when bending the laws of physics, including a rather unfortunate incident involving the son of a powerful tech oligarch. A smug privileged charlatan who, much to his parents' chagrin, flamed out mid-livestream. Literally. Strapped to a surgical chair as the overloaded lab equipment went thermonuclear. An after-action report had found that a lab assistant had spilled an orange soda. In the plasma transformer. A one-off piece of equipment that had cost two point five billion and the better part of the lone scientist's mostly solitary life.

The public was told the impromptu fireworks show was nothing more than an old-fashioned A.I. “deepfake;” no actual humans had been harmed. (Which was sort of true.) The hoax perpetrated by one of the many competing life extension startups Neu-Life's founder Sal Tyler had bankrupted through years of bullshit lawsuits and outright fraud.

But even with the debacle involving the world's seventh most followed influencer, the number of customers on the waitlist, signed up

for the basic procedure — and, more importantly, as far as good old Sal T was concerned, the stock value — shot up, a near vertical trajectory.

Then the next wave of A.I. came along. General intelligence and its beyond-godlike capabilities. Neu-Life relegated to the scrapheap of history. The hundred or so multi-billionaires already downloaded, flesh and blood, mind and spirit, reduced to digital code, already forgotten—in a data cloud. Scheduled to evaporate at midnight.

The scientist took a seat in the chair, the same chair that had flambéed the world's number seven influencer, and launched all those billionaires into eternity, or at least the next best thing. Hard to know for sure. Because, as a certain orange-soda-drinking lab assistant had so eloquently said to him, "Ain't no fuckin' way nobody's coming back from that shit bro... Are they?"

He lowered the halo, clipped the electric leads to his head and body, and flipped the switch.

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Inside the program a slender, unremarkable man with an unremarkable face (not unlike a much younger, neater-kept version of the scientist) joined the woman and child, the sun warm, the sky clear. He smiled, kissed his wife lightly on her cheek, and looked at his watch. A few hours. No more. There would be no last-minute reprieve.

Could a computer program transmigrate a digital soul from a pile of silicon chips to the heavens above? Would his wife and child — his own creations — be waiting for him if and when he got there?

He held his daughter's hand and smiled. "What would you like to do, kiddo?"

"My choice?"

"Yeppers," he grinned. "Your choice."

"Ice cream?" she asked, jumping up and down, yanking on his arm.

"Ice cream?" He tried to sound mock stern, parental, but playing along. Like a real parent would sound. "Before dinner?"

"Please," she said, swinging his arm back and forth.

"Okay," he said. Swept her up in his arms and swung her in a circle. "Why not? Let's go get some ice cream. As much as you want."

"For real?"

"Absolutely. For real," he said. "For real as real can be."

Untitled, Jeff Hovatter

Such a wonderful day. Perfect weather, with lots of sunshine and pleasant temperatures.

Zoe was tuckered out. The complete happy-tired that seems to only come to children. She had run and played all afternoon, stopping only to eat, at her mamma's insistence, then rushing off to chase the geese.

Dad, seeing the blissful, contented expression on Tiffany's face, snapped the photo. To him, it was a look of pure love and happiness. Jay was a good husband and father, this time. He was maturing in the role, and Tiffany, despite their age difference, seemed born to be a mom.

Jay had to impulsively let himself, to his chagrin, give in to the temptation with one of the church picnics. He volunteered to carry items for her, and in the parking area, alone, she had offered to "thank" him. Those few minutes were his focus as we went through the red light. The impact was a dull, metallic thud, and he lost consciousness. He lingered for four days, before going "to a far better place."

With Jay went all means of support for the little family. Bills soon overwhelmed Tiffany. A lawsuit from the pickup driver froze her funds. Then Jay's first family sued for property and funds. Jay had not made a new will, so they had a strong case.

Tiffany begged for shelter from an old acquaintance, and unable to find a living-wage job, began waitressing at a truckstop, during the night when traffic was slow.

Desperate, Tiffany went to the strip-joint across the highway. Long hours at night, being pawed and solicited, brought more money, but took a toll. She became haggard and slept all day. A driver offered her a solution in the form of pills. She was full of energy at night, but soon needed the boost to keep going.

Tiffany spiraled into addiction and prostitution. Arrests led to stints in rehab. Intellectually, she knew she had to be clean and

sober, but her drug-altered brain caused irresistible cravings, and she gave in.

Her possessions dwindled to only a few keepsakes. The system took Zoe from her. At times she was on drug-fueled blackouts for days. She didn't know the woman who died, but the cops said Tiffany was behind the wheel. She couldn't answer the questions.

Withdrawal and the trial were a bewildering, painful, shameful experience. The photo was all she had now of Zoe. Tiffany came back from chow, dug out the picture, sat on the hard, narrow bunk, and let her mind go back to that day. The surge of sadness came suddenly, she fought it as a tear rolled down her cheek. A sob burst from her chest. She took a deep breath, wiped at the tears, sighed sadly, and rose to put the photo away.

The Quiet Six, Jonathan Holeman

It's two in the morning, and I just had another one of my dreams. They have been coming less, since you've been praying for me, Maybe it's a subliminal thing, me knowing you're praying has been causing it. Really, I'd rather it's all real. That there's a God, that he's watching over us. He's answering your prayers for me. I should believe in God after all that's happened. I suppose I do on some level. At least I thank God, every day, for bringing me to you.

Last night's dream was the same. You're holding our little girl. This serene look of peace on your face. The light is hitting your hair just right, making it appear to glow. I feel happy in the dream. Then I look down this road behind you. It's one I've never seen. It's dark and rises off into the trees. You turn and start walking away. I follow, but the quicker I go, the further and faster you walk, then jog, then run. The fear hits me when I try to yell out to you. It's like my mind forgets that I can't yell or speak.

Then everything flashes. The road. The white sands. A large flat valley, with a black building shining up into the clouds. This time though, the tower, maybe it isn't a building? It shines. There's no windows. It looks more like a giant black gemstone. People stand staring in a wide circle around it. There must be a couple hundred. They are all thin, hunched over. Their skin looks flake-like, dry. I'm not sure they are

even people, not anymore. I woke up this time before you made it to the tower.

I don't know what it is, Jess. The dream means something. Maybe you shouldn't be praying for it to stop, but for it to make more sense. You know, the dream, it makes me miss cameras. If I had a picture of you and our girl, that picture. You, eyes closed, perfect smile. Her, hugging you, while falling asleep. Maybe I only had the dream today because you told me you're pregnant.

I'm so happy, Jessica. It will be a girl. I want to name her Sydney, after your mom. I wish I could have met her. Just writing that now makes me agree with you. We are going to have to travel. You're right, we should find other people. I don't want our girl to be lonely. I'm even thinking of going up to the valley, where all the animals were. At first I thought to get her a dog. Then I realized, we live on a farm, shouldn't we have some animals? We'll have to talk about it, for some reason I wonder. If all those animals ran up to that valley, they're all at peace there. Should we be moving them anywhere else? A voice inside is telling me no. A voice inside is telling me that we should go there. I've been thinking that for a while now. Ever since you had me start reading the bible. I'll just make my argument now.

The day it started, when the world went quiet. Everyone just disappeared. All the animals, the birds, everything. Nothing electric or digital worked anymore. The first people, the only people either of us had seen, were the standers. They just stood staring at buildings at random. Just wasting away doing nothing. We both know what happens in the building. Some type of dominant person-thing is waiting where it will make that scream. The scream that made me deaf. The people outside but when I woke up, they were all dead. You know this already, but think about it, Jess. I traveled around until I found that beautiful valley where all types of animals lived peacefully.

Then I found you. I think maybe it was all meant to be this way. I read Genesis the other day, and it's all I can think of. Adam and Eve, in Eden. What if that valley is where we're supposed to be? You told me that God works in mysterious ways. That God has His own plans. What if this is it? A restart. I can understand taking away the cell phones, the televisions, even the people. What

I don't understand is why God would pick a soldier with drug problems? I do know that God couldn't have found a better woman.

I think we should go there. It's only two days away. You said you wanted to see it sometime. No matter what, Jess, whatever you want, that's what we will do. Whatever you say, that's what I will trust.

A Mother's Embrace, John Williams

I would cherish, and most importantly, I would love one. Could I dream of something so simple as this. It's all I have dreamt. Don't remember dreaming all that much but when I did it was this—

A mother's embrace.

I ache still for a mother's embrace, still suffering this persistent pain. I would cherish this more than money or gold. I could only imagine the amount of love in just one.

I did learn something from this absence of love: hug your children. Give them that warm embrace. Hug your children, I would always remind myself.

Nothing more a child wants than a mother's embrace.

Strange, one may say, this very natural or what should be natural made me who I am today, a better parent, a better man.

A mother's embrace is warmer than the sun shining down on a hot summer day in July.

This mother's embrace would have made up for all the many things you were emotionally unable to give me.

Here Comes the Sun, Gary Farlow

It had been an overcast morning in late autumn that threatened rain. April, just 6 and in her first year of school, had dawdled, taking extra long in brushing her hair and teeth, changing her shoes twice, then slowly, oh so slowly, eating her Captain Crunch.

What is with you today? her mom asked. "You love school honey, but if you don't get your skates on, you're gonna be late."

April attended the little neighborhood school a mere two blocks away where her Mom walked her every day and was waiting each afternoon when school let out.

Even after her mom had managed to get April ready and they set out, the little girl had forgotten her lunch box, then her pencil case, then the golden delicious apple that she "just had" to give her teacher.

Finally, lunch box, pencil case, and apple in tow, they wound their way down the sidewalk, April skipping at her mom's side and halting every few feet to inspect a rock, point to a squirrel, and wave to old Mrs. Ruth, the elderly lady who always had a special treat for April each Halloween, Christmas, and Easter.

Her mom just couldn't understand April's seeming reticence in wanting to go to school. Usually, her little girl practically ran the two blocks and her mom had a hard time keeping up. Not today.

"April? Why are you taking so long this morning? Don't you want to go to school today?"

"Ye-a-h," the child said slowly. "I 'spose," she added.

Her mom wore a frown as they walked on, which deepened as the pair turned the corner only to see a phalanx of police squad cars, firetrucks, and several EMT units surrounding the school. Police officers had cordoned off the area and local media were swarming like bees to report on... what?

Spotting Mandy Grimes, the mother of April's friend Tommy, she approached the woman who was clutching little Tom so tight the boy was almost blue.

"What's happened?" April's mom asked, fearing the answer.

Mandy looked at her through tear-ravaged eyes and responded, "a shooter."

"A shooter? Here!?!?" April's mom said breathlessly, automatically pulling her child close.

"I was walking Tommy to school when I heard a loud pop! pop! pop! then sirens screamed and, well..." she looked down at her son and then at April, "there've been, uh, injuries."

"Oh God!" April's mom covered her mouth with one hand, holding April tightly with the other.

"Ladies," came the voice of a police officer. "School's closed today, probably the rest of the week. You should take your children home and be glad you were late this morning."

As April and her mom turned to go back home, she knelt in front of her child.

“April?” Her mom looked into the little girl’s cornflower eyes, “you took a lot of time this morning. I just don’t know why, but...”

“Mom,” the little girl said. “I sorta heard somebody.”

“Heard somebody?”

“Not out loud, just, I dunno, like inside me sorta,” April said.

“What did this somebody say?” her mom asked, her body tingling.

“It said *be late today*. That’s all. It just kept on saying *be late today*. So I was.”

As if on cue, the clouds that threatened rain suddenly parted and a brilliant shaft of sunlight washed over the two as they held each other on this tragic morning.

The Mother’s Love, Christopher Cross

Her love is fierce — it is a fire that purifies and guides us along through our sadhana (practice). Shakti looks after all Her children, especially those sadhakas (aspirants) who are open to Shiva’s grace, and looks upon the Guru with bhakti (love and devotion) in their hearts.

Shiva, Shakti, Guru, and disciple, all are one, when you really get to the bottom of it all. But in the beginning of the sadhana, it may be helpful to view oneself as separate, until one is able to lay a firm foundation of bhakti. Eventually, though, all dualities should be let go of, if one wishes to realize the Self. For surely the Divine Mother is none other than our own indwelling Self (atman), and true liberation is realizing “thou art that” indwelling Consciousness of the pure nirvikalpa (thought-free) state.

I am slowly beginning to realize this, although I still see the Guru’s love, Shiva’s love, as the love of a mother for her children. Once you realize this love, it begins to reciprocate, reverberate in your own heart. And that is ananda (bliss or joy), Shantih (peace) and bhakti (love). Those are the fruits of sadhana. Yoga is not supposed to be dry or cold. I’m naturally joyful, so this is a big part of what draws me to the Siddha Yoga path. Another distinctive feature of Siddha Yoga is that you develop, as a fruit of your sadhana (practice), a firm conviction, the undeniable experience, that what you are practicing is true. Knowledge of the self is firm conviction. That lays an unstable foundation from

which you not only realize jñana (true knowledge, knowledge of the Self), and attain God, but it’s also a firm foundation upon which to base your “mundane, worldly” life. Of course Siddha Yoga makes no distinction between worldly and spiritual aspects of life, as it is a philosophy of non-duality, all is Consciousness, or God (Shiva). Once this conviction lays hold, there is no doubt about the practices, or whether they “work” or not, because you have the deep experience of the Truth. And from there on, all is bliss, and joy permeates every fiber of reality. And that is sublime and beautiful.

So anybody who is seeking God, seeking jñana, I suggest taking a dive into the pool of sweet nectar that I have discovered Siddha Yoga to be. I’m not claiming it’s the only true path— I’ll leave that to religious fanatics. But I can point to it and assert that it has helped me to grow into peace, love, and joy. I’ve quit seeking. I have found the path which is my own way back home, back to the Atman.

Untitled, Jeremy Hoffman

Hell on earth is in these lower 48s once you enter these gates joy flees happiness shrivels. Premonition proceeds these holders of law, hearts indifferent to all residence, Yeah right!

This bus is stuffy, we been park’d waiting over an hour, listening to tots being drop then pop’d, and chains jingling, inmates swearing their last spots were off the chain! I think, *yeah, if so, how come you on this chain gang, going to a new penitentiary?* So much layers of injustice at play rage fuels my mind down this walk...

“Hey,” CO bellows. “Listen up when you’re called. Give me your name and number, exit, then stand in single files.”

This is a routine I’ve done seven times now. Sadly it’s my only chance to see freedom, go by through the bars. So much never accomplished.

“YO MOVE IT,” the CO yells.

I slowly walk into this new belly of the beast towards R&D. We’re met by new goons, mug us up and down then the LT steps forward.

LT bellows, “Move! Let’s go, Move! Listen up, yall gonna walk the main line today.”

“Yes, sir.”

“We got a special one on this bus today. Oh yeah, we got a flat liner! MOVE IT! Single file boys! Hurry up so we can get this show started.”

I shuffle behind another inmate shackle biting belly chain singing loudly as if it’s feeding off me in a frenzy before I’m uncuffed.

“Next!” The CO states. “Next,” he looks at me head to toe and then asks me, “are you a gang member?”

I reply, “no sir, just a regular ol chief, an Apache sir.”

“Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!” The CO says, shocked. He hollers to his fellow workers, “we found a brethren, fellas, a real savage!” He smirks then leans in close as if to remove my belly chain to whisper, “heads up, I got you a fresh one in holding pen. Number one, be a good sport and handle that.”

“Yeah,” the CO yells. “We’ll put this one in holding pen number one.”

My heart skips a beat, plead out to a lesser charge than premeditated murder, still lost my life though, wondering WHY? WHY? As adrenaline floods upward from my feet as I draw in power from mother earth which ripples the fabrics of reality causing a loud vibration, then I exhale piercing the veil. Walk back in time some 150 years or so I thought.

Dagotée gather around...

A symphony of excited women laughing, cheering, yelling at the top of their lungs in a language I can’t understand, echoes out in this vast space. For that’s what this looks like, space without stars, planets, nothing but the women floating.

A voice enters my mind, saying *you’re correct, Apache, it’s space in time, we’re in the underworld, not by choice but by force, and we’re all named Persephone, will you help us and release your marks that talk???*

Mother’s Love, Richard Schmidlkofer

Jan 28, 1972 was the first day I was born and you held me in your arms to comfort me. You tried your best to take care of me. I know I was not the best child and only child. I wish we could have spent more time with each other.

Mother, I'm sorry I did not behave and got in trouble all the time. I blame myself for all the stress in your life. I wish I could change my past.

Mother, you visited me in prison, and I'm sorry you had to see me here. I made you sad and you cried. This really hurt me. I know down in your heart you really love me.

Mother I really miss you when you died on Aug. 1, 2003 I wish you were still alive. I blame myself for your death even though God took you. I hope you are in heaven and not in hell. I hope you accepted Yeshua (Jesus) before you died. I hope you are not hurting any more and happy being in heaven.

Hugs + Kisses, The Rainbow Sheep

My awesome kids, this Daddy misses.
Can’t wait to give you hugs and kisses.
Pick you up and squeeze you tight,
Tuck you snugly in at night.
Bedtime stories, Minecraft games,
Give each other spy code names.
Build sandcastles, pillow forts,
Laugh at Daddy’s silly shorts.
Five long years is too much time
To hear my voice in words and rhymes.
No Christmas gifts or birthday cards,
I never thought it’d be this hard.
November’s here, I’ll soon be free,
The wait till then is killing me.
Get out, stay out, and don’t come back,
I’ve finally got my life on track.

Untitled, Charles Whitfield

There's no greater joy than that in seeing any mother holding her child in her arms, for seeing such a sight displays the love and affection she has for her bibelot.

There have been times when I've seen brothers who're confined literally break down into tears upon seeing the woman who blessed him with their child or children. And I've witnessed the same thing while I was free. This is HAPPINESS: A most sacred emotion of a horse that no one can break.

Gazing at the face of the woman holding her child, I sense she exudes motherly peace of mind. And the mind's never right but when it's at peace within itself.

She displays the unique strength of a woman that makes her a heroine in the eyes of her child. For sometimes much is to be learned when one can't do that what can be done. And one's expected to achieve the impossible.

So I salute you sisters who have a child or children, teach your child or children well. What you help a child to love can be more important than what you help him or her to learn. Mad love, mad respect.

Dreamy Hugs, by Alejandro Macias

In jail, one of the sacred rules (if not the #1) is to respect others' sleep.

This I take very personal, and I agree; it's the only moment when my mind and soul are not confined, when they are free and I do everything that I hope to do one day. For example, drive a motorcycle, eat something more healthy or get a hug from my mom. Something that I have wanted for a long time.

I am from Mexico, which is more than 3,000 miles away. I was 20 years old when I left Mexico. I was allowed to work in this country for 8 months, so I didn't have to make a big deal of me leaving; I only said goodbye to my girlfriend, a few friends; I gave a small hug to my dad and my

mom and left, because "I'll be back anyway" I thought.

5 months later I was facing life in prison.

Sentenced to 22 years to life, I went to jail. I didn't know how to speak English, I was oblivious of the awful things that people have to go through on this side of the fence. I was alone in a delusory world.

With time I learned how to navigate through the darkness of this world by myself, but from time to time I was missing the warm hugs of my mom; at this time of my incarceration (16 years later) I still dream of wandering through the streets of my town trying to get home. Sometimes I get there and see my friends and family, some others I wake before I get home or before I see my family. Only a few times I have hugged my mom in my dreams, which makes me feel sad and happy at the same time.

I had heard many times stories from 1/1's where they have lost their siblings during jail or which is worse, right before their release. Perhaps they are missing theirs as much as I do, or maybe not.

But I do, and every time that I dream with my loved ones I don't want to wake up, I just want to hug them.

Just like a few weeks ago, I dreamed that I was chatting with my mom, we were having fun talking, wandering through the streets that I so much miss and that have changed a lot, but right before I open my eyes, she told me: "It's time to come back home," to which I replied; "Almost there, only a few more. Just hang on mom."

In my dream I knew that I was in jail, and that I had to wake up to go to work, but at the same time, I didn't want to leave her, I wanted to hug her; I stretched my arms, but she started to fade away, before I knew it I had my eyes open.

I couldn't go back to sleep, even if I wanted to. I had 20 minutes to go to work.

It's for reasons like this that I respect others' sleep. I don't know if they feel the same way; be somewhere else rather than this place. But I rather be in my dreams hugging my mom...

Unconditional Love, David Evans

I am blessed to have felt unconditional love. My father was murdered when I was 8 years old. So growing up it was on my mother's shoulders to raise me. And I didn't make things easy. I took for granted knowing my mom would be there for me. It seemed to go without saying, I could turn to her for whatever through whatever. I remember this time, the first time I lost a girlfriend who I truly loved. My mom wrapped me in her arms and held me close to her as I cried. Assuring me things would be okay. In 2020 my mom passed away from cancer. And when I think of her I don't think of how we were always poor, I don't think of her as a drug addict, I don't think that she let me down. I feel she did her best and she accomplished what God wanted from her as a mother by showing me how wonderful unconditional love is.

Unloved, Brix Capone

"Anthony, I know I wasn't a good mother and I apologize for being a shitty mother to you!"

"Okay but why were you so shitty?"

"I didn't try to be, it was just out of all my kids you seemed like you didn't need me."

"It didn't matter what it seemed like, Ma. I was a child and a child always needs his mother!"

"I'm sorry Anthony, I love you, to the moon and back!"

My mother and I had this conversation over the prison phone the same year that she died, 2021, almost as if apologizing to me was the last thing she needed to do before being ready to die. I understand now what she meant by it. Seemed like I didn't need her. It was that Persistent Leader quality in me; I was very independent, liked being by myself and doing what I wanted to do. My 4 other siblings were a bit needy. But between my mother ignoring me and my father beating me, it made me feel unloved. I seriously thought my mother didn't love me.

The first hug that I remember (I'm sure she hugged me as an infant but I don't remember those), I was facing juvenile charges for breaking into a house and stealing a bike for my uncle. My mother came to visit me and she hugged me. The first thing I thought was, *she's*

just trying to look good in front of the officers, like we were a family that hugged, but it made me feel loved.

The next time we hugged wasn't till years later when my grandmother died. I may have been a very persistent, independent child but I needed and wanted my mother. I'm 34 years old and I'm man enough to admit that I really could use a hug from my mother! If anyone thinks that makes me soft or weak, then you're welcome to come try me, and I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed. If anything, feeling neglected as a child made me a very tough man who knows he can survive anything. But not everyone deals with shit the way I do.

So I have a message for parents who think their children "seem" like they don't need them. It doesn't matter if your child is real independent and content with playing alone, your child needs you! So show them love! Hug them! Give them kisses! Give them your time! I promised myself I'd never let my babies feel the way I felt!

The Fork in the Road, Abdul Robinson

This impressionable Teen-Mom is not only being bullied by the stresses of womanhood and motherhood, but she's come to the proverbial fork in the road...

Unbeknownst to the beautiful 5-year old girl, her mother, who was recently contemplating not only suicide, but also giving her up for adoption, has made the executive decision to pledge her allegiance to the virtues that constitute parenthood, attend suicide prevention seminars and not give her daughter up for adoption... Hugging her precious daughter makes her not only feel special, relevant, seen and validated, but in essence, receiving a hug on this very day seemed to solidify their connection, fortify their blissful bond and give credence to their authentic adoration for one another...

The 5-year old toddler clearly appreciates the utter euphoria and nurturing properties she's receiving from this hug in general; being lovingly cradled by her impressionable mother appears to make her feel wanted, treasured, honoured and loved... Her mother's hugs surely have the ordained propensity to not only intoxicate her and neutralize her anxiety attacks, but also cause her to abruptly fall asleep...

The smile on the mother's face represents her spirit now being in sincere alignment with every aspect of motherhood...this image is a proverbial testament that their quintessential union is officially smothered in state of the art unconditional love. A vast majority of poverty stricken teen moms are subjected to the twisted fork in the road, which sadly entails: succumbing to suicide, due to being ambushed by the perpetual pressures of motherhood, childhood trauma, and validation deficiencies.

Versus: embracing the reality of being a single, resourceless teen mom whose swan-colored wings are broken in 16 different places. The toddler is without question at peace and most likely dreaming about Barbie dolls and assorted candy. The mother's smile reeks of unprecedented relief. The hug they're tastefully sharing can't be taken out of context. The hug in itself is the quintessential hug that all motherless mothers and fatherless daughters desire, deserve and crave. The cobble-stone road to the right of them represents the journey that lies ahead for the teen mom. Every 100 yards or so she'll abruptly encounter a proverbial fork in the road that'll entail the prioritizing of her daily priorities concerning her self-care regimen, her daughter's overall welfare and her parenting prowess. The road itself also constitutes how far the teen mom has come in matters regarding understanding the application of self-love, appreciating the gift of motherhood, neutralizing her own anxiety attacks, abolishing the suicidal thoughts that haunt her very essence, and the overall beautification of her sense of self-esteem, moral compass, and sense of self-worth.

The enchanting ray of sunlight that's depicted to the portrait appears to telegraph the divine fact that the gods will not only award this teen mom with the sacred luxury of raising her daughter in an incident-free environment and solidifying the precious welfare of her daughter but also that both mom and daughter will be showered with security, bombarded with favor and grace and awarded perpetual protection from all toxic forces. The lush vegetation that is captured within the very essence of the picture signals the prosperity that awaits them both as they grow older and understand the circumstances of life. I can sense that it goes without saying that the mother in the picture has

made a vow to be the most loving, most nurturing, most thoughtful, and most affectionate force in her daughter's life.

Untitled, Ed Wrench

That picture reminds me of my mom Mary. She used to hug me a lot. I miss all of my mom's love and hugs. She passed away without giving me a hug. Hold on to your moms while you can because once they pass on we won't have them. God bless all of the moms.

Cosily Carried, Howard B. Brown

Valentine's Day is a special day for The Little One. Her cake had light red frosting with strawberries decorating the top spelling "Happy Birthday." Because the strawberries laid on their side, the strawberries looked like hearts.

The Little One took a deep breath. As she blew fifteen candles flickered, one after the other. Small streams of smoke rose up from the wicks.

Jana smiled at seeing The Little One becoming a young lady, now. Jana thought back, those many years ago, carrying The Little One in her arms. On the drive home the Little One had sung the chorus of a song on the radio. Between the energetic singing and long ride, The Little One fell asleep, so got cosily carried towards the house.

Jana smiled at that fond memory. She looked over at The Little One. She thought how time had gone by, saying sotto voce "The Little One is taller than me now. Ha, ha."

Mom's Hug, Bert Zamora

She bursts out into the light.
She is small and new and cold.
She needs something.
She screams loudly to get anyone's attention.
She is handed to someone.
They clean her and wrap her in a blanket.
Then she is handed to the most beautiful person in the room.
The woman hugs her tightly and cries over her.
In her arms she feels safe, warm, and loved.
To her this woman is the greatest person in the world.
Years pass as they tend to do.
On a dirt road the two stand holding hands waiting.
They are surrounded by trees and the early morning sun.
"I don't want to go," says the little girl.
Her mother smiles, picks her up, and hugs her.
"It will be alright, I will be right here when you get home."
The firm, loving hug makes the little girl feel better.
Just like all the hugs that follow for many years to come.
Birthday hugs. Graduation hugs. Happy hugs and sad hugs.
Hello hugs and goodbye hugs.
The worst was the last hug.
The woman holds her daughter tight until her spirit leaves her.
The girl holds her long after that.
But she knows she will see her mother again.
She is sure there will be a hug for her when they see each other again.

Mother, Master of the Heart Ever Ready, Your Lost Prince KK Jr.

I don't know what to do. I'm so lost without you. I'm so sad and lonely. With no shoulder to cry on, no arms to hold me. I no longer have family or friends to rely on. It just builds and builds loneliness and pain. I find myself hoping and praying more and more each day and night for it all to pop, so I can drop and leave this world.

What am I supposed to do in a world without you, now that you're gone? I'll have to

change, it won't be the same. Please tell me, how do I heal, how do I deal in a world without you? How much of me did you take with you? Alone and hollow is all I'll be.

You left me alone, I wasn't ready, in a world of hate with an unknown fate. Your love you took, my heart you broke. The sun doesn't rise, the stars don't shine. Upon my mind the memories climb. The happy, the sad, the tears of joy and sadness we shared. Your acceptance of me my whole life, even after I came out, you told me you already knew and you knew for a long time, you were just waiting for me to accept it myself. You were my greatest support, you were there for me when I needed you most and I for you. I need you now, I'm lost and I feel forgotten.

Mom, I miss you. I can't believe May 31st marks one year since you've been gone. It hurts so much I really do miss you.

Love,
Me

Untitled, Cesar Hernandez

My cousin got pregnant with her first of five children at the age of 16. When she told her dad about the pregnancy he told her to pack up and be gone by 6AM.

When her daughter was born she was so happy to have a little girl. Her dad took a while to warm up to his granddaughter. He eventually lets my cousin move back in for a while.

When she ends up pregnant with her son she has to move out again. She now has one daughter and four boys.

Stay Longer, George Hesse

Every morning little Emily wakes up to her A.I. "Good morning, I love you," she hears.

"Stay longer," she whispers back. This far in the future technology is very therapeutic. Emily is grieving her mother who passed away from breast cancer. (Rest in peace Jan Jesse I love and miss you mom).

Mama's Love, Jack Simpson Jr.

Our daughter "Michelle" was born in January of 1974. She was our first born. I've seen parents favor one child over others. To me it should be an equal love.

Michelle had gotten sick with a respiratory infection. I had a job that I had to work in order to pay my bills. My wife was working part-time at a job.

After returning from the family doctor, he wanted to put her in the hospital. I did not have the money or enough insurance to cover that.

I carried her to the best person I knew: her mother. There is nothing like a Mama's love. In four days she was up running around, no fever, her lungs had cleared.

No matter what she got into at the house, she could do no wrong. Her Mama's love would outdo time. I can say for sure I got in more trouble because of her than she did.

Still I would take all those things she did all over again. Just to hear her laugh and watch her point at me when her mother would ask, "who done it?" Naturally I got blamed for it.

A father loves their children. There is still nothing as strong as a Mama's love. To see her as a small child again playing around the house or hugging her Mama is a great gift. Truly a Mama's love is forever. Thank you Michelle for the memories.

Unconditional Love, Kelly Messenger

There is no love like the love between a mother and her daughter. It's unconditional by the looks of it. This mother actually loves her daughter. She will do anything to love and perfect her daughter. She only wants to see her daughter grow and mature.

She's not praying for her baby's downfall, pulling snake moves just to get joy out of watching her baby fail. She wants her child to succeed in life. She wants to see her make it. She's not out to use and abuse her baby girl. This

is a love that is real; It's unconditional love. You can only get one Mother and one Daddy, and no one else can compare.

The only problem is, there are people out there who just have kids and don't know how to be parents. So they (the kids) rob life out there looking for a motherly, fatherly love; the type of love they never had, but should have had.

They've been hurt and abused their whole lives. So when they find people to take them in and show some sort of love, they want to cling to them believing it is real. Some might even start callin' them Daddy or they Hood mana, not realizing that they (not the kids) are only using them as pawns in a game. Some people like to play as they climb their way to the top, not caring how many people they knock down with their fake love in the process.

Love yourself. Put yourself first. Be loyal to yourself. Nobody is going to love you more than you love yourself... Come on, stop playin'. Most of y'all are playing against yourselves rather than trying to make it somewhere in life and succeed. Be selfish.

Age of the Child, Karla Wooten

2 girls hugging, look at the age of the child. One is a mother, and the other is a little girl.

When I see the sun shining on them, I think of peace. I refuse to consider the ugliness of the world because the child reminds me of dreams.

When I was a little girl hugging my mother, I never knew about trauma or chaos, all was right with my world.

I was at the age of innocence before a pedophile tried to destroy my world.

It's always most of the time that the family knows and the age of the child usually does not matter.

This child in the picture is still innocent and hasn't had her world shattered.

I would pray that all the children globally could be at peace, grow up to live a life that provides decent food, housing, love and education... but this is now like a dream- hug your mother child, and remain at peace.

A Mother's Love, Karla Wooten

A mother's love is limitless, without reservation, without hesitation, and lasts the test of time. A mother's life is long-suffering, kind, not proud but humble.

The sun shines on the mothers who forgive the unforgivable, love the ungrateful and who love their children beyond eternity. Children are a gift from God, they are a gift of the heart.

Cherish your children and all the children in the world, they are our legacy, our future, and are born innocent.

Children deserve to be protected. Support a child today @ NOKIDHUNGRY.com

Become a philanthropist. And love the world's children without limits.

Untitled, Jacob Lester

A mother's embrace can heal all that ails you. A mother's embrace, whether blood or chosen, can soothe the ails that plague you. A mother's hug is the love that can create a panacea for all. Feel the divine mother embrace you all, even when your mortal one cannot.

Home at Last, Steve De Logé

I was seventeen and stopped taking the pill because my boyfriend said if I got pregnant, my folks couldn't keep us apart and we'd get our own place. When I announced that I was going to have a baby, they told me to move out. They ranted about their church, illegitimate children, and people who sin. My baby isn't illegitimate, I protested, and she isn't sin. I didn't look back.

The only place Renzo could afford was an unfurnished loft close to the repair garage where he worked. The area was semi-industrial and bleak. We got some stinky second-hand furniture and I got a job waitressing, but we could barely pay our bills. There wasn't enough money for things like maternity doctors and so he said that I could apply for welfare assistance, as long as I didn't mention that he lived with me. The welfare people gave me hateful looks until they got the medical report confirming that I was going to have a baby. Then they paid the rent, paid for the doctor visits, and gave me food assistance. But even that help wasn't enough. We needed a crib,

maternity clothes, baby clothes, a stroller and car seat, and a better neighborhood to bring our child home to.

It was too much pressure for Renzo. He worked hard fixing cars at the shop, but he didn't make that much money. He said that he didn't have the right tools to get the jobs done as fast as the labor manual said he should, but each week he spent money on new tools and beer and keeping his junky Chevy running. There was never enough to plan for our future.

When the baby came we made out as best we could. Some nice folks gave me used baby things, and the local food bank pitched in with diapers and formula. Renzo was a different person with a kid in the house. Every time she fussed, he went out for a drink or to clear his head. I felt like I was doing this alone. He said that he was being hounded at work by the welfare folks who wanted to attach his paychecks, so he quit that job and started looking for another one. Then we broke up.

Really, it was good riddance. He never acted like either our daughter or I mattered that much to him. I got a babysitter and went to work on the nightshift at a 24-hour diner. This way I could spend time with my daughter during the day. The welfare still paid the rent, but reduced my monthly pay so that I could barely afford childcare. It became a cycle of working, feeling alone, neglecting my child's emotional needs, and living in a neighborhood that I was afraid to be in after I found the shattered front door hanging by one hinge. Someone had broken in and taken everything of value, including a laptop computer that I had saved to buy.

The baby was almost four now, and ready for preschool. The closest one was a bus ride away, and the school district we were in was reported to be one of the most underfunded and poorly managed in the county. I was trapped in this place and couldn't see any way out except to move to some rural town where I could escape the crime and negative aspects of the city. But where? Montana? Oklahoma? And then it dawned on me. Hawaii is a state, just like Nevada or New Jersey. What if I took my last paycheck and next month's rent money, filled a couple of suitcases with our clothes, and bought one-way tickets to Honolulu? I'd still be poor and a working mother, but at least we'd be living in a great place.

That's exactly what we did. I got off the plane and took a rideshare to University District, right next to Waikiki Beach. I got a room and then contacted the office for state assistance. When they heard I was single and had a child, they told me to find an apartment where the landlord would accept a voucher for the rent, and they would pay it. They gave me a debit card for food, and cash to use until next month's stipend would be posted to my account. I found a job at a restaurant on the North Shore, and a shared house with another single mom that is a nice walk to the beach. My little girl and I walk there every afternoon to play in the sand and hang with the surfers, and as the sun sets I carry her home in my arms, so happy to have found our paradise.

Mother and Child Embrace, by Sherman Graham

I don't remember such warm and comforting moments like that with my parents.

So beautiful to see a child being completely accepted and loved. (Not being despised for her differences.)

I never knew the warmth and comfort of a mother's hug.

Only the quickness of her hand, or the look of triumph when a belt was involved.

Or on those special days when all that was needed was a fist.

I can almost feel the little girl's comfort.

I longed for times when my closed eyes could stop me from crying.

To hold, and to be held. The feel of a deep love between a mother and child. Two souls deeply connected with a touch.

The mother smiles knowing that she has given her daughter the feeling of safety, And the little girl values her mom. And loves her, but the girl knows she is valued and matters to her mother.

A child should always know they matter, even to the world.

She should never know the burning in her throat, and the difficulty of taking a breath, while holding back tears that could end in pain.

It has been 52 years since that first day I felt my spirit break. It would take several weeks before a confused, and sorrowful little boy would realize that he didn't matter to his mom and dad. Nor did they hold any value in him.

I forgive my parents every day I wake up, for not wanting me, or seeing the effort I gave to earn their love and acceptance.

We never came together to fix our brokenness. Now you are gone. And I pray they find peace in death that life and I could never give them.

Me? I'm still broken. But I found a way to celebrate my uniqueness. I do all I can to see that those around me understand that they matter, and in the world, they are valued.

Back when I was 8, 9, 10, I mattered. And it was your place, Mom and Dad to see to it that I knew that as a fact. As well as so many enriching and deeply meaningful things.

I'm no longer angry. But for the life of me, I can't forget. But I forgive you both.

Broken, but healing,
Sherman Graham (was your son)
Sage Nicole (now your daughter)

Unconditional Hug of Love, by Allen P. Parker

On a nice summer day I spot the most amazing thing. A mother and child. My eyes watched as both were in their own world.

They sat next to me watching as the child played breathing softly as she whispered, "have fun sweetie." I can tell life has knocked her around by the forced smile she displays.

As I read my paper enjoying the breeze the day brings, she breaks my focus by saying, "thank God for moments like these." Confused by her words I look up watching her lean her head back and enjoy the breeze as well.

Nodding before returning back to my paper, I hear a loud yell screaming "mommy!" Before I could jump to my feet Superwoman was there on her knees.

The child runs to open arms and embrace the hug of mom. I watch. I was shocked at the response the hug gave to the child. Arms offer security and relief but on the other hand the mother is able to prove her worth.

To me this was the most amazing thing I had ever seen and in that moment I understood what life was and what she meant in her comment.

Going Home, by C. A. Fischer

Thumbing through the pages of the Prisoner Express Newsletter Winter 2025, I knew immediately what I would title my essay for the photo prompt due Nov 1st.

In the margin next to the photo I penned in: "Going home." Everything about the prompt evoked the spiritual. It's a rare thing for me to be moved in this way. I've spent around 48 years of my nearly 65 years of life in prison. And any sense of the spiritual has been ripped from me root and all by the system - or so I thought. I was surprised when out of the depths of my soul - a voice spoke to me: "Going Home." Mixed emotions, a welling in my eyes, I felt the indescribable.

I've been lost for so long in this razor wire wilderness that I've forgotten how to feel. Over the past 25 consecutive years I've numbed all feelings and emotions down with illicit substances which the state of Kansas in all appearances tends to support and make readily available to all its wards; all the while chanting the mantra: "At least they're not bored."

Jobs or work opportunities are for the elite residents, programs are artificial and anemic, or nonexistent. Nearly the entire prison population is currently addicted to illicit substances. That is where I've been - and why not? I'm human, and it's not like I've anything better to do . . . except write, create artwork, think clearly . . . or feel; none of which I can do when I'm jumping over the moon with a needle and a spoon.

I'm tenured in the school of hard knocks, some would even say "Professor Emeritus." "Double or Triple O.G."

In reality I'm just a tired, old convict living on borrowed time. A remnant of another time and place. I am not of this century and every day when I look out upon those old walls, part of me is still there - reverberating, yet I'm here - fenced in, writing my messages to the world, hoping someone might hear. Yoohoo - anybody out there (does anyone ever read my essays)?

Well, here is another message in a bottle thrown over that wicked fence.

I've been a lost soul in a small boat trying to navigate this sea of anguish and despair without a sextant for many years. As of recent, I seem to glimpse a distant shore and now I can

hear the waves crashing on the coast - I've abandoned my small craft and tethered myself to the unsteady buoy of my dreams. Fighting against the currents and riptides, I struggle to swim into the light.

I know she's there waiting for me.

I want to go home.

I want to feel what it feels like to feel again.

Like the child in the photograph, I want to be in my mother's embrace, my head laying gratefully on her shoulder. The look of love and satisfaction on her face - then hand in hand she will lead me into the eternal light.

Going home.

BFF, D'Andre Morris

"Did you make any new friends in your school?" Taneka asked.

"You are my friend. Aren't you?" I asked.

"Always! A good friend! A great friend. We're best friends."

"Best friends! The better friend of all friends!"

"Best friends forever! I'ma call you best friend. You're the only friend I want," I stated. "Draw two. Uno."

"Well, I've taught you well. The color's yellow. You don't have one of those," Taneka stated.

"Thought too soon. I can see the moon. Wild! Color yellow! Uno out! I win!"

"The force is upon you, padawan."

"Anna Taylor, come with me, dear," I was at school. My principal said, "you have to live with your father. You're going to a new school, in another city. You're leaving today. And your mother's here."

My best friend already told me I would be living with my father, because he had more money.

"Hey, besty. This lady is going to take you to your new home, okay? I just want to give you a good hug. I already miss you. Come here! Call me every day, at 8:00. The judge agrees. If daddy says no, he's in big trouble. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Hey, besty! What'd you do today?"

"I'm sitting in daddy's room. I waited all day. He never showed."

"He works a lot. Is there anything else for you to do over there?"

"TV," I stated.

"What else?"

"Eat."

"What else?"

"Clean."

"Clean? This is your first day, and they got you cleaning?"

"I had help. The cleaning lady helped me. The house is spotless."

"You don't have to clean anything but after yourself, okay?"

"Okay."

"Go take a bath and go to bed. Call me tomorrow. What did you eat?"

"The cleaning lady and I had hamburgers."

"That's it?"

"French fries!"

"Okay, I got to go sweetie. Is there any fruit?"

"Some apples!"

"Eat one of them before you go to bed. Alright besty, got to go. Love you."

"Love you besfee!"

I fell asleep in my father's bed, who never showed up. I was mad at him.

Some girl wanted to be my friend in my new school. I told her I already have a besfee and I don't need a new friend.

The cleaning lady always picked me up from school. Most of my days I spent with her and talking with my besfee.

I hadn't seen my father in a long time. Then one day he walked right by me. No word. Not even a glance. I felt forgotten. Invisible.

I screamed at him, "you're no father! You're no friend! You're no man! You're a ghost!" and he looked at me for the first time. I ran.

After that, he noticed me. I ran every time. Until he started to show up for dinner.

"Why do we eat burgers every night?" he asked.

"That's what she wants to eat," the cleaning lady responded.

"You like burgers, Anna?" were the first words my father said to me. I ran.

I went back for the rest of my burger and got stuck.

"Have you ever had bacon on your burgers?" he asked me.

"My besfee fix 'em that way, but ain't no bacon here."

"Yvonne, remember to buy bacon."

"Got it," Yvonne replied.

"What else do you like to eat?" my father asked.

"Ice cream, pudding, ice cream, pudding, chicken patties, pancakes," I had gotten all I wanted, but he grew distant once more.

"Your father's picking you up early tomorrow. He says to get some good sleep and wear your favorite outfit. He's taking you to a nice place," Yvonne said.

My father came early the next morning. "You ready? I got a surprise for you. I know you hate me. I am who I am. After today you won't hate me anymore. I'm going to show you I'm a good father. Can I show you, Anna?" He took my hand and led me to the car. I started to see things and people I know. Then we pulled up at my besfee's house.

"I need you to come home right now. I have Anna here. She don't want to live with me. She's yours. Fuck the court. I love my daughter. That's why I'm giving her back. Your house. Yes. Okay."

"You're going to live with your mother from now on, okay," my father stated.

My besfee came home. I ran to her and she caught me in her arms. We hugged in a strong embrace. "I thought I'd never see you again," my besfee cried.

"Thought too soon, I can see the moon," I said.

"I see it too."

"Of course you do. My best friend sees everything I see."

"Best friends forever."

"Besfees forever."

I didn't see my father leave the porch. He disappeared. I never forgot how I reunited with my best friend. Our life was good together.

The Hug or Embrace, John Prentice

Receiving a hug or embrace
is something to be cherished.

I miss the days of giving
or receiving those cherished
hugs from my son his mother
and family.

The last hug I gave as a free man
was to my son June 23-2022
It was his last day of school
I hugged him tight, said I love you
and have a good day, I'll see you later.

He didn't know it but the next time he saw me
I'd be in the county jail unable to hug him
We could only exchange air hugs through the
glass separating us, by far not the same.

The little boy I hugged in June of 2022 was 5
going on
6 within a week. That same boy is 9 now. Every
hug on
the visit is slower; I don't want to let go, not
knowing when
the next will be. Visits in NYS Docs are a mess
after the Feb-March 2025 CO strike and
subsequent
prison lockdown.

So always share a hug with a loved one you might
not get another chance.

Daughter, Terance DeJuan Wilson

If beauty had a name she'd be draped in you
Like perfume, you turn heads when you stride into
a room
Thoughts intrude, they include your smile and
subtle little things you do
Improving what was once empty space. If
brilliance had a face . . .
If fashion had taste; you wear clothes to match
your attitude
Given an advantage, the stage awaits your graces
and mood
I'm fascinated by you, I'd stand out in the rain,
hold hands with you
Heart must be truant, lately daughter, I'm under
your influence.

I had a dance in an evening breeze, kissing the
wind, stepping through leaves,
Sleepwalking in Autumn, bright blue and yellow
diamonds in cuff-links
Illuminate the space in the shadows of your
bearing staging light
Traces of your presence the moment that our
eyes catch sight
To the blind you'd be a masterpiece in braille,
fingers tattling suspense
A sudden pension after years spent drifting in a
penal system
On borrowed time, suddenly in a race to supply
proof of your existence,
daydreaming is something that I do whenever I
am under your influence.

When you burn the house down you get a clear
look at the sky,
At the people in the frame; the picture frozen for
a moment in time,
first they love you, then they view you as an
obstacle
Impossible, is what they call you when you
confide to them your dreams
The same ones that encouraged you, they say,
"Go much further than me!"
Daughter, suddenly they fear your ambition,
because they know what you can be
Beware, daughter, they say that history lies in the
heart of a girl,
You always belong, believe in me, whenever I am
under your influence.

Upcoming Word Themes:

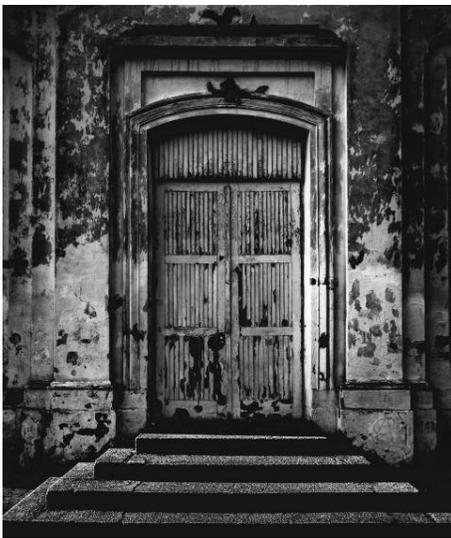
- **Due March 1 2026:** “Dogs”
 - **Due April 1 2026:** “Bottled Emotions”
 - **Due May 1 2026:** “The Test”
-

Upcoming Picture Themes:

Due 3/1/26:



Due 4/1/26:



Due 5/1/26:



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.

Contact us with any questions.

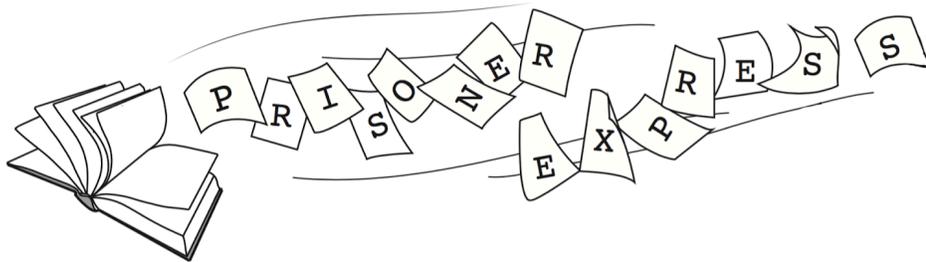
Please note! Submissions will not be included in the anthology if they do not follow the guidelines.

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