

Prisoner Express

Theme Anthology: May & June 2025

Hello friends!

Welcome to yet another edition of the Prisoner Express Theme Writing Anthology. It's a pleasure to have you here, whether you are one of our writers or a reader, an old friend or a new one. My name is Phoebe, a student at Cornell University and a new member of the PE team!

When I sat down to read the essays for this issue, I was struck by how often the smallest things carry the greatest weight. Holding hands. A song that lingers in the mind. These are moments we might take for granted in daily life, yet down the line, they represent comfort, connection, and even survival.

As I kept reading, I was reminded that touch and music are universal languages—ways we reach for one another, across distances seen and unseen.

Some essays were witty, others sophisticated, several heart-wrenching, and truly, I'm blessed to have had the opportunity to read and edit all of them.

Thank you for sharing your stories and lives with me, with such honesty and heart. I hope that you all can enjoy reading this anthology edition just as much as I did.

Phoebe W.

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Table of Contents:

- **May Word Themes:** pages 1 - 35
- **May Picture Themes:** pages 35 - 43
- **June Word Themes:** pages 43 - 67
- **June Picture Themes:** pages 67 - 82
- **Submission Guidelines & Upcoming Themes:** page 83

May Word Theme: *Holding Hands*

Not White, Catherine LaFleur

After graduation, I got hired at a Headstart program in Hotlanta. My parents arranged for me to board with their friends Mr. and Mrs. Cletus, a pastoring couple out of Ebenezer Baptist Church.

Urban inner city life was a revelation and so different from my childhood in the religious commune. Every day I rode the bus with other adults going off to real jobs. Although I was still dressing Amish-lite, I felt like I was fitting into my new community. The kids certainly loved my Little House on the Prairie vibe and took to holding onto my long skirt to get my attention.

Our class was divided into three groups, each with a teacher's aide: Miss Simone, Miss Toya and me, Miss Caffy. You aren't supposed to have favorites, but....mine was LeRoi. This tiny charmer had bronze-colored braids and wide peridot green eyes.

When the class went to the lunchroom or the playground, LeRoi grabbed ahold of my hand which meant I had to allow another tot to hold my other hand. Soon that became a reward for good behavior. Who gets to hold Ms. Caffy's hand today?

One day, LeRoi studied my hand closely before letting it go. He announced loudly, "You not white, Miss Caffy, you beige!"

Out of Control, Todd Broxmeyer

When I first read this theme, *Holding Hands*, I thought of different pleasant experiences in life. One was when I played 'Red Rover.' In this game, you and some friends form a line and hold hands. There is another group a distance away doing the same thing. Your group calls out 'Red Rover, Red Rover, let (a person's name) come over.' That person runs toward your group and tries to break through the held hands. Then another idea was the first time you hold hands with someone you care about. That first touch is so innocent and intimate at the same time. While ruminating on which direction to go, the week of March 30th happened.

That was the week the executive staff and all their underlings lost their minds and broke many laws at the federal prison Ft. Dix. Actually this started around March 18, but since there are two separate compounds, the West side only heard rumors from the East Side. We, of course, were skeptical; rumors in prison are not the most accurate. So when the siege started and the rumors turned out to be true, we were all a bit shocked. So as to stay on theme, let's start with something I saw directly.

The man was holding his hands behind his back; he had no choice since he was hogtied. The officers were holding hands to carry him. Because of the pain, he was screaming. They did not like this so they told him to stop resisting. Then, they levitated this defenseless man above their heads and dropped him face first on the ground. He screamed so they started beating him. The egregious offense that brought this on, you ask? He did not remove his hat fast enough.

This story is one of the milder ones of those weeks of operation 'clean sweep.' There are stories from every unit. The officers went after compliant people and shot them with rubber bullets, some in the face and head. They shot others with pepper spray, pepper spray balls and sent canisters of the stuff down hallways. These beacons of society even deployed a 'Hornet's Nest' (a grenade-like device full of rubber bullets) into a 12-man room. All the people in that room were lying face down and were holding their hands behind their heads.

When you hear or read things like the above actions going on, your first thought might

be that there was a massive riot going on. There are almost 5000 incarcerated people here at Ft Dix between the East, West, and camp. A prison riot here would have made national news.

There are other details that made this behavior even more suspect. There is a consistency of action and timing in every unit. The attacks on certain people were premeditated. Officers would run to certain people and just start shooting or beating them. Now add in that Fort Dix is a LOW security federal prison.

Let's do one more example just to meet the theme again. A guy self reports to the prison on Friday April 3. Two days later he is sitting in a t.v. room. Officers come running in the building and start screaming at everyone. This guy is shocked. He turns to the guy next to him and says, "Wow this is how you do this here?" Officer K (initial not name) turns and aggressively asks "What did you say?" Then starts beating the guy up. He and other officers force the man to hold his hands behind his back and zip tie them. While walking him backwards outside the unit, his shower shoe slips off. They tell him to stop resisting, lift him up and drop him on his head. The 150 people watching are talking about how the sound his head made was horrifying. Now obviously unconscious, the officers beat him more, telling him to stop resisting. One officer then turned the rubber bullet gun on the unit and told those watching to get away from the windows or they would be next.

I wish this could have been a sweet story of innocently holding hands, but unfortunately it was not to be. Prison has ruined many things, but not in my wildest dreams did I think it could tarnish something so innocent.

Holding Hands, Alan Piwowar

I would really, really love to come up with a way to go back through time without altering the outcome of the path of life—just to have the chance to hold my hand at those times when I felt alone and needed someone to just say, "Hey, it's going to be ok!"

In fifth grade — that one time I attempted suicide — ok, thank gods or the higher ups — but when it failed — I could have held my hand and cried together with myself.

I would have loved to have held my hand when I realized I was in love with my straight best friend — and cried cause it was never gonna happen.

I would have held my hand when they said I had MS., before my friends got to the hospital, cause my mom and my sister failed to be there for me — despite me always being there for them.

I would have been there to hold my hand, and maybe convince myself not to do the meth — even though it was there, and free, and it seemed like everyone else was ok...

It would have been great to be there awaiting arraignment while I prayed all those OUR FATHERS and “HAIL MARY”s.

It would be great to hold my hand when I’m trying to fight the dope sickness.

To comfort myself on store day watching my fellow inmates walk in with a store bag filled so big Santa would be jealous. And to remind myself that the size of the store bag doesn’t mean their family really loves them as my stomach growls. I think that everyone must feel this craving for food and what must be their stomach eating itself.

To hold my hand as I remember the “learn to be lonely” song from Phantom, I’m my own companion.

Hands Made For Holding, Christian Hansen

I was born December 1977, in a small Nebraska village (population 128), where I lived right across the creek from my grandparents. My grandfather taught me from a very early age, “Real men don’t hug, they shake hands.” So this instilled in me the belief that real men’s holding of hands was only for a hand shake, nothing more. Of course on the other side of my family, my mom’s side, both of my grandparents taught me hugs were okay and people (no matter male or female) can hold hands.

Now here I am 47 (moving towards 48) looking down at my left hand, holding this ink pen, opening my heart to my readers, addressing how my hands have held on to many others.

Of course, like many other fortunate children, my hands have held my parent’s hands, as I walked through my childhood life and into adult life. I’ve held my father’s hand as he laid in

a hospital bed following a brain tumor surgery in 1994. I held my mother’s as she was hospitalized following a heart attack in my car. My hands I feel were made for compassion.

These hands have held the hands of two children, a son and a daughter. I was given 6 years of “Charles” life, before his mother and I divorced. My son (he’ll forever be) is now on the verge of graduation and turning 19. I wish I was there to shake his hand. I was only given 199 months of “Elizabeth’s” life, holding her little hands as she took her first steps. In 2019, my hands were forced and the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP) banned these hands from ever holding hers again. I only pray one day her little hand will hold mine once more.

Now I’ve gotten ahead of myself in this writing. This hand holding my pen had a mind of its own. When I saw this month’s word theme, I instantly went back in time to the most relevant memory of “Hand Holding.”

In 2012, after getting past my fear of dead bodies, being down on my luck and out of work, I went back to school and became a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). I’ve been present as several elderly people have left behind suffering and pain to enter a better place and meet their higher being, but one will always stick with me.

“Paula” was a bitter lady and for some odd reason, she never really cared for me. If I was in her presence, she chose to strike me, pinch me, spit on me, etc. One day, her final day, **SHE CHOSE ME** to sit with her, comfort her, hold her hand, as she started the beginning of her end. I thought it only Hollywood magic, that a final breath comes out, like blowing hot on a cold day but on this day, I swear I saw her final breath exit her mouth. Looking down, I saw her withered hand holding mine.

47 years later, I have to point out, my grandfather was not correct. Yes real men use their hands, but not only the way he taught me. My hands have a purpose. They are made for holding, helping, and showing compassion.

Can I hold your hand, my friend, my family, the future generation. Please help others, instead of using your hand to hurt others. Please show compassion and love — stop the hate. Like Paula, be at peace once and for all. Find another’s hand to hold.

No Greater Love, David Lee Wilson

When my daughter, Alyssa, was born, she was twenty-one inches long, and nine pounds three and a half ounces of joy and beauty, to both her mother, Nancy, and I!

To see her delicate and precious hands and feet with her tiny fingers and toes... and to hold her tiny fragile hands in my own — even now, twenty-three years later, brings tears to my eyes, even though her mother and I are no more.

Watching her take each wondrous breath, and to hear her precious baby heart beat— screams the miracle that was Alyssa's creation and birth!

There is no greater love shared between two people than in the very moment a new life enters our world, and your hand is the very first they ever touch.

Alyssa... I love you!

Connection, James L Pierce

Life often throws heavy punches at us literally tearing us apart, even ripping us to threads at the seams. It's a thousand-piece puzzle thrust high into the air, but having shards of sharp metal rain down upon you, cutting through to your soul. It's difficult to step forward when the world shoves you backwards three spaces. It's a psychological strain on your groins.

I sat on the couch in our dayroom completely absorbed in the T.V. But I'm not fascinated over some damn sporting event because I have no desire in watching men perform, but I am intensively drawn to the beautiful angels known as cheerleaders. A rarity scarcely shown during any game.

I am a man who hasn't forgotten about the cherished possession those ladies have given us throughout the years, along with the love and affection that could always warm the heart in the coldest moment. Oh how I wish I could awake in the mornings to their cherub-like faces and warm smiles. I desire and long for what I had lost long ago: a connection with the opposite sex.

It is through their intrinsic beauty and natural sexuality that life is born. They aren't mere sexual objects but vessels of pleasure in multiple ways. Their warm embrace drives shadows of doubt away, providing

companionship. No imitation can create such a realistic heaven.

I desire their embrace; feeling their heart beat next to mine assures me of promised comfort and endless passion. They may be goddesses touched by Aphrodite providing streams of sexual love, but treat her right and the reward will be greater than your expectations. This is the connection I long for. It's a life preserver in itself.

The psychological effects of loneliness are easily diagnosed. It begins with the loss of companionship, resulting in a need for love and affection, and ending with settlement for infatuation. And that's why I seek connections. I haven't forgotten the effectual need for love and the importance of sharing it with others.

Genuine compassion can't be bound nor incarcerated. The world may have corrupted its terminology, overshadowing it with problematic meanings, but in its truest and original form, it cannot be created or birthed without the female species. Compassion is the seed of love. And love requires connection.

It's a chain reaction from one couple to another, spreading hope and sharing dreams. It's rebuilding compassion in a world of hate. It's imprisoning darkness and shining light on hope and remembering a lady you once forgot. It may have been a mother, a daughter, or even a wife. But seek reconnection with them. If you cannot, then you're the one with the cold heart.

Society continually attempts to change worldly norms, and many of them are accepted by society and legalized by the law. And to each his own. But I only recognize those having a natural slit. I can't find romantic companionship or any type of sexual craving for men and it only intensifies the craving for connection with the opposite sex.

I have been hurt and used by women but it doesn't change my preference concerning women. I still appreciate their intrinsic beauty and natural sexuality. I am a male with sexual needs that can't be satisfied by another man. It's difficult finding female pen pals because the world has become too judgemental having only seen my offence rather than my emotional scars. But the truth is I've never disrespected any female I have ever been with, but I have

experienced multiple broken hearts. I've chosen to forgive instead of hate.

I feel connection is important and everyone in the world has something to share that would enhance a natural peace. But all I am wanting is forgiveness and connection. I am probably wasting pleas on foolish acquisition because judgment will always reign in the hearts of the free and incarcerated women and I will have to cling to my imagination to find comfort and connection.

Holding Hands, Scott Cascone

Will I ever have the chance to hold your hands again? Remember their strength, their warmth? Missing those who love me in spite of my self and actions.. Do I deserve to know their trust again?

It's been 9 years, maybe even more so since I had the opportunity, the privilege, the pleasure of being able to feel the company of your hands covering my own.. to hold on to them so tightly, never wanting to let go, feeling that if I do, I may lose their memory forever... A few hours here or there.. a few months passing between every visit, is not enough, will never be enough for me.. I can only imagine how hard it may be for you.. knowing that one day there will be no visits.. no more smiles and stories exchanged, no more hands to hold.. Time flies by as my time here increases.. the distance, no greater in my mind.. but I miss you all.. and I will always miss you.. even when I just saw you an hour a day, a week, a month ago.. It never gets easier does it? The feeling... this fleeting meeting and exchange of greetings, so beautifully bittersweet. I wait and wonder.. praying all of you will be all right.. Father, Mother and both my brothers.. The people I love most in this world.. the 4 people I could not live my life without.. I'm patiently praying.. watching the time passing... anticipating with everything I am, the next time we as a family, will once again Hold Hands.. thank you for your love, now and always.. Love, Scott.

Holding Hands, Rick Clappsy

When I was five, I did a lot of hand holding. My mother led me by the hand in public, I led my baby sister; it wasn't about affection,

more about being safe in New Jersey. My mother sought to protect me, and I, in turn, kept Amanda safe as a brother should. Holding hands was normal and good in 1975.

When I was ten, holding hands with my mother and sister was not cool at all. No, these were the days of riding bikes, playing on monkey bars and all that other rugged boy stuff. Holding hands was not very big in 1980.

When I was fifteen, holding hands meant I had a gal who was sweet on me and we wanted to show the world that we were together. It also meant she was choosing me, unashamed, which felt good in a way that balanced all the bad I was getting at home. Holding hands was life-affirming and good again in 1985.

When I was twenty, I had a wife and a child whose hands I should have held onto for dear life, but I was selfish and stupid, which made me lose my grip on the most important hands in my world. My hands and my life became empty. Holding hands was a lost privilege in 1990.

At age fifty, I finally stopped running from God and realized He had been reaching out for my hand my entire life. It dawned upon me, finally, that holding hands is best when our free hand holds onto the promises of God. He never let me go, it was all my doing; maybe my daughter and my wife would still be in my life if I had put my priorities in order a long time ago. In 2020, I know holding hands is a gift to be cherished.

All this contemplation about holding hands fills me with a lot of regret and hope. I regret the hands I let go of, slapped away or refused to hold at all; my hands were too full of baggage for me to handle anything else. My life was cluttered by debris that made me incapable of truly appreciating what was literally within arm's reach. My hope is that it's not too late for you to get a firm grip on the many important hands in your life. My prayer is that holding hands is normal and good for you in 2025.

Holding Hands, Omar Recalde

I was lying on the floor next to Monkey. We had finished our meditation and now our sangha was sitting or lying in a big circle, about a dozen of us talking about any struggles we'd had that week, or any lessons we've learned. Monkey (not her birth name) was going out with Lily. As the

door monitor, Lily was on the other side of the room where she'd kept people from interrupting our meditation.

So I'm next to Monkey, my hands on the floor, and she gets comfortable in her spot. She drops one hand next to mine. And our fingers touch. I hadn't had an affectionate touch, besides family, in years. And she wasn't moving away. I glanced at her, corner of my eyes. My arm hair was standing up and my heart was thudding away. She was looking at whoever was talking. But she didn't move her hand away. Even after I twitched my fingers. We stayed that way, fingers touching for the next hour.

She & I never talked about it, never brought it up in any way. I built a whole debate back and forth on what she might've meant IF ANYTHING. It might've been completely one-sided on my part, us so close to holding hands. I'm just glad that I've had the chance to learn to be more thoughtful, considerate (yay prison!). Otherwise, I have no doubt that I would've pushed for something to happen, given her The Look or something.

We are Humans: Stories from the Incarcerated, Martin Vicario

As a child, a person feels the security of their parent enfold them as they hold hands. And years later, when the child becomes a parent, they feel pride, love, the blessing of having their own children as they walk side by side holding hands. Holding hands symbolizes unity and trust. It is saying, "I permit you to be part of my inner circle." I also remember the first time I held a girl's hand. It was a big deal for me. She was my best friend's sister and lived up the street from my house.

It was in the third grade when I first held her hand. And when we walked from school, I also carried her books along with mine. I recall feeling like a teenager in high school. We were in the third grade and as the years went by into Jr. high and high school, we became best of friends. Holding hands was natural for us. It was part of our relationship. But something happened within my mind in high school. I started to feel different. Holding her hand started to feel like something more. And I should have mentioned it to her, but I didn't. Sometimes people take friendship for

granted as I did. She had been my buddy, and I was hers. We would call each other and stay on the phone for hours at a time. You know, just friends. During our last semester in high school I had made plans to tell her that I felt different about our friendship and how I now felt about her and us. I told myself, "I will mention it to her on the bus." On that afternoon, as I boarded the bus, I noticed that she was already there and smiling. She had a big smile on her face. You could tell she was full of joy. As I sat next to her she mentioned to me, "I have some good news I want to share with you." I thought she was going to tell me of being accepted at a certain college, but it wasn't like that. Instead, she told me of a guy she had fallen in love with and would be leaving with him after graduation.

The news struck me like a hard ball gone astray and hitting my chest. It burned, and it burned really bad. I remember telling her that I was happy for her and though I smiled and shared in her joy, I really wanted to run out of the bus and cry. We grow up with people holding hands and at that moment it feels that our friendship will last forever... But something happens after high school that all school mates go their own way, they have to. It's called life.

It has been 44 years since Teresa graced me with her smile and news on the bus. I sometimes think of her, as I am doing today. And I miss her. I also hope that life turned out the way she wanted it, full of love and complete.

HOLDING MY HANDS, Michael Blackburn

Before prison, I had a hard time caring about and loving others. I went through life justifying my attitude by convincing myself that the world was the one that screwed me first by dealing me a bad hand in life. I would keep everyone around me at a distance living in fear that I would be hurt once more.

In the end I was the one who hurt myself.

Over these past seven years of sitting in prison, I have chosen to confront myself and my misleading beliefs, like everyone is out to hurt me and use me. I have been also blessed to meet a patient, loving, hard headed but experienced, hurt person like myself. He has chosen to take me by the hand and gently guide me into a life where I can learn to love myself and see a future without

internal pain and suffering from fearing being hurt again. I still have my trust issues and isolation habits at times but as it is said “Every day is a new day to try again” and today is a new day.

The Longing For Holding Hands, Tyler Ulm

“Holding Hands” for me is the wish that I could hold hands with my dad and my youngest 4 siblings, who are all under 8. I was still free when LJ was born but fell 2 months later. Now, it has been over 7 years and 3 more siblings have been born, as well as a niece. The fact that I’ve not been able to talk to them since 8/27/2024 — those 8 months feel like 80 years. When I could call, I would talk to them almost every day, keeping our relationship strong.

So wanting to hold LJ’s tiny little hand, as he started his first day of kindergarten or when our dad had a heart attack, being next to his bed holding his hand, in the ICU along with my step-mom’s. I hated her at first, for my dad leaving my mom for her. They were better parents than they were husband and wife.

The fact that, when I was little, my dad’s giant hands held mine when I was in the hospital at 3 1/2 or teaching me to work on cars. I would hold the tools and be sitting on his lap, as he was teaching me to change brakes.

Now looking back over my 30 1/2 years of life, I see how my one choice caused me to give up the chances to hold hands with all of those I love.

Holding Hands, James Bauhaus

Holding hands? How Victorian! I remember hearing about it in songs, and reading about it in an old book or two. Probably the last good song about holding hands was the one that made the Beatles famous on Ed Sullivan just about the time that the shadow gov’t’s two snipers killed our civil rights president. Paul and John co-wrote that song with a British snicker because they didn’t think that any of us Americans knew enough of their royal culture to realize that they were making fun of our comparative lack of culture.

They didn’t just want to hold our hands. They wanted to also, while doing so, enjoy our startled answer to the subtle, stealth, ribald

question asked by tickling our palms with their middle fingers. To them, we were still in our up-tight Victorian stage while they had progressed to become the jet-set of rich people conspicuously consuming the best of everything. We poor, rustic, American dupes never did fully “get it,” but, thanks to the “British invasion,” we finally did manage to shed most of our social awkwardness by 1968 (?) I’m not sure, but I think that ‘68 was the one that our media trainers dubbed “the summer of love.”

More accurate “historians” may have called it, “The Age of The Protective Notebooks” (pressed tightly to the chest). Or, “the Age of ‘Beaver shots.’” As far as I know, hand-holding is what we were encouraged to do with each other in Church. Or, it was a memory pressed upon us children by our Great Depression parents who thought it was cute and homely. The lucky ones of them never nearly swooned by catching you smoking dope, or in a dark or otherwise secluded place learning or teaching the secrets of anatomy together. Yes, most of us, by at least 1970, thought that hand-holding was an ancient Bard’s myth and had moved on to much more athletic, flexible and recklessly infective practices than merely holding hands.

Holding Hands, Jacob Lester

The calluses I feel on his hands make me smile as I entwine my fingers with his. I smile at the feelings they evoke and glance over at his face. The calm studious look he gives the world takes me back to better days, before the illnesses started to stack up and the wear of time began to take its toll on him. Sitting here calmly holding his hand as the nurse preaches at him hurts my heart dearly, but I can’t leave him here alone. Day after day, I sit here with him, neglecting my own tasks and wants to make sure he is ok. Day after day, I make the drive hoping for better words. Holding his hand, I try not to cry when I can take him home. An infection, they said, caused it, but in my heart I know it is a lie. They truly don’t know what happened, do they? Will this be my last chance of saying Goodbye?

Holding Hands, Jack Simpson

OH! The good old school years when I was young. In elementary school all we wanted were friends and a girl we could call our own. We all wanted a young girl to hold hands with and be seen together.

I met a young girl in the seventh grade. We hit it off together and shared the same interest. Her eyes were a dark brown with eyelashes that fluttered with the wind. The first time I saw her, I knew that she had to be by my side holding hands.

We were so young and didn't have thoughts kids these days have. We were so happy together. No matter where we went walking to school, window shopping, or to the walk in theater, we could read each other's mind.

Four years we were together. Then her family up and moved away. Her dad had a job in California waiting for him. I was lost. The love of my life was gone. Not knowing if we would even see or feel like that again. Not having anyone to hold hands with again.

Twenty years later, I was in the store (EZ-MART) buying chips and sodas. I headed to the river to bass fish. My items paid for, I headed for my truck. As I sat in the seat, after the motor was running, I put it in reverse. Someone called my name.

Again that same voice called my name. "Jack, Jack!" I turned the ignition off. A young woman was walking in my direction. She was wearing dark sunglasses, holding a smile in place. I looked and only saw a stranger.

"You sure are hard of hearing," she said. "I called you at least a half a dozen times."

"Do I know you?" I asked. Then she removed her sunglasses. I was shocked, speechless, my heart fell to my feet.

Those beautiful brown eyes that I had dreamed about for years. The door opened and I stepped out. "All these years, I don't believe it." I hugged close, not wanting to let go. "Are you for real?" I had to ask.

"Sure I am, you big man of mine."

"How long are you back for?" I had to ask.

"We moved back a week ago. I guess we are here to stay."

"Did I hear you say we?"

"Yes, my Mom and Dad are still alive. A lot older now. I have been taking care of them."

I was holding her hands and hadn't realized I was doing it. Neither of us had ever gotten married. We picked up where we left off. Going places together, always holding each other's hands.

Time has been good to Barbara and I. We have four kids, six grandkids. Almost a full house. Every afternoon rain or shine, Barbara and I sat on our porch holding hands as we watched the sunset. My brown-eyed girl to my lovely wife. It is my prayer that if I should pass before her, please let it be with her by my side "holding hands."

Can I Hold Your Hand?, Matthew Ambrosi

I used to give you my pointer finger, and you'd wrap your delicate little fingers around it. We'd walk around together through the grocery store, and I'd be so proud to be your daddy. Your sister was only a few months old when I was arrested, so I never got to do the same with her. It's now been over two years since your mom stopped answering the phone for me to be able to talk to you. Today is your birthday, but I have no way of contacting you. You'll be 8, but you were 3 when I last saw you. If things go the way I think they will, you'll be 16 when I'm out of here.

You'll probably have some questions for me... that is, if you want to talk to me. If... if you'll be willing to give me a chance. Maybe you'll say I had my chance, and I blew it by going to prison for 15 years. True, true indeed. Thinking about you every day doesn't make up for me not being there. Nothing can.

I might not be worth much to anybody when I get out of here. The Bureau of Prisons would love for me to be something less than a man. Yet, I am... your father and if you'd like to, we can walk through the grocery store again, holding hands.

That Day In July, Gary K. Farlow

Prison is by its very nature an inconsistent place and inmates are transient. When I first entered prison, I was told that if I made just one real friend while incarcerated, then I would have achieved what most fail to do. Making a friend is

hard. Having a relationship? Such is nearly doomed at the start.

I had lived in dread of that morning. After years of utter failure in 'affairs of the heart,' I had finally met you. I had to leave you that morning but I still see you standing in the morning sun; the light shining on your red hair creating an aura, a halo...

You walked with me a little way, beside me, as I relished our precious seconds. You couldn't see, for I kept up a strong facade, but oh how I crumbled inside, tears threatening to burst as I clung to you on the sidewalk. My lips on your neck, tasting your sweetness.

Do you still think of that morning as I prepared to journey into the Unknown?

The power that could take me away from you for the age of even one day - the measure of time like an eternity since I was torn from your side - pales to the power of my love for you. Just as I held your hand that morning, I hold your love in my heart forever.

Holding Hands, D'Andre M. Morris

When I'm in deep thought, I swing my hands behind my back, holding them together, pacing and thinking.

I think of new inventions, about my future, my surroundings. I am mentally satisfied when I think. Because my thoughts are brilliant.

So, when I'm seen with my hands together behind my back, I'm in a thought zone. And I'll stay there until I'm mentally fulfilled.

Old School, Terry Lytle

I wrote this on 7/12/2017 — two months shy of five years — for a lady 19 years older than me, who is also Black.

She became my closest friend, inspiring me to stay clean and sober much more than any other thing in my life. Today, having already begun my journey, I just recently celebrated 15 years of sobriety.

I am sure she doesn't mind me sharing this with all of you. It's part of my repentance — the turning away from my old self.

To this day, we have only talked on the phone and through letters — never seeing each

other, except through pictures. I hope this is real enough for us all: I have yet to hold her hand.

I don't know when the world forgot about it...

As young as I am... I haven't...

I'm "Old School"... when it comes to that...

I want to Romance ya... so why would I forget...

The intimacy... of the first time...

It's one of the world's biggest

public displays of affection

For the selection is simple...

Woman...

Man...

Touching...

Allowing all the Creative Energy and "sparks" to travel back and forth...

Continuously... so silent (YET! So loud...)

For who can silence the sound of the 'Old School'...

between me and you?

It's kinda like the pipes on an old-school Chevelle

or, 70's fastback Mustang we could be in, tonight...

With the backseat, bigger than me and you...

Maybe at the Drive-In... Respected... admired...

The 'OLD school'...

So.....

"Why doesn't anybody hold hands... anymore?"

Holding Hands, Anthony Garcia

Instantly, I am drawn back to December of 2014 when my father, my daughters (who were 3 and 2), and myself were staying in a motel. I was there first using the room to illegally forge checks, then my kid's mother came and told me she was going to Florida with her new boyfriend because she had no choice (you always have a choice) but she didn't want to deprive me of my children because I had already missed the early years of their lives due to "gang shit" in Oklahoma and Texas chasing "the Almighty dollar." So she let me keep my kids. Then my father and his girlfriend had a "falling out," so he came with my kids and I. To kill the curiosity you may have, the

moment my kids were left with me, I moved the check-forging to another location.

Anyway, around 5 PM my 3 year old, Aubrey, was laying with her head hanging off the bed watching "Stewie" (Family Guy) when she saw a McDonald's commercial.

"Oooh, Daddy! I'm hungry!"

"Yeah Daddy! I hungry too!" shouted my 2 year old, Sissy, while pulling on my hand.

My father was asleep on the bed exhausted from a 12-hour shift at a warehouse. I woke him up. Briefly, he was half awake when I told that the kids and I were going to get food. On our way out, he shouted my name followed by "hold your sister's hand!" I told him I would. We had to walk because the previous year I sold my car for their Christmas.

As we began trekking through the mild snow, I told my girls to hold my hand but they both have my rebellious nature and Aubrey said "Daddy, I'm a big girl!" and Sissy concurred. So I told them "Fine, you don't have to hold my hand. But stay in front of me and don't go too far without me!" They both went ahead of me. Aubrey almost slipped which scared her because she stopped and waited until I was next to her where she reached up and grabbed my hand. "I want to hold your hand, daddy." "Okay my Baby."

We walked a little ways before Sissy realized Aubrey and I were holding hands. That's when Sissy turned and walked towards us holding her hand out to me. "Hold my hand," she said in a demanding tone. "I thought you didn't wanna hold daddy's hand?" She shot a mean mug at Aubrey, grabbed my extended hand and very proudly said "My daddy."

Aubrey must have been in a long thought session cause after being steps away from McDonald's she looked at me and said "daddy weren't you my daddy first?"

I won't ever forget this day because it was the first time my girls chose to want to hold my hand on their own accord; one out of fear of falling, the other of jealousy, but hey, a win's a win, right?

Completing the Circle, Daniel Reyes

Touch, an intimate experience we share with ourselves and crave from others. Hands clasped together in cozy familiarity. They came

together in salutation forming a link of trust. They reach out in comfortable empathy to the suffering. With held hands we acknowledge equality with those we hold. Sharing tenderness, we can cede life's fragility and acknowledge strength in our togetherness. Completing the circle.

Pointer finger extended. Newborn hand wrapped tightly like ribbons on a maypole. Many tiny fingers surrounding one, clinging on in dependence. Like an empty vessel receiving data on the fleshy bridge of bone and skin transferring love from parent to child. Completing the circle.

Hands folded in prayer. Fingers intertwined. Head bowed resting on parallel thumbs. Communing with the divine. Hands held aloft with whispered prayers. Sanctuary in the spirit world. Completing the circle.

Hands flat. Palms up. Right hand covering the left. Resting on the lap. A relaxed posture examining a noble truth. All conditioned phenomena are impermanent. Completing the circle.

Interlocked fingers. Soft palms sharing warmth. Side by side. Arms swaying softly as one. An affectionate display. Assurance that love is shared. Completing the circle.

An aged woman's spotted hand covers the gnarled knotted hand of her dying husband. The stiff linen of the hospital bed presses back on their hands. The synchronized beats they once shared fade. Each breath shallower and quicker than the one before. She grasps tightly as he leaves the world. Their unending love returns to the world from where it sprung. Completing the circle.

Holding Hands, Kelly Messenger

When my daughter was little and we went places, she would hold my hand as she walked with me. It would make her feel safe and secure. It would make me smile when we walked in the store and she would point at the racks of candy and say, "mumma tandi tandi mumma, I want tandi."

As time went by, things changed. My life alone became a struggle to survive. She was taken to live with my parents and I was thrown to the streets and the wolves, to make it whichever way I knew how.

Of course, it didn't work out and I'm in prison singing this same old song over and over again about how I was dealt a bad hand in life and didn't ever get a chance to live my life. The hardest part of being in prison is watching and realizing it's the ones I love who are hurting the most.

I still remember holding my baby girl's hand while going through the checkout line and her asking for candy, and it breaks my heart to pieces, remembering the innocence in her voice and how much it hurt her for me to be away for so long.

I wish I could have been a better mother. I wish I had a chance to be one. I never meant to hurt my baby girl. Now she's having one of her own. I hope and pray she can and will be a better mother than me.

A CONNECTION RAZOR WIRES CAN'T BREAK, Ju'ane T. Kennell

In a world that often feels cold and unforgiving, the simple act of holding hands becomes a powerful symbol of love and connection, especially from the confines of a prison. For those of us who find ourselves behind bars, physical touch is a rare luxury, and the moments spent with loved ones during visits are both treasured and bittersweet. Holding hands during these fleeting encounters transcends mere physical contact; it becomes a lifeline, a bridge connecting the heart and soul despite the walls that separate us.

When I sit across from my loved one in that sterile visiting room, surrounded by the echoes of conversations and the watchful eyes of guards, the anticipation of our touch fills the air with a charged energy. The moment our hands meet, a wave of warmth washes over me, momentarily easing the weight of my circumstances. In that instant, the world outside — the noise, the chaos, the judgment — fades away, leaving only the connection we share.

Holding hands is a way to communicate unspoken words. Each squeeze, each gentle caress speaks volumes about our hopes, fears, and unwavering support. It's an acknowledgment of the struggle we both endure; a reminder that love can flourish even in the harshest environments. In those moments, as I

grasp my wife's hand tightly, I feel the strength of our bond, a reminder that I am not alone in this fight.

Yet, this connection is tinged with the reality of our situation. The visiting room, filled with other families experiencing similar heartaches, serves as a constant reminder of what we've lost. The barriers of glass, metal detectors, body scanners, razor wires, and guard supervision create an atmosphere of confinement that can be suffocating. But as I hold my wife's hand, I find solace in the shared understanding of our circumstances. We navigate this reality together, and every moment spent in each other's presence is a testament to our resilience.

The simple act of holding hands also embodies hope. Each visit brings the possibility of a future together, a time when physical separation will be a thing of the past. As our fingers intertwine, I envision the life waiting for us beyond these walls—a life filled with laughter, freedom, and the ability to share every moment without barriers. In that vision, holding hands becomes a promise, a commitment to endure the challenges ahead until we can finally embrace without restrictions.

As I reflect on these moments, I realize that holding hands is more than just an expression of love; it is a profound act of defiance against the isolation that seeks to consume us. It is a declaration that our connection will not be diminished by circumstance. In a world that tries to tear us apart, we find strength in each other, and in those hands, we hold the power to heal, to hope, and to dream of a brighter tomorrow.

In conclusion, the significance of holding hands during prison visits extend far beyond the physical act itself. It encapsulates the essence of love, resilience, and hope in the face of adversity. Each squeeze, each moment, reinforces the bond that remains unbroken, proving that even in the darkest of places, love can shine through, illuminating a path toward freedom and connection.

Holding Hands, Quentric Williams

I used to hold hands in the spot
I used to hold hands in the whip
When I jump, you and I can hold hands
while we walk through the park

Behind Held Hands, Rolf Rathmann

Aside from the hand of our earliest caretaker, the cumulative act of holding hands is first experienced in grade school, perhaps a field trip to the local children's museum (or in my case, the La Brea Tar Pits, circa the Seventies). We were commanded by our trusted teacher, "Stay in line—hold hands!" Given gender norms of the time, we were probably paired up boy-girl-boy-girl; it's doubtful though any of us would have been remotely aware of that very adult concept of gender identification ingrained in us from the moment we leave the womb. I know I wasn't—I was too damn excited to see where dinosaurs were trapped and died a slow agonizing death in oozing, bubbling tar!

Solidarity in the safety of numbers. (Well, not for the dino, but us students—holding hands.)

The next memory of a hand held was a bit scarier. My family and I were touring The Queen Mary in Long Beach, CA. It was crowded. I felt engulfed, overwhelmed, small and disoriented and found myself reaching for the hand of a stranger, mistaking that person for one of my parents. Realizing my mistake and frantically searching for my actual parents, I was mortified—delving into my first foray of negative self talk.

Solidarity lost, then found—comfort regained.

Then there was acting as in THE THEATAH (said in a snobbish, entitled, upper-crust tone). With my European-cut jawline, California-blond hair, and blue eyes, I was typically cast in the High School romantic lead (boooooing); "Arsenic and Old Lace" and Molier's "The Miser" par for the course. If not the lead, I'd be in the Company — a dance sequence duet in "Romeo and Juliet" or "Oklahoma!" - holding hands, of course.

In hindsight, it occurs to me through the prism of more aware adult eyes, that the societal norm at the time was that romantic lead equals white. (An early dose of participation in white privilege?) I'd hold hands (and even kiss!) (Mon Dieu!) my leading ladies—that sounds very sexist! Of course, the biggest acting job (lie) of all was portraying straight.

Solidarity: through the fakery of wannabe Oscar winning actors.

My real acting came in the first girl I went on a date with, Muffie. Hey give us a break, it was the preppie era. I took her to see the musical "Evita." Long sigh. Can I just say "Screams Gaaay!" But it had the original cast: Patti Lupone and Mandy Patinkin—any gay male of a certain age should be swooning with envy, for they were the quintessential role models of acting royalty. (Am I leaning too heavily into gay stereotypes?)

The second girl I held hands with was Liesel. I (ROLF) really was 17; she was 16. Pause. Pause. Pause. Hello? "Sixteen Going on Seventeen?" "Sound of Music?" The only reason we went on that date was because of our famous namesakes. Needless to say, both dates were awkward.

The solidarity of two dates, and holding hands with a lie.

Lastly—all of you! The hands I've held since the beginning of COVID; the ones I've known only from afar. The Cornell readers and volunteers; Elizabeth/Tim/and Gary; and of course, my fellow writers, but especially Cardez, The Flower (thank God I know French!), Wooten, Hicks, Chrome, Cox, Farlow, and Bauhaus—to name but a few of my faves and—the most enduring.

Solidarity. Can't think of hands I'd metaphorically rather be holding.

Unloved, George Hesse

Parole denied, fading plans, missing God, miss my mom, missing a few exes, miss holding hands. Once alone, this isn't my only stance. Disliked holding her cheating hand untold times unfolding man like why she lying then tryin to grab my hand. After a stab in the back, through the heart then tryin to finger lock like we married. Why can't I figure it out? With a spark holdin hands in the dark maybe after a couple of shots...

Is holding hands romance? If so, why does my chest feel like I just got shot? Yet I slow dance in pain an' trauma. Hear empty dreams about... Now it's like poison in your mouth but I'm not perfect so I'll enjoy this moment. Holding hands, shootin vials, our artifacts of an addict holding hands in detox an' cold sweats reminiscing, our fingers locked in the beginning. Her pregnancy didn't last, invisible in a minute. Drinkin thoughts, my mind a spear, holding hands, dark thoughts, do we even love each other?

Holding Hands, Christopher Cross

I love holding hands with Her. So many people take that simple, yet profound bonding activity for granted. I never will again. I have no specific Her. She is a concept in my mind, a wish so frustratingly out of reach for the next 5 years. I will find somebody when I get out, hopefully even before then.

Her hands transmit love, joy, and kindness. They caress me when she chooses to gift me, but are capable of slapping me when I need that or deserve that. When I'm lucky they choke me during sex.

My hands are so capable of destruction, yet when we are holding hands, Hers are a stabilizing, calming force. And when necessary, a restraining force.

Her hands have the potential to be deadly, so don't cross Her! I can't promise you, sir, that my hands are a restraining force. Quite the contrary. If you harass Her, I will use my hands, feet, knees, elbows to disable you. Not to take the fun from Her. Because trust me, poor fellow, She is going to break your shell.

Mutual defense between a strong woman and Her mate is a wonderful bonding activity. Especially when followed by holding hands. Her freshly sweaty hand in my own, energized by taking down a would-be predator, mugger, or asshole. Such bliss! My hand in Her own, knowing Hers is capable of such controlled violence! I warned you, fool. She's been training for years. But the danger is not to me. The love is, though, so I am on the winning team. Who wants a weak mate? I protect Her. She protects me.

Now we've been holding hands for two years. It never grows old—fresh joy blooms between us as fresh and new as ever.

Her hands are strong and capable, as are my own. Together we will build this thing from the ground up.

Holding Hands, Brent Seheult

Holding hands is a form of being romantic with your partner. I remember my boyfriend and I always had to be careful holding hands. Growing up as a gay male in the 1960's and 1970's, boys didn't hold hands with each other.

Steve and I were seeing each other. We had to cross a major road. He was younger than I was, so I held his hand as we crossed the street. We smiled at the feeling we received from the touch.

Holding hands is a form of romance. It can also be erotic in nature. It is showing love for your mate. When I was eighteen, I saw an elderly couple in their eighties walking down the street holding hands with one another. My thoughts were, "God bless them. I hope I love my husband that much when I'm their age."

My first boyfriend in Germany loved holding hands. I was stationed near Garlstedt. He lived in Bremen. I loved holding Hans' hands. He had the softest hands I ever held. They were baby soft. However, with me being active duty military, we had to be extremely careful as to not get caught. Because if we were caught, I would be kicked out of the military. Again, this was in 1979.

Holding hands of your children is a thrill also, because they are dependent on you for guidance and safety.

Holding hands is a fun activity. Everyone should try it. Holding hands in bed after making love is best.

Holding Hands, Orlando Valdez Jr

There were some joys I thought I would never see again, in this place. I definitely thought that love would be barred to me, and intimacy, and courtship. Somehow, though, I was able to steal the fire from heaven, and I had these things for a little while, while I had him; before reality caught up to us, and separated our just budding relationship.

"He," though, since they were young, has been a she. Before I ever really spoke to her, I had seen her around. Well, everyone noticed her, because she just has that kind of beauty that lights up a dark place. From the beginning my heart desired her, but in the beginning I just kept my eyes and thoughts forward, away from her. I know my fate. I never got the one everybody wanted. She was just a fantasy, a dream, and a pleasant thought in this unhappy place. But not meant for me.

At first, even having the chance to talk to her was near impossible. She was in a restricted housing section, closed to me. Later, this

restriction wasn't a barrier anymore, and I often would visit that housing area as a part of my work schedule. I, of course, wouldn't say anything to her, besides the simplest cordialities, for almost a year, out of a deeply ingrained social anxiety, and self-doubt.

One of the first things I ever said to her had something to do with my mentioning that they normally look terrible, believing the shock value maybe would compensate for my lack of confidence. Yeah, I was a charmer, alright. After this, though, we started having regular, but small, talks. In one of our first talks she mentioned that I caught her attention long ago. I managed to dismiss this comment right away, because I was just so sure that that couldn't have been possible. She told me later that she couldn't believe I had done that, and was pretty angry about it at the time.

I think the gods eventually took pity on me, because a few months went by and she brought the subject up again, and this time I confessed that I thought they were one of the most beautiful people I have ever known, that I greatly admired their intelligence, and that I had liked them for a long time. I confessed, too, that I was struggling to believe that I could ever catch their attention.

Not long after this, I experienced the best months I have had in prison. I only had to wait six years, but it was worth it. It wasn't easy. Our challenges were many, and people were always watching us with curiosity. Despite this, I was able to hold her more than a few times. We had many private talks that were sweet and love-filled. Many times I felt that I had found all I ever could want. I will cherish these memories eternally.

I needed to write about this, about how I found love in a loveless place, and about how I was reminded that one of the greatest gifts in life is holding hands, even if you have to be discreet and can't do it for long, with someone you love.

Holding Hands, St. Primo

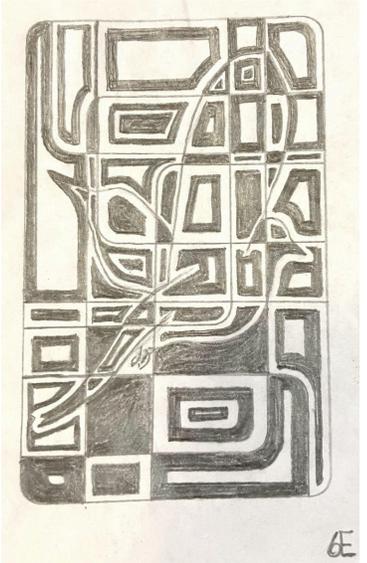
A hinge
between two hearts,
healthful and honest.
A healer of
hag-ridden,
hand-me-down
hauntings.

A harmonious
hyphen, for the
happy-go-lucky. This
hypnotic,
hand-to-hand hitch, is
more than an honour,
it's a harbinger of
heavenly heydays. I had been heading down a
hazardous highway, haphazardly and headstrong.
I hungered for happiness, and couldn't handle the
hurdles of my half-hearted habits. Now, here I
am, in the here and now. I have halted my
hell-bent hellish hellraising hapless holidays. I
threw a Hail Mary hammer over the hump that
hindered my handcrafted high jinks from having
hindsight. No more hocus-pocus hogwash. No
more hiccups. No more hesitation. The haze has
lifted. Hence, the handheld halo I was heroically
holding onto at the helm could be released. I am
heading to a healthier horizon.

Hopefully, it's not heresy to help a human
hauteur, like me. Heuristic teachings from
historical halcyon handshakes have been a
hotbed for hospitable hosannas. However, if we
haven't henceforth learned from our hedonistic
history, it will be hard to change the habitat of our
haggard homes without heightened acts of
heroism.

I am not a hireling and it was a hefty
howler headbutting my high spirits. Now, there
will be no more head-to-head hardships as we
have harnessed the heaven-sent power of our
hand in the right hand of God's. He held it out for
us to hold, to be healthy, happy, and humble.

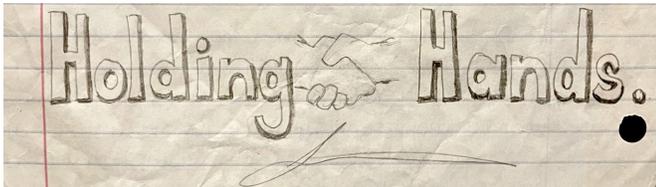
Having this haven in the palm of our hands
is not only handy but a hunky-dory way to say
hello. This hinge between our hearts; the truth of
one hand holding another; this healer of hatred;
this harmonizer of hopes; this handmade
heart-warming connection is accomplished by
the simplest of actions. Often overlooked, and



unacknowledged, the culmination of all humanitarian advancements can easily be summarized into one tangible choice: the blessing of holding hands.

For peace, for love, for help, for all things, and through all things; hold hands. You'll never be alone holding hands. Holding hands will always make you stronger, so, hold on, hang in there, take my hand and I'll take yours.

Hand in hand, we'll hinge our hearts with



Holding Hands, Robert Bridges

I was about three or four days old when a Polaroid was taken of my itty bitty hands clutching my mother's hand. In a lot of my baby pictures, you see a chubby little boy trying to hold someone's hand. My mother would go on to embarrass me with these pictures. But I outgrew holding her hand. We went to Wal-Mart when I was about four or five years old. That was over a decade before the Super Wal-Mart.

"Hold my hand Robert cause we are in the crosswalk." Reluctantly, I grabbed her hand and we went into Wal-Mart. I refused to ride in the buggy, so I was forced to hold my mother's hand. At some point I escaped and hid in one of those round clothing racks. She went frantic trying to find me. My giggles gave me away. I was forced to hold her hand after that.

Fast forward several years and I'm seven years old living on England Air Force Base (AFR). The elementary school is on base so I can and do ride my bike to school. My mother is pregnant with my baby sister and almost ready to give birth. I'm riding my bike to school and as I ride across a crosswalk, a woman in a car runs the stop sign and hits me and my bike. I get flung out into traffic.

My mother was on her way to work at Target off base and saw the incident. She stopped the van, got out, and ran her pregnant self to me and stopped the woman from leaving. I'm just laying there looking at a pickup tire not far from my face as Security Police show up and

my mom says "It's ok Robert, momma is here holding your hand. You're going to be fine." Totaled my bicycle but I was fine.

Fast forward many years. I'm 36 years old. Fresh out of prison on 26 February 2020, staying with my parents and younger stepsister to help each other out. I keep the house clean, cook dinner, wash dishes (yes, by hand), and take care of my special needs nephew. My mother, who was a school bus driver, got sick with Covid. Her husband refused to go near her without a mask and gloves on. Me? No gloves and no mask, as I have a pinch of smokeless tobacco in my lip. I walk up to her, give her a kiss on her temple, and hold her hand while I tell her "it's ok ma, I'm going to help you." Every time I went into my mother's room to get her dirty laundry, take her something to drink or eat, or take out her trash, I would stop by and give a kiss on her temple and pat her hand, making her smile.

Several months later, I saw my five-year-old twins for the first time in four years. My ex-wife threatened to never let me see them again if I told them I was their daddy but kids are smart and they figured it out. Anytime we went somewhere, both my son and my daughter would argue as to who got to hold my hand. My mother was amused since I refused to hold her hand at that age. Finally I would stop their arguments and say "Luke, take my left hand. Leia, take my right hand. Now, don't let go and guess what? You are both holding Daddy's hand." They were happy and giggled.

Fast forward a year. I made their mother mad for several reasons. I didn't want my kids to be taken from me to another state. I got into an argument with her and I apparently lost. I lost my freedom. I lost my family. I lost my friends. I lost my time playing or coloring with my kids. I lost my time trying to teach my son how to be a Southern Country redneck hillbilly hick Gentleman and how to show his sisters and other females the respect they deserve. I lost my time trying to teach my daughter how to be a Southern Country redneck hillbilly hick Belle, and how a man should treat her when she got older. I'm looking at twenty-five years for an argument and standing my ground. I will miss all the most important parts of my kid's lives, but I will always cherish them arguing to see who will hold their Daddy's hand.

I can't physically hold their hands, but in my heart and in my mind, I never let go. Until I'm free and can hug them again, forever in my memories and heart, I hold their hands and pray that they know I love them and miss them.

Well mother, the tables have turned. I miss holding hands now.

PLANET CARCELONIA, James Lopez Diez

Welcome to Carcelonia, Humans. You have been transported to this Dimension of Cosmic Space by Your world's government involuntarily, because of Your insistence on exercising individual liberty which offends Your Planet's Aristocracy. There is no possibility for You to return to Your planet unless Your world's government opens the portal from their side. You must learn to fit into the Inhuman Species' civilization and pass as Inhumans in order to have peaceful and complacent co-existence. Our Carcelonian Oligarchy has therefore determined that the most efficient, effective, and successful method to achieve a more Inhuman character in Human beings; and has made the following LAWS.

No. 1: In that our studies have shown that interactions and associations between Male and Female Humans, and between Adult and non-Adult Humans, tends to cause increased Human behavior - ALL Human Children will be segregated from Adult Humans and placed in Inhumanum re-Education Institutions to be programmed intensely in Inhumanum thought and behavior; and, ALL Male and Female Humans shall be separated and confined to separate continents until acceptable levels of Inhumanum traits and behavior is permanently had.

No. 2: NO physical contact shall be permitted between Humans, and, Humans shall at all times maintain a half-arm's length distance from other humans, and a full arm's distance from Inhumanums. NO physical contact will be tolerated for the duration of Your stay on the planet Carcelonia. NO unsanitary kissing or hugging; NONE of that psychotic, emotionally disturbing back patting, hands on shoulders/around waists; NO face caressing; and, absolutely NO holding hands (as the Carcelonia Oligarchy has determined hand holding is especially effective in reinforcing humanity and

strengthening human bonding). Also NO unauthorized human mating rituals - all reproduction shall be by Inhumanum scientific standards in the Central Artificial Womb Laboratory (CAWL).

NOTE: Humans who violate ANY Oligarchical Law applicable to Humans shall be immediately placed in a Carcelonian dehumanization Chamber for an unspecified period of isolation and sensory deprivation designed to induce a form of mental chaos ("psychosis") conducive to manifestation of programmable Inhumanum type psychological development. No exceptions.

We Inhumanum Carcelonians wisely recognize that You Humans are compelled to come to our world involuntarily. Nonetheless, You ARE here for an indefinite period of time. Therefore, it is essential You MUST develop a deeply seated Inhumanum character to be able to "fit in" with the Carcelonian Society. You must distance Yourself from Humanity. You must become as we Inhumanums, to be comfortable and obedient to our Rulers.

In time, IF Your World's leader shall open the Portal and permit Your return to the human world (?), the Carcelonian Oligarchy will ensure that you receive appropriate rehabilitative measures to restore Your very unfortunate humanity with all its germ spreading emotional chaos and insane physical intimacies. Nonetheless - while You humans burden OUR world with Your presence - You SHALL push that psychotic Humanity out of Yourself and learn to think, act and live as Inhumanum native Carcelonians! No exceptions... and, REMEMBER, NO HOLDING HANDS!

Have an enjoyable stay here, Humans. We Inhumanum welcome You to Carcelonia.

* the beginning of the end *

Holding Hands, Michael Medina

I held my hand out to help you stand up for the first time

I held my hand out to guide your first and second steps

I held my hand out to get you back up after you fell

I held my hand out and you held it back

I held my hand out to take a cup of tea at the tea party

I held my hand out to have you paint my nails with markers

I held my hand out to carry your toys from room to room

I held my hand out and you held it back

I held my hand out to cross the street safely with you

I held my hand out to protect you from the scary dogs

I held my hand out to get a super high-five with a fist bump

I held my hand out and you held it back

And when I'm home, I'm never letting go again.

Holding Hands, Gardner LaMarche

During the beginning of my incarceration, I spent a great deal of time in solitary confinement. The first five years or so I spent in the hole. And it was probably during my second year of solitaire that I thought of an idea for a global holding hands event.

I was in the process of reading the Bible for the first time and I'm putting that in this article because I have made a lot of changes since then. It wasn't that I was using the Bible at the same time as I considered the effort for a moment in time where the entire human population bonds. It was more or less a thought that came to me as I struggled with disparity. There I was hopeless and reading a book that I didn't understand and for some reason the beautiful idea came to me.

I've learned so much from the Bible, and the exercise of praying and following God has literally removed so much from past deficiencies. I'm certain that I could not be who I am today if not for my faith in the goodness of God. And my empathy goes out to the spirit as I write this for I am amazed at God's strength. His goodness endures. And thankfully He was there for me, waiting to share the wealth of his goodness. And I praise God everyday. Hopefully my idea will be considered by the whole world.

At Last, Jeff Hovatter

As I walked off the plane, my first impression was of heat and humidity, and the slightly dank aroma of a height-of-summer dusk back home. The terminal appeared like most I had seen, but obviously worn, rather dimly lighted, which lent it a rather dingy tinge.

My first time in a country where I did not speak the language, where I was like a beacon in the crowd due to my white skin. For the first time in my fifty years, my five-foot-eight-inch stature appeared tall. I drew no attention as I nervously cleared customs, changed money at a kiosk, then made my way hesitantly into the crowded, gathering darkness in search of a taxi.

As I neared a taxi stand, a small brown-skinned man approached, calling me by name. After a moderate length ride in dark crowded streets where traffic rules seemed to be very loosely followed, I was dropped at a high-rise that appeared to be dingey beyond the broken sidewalk, but was quite clean and nice inside, past the guards with M-16s.

Next morning I went on foot a mile to the U.S. embassy, past the small cadre of guards in camouflage uniforms outside the gate, presented my passport and identification, then asked directions to the room I was to be in for training. To my surprise, no one else was there. I waited until ten minutes past start time, then went into the long, deserted hall-way in search of assistance. I met a tiny, black-haired, very pretty woman wearing jeans and a dark T-shirt, who to my surprise, called me by name then led me to where the training had been moved.

During a break, I saw her alone in a small, windowed office near the room where class was. I approached her desk to thank her and secretly admire her exotic beauty. Nerrissa, "Call me Nerrie, anything but Mary," was a delightful, smiling, friendly person, who I went back to chat with a few times during my stay.

Over the following year we stayed in touch via the chat service on the computer. That was before video calling was available to the masses. I, and I thought she, became interested romantically. I was very much looking forward to seeing Nerrie when I went for annual training. We spoke by phone a few times as well.

She was all I recalled, and I invited her to dinner. She accepted! We strolled by the bay in the early evening holding hands. I was floating. I managed to get a hug when we parted after dinner, and she gently chastised me for fixating on her.

I last heard of Nerrie, that she had married an American, and they were living in Washington, DC. Holding her hand that soft tropical evening was special to me, I think of Nerrie often.

Holding Her Hand, Jonathan Holeman

When my daughter was a little girl she was the best of friends to me. She would smile, laugh, then dance and sing and wouldn't like it when I'd leave. She would wear her little witch's hat long after Halloween. We watched Star Wars all through the night. In the day she'd ride her three wheel bike with her imaginary talking pet monkey, up and down the hill in our backyard.

The best days I ever had on Earth were long and slow. All was at a simple ease. We would walk to parks, feed horses, but she would never pet the sheep. She used to say, "I never give up," making every task an adventurous mystery. The greatest days I ever knew were walking with my daughter, holding her small hands.

Will we walk one day in Heaven? Will we still be holding hands? Will I make it through those pearly gates? Will she still be my best and only friend?

When her Mother went away and took her far from home, there was this empty pit inside, for once again I was left alone. Never had a truer friend. Never knew a closer love of a Father for his daughter. Never dug my way out of that pain, instead I turned my life to every drug.

Once, outside a tiny church, she drew three crosses in the sand. She pointed to the largest one and said "that's what's in my life Daddy." I've looked back on that time for decades, wondering how, when, or where, this life had all gone so very wrong.

If I ride that dragon another time again, I pray that God will guide her, and hold her in His hands. For my hands are broken. The sorrow never leaves. I live my life in solitude, alive my misery.

Will we walk one day in Heaven? Will we still be holding hands? Will I make it through

those pearly gates? Will she still be my best and only friend?

Holding Hands, Brianne Carson

So as early as I can remember back – the security of putting my hand in my mom's and feeling safe. It told me she would be there and she would protect me. She would be there to help me through anything and everything. She made me feel secure and comforted me.

So I grew up and I was like every other kid. I pulled away from the affection of my parents but I never got sick of holding my mom's hand. She held my hand in happy times and sad times. Through tough times and stressful times, but she was always by my side through every struggle, holding my hand.

So life is not fair sometimes, and it gets really difficult at times. My mom would let me scream and yell and cry and hold me tight and just save me through it. She would hold my hand when I was scared and she would comfort me. She would soothe me by holding my hands and talking me through it. She showed me the love between parent and child just by holding my hand.

As life went on, I remember holding hands with my friends. It made me feel secure in my friendships and made me feel wanted as a friend. Friends are there to support and help out. They are very uplifting. They are there through the ups and downs and all the battles you fight.

As a friend, I put every one of their problems before my own. I tended to stretch myself very thin for my friends.

I remember every year for school my mom held my hand out to the bus stop. She comforted me all the way there and told me it was going to be just fine (which most of the time was true). How did she always know that? Then I would walk into school hand in hand with my friends, as confident as ever. Holding hands gave me the boost of confidence that I needed to get through a scary, crazy, joyful and happy time.

Next, I moved into high school where boyfriends came about. Holding hands with them made me feel worthy and wanted. It made me feel connected and valued. I also held hands with my best friend that I had from the time I was very little. She made me feel like she was there

for me through everything. She went through every relationship and every breakup. Every celebration and every meltdown. Her hands comforted me through my teenage years.

Next, I moved into a companion relationship, holding hands with a spouse. I got married at 23 and was so excited to be married and celebrating. Holding hands with my husband made me feel special, valued, worthy and beautiful. I felt extremely secure and protected. He led me and I followed in a trusting way. Sadly my marriage fell apart but we usually try to be civil with each other because we have a child together. I believe my perfect match is out there and we will meet and hold hands for life.

Holding hands for elderly people is a spirit lifter. It helps them know someone is there to help them and they are not alone. It's very encouraging for them to not give up and helps them feel like they matter. It shows them that someone is there to love them, care about them and even just talk to them. Their feelings are so tender and genuine that usually one simple act (holding hands) makes their entire day and can help them physically, mentally and emotionally. This is super important in our society today.

Holding hands means different things to different people. But what it means to me is it is a sign of love, kindness, helpfulness, generosity, encouragement, faithfulness, and security. I feel holding hands is a great way to walk through some things we battle. It helps the body respond to the physical touch and mentally to the thoughts of someone being there and emotionally that you are not alone through your battles. All of this wraps up my feelings.

Now prison definitely does not make this easy at all. Most facilities are no-contact facilities which means no touching allowed at all. Well let me tell you, I take every opportunity I can to hold hands and make someone's day. Do not let prison take you down like that. Overcome it and show others you are there for the long haul. Never let go and keep fighting for all that's good.

I will never stop holding hands. I cannot wait to go out and hold my daughter's hands and most of all my mom's hand. Never take holding hands for granted.

Favorite Visiting Room Memory, Chad Frank

Holding hands and talking
with my eight-year-old nephew.
Years and miles later
I wonder if I'll ever
experience such a moment
again.

Elizabeth, Michele Lochridge

I've been struck by lightning. This is not like the time that I got licked by a shark. A bolt of fire hits my abdomen with surgical precision. It races over my stomach around my back and down my legs. I fall to one knee. Is that me screaming? I look up to find my little sister in her mean girl stance and mid-eyeroll. "Dramatic much?" She sarcastically baits me. "You were adopted!" I snarl through breaths. "Thank God," she answers, "Because you are lame." My baby brother comes to my rescue. "Come on, Shell! You can do this!" What? is he absolutely serious? What! I scream, "No, YOU can do this!" He looks hurt but I don't care. He has a penis. My baby brother is, at this moment, the enemy.

My mother honks from the driveway. Nobody told her to build a circular sidewalk to the driveway. "Hurry up, Tubby!" My sister calls. I snarl, "When I'm president, I'm deporting you to any country ending in Stan." She laughs, "You gotta' pass Economics first. Does mom know you're failing on her dollar?" My brother tries again, "Shell?" "I swear, I'm gonna' eat your kitten!" I yell. He giggles as he reminds me, "You're a vegetarian." "It's orange just like a carrot," I retort. His bottom lip quivers a little. "Come on, Shell, I'm only trying to help." The pain comes again. My mother is honking. Suddenly I'm cold. My body shakes. I go down again. Everything goes black.

I smell her first. Before I can open my eyes.....before I can focus on voices. I can smell...her. It's a sweet smell with a hint of lotion. Then I hear eh-eh-eh and know it's finally her. I force my eyes open. Tubes are everywhere and I'm tangled. Nobody else is paying attention but she is. The wail shakes my eardrums. "Bring her here!" I command. Delicately, my mother lays her in my arms. I wrap my hand over her tiny fingers. Lightning strikes again. The warmth

travels from our hands through my body. Not at all like the time I swore that I was licked by a shark.

HOLDING HANDS, Belinda Ladd

One of my earliest memories of childhood was taking nighttime walks with my mum. A single lady with three children in the 1960s, she dealt with ADHD the old fashioned way; lots of exercise and a diet low in sugar. I just couldn't go to bed and sleep like other kids because my mind wouldn't slow down. Orange County was a bedroom community for Los Angeles back then, and a zillion-mile maze of quiet streets with smooth concrete sidewalks. We'd venture out in the cool evenings, walking around our block and maybe taking some new routes. Her long, slender fingers held my little hand as I skipped over the cracks, and my inquisitive brain reeled from the expanse of stars overhead. I talked endlessly and she listened to my fantasies and wonderment at anything and everything I encountered along the way. Of curious note was the tradition back in those days of date—stamping the concrete. About every thirty feet or so, there would be a company logo, a small oval brand with the date the slab was poured. I had to read each one aloud, calculate the years since the sidewalk had been constructed, and think about the laborers who had worked on it.

Years later, I operated railroad equipment back East and discovered that the makers of wooden ties used a brass nail with a large head embossed with a two-digit number. This indicated the year the ties were laid. They stopped using them in the 1970s. These date nails were rare and different, and I began to walk down old spur lines looking for them so I could pry them up and collect them. But back to the subject, holding my mother's hand was a pure source of contentment for me. With all sisters and no dad around, I was like Little Lord Fauntleroy, basking in the attention that the others, already fast asleep in their beds, didn't usually get. I outgrew holding hands with mom, but that comfort remained ever-present in my life. As I ventured out on my own, she clasped them together each night praying for my safety. Whenever I visited, she would reach for my hand and grasp it firmly, telling me how delighted she was to see me. When I was in the throes of a

contentious divorce and custody battle, she drove from Portland to Kalispell to offer her support and care for my kids. I watched those nimble fingers coil around the soft hands of my little ones, leading them as she once led me. Even as she aged, those hands were timeless; still smooth and elegant as she held her coffee cup and we talked late into the night about life and why things were the way they were. At the more poignant moments, she'd reach across the kitchen table and take my hand, telling me she loved me so.

She's been gone for nearly a decade now, but I feel a presence whenever I think about her. It seems as though she's still willing and able to hold my hand, anytime I need her to.

Holding Hands, Jordan Switzer

Many of my favorite memories began sitting next to her on the couch, when one of us reached towards the other. I remember the delicate touch of her hands as our fingers interlocked. I remember the way her loose-fitting rings would slide and spin as I fidgeted with them. The crackle of a recorded fireplace broadcast through my television. The scent of her hair filled the space around me, overpowering the burning candle less than three feet away, as she nestled her head onto my shoulder. I was with her—everything was okay. Who would think so much comfort could derive from the simple act of holding hands.

Now, instead of holding her hand, I attempt to hold onto the memories of doing so. Now, instead of holding her hand, I add it to the long list of simplicities they deprive me of. Over four years have passed since I held the hand of a loved one. Even in our in-person visits they forbid us from any contact outside of an initial hug. I wonder... why? Would it be too much to ask for? Pose too high of a security risk? I wonder about the aftermath of such restrictions. What happens to a person emotionally and mentally after being deprived of any physical affection for years and years? As social creatures, I only imagine it being detrimental.

As my thoughts continue down the rabbit hole and into the future, I worry that I will never be able to hold this person's hand again, that I'll never hold anyone's hand again. The mere thought of this angers me. No one should have to worry

about such comforts being taken from them. No one should have the power to take such comforts from another person. But I do have to worry, and they do have the power. So rather than holding the hand of a loved one, I hold onto my memories in hopes they will be enough to get me through.

Holding Hands, Jonathan McCord

I don't know much about hand holding but I'd sure like to learn. I've been in prison since 1996. What little affection I gathered in my pre-prison years has worn off. It would be wonderful to hold a woman's hand in the future but I'm not banking on it. Over the decades of my incarceration I sure could have used a woman in my corner cheering me on.

I have roughly seven years left to serve and I feel at a standstill. I don't wish to jinx myself but I imagine I will always be alone. Oddly, I kind of feel I won't be able to attain being alone enough. Prison has served to make me desire being a hermit.

I am your Law Clerk. I work on Legal Motions and Torts, Karla Wooten

Last year, I met a man who I felt like I had misjudged and I decided to give him a second chance. He was persuasive, dynamic and charismatic—he would tell the inmates: *I want you to be the best version of yourself; I've been in Law Enforcement for 34 years and if I could I would let all of you out.*

It was funny to me—and I mean ironic, when I figured out that he was gaslighting me—his actions alone proved that he was untrustworthy.

My grandmother used to say that when a person shows you who they are that you need to believe them.

My Mother used to tell me that I had a certain type of men that I like but that I needed to realize that the men that I was attracted to were Toxic and that when I figured out that the men that I liked did not have good intentions towards me—then I would truly be Free.

Mama died in 2023—she was wise and she used to give me advice that would get on my nerves but you know what, My Mother was right

in so many ways and I loved her so much and miss her every day.

I am trying to be politically correct and repeat what Mama said in a diplomatic way because, what Mama actually said was that every time that GOD was going to deliver me, I would get caught up in another bad relationship with a Toxic man and that what I was doing was living my life in an endless cycle of bad relationships that had characters that were alike.

Mama said that I needed to realize that for every man that I was in a relationship with, I kept making the same bad choice every time and that what I was bringing home was the same demon wearing a different pair of pants and that when I learned how to recognize Satan in all of his forms—because the devil is deceptive—that I would finally be Free.

Mama was right—she said, *Stop holding hands with the devil—GOD said, it is the devil's Mission to Kill, Steal and Destroy your life.*

Mama said, *Act like you have some sense. Stop saying that the devil that you know is better than a new devil.*

Mama also said, *There will never be a time in your life when the devil will leave you alone and if he is leaving you alone, it's because you are his favorite and you are doing his work.*

Mama said, *Stop deceiving yourself and be all that GOD wants you to be, which is the best version of yourself.*

Mama said, *You are fearfully and wonderfully made, you are a masterpiece in the eyes of GOD.*

Mama said, *Anything that is contrary to the word of GOD is not of GOD and any man that does not VALUE YOU is not worthy of you.*

Mama said, *Any man that does not want you to be the best version of yourself, that does not believe in you, that does not encourage you, that does not want the best for you, that does not inspire, respect and admire you—you don't need them.*

Mama said, *Any person that does not value you and knows that you are precious and priceless and a jewel in the crown of GOD, do not mourn over that person. Realize that GOD has someone better and greater in mind for you that will love you for life—more than you could ever dream, imagine or think.*

Mama said, *Tell the LORD, Thank You—for every man that rejected you—because He was not your King.*

Mama said, *Your King is coming—you are a Child Of GOD and He is the King of Kings, if your Daddy is a King—then you are a Queen.*

STOP HOLDING HANDS WITH THE DEVIL.

Don't Hold My Hand, Christopher Monihan

In my endless journalistic quest to draw awareness to the plight of the oppressed and enslaved souls within America's Prison Industrial Complex, I appear to have stumbled upon this discreet gathering of writers. My curiosity had been piqued.

Thumbing through these pages I recognise names: Cardez, Weber, LaFleur and others. Ah, so this is where the great minds have gathered. A secret society within the secret society of prison writers. I am humbled.

Like many of you my days are regimented — by choice, of course — and not due to any edict policy or arbitrary rule. No boot shall press my neck to the earth, no act of verbal or physical assault has conquest over me for I am forged from 30 years on the inside.

My mind is my army and the pen is my assault rifle. I don't need anyone to hold my hand thank you.

All around me oppression pierces the flesh of those desperately fighting to survive. How is it that a father or a mother is forced to struggle on \$20 monthly earnings from working a prison job? I see mental distress etched across the faces of the men in this situation. I know that hopelessness for I was once there. It is cruel and unusual punishment.

How is it okay that the poorest citizens are disproportionately burdened with financially supporting an incarcerated daughter or son? Systemically raped by monopolistic companies preying upon the incarcerated and their families — JPay, GTL, Securus, CorrLinks, to name a few — don't get me started.

In no other nation is it acceptable to allow the most vulnerable population to bear the expense equivalent of \$104 bars of soap or \$595 boxes of tampons. Nationally we incarcerated average 14 cents hourly earnings working a prison job.

Here in Ohio a bar of soap costs \$1.42 in prison commissary. This is the equivalent of 10 hours of prison-earned wages. Ohio's incarcerated average \$20 a month working 36-hour work weeks. A box of tampons from one of Ohio's sale source vendors costs \$7.95 which is the equivalent of 57 hours of monthly wages.

Let me put this into perspective. Ohio free world citizens earning minimum wages of \$10.45 an hour would pay the equivalent of \$104.50 for a bar of soap and \$595.65 for the box of tampons. How is this okay? Make this make sense.

Fellow prison writers, I know you already know these truths. This is for the readers who know not our plight within the abyss of American correction. And we have the nerve to lecture other nations on equality and basic human rights? Spare me.

I cannot and will not stand idly by and become accomplice to this crime.

"We must speak out," I said to Spider

"I don't know Moni," he said, calling me by my nickname (Mah-nee). It's a respectful play on my last name. "How? I mean, where."

"Prison Journalism Project, the Marshall Project, Inside, there are many places, these are just a few."

"I don't have the skill that you—"

"I will help you."

"I don't know what to write—"

"I will guide you."

Spider fell silent. I knew the battle raging within the depths of his mind. Fear of reprisal, fear no one would care, and fear for the sake of fear itself. I once feared the same.

I have my hands in every group and organization here at Camp Cupcake. I seek to open the eyes of these men who know not the hand to hand combat of daily life at the higher security levels. They seem more concerned with what's new in commissary than the fact that we're viewed as modern day slaves by the 13th Amendment: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, EXCEPT AS A PUNISHMENT FOR A CRIME WHEREOF THE PARTY SHALL HAVE BEEN DULY CONVICTED, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

I educate and never pontificate. I fight for those who don't have the strengths that I do or who have given up and can fight no longer.

I network with outside organizations and I seek to destroy stereotypes about us. I am on a mission.

I am Christopher Monihan or “Moni” to the many that know me. I hail from the state of Ohio, but not by choice.

I am humbled to meet all of you.

Holding Hands, Andy E. Ortiz

I’m in the streets of Philly known as Philadelphia. I was born and raised in the streets of Philly damn near all my life.

I call “Rosa” from across the street on 2nd and Tioga. She doesn’t acknowledge me but walks the other direction. So, I look both ways before crossing the street and running in her direction but, from behind her. I cover her eyes while my body is pressed up against her from behind her. Rosa tries to grab my hands to move them away from her eyes but they still remain in the same place. I try to change my voice from my actual voice to make myself sound different. I say “Longgg time I haven’t seen your pretty self.”

Rosa still tries to remove my hands from covering her eyes while saying, “who’s this?”

I laughed and said, “Guess who?”

Rosa said, “Is this my baby daddy! Well, let me fix that... Is this my baby’s father.”

I was like fuck she guessed right! So, I release my hands from covering her eyes. Rosa continues to hold my hand while I go to the right side of her. So, now she’s on the side away from the street cause, I was on the side exposed to the street. That’s how I was taught to walk with females. As I and Rosa were holding hands, I leaned in for a kiss and I got a kiss in return.

Rosa said, “Mmm, I miss you!” “Where have you been?”

I said, “I’ve been doing bigger things so I can put some money on the table for our future child.”

Rosa said, “When are you gonna spend the night with me at my house?”

I said, “Ain’t that’s what I’m here for?”

It was a nice Saturday afternoon. It was July 8, 2019. So, it’s nice and sunny out and it was still considered summer time. You can hear the birds chirping and people around us wearing summer clothes. You’ll see grandmas and grandpas on their front porch sitting on a folded

chair trying to get a sun tan. There were kids running to the park and kids were in little ass pools in front of their houses. Me and Rosa were walking holding hands talking about our future together with our newborn child that’s on the way.

Rosa tells me “I want you to spend the night.” I said, “Okay, I’m gonna spend the night.” Long story short we had a good night with some love making and some good hot ass sexual intercourse. But, there’s a knock on the door BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! I’m awakened to the loud knocking on the door BOOM, BOOM, BOOM! I then tap my Apple watch to see what time it was. It was 2:45 am in the morning.

I got out of bed and saw my pretty little baby mama was sound asleep. I hurried to put my clothes on and opened the window to see who’s at the front door. As I’m opening the front door I said, “If you don’t stop knocking on the door like you crazy...” I was cut off.

“Police! Get on the fucking ground.” I automatically got to my knees and placed myself to the ground and was put into handcuffs.

I said, “What’s this shit all about?” I was then told by police, “Mr. Ortiz there’s a warrant out for your arrest and we’re taking you into custody. You also have the right to remain silent that anything you say will be used against you in the court of law, if you Mr. Ortiz can’t afford an attorney one will be appointed to you.”

I started to shake my head from side to side while being thrown into a police marked car. I looked out of the police car window to see that my baby mama was running toward the police car. Before she was able to put her hands on the window and stated, “I love you!” The police car drove away and took me down to the roundhouse to get processed and fingerprinted and was taken to the Philadelphia county jail.

That was the last time me and Rosa was to ever be holding hands with each other.

Holding Hands, James Kyles

When I think of Holding Hands, I think about contact. At times I couldn’t remember what contact was, when I was 16 years old and alone, segregated, falsely accused. Cut from society but in the name of injustice wishing and hoping to be able to feel the physical again. All humans need touch and contact, but me, I’m

feeling like a caged animal in human flesh. Putting my hands together to pray and to see if this nightmare is real. 13 years later, I'm still yearning for that touch of freedom and the Supreme Court answered me and said things that happened to you were unjust and ineffective. Now 29 years old I finally have my chance at holding hands with Lady Liberty.

CONVICT CHRONICLES: *Holding Hands With God, Leo Cardez*

I grew up spending most days running around the neighborhood with my older sister—back when front doors stayed unlocked and you were expected home before the streetlights came on. Except for Sundays.

My house was packed with shrines to the Virgin Mary and the Pope. Bibles sat on most tables, and Sunday church was mandatory. For one hour that felt like a year, my family sat quietly listening to the liturgy. Oftentimes that hour was compounded by Bible study classes meant to prepare me for my First Communion and Confirmation. Once I left home at seventeen, I left that world behind ... or so I thought.

Cut to ten years later, now in year two of an eighteen-year sentence:

I find myself at the prison chapel, as an excuse to catch up with an old cellmate, getting nostalgic for the familiarity of the hymns and prayers. I'm amazed I still know most of them by heart. I return to the Christian services trying to reacquaint myself with something that resonated so deeply with me.

Attending services lift my spirits for the day, but not enough to fill my spiritual reservoir to last the week. So, I quit again.

Fast forward two more years to the prison visiting room where my sister gives me advice that would change my life forever. She calmly explained, it's not about the act of going to church and attending service; it's about prayer to build an intimate and personal relationship, like holding hands with God.

Right there, between bites of my burger, I accepted God into my life. Now what? I asked. Now, you pray, she responded, talk to Him like a friend, honestly and often until you feel comfortable holding hands with God. It wasn't easy at first. I felt silly and self-conscious, but I

didn't give up. With time, it began to click. It helped sustain me, helped quiet the anxiety. Now, I regularly pray three times a day.

Every morning, I drop to my knees (kneeling as an act of humility) and offer a prayer to the deceased, like my Aunts Gloria and Chuy who were taken too soon, or my buddies Tommy and Wilson, who lost battles with an invisible virus during a once-in-a-lifetime plague. In a twist, I also include all inmates, as we are all (in many real ways) dead but unburied—or are we buried but undead?

After lunch, I drop to my knees again. This one is for the living. One by one I run through my loved ones' faces in my mind asking God for help for those who are going through something particularly difficult. I include estranged relationships and my victim-pleading with God to heal and soften their hearts.

Lastly, before bed, I thank God for all my blessings and ask Him to guide me in my own life; to help me through the thorny decisions that come with incarceration and ease the headaches of everyday prison life.

Then, I sit quietly and listen. See, I've learned God talks back to the faithful just not in the ways we imagine or on our timeline. If you watch for the clues, you'll notice His hand in every part of your life.

Am I as religious as my parents? Maybe, but not in the same way... and really, that's besides the point. What's important is that I found a comforting, meaningful relationship with God that keeps me focused on what's important.

I pray you'll let God do the same for you, that you learn to hold His hand.

Hold My Hand, Akbar Jones

Before you judge me on my demeanor, try to hold my hand to witness my efforts to pursue a woman's state that's worthy of pursuing and more / her swagger, compliment her shoes that complement her hair with time spent on it with care / hold my hand to share an evening that I can't see sharing without you / hold my hand as I witness the lights dance off your eyes to teach me why stars shine / hold my hand to welcome the forever of ups & downs of our emotions on this God's green earth together - I pray.

I'm feeling you, you feeling me / hold my hand so I can witness your lips dance while you converse with me. / Overhead is the love you carry for me / overhead is the expression of encouragement I feel when you hold my hand. / Beside me is a helping hand that caters to my needs & less to my wants. / Receiving concentration from a helping hand is a trove verb I love & treasure. / Because it's your hand I'll be holding when you pull me up while on cloud nine / your hand in my hand is where you belong until you forfeit it / entering the threshold of our problematic yet the solution to the toxicity of our world that we call we share / I ask for your hand to feel the joy that believe in us.

Holding Hands, Devante Thomas

*I remember it just like yesterday...
Holding your hand, so soft, so pretty...*

Remember we used to wrestle behind your house? I miss the way you would stare into my eyes, smile, and laugh, hug me, and kiss me. Now, I have no one to hold hands with. To talk about life, grow, and build. No one could really compare to you really. What kind of relationship did we really have? We were 12 and 13—teenagers acting grown, but had no clue in the world. I was hiding behind current trauma, but burying it in drugs and alcohol, fighting, flirting, and bonding with you.

What were you going through at the time? I wish I could've put my pride and stubbornness to the side and just started back talking to you. I had the nerves to act like I didn't want to have nothing to do with you—like I really didn't miss walking to the U-City Library with you—laughing, kissing—holding hands.

When you moved to U-City permanently; I had just got put out of my dad's house a month earlier. He kept my phone, so I wasn't really communicating with people like I wanted to. Then I heard you were going to my school (Brittany Woods Middle); on my team (Xavier); cool with my friends; kicking it in U-City—I guess your Mom finally let you off the porch.

This was annoying and irritating to me—I was supposed to be enjoying your company and happy to hold your hand again. Walking to the Delmar Loop, the Library, Heman Park, the Rec

Center, or whatever else—was supposed to be our dates. But I was being an idiot and wanted to ignore you. I would walk past your street; I wanted to walk to your house, but I'd deprive myself and move along. I knew you wanted to reignite a relationship—but I chose not to.

What did I want? I didn't know. The weed and alcohol clouded my common sense. I let you slip through my grips. The day I committed my crime, I wanted to come see you for one last time—but I wasn't entirely sure if you were around.

Sitting in juvenile, I daydreamed of the life we could've had.... We both graduated from University City High School; I got accepted to Washington University on a football scholarship and academia. I chose to start back playing football and went to football training camp that 2009 summer instead of working at the car wash. We were deeply in love at this point. Living together in Westgate. As back up, I was taking Psychology as my major—I wanted to become a therapist for at-risk youth in football.

Sitting in jail, I daydreamed a different life I wanted for us.... We graduated High School and I got you pregnant on purpose. We got married and I was going to a technical school for a trade in computer engineering and technology—while working at a computer manufacturing factory. Life was good; you wrote children's books and painted. We were deeply in love and always holding hands in public.

Sitting in prison, I had nothing but time to daydream and actually have dreams about you...

At this point of course the daydreams got great; I could write some great love stories on them—though we never had sex. The dreams seemed like nightmares because I knew I couldn't be with you; I couldn't get in contact with you—no matter how hard I tried; and your name would appear in everything.

Erica...in **Am**(erica)

Erica... in books

Erica... in magazines

Erica... in movies and shows

Erica... in commercials

Erica... in the credits of movies or shows that I didn't even mean to be watching

Erica... everyone knows an Erica

Erica... I love the way the name sounds—and I'm reminded of you

Erica... I miss holding your hand, hugging you, talking to you, but it's starting to wear me down.

How are you doing now?

Erica, Erica, Erica! I don't even put in the effort to try and meet new women or even search for you anymore. Being a Muslim now, my excuse is that if you're not Muslim or even considering it, there's nothing to talk about. I can't even freely hold your hand—unless we're married.

These are the tests that I've been faced with; every guy in prison takes advantage of women all the time and wonders why some women try to distance themselves. Boys who assume they are men don't even want to hold hands with their woman. They don't even know how to treat their woman.

Erica Brown—I just want to hold your hand...one more time.

Holding Hands, Ryan Lapp

Holding hands is not an activity I associate with prison life except in the sense of holding my own hands behind my back, with or without handcuffs. I had to sit back and close my eyes for a short spell of thought. I was trying to conjure up a memory of the last time I meaningfully held someone's hand. Immediately my mind went to the list of past lovers. I quickly realized it was not a good idea to go down that rabbit hole. I'm not one to dredge up my past misjudgements at least not too often.

A half hour later, and I landed at a very painful memory from over a decade ago. I was holding my beloved grandpa's hand as he passed away from a 6-month fight with cancer. I still dream about him as if he is still here, sometimes sad, more often happy. I don't dream about the last moments of Grandpa Bud's life, at least not yet. I am only saddened when I awake to realize that it was only a dream.

That was the only time I ever held my grandfather's hand, much less show any type of emotion even close to compassion. My grandpa never showed love to me, his wife, or children, but you could still tell that he loved his family, even the fuck ups like myself. Nobody talked about it but Bud was no angel in his younger years either. By all accounts, he was a man, a war hardened

man, in and out of jail in his drinking days, and a very very good businessman in retirement.

I am the man I am today because of the lessons Bud taught me in life. If not for him, I'd have no sense of work ethic. He taught me what it means to be a man, and how to weather any storm. It is in part to Bud's credit that I have the mental fortitude, personality, and life skill to survive the California prison system and remain sane. THANK YOU GRANDPA BUD.

Memories of Holding Hands, Howard B Brown

Back in 1973 when awaiting trial, my parents would visit me weekly. We were allowed to sit together in the visiting room. It felt reassuring when Mom reached over so that we were holding hands. Without words the feeling of her hand said "We're here for you. It's okay."

After sentencing, I was at maximum security, for several months, at the start of 1975. Mom's caring hand would hold mine. Without words, holding hands said "We're here for you. It's okay."

The spring of 1975, when the world bloomed into a new beginning, I was at a medium. On weekly visits with my parents I'd find Mom holding hands with me. At times Dad would pat my hand. Unsaid, "We're here for you. It's okay."

May of 1978 I was at a minimum. Sadly Dad passed away. There was a question if I'd have Mom holding hands with me again. But, Mom was dedicated to her son. At the age of 58, with limited schooling, she studied to get a license. My sister took Mom to the D.M.V. for a road test. Mom passed. She found her way on a drive of over an hour to hold hands with me.

From 1979 to 1985 there was less holding hands. Mom became my furlough sponsor so she'd pick me up to take her son home for a home cooked meal. Being together replaced holding hands. Usually we went home every other week.

From 1985 to 1988 I was at a Pre-Release Center. Our time together on furloughs continued. For about a year I worked at an institutional job. Then I became eligible for actually working at a job in society. Our bi-weekly visits home continued. On Pre-Release I had Program Related Activity (PRA). I could use PRA to go to a mall. Even went to junkyards a few times. A few PRAs I

took Mom to the mall. We'd have a meal at Newport Creamery.

In 1988 I was returned to medium after a denial of parole. Being together was a matter of visits again. Once again I'd feel the warming strength of holding hands. Unsaid: "I'm here for you. It's okay."

In 1992 Mom had serious heart attacks. I was taken on escorted furlough to see her. As she laid weak in bed it became the last time we were holding hands. She passed away.

As I write this at maximum I note the rules for contact visits. "South-side visits are designated as limited contact. The inmates and visitors are allowed a very brief welcoming and departing embrace and closed-mouth kiss. The inmate and visitor will sit face to face with their feet flat on the floor, maintaining a correct, upright posture with their backs against the chair. Rubbing of arms or legs of the other shall not be permitted..." (Inmate Handbook 2020).

The experience of holding hands with an unsaid, "I'll be here for you. It's okay," will not happen.

Holding Hands, Philip Grigsby

Her tiny fingers tightly wrapped around my ring and little finger, her short legs pumping like pistons, keeping up with her daddy. The toddler who clings to me everywhere I go, who screams "daddy!" and runs to me when I come home from work, who has covered the refrigerator door with Picasso-ish drawings all declaring her love for her daddy.

I look down and my heart stops, the happy daydreams I was just in vanish to reality; my hand is empty. "Where did she go!" I think to myself. I fight reality and will for the tiny hand of my baby girl to reappear in mine. Reality wins and I walk home now with my shoulders slumped and heart aching. My empty hand feels incomplete.

I pause at my front door, as I do everyday. I open the door needing to see that beaming, little face but reality wins again! I walk through the quiet messy house where I live alone. In the kitchen I stand in front of the refrigerator. I stare at the single ruffled, tear-stained picture left. It's a big red heart with the words 'Best Dad Ever.'

I look at my hands and curse myself "how could you let this happen?" I used to think holding hands was silly. I didn't understand how painful not having a hand to hold could be.

Transfer, Gary Farlow

Prison inmates are, by nature, transient. Here today, gone tomorrow. So forging a friendship, let alone a relationship, can prove not only difficult amidst hundreds of ever-vigilant eyes, but equally risky, as the one you've come to love can be subject to "diesel therapy": prison slang for transfer.

Or... it could be you.

Prison administration loves to play what inmates term "musical beds" or swapping around inmates from prison to prison, often for no reason other than *they can*.

So it was in July of 2021 when N.C., after 31 years of confinement, decided to grant me parole - only to be sent to SC to serve a consecutive term for the same crime - that I prepared to take my leave.

Anthony and I had built a relationship amidst the rampant, sometimes violent, homophobia seemingly endemic to prison. Yet, despite the hatred born of fear and misguided beliefs, he and I persevered and our bond grew. We were a couple, acknowledged by sympathetic staff and our friends who supported us.

While love survived the Holocaust when partners were separated for years with no contact, unknowing if the other was even still alive or dead, love cannot halt a prison transfer.

July in the South is like a party guest who stays too long. The humidity and heat combine to make even the trees pant. I had packed the few belongings I would take, having given to Anthony what I did not mail home. He walked with me the precious few steps to receiving, where a car from



the SCDC was waiting to whisk me further south into the unknown.

The heat, even in this early hour, bore down on us. Silently, Anthony slid his hand into mine. Followed down the sidewalk by a C.O., we reached the door to receiving all too quickly. A last touch. A gentle squeeze of my hand. A final hug. My lips on his neck. His lips on mine. Then... we parted.

"This isn't goodbye," I promised, as tears welled and my already shaky voice hitched. "It's so-long, for now."

"For now," he repeated.

Holding Hands, Dustin Sherwood Clay

There was this 'Vibrant Thang' that loved to slide her compact body into my compact car. While waiting for me to put the car in drive, her hand closest to me would be resting palm up on her thigh. My palm found hers as naturally as tagging the worst player in a game of hide and go seek. She was 'It', in cool gym shoes and blue jeans, with eyes that sought and found connections in a hand-holding stare. Interlaced fingers require a spreading that joins two hands inside each other. To grip that which is tender opens the heart, shouting monologues of free-flow verses of heart things. She then keeps me witnessing her seek-and-speak poetry in her thoughts and in the language of her body. At my side, leading me to lead her, she's forever the little girl who likes a boy who likes holding her hand.

Holding hands always takes me back to asking a girl "Will you 'Go' with me?" Declaring your affections for one another in this manner speaks to our base need to be chosen. The question "will you go with me" asks warmly, will you accept me? The joining of hands states that answer boldly with internal body heat rising past the degree that's transferred between connected palms.

On the playground, I share my wishes to place your tiny hand in mine with other people with penises like it was a premonition. The joining of hands is all that's needed for a legally binding contract, so it's no surprise in the thought that two people could have their love bonded in this manner. Connections are needed and as they were, they need to be felt. In fact, hand-seeking a softness in I Do's still seems fitting. A softness

that's silently investigated while being forever emotionally catalogued and filed under infatuation. Even the strength of the grip is communicative. When you feel like she never wants to let you go, you feel empowered. When what you truly desire is in your hands, you come to this realization that it's completely up to you on how you hold on to it. Who or what will cause you to let go? When or why would you hold on tighter? Skin is simply our surface. If there's any confusion as to what's at our core, just try to define how you feel when you are deeply touched. Those are the feelings that insist on holding hands with you for as long as you live.

Holding Hands On the Great Rebellion, Myron Martens

Ever wonder what life was like before the Civil War? In America, we had already been at war with Mexico (1846-1848) just over a decade prior. What was life like during the massive Reconstruction era when visionary Congress members amended the US Constitution three times in just four years? Indeed, after one of the bloodiest battles in the Western Hemisphere (1861-1865), the US government was forced to recognize a people whom it had considered property or merchandise merely to be bought and sold, traded on the open market; an enslaved people who literally built this nation into what it is today. It's about the same as the modern warehousing of US citizens for decades in the Prison Industrial Complex today. Holding Hands to understand life before the great rebellion.

Congress passes the monumental Civil Rights Act of 1866, the 13th Amendment in 1865, which, of course, did not abolish slavery as it says, rather it just got polished, shined up into another institution of slavery, the PIC: the 14th Amendment in 1866, and the 15th Amendments in 1870. Yet there still remained a host of local, state and municipal laws and statutes which were designed to subjugate the formerly enslaved and keep them in their place. However, despite these evolving standards of decency in society, those in power would stop at nothing to maintain their power. Then there was a necessity for the Enforcement Act* and the Civil Rights Cases* as well. These all come with a load of rejections and fierce opposition.

The events and Supreme Court decisions that guided society to Civil War are too numerous to enumerate because they consist of decades of torture, beatings, force hard labor in the fields (oh the evils of slavery) and exposure by abolitionists such as John Brown, Windell Phillips, William Garrison, Henry David Thoreau, etc. The history of slavery is one of the darkest strains on American democracy, yet it sparked one of the greatest fights for civil rights the world has ever seen. Here just to name a few: the Industrial Revolution was in full swing; the Supreme Court decision in *Dred Scott v. Sandford** in which the US government shamefully declared that everyone of African descent had no rights as citizens in this country, didn't have any standing in court, could not justify against a white person, and could not own any property, namely land; the publication of antislavery novels such as Harriet Becher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin** and Thoreau's *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience**; and the Supreme Court decision in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania** in which the runaway slave laws allowing bounty hunters to capture men, women, and children in order to return them to their slave owners was challenged. We're holding hands with those that fight for civil rights.

Plus the hypocrisy of the government which drafted our founding documents with these "self-evident truths," that "ALL MEN are created equal, with certain inalienable rights, endowed by the Creator," that among them are "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,"* while denying 1/3 of the population — the enslaved African-Americans — any such rights as citizens; all these things played a part. Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, our Founding Fathers, allowed hundreds of slaves at the time they were drafting these timeless documents, simultaneously promising liberty and justice for all while condemning Blacks to slavery. Abraham Lincoln even declared his purpose to "save the Union" and protect the Bourgeoisie, the capitalists, in an arrogant letter to Horace Gruly*. Furthermore, Abigail Adams writing to her traveling husband, then future President John Adams said it best in 1774: "I wish most sincerely that there was not a slave in the province it always appeared a most inquisitive scheme to me to fight ourselves for what we are daily rubbing and plundering from those who have as good a

right to freedom as we have."* Surely she was not alone in this sentiment. We'll be Holding Hands with her.

Since the destitution of those formerly enslaved had become "too appalling for belief," the Bureau of Refugees, Freedom and Abandoned Land — War Department was set up in the aftermath of the bloody war in 1865, in order to assist in providing humanitarian aid such as food, water, clothes, books, money, teachers, etc. "For the newly and soon to be emancipated," "It was charged with the study, planning and execution of these services to contain the War of Rebellion," as well as the management of all abandoned land. "...the abandoned rice-fields along the rivers for thirty miles and the country hoarding the St. Johns River in Florida (and Georgia) were reserved for and set apart for the settlement of (slaves) now made free by act of war."* So said the Special Field Order #15. It was "Forty Acres and a Lie,"* but it was supposed to be a mule. Newly elected President Andrew Johnson would put the land back into the hands of the Bourgeoisie with the Amnesty Act* of 1871: "For the collection of abandoned and captured property in insurrectionary districts and for the taking possession by the government..." Shortened to simply the Freedmen's Bureau, it beat the formerly enslaved out of rich lands.

**Works cited included with submission were not included here due to space constraints.*

Holding Hands, Stephen Burton

Holding hands is the third intimate form of contact that can happen between two people. The top forms of contact are a kiss and a hug. Let's examine the positives and negatives of these forms of contact. A kiss is a climatic moment that happens at a beautiful wedding. Remember Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss on a cheek in a garden under the cover of night. A hug allows you to embrace a loved one or a friend when you greet them. The Roman senators hugged Julius Caesar on the floor of the Senate, falsely making him welcome, as assassins approached him from the rear.

There is no better feeling than holding hands with your significant other while enjoying a walk. There is nothing like enjoying that summer

atmosphere with that person. When you're incarcerated, linking yourself to someone is similar to holding their hand. You become connected and identified by others based on your company. You can choose to be someone that flies under the radar quietly serving your time until it's over. The alternative is to try to impress people who you really don't know. The side effects of those kinds of foolish decisions is having your cell destroyed by security on a regular basis. Whenever you first meet someone in prison you meet their representative. In time their mask accidentally slips off or they snatch it off in anger.

This occurs in the midst of being in the worst community anyone could live in. Inhabited by people who are dealing with past hurts and regrets. A majority are flawed individuals dealing with mental instability. Not to mention bitter and unrepentant lifers who feel they have nothing to lose, unable to understand the difference between a lifetime and an eternity. In light of understanding the difference between the risk and reward of holding hands with the wrong people, you have a decision to make: who you choose to be linked to. Allow God to guide you. God bless you.

Holding Hands, Vinicio J. Garcia

Parent and Child, Lovers, Bobbies holding back the girls, solidarity — a very versatile appendage. As I was contemplating the contents of this essay, Little EVA singing Locomotion came on.

A recent photograph of a father holding a young boy's hand while the angst in the boy's face is evident. The little boy is clutching his toy as they leave the rubble of Syria. The comfort and strength of the father's hand only somewhat assuages the terror of war and destruction which envelops them.

In 1948, in Pennsylvania, a town surrounded by Zinc smelters required children to hold hands to go to school. An inversion layer occurred in OCT or NOV — don't remember exactly — but they couldn't see a foot in front of them. Doc said some people died because of the air pollution. He was told you're wrong, air pollution can't kill. Doc said shut down the smelters for a few days — can't, it would cost too

much to return to the required temperature. Air pollution can't kill Doc — inversion lifted. In 1952, in England, an inversion occurred. 2000 people died.

You cannot shake someone's hand without holding it. So shaking hands, in my reasoning, would indicate it is a subset of holding hands, since I don't normally consider the two ideas equivalent. Are they?

So when was the first handshake?

Have you ever shaken someone's hand and thought, Oh my! — Holding hands is big in movies and in real life — SAVE a life.

Electrostatic repulsion — Kirlian photography. Our magnetic field is real. CAN human touch transfer bits of data about ourselves? Eventually I have little doubt we will discover it does, and we will use that for benevolent and malevolent purposes.

Pandemic practice run.

Holding hands with the dying. I didn't realize that dying refers to death while dyeing refers to Batik until I looked it up. It is perhaps that I am really old (over 22) but connections of images emerge before me in what should be non-sequitur thoughts.

Early 20th century, Hattie Green, Philly multimillionaire not holding her nephew's hand — she had her chauffeur drive around looking for the least expensive hospital — I believe he was involved in an accident — The delay caused the necessity for an amputation — Apparently it took a while to find the least expensive hospital.

Saw a program about a first-time chimpanzee mother holding her baby's hand for a couple of days after the baby died.

There are far more capable writers in this group at recounting poignant events than I am, so I am going to go scattershooting.

I saw my first UFO on March 22, 2025 while going to chow at about 11 am. Perhaps it was a UFO since I couldn't be sure what it was — It was elliptical first, lengthwise horizontal, then it rotated 90° to vertical, then it turned so as to appear narrow, cigar-shaped — then it became intensely bright and disappeared. This only lasted 2 seconds — I kept my eyes focused but there was no sign of anything — The guy behind me said it was a UFO — I asked, so you saw it? Yeah, but I don't tell anyone since I've seen them a couple of times and nobody believes me — I

looked around and no one else was looking up. He is from a different Bldg and ate at a different chow hall.

Now to reveal my ignorance about smiley emojis and such things. I have intentionally ignored such symbolism. I have a difficult time with the English language as it is.

Smileys have started appearing in some letters I received — I realized they looked like Sumerian. So I asked a fella about the emojis and smileys. It was quite fortuitous. The fella told me about unicode — As I am looking at these emojis I then think of Popol Vuh and the Mayan language. He tells me every symbol on earth is listed in the unicode — What a find! What implications!

There are so many exciting things happening. AI is reading thoughts in real time. Two of Elon Musk's rockets exploded — The largest non-flying insect (5.9 inches) has been found, which was thought to be extinct — The dire wolf has been resurrected. The FDA had 3500 jobs slashed. Physicists and other scientists are being laid off. Those bad bad people.

Volcanoes erupting and earthquakes on the rise. Let me be wrong about the magnetic reversal and ice shelf collapse in Greenland.

Holding Hands, Charles Whitfield

We walked together upon the golden sands,
whispering sweet nothings while holding hands.
It's a blessing when you know you're loved,
it makes angels rejoice in H'ven above!
We sit on a park bench,
making wishes upon the first star.
We wish for blessings to rain
down upon us, from H'ven afar.
The eyes of all were upon us
as we were holding hands,
walking along the golden sands.
When your soul feels free of strife,
it's because love's come into your life.
We didn't even care as others saw us
kissing,
as we got up 'n strolled along the lane.
'Cause the heart doesn't listen to the brain.
The eyes of all were upon us,
as we were holding hands,
walking along the golden sands.
When your soul feels free of strife,

it's because love's come into your life.

Holding Hands, Christopher Cross

Time is never-ending,
And as it's wending,
It feels to be bending,
Leading me on.
In this bizarre dream, Time,
Is of the same substance as Mind,
And as they intertwine,
They merge into One.
Beneath lies much anxiety,
But the sub-strata is peace—
A delicate balance.
So escape while you can,
But I cannot take your hand.
By grace you may find an out,
But not by my own—
That is above my pay grade.

Holding Hands, Stephanie Hicks

"I'm so excited today!" I tell my younger sister. This is our day to go shopping for groceries and more. I am big sister. Mom takes us in and out of all the stores. We are getting my favorite Cap'n Crunch cereal and more toilet paper, because I don't like using those brown paper towels mom brings home from work.

My job is to hold Sissy's hand and to keep her safe. We are hustled and bustled in and out of store after store. Mom is busy! She sees a friend and starts talking.

I have to hold Sissy's hand.

I. Have. To. Hold. Sissy's. Hand.

OMG! It's the new Barbie! The doll is on the shelf at my eye level. I have to go look at Barbie just for a few seconds.

"Stay put, Sissy!" I whisper. We are not holding hands.

I walk to Barbie, mesmerized by how she looks. Her hair is how I want to look. Her clothes are top fashion like I want to wear. All Barbies love her and want to be next to her. I want friends who want to be next to me.

Oh no....next to me.

Where is my Sissy? I'm not holding her hand anymore. Sissy is gone! I run around looking for her everywhere, in the dressing room, by the

toys and up front near the candy. All little kids love candy, right?

Nope. No Sissy. Not here and not there. What is my mom going to do to me? I'm in such big trouble.

I'm crying my eyes out. Please God, help me find my sister. Help me see her. Help me hold her hand!

Suddenly, there's my mom out of nowhere. She's holding my sister. Sissy jumps down and runs to me hard. Instantly I'm knocked over. I kiss her face all over and let her know, "I'll hold your hand forever."

Holding Hands, Jeremy Brown

I like to hold hands. I hold my mother's hands when she visits me. They are getting old from years of hard work, yet her hands are caring hands. My hands enjoy others' hands. I miss holding my partner's hands. I miss holding hands. ☺ Can I hold your hands just for a moment? 😊😊

Test Results, Jacob Preuschl

"I'm afraid I have some bad news," the doctor says sitting across from me. He's so young that he looks childish in that pristine white coat. It's almost like a Halloween costume. He is visibly nervous as he looks me over. I must look like Hannibal Lector to the poor doctor. Who needs seatbelts when I have so many chains pinning me to this wheelchair. I wonder if this wheelchair is properly insured. I smile to myself as I look down at my black-boxed hands and see the tattoo of my family motto, "Always Resilient."

"Whatever it is, I've survived worse and become better," I reply as time stops and I experience a flood of memories. Growing up the oldest of four kids of Catholic farmers, my earliest memories are of abuse, alcoholism and violence. They divorced when I was young. I was forced to grow up fast to protect my younger siblings. I recall the cuts and bruises from the fights I'd get into until high school. The football and wrestling coach recruited me to channel the raging storm of anger inside. I can smell the fresh cut grass and sweaty locker rooms. Nothing calms an angry young man down like head trauma. I can taste the birthday cake I stole from my grocery store job for my baby brother's 7th

birthday. I can see the shock and joy on everyone's faces, including my own, when I not only finished high school, but was accepted into engineering college! I was flying high on the promise life showed, but like Icarus flying too close to the sun, I came crashing down to reality.

At 18, my dad's demons finally catch up with him. I close his sightless eyes upon discovering him after his overdose. My tailspin continues as I nearly fail out of college. Then, just when it looks like I'm about to hit the ground, I fall in love. What can I say? It's the khakis. My winged angel and I share a forbidden love. She, being muslim and I, being Christian(ish), hide it for as long as we can. Sneaking hugs and smiles in between classes and over coffee. Her dad finds out and sends her back to Egypt and I discover that my freefall was only delayed. I hit the ground and start walking down the well worn family path of addiction, and in my family addictions come bundled together like State Farm bundles home and auto insurance. It comes to an apex as a toxic relationship and a DUI. My siblings pull me out and I manage to graduate with a bachelor's degree. A professor convinces the college to waive my graduate school tuition if I work as a teaching assistant. I can't say yes fast enough. It turns out the only thing I love more than helping millions of Americans on their insurance is teaching. The feeling of pride in helping someone get that "Ah Ha!" moment is something that I'll cherish forever. Like a good teacher, State Farm is there.

I remember the drunken college parties. (I'm a slow learner on drinking). I fight a cop... seven to be exact. At least it took seven to bring me down. My dive continues with an ill-advised fling at work. The police raid my house. My lawyer advises me to pretend nothing is happening and to live my life as normally as possible.

I finish grad school two years later, receiving my master's degree. I join a start up company as its first employee. I can see the pride in the owner's eyes as I complete my first solo project one year in. The company expands and soon I'm 25 and making \$70k/year. I pay off my debts, buy phones for my siblings and travel to Europe with the love of my life. Then I get a call from my lawyer. That fling I had a lifetime ago, well the coworker was only 16 at the time. My case had gone federal.

I'm sitting in county, wearing orange knowing that I can trust my lawyer, or at least the American Justice System... right?

I'm wearing khakis again, but this time my name and number are on them. I have a 20-year sentence hanging over my head.

Here I am three years later at 31 years old, my love, house, job and life all gone as I sit here staring at this nervous trick-or-treat doctor. Holding my hands together, I take a deep breath. I realize no matter the results of this test, it's just another step on this wild unpredictable journey.

"I've never seen anything like this before."

"Am I dying or something doc?"

"Your test results indicate that you are completely fucked in the head."

"Oh, is it that obvious?"

Holding Hands, Craig A Fischer

I remember those long ago days of innocence and youth. Life was teaching me those simple lessons of living, laughing, loving in that fiery passion of life. Everything was so much simpler then, a look, a smile, a tease or a touch, Oh - how I long for those days.

That was a magical world for me, full of promise and hope. Santa lived way up North in the land of ice and snow. The tooth fairy left rewards for me for something that occurred naturally. Nymphs lived in the forests and ponds alongside frogs, salamanders and garden snakes. Oh, I know how whimsical and silly all of this sounds and looks written down. (You haven't seen nothing yet). Still I must ask you, have you ever considered what happened to all of that magic and wonder?

I do not claim to know much about anything at all, but I do know magic and wonder still exist. I can conjure, I can create, and... I can destroy!

I recognize my divinity. It was given to me by my ancestry. Once I accepted it, I consumed it, I drank it - and it intoxicated me!

Today I'm an old man - but when I remember the girl next door - the excitement I felt when she held my hand...

My oppressors haven't accomplished anything -- they haven't taken anything from me because all I have to do is place my two hands together - one hand holding on to the other.

Holding Hands, Herbert Groves

That simple act, the entwining of fingers. The simplest form of affection. It's one I miss the most. Here in the world of all male companions, I miss holding my wife's hand as we sat in a theater watching a silly or romantic movie. Holding hands as we walked along unknown storefronts looking for that special antique store. Even simply holding hands as we sat on our porch watching the sun set or rise.

These memories are precious, however they can easily lead me down into despair. I know my actions that led me here have hurt her and others in my family. I know they are faced with my stigmatism. Criminals breed criminals after all. Even though I don't truly believe that, it's still a foggy whisper in the back of my mind. Feeding the diaspora of self-hatred.

I try to drag myself out of that pit constantly. Memories should be a place to escape these four walls. We are told to face our demons in order to put them down. It's difficult when those demons corrupt some of my fondest memories. Forgive yourself. Easier said than done.

Memories of the birth of my children. Their tiny hands holding my huge ungainly finger. Striving to hold my hand. One of the simplest yet painful forms of affection.

Holding Hands, Cesar Hernandez

My baby sister and I walk down the street to the park. I'm surprised to see my neighbor Lizzie sitting on a bench working on her laptop.

We give each other looks.

"You can't concentrate in your home office?"

Lizzie smiles, "I needed a change of scenery."

"I can tell you love your sister." I shrug. Lizzie points to a woman, "See her, she holds her kid's wrist while you hold your sister's hand."

"I always hold her hand."

Lizzie says her sister Debbie would always hold her wrist. If she tried to hold Debbie's hand Debbie would let go and hold her by the wrist.

"So you want me to hold your hand?" Lizzie busts out laughing, "Okay, the three of us will hold hands. Let's walk down the street and have lunch at Breadwinners."

**Imagine The Whole World Holding Hands,
Marino K. Leyba**

Who are you holding hands with? God or the Devil, Life or Death, Good or Evil?

I remember holding hands with a girl I liked. I remember holding hands with my mom as a child. I remember holding hands in a prayer circle. Holding hands with people shows we are all connected. I only want the best for the world. I only want peace but in our world we may never see it.

Our world is a mess. Yes a mess and not blessed, but imagine if we all could work together for the best for each other. Imagine the whole world holding hands and helping each other out. I know, I know it's just a dream yet I can imagine right?

I guess that will be what heaven is like, when Christ JESUS finally returns to the earth. The Great Touchdown. For now, until then, I guess we should just cherish the hands that we hold on to and hope that there are more hands to reach out to and hold in the future.

I'm holding my hands out. Who will reach for them? Who will hold hands with me and the rest of the world?

Holding On, Genevieve Brüemmer

24 October 2014: My House

I'm buried in self-induced sensory overload – my laptop plays YouTube; my Galaxy Tab plays music; Mass Effect is paused on my PC; I browse Eye Bleach on Reddit on my mum's Apple – so I'm spared needing to actually think. When I do, even for a moment, I remember that Colton is g— I blink.

Why is the Apple in screen-saver mode? Why does my chest hurt?

My door flies open. Da stands there, and it takes a moment to register that he's signing something. I turn my speakers down and immediately feel the Black Swarm of thoughts press in. I try to focus on da.

'Get dressed,' he signs.

'Why?' I demand, irritated—I'm always irritated, anymore.

'Your Mum's in the hospital.'

The swarm descends.

25 October: Gerald Champion Regional Medical Centre - ICU Waiting

I'm staring at the floor. Over the buzz of Black wings, I hear my family doing what they do best: argue. I turn my hearing aids off, but I still hear the noise, if not the words.

"How else did mum develop a bedsore, which became infected, caused Sepsis, and put her here?" says Sandra. "She's old, bloody well gone 75," Padriach retorts. "It's all the fault of COPD," says Gary. "Shut up!" someone yells.

Oops, that was me. My voice is scratchy; I haven't spoken in 57 days. No need, no one to talk to, not since Colt – buzz, buzz goes the Swarm.

Feet appear in my view, and I look up into a face exactly like my own. I haven't seen my twin in two years, yet we embrace as if nothing had driven us apart.

When the ICU door opens, my twin and I go in. She holds my hand as we walk, squeezing tight. At the bedside, we each take one of mum's hands. Our da, who hasn't left her side, signs and says, 'She just fell back to sleep. Please don't try to wake her up.'

We don't.

26 October: Gerald Champion - ICU

Visiting time is over for the day. Da gives mum a hug goodnight, then my sister gives her a kiss. My turn. But as I take Mum's hand, I have a flash of intuition. My vision blurs as I bend to kiss her. I know I need to say something I haven't said to her in years.

"I love you, mum," I whisper. "Get some sleep. It'll all be better when you wake, I promise." She smiles at me, most likely doesn't even recognize me, but I can tell she's happy to hear my voice.

I take my sister's hand as we leave. The beat of Black Wings increases.

27 October: *Gerald Champion - ICU*

Buh-beep, buh-beep, buh-beep. The machine's steady beeping is loud in this tiny room. My mother's hand is dry in mine, which is sweaty. I stare at her wrinkled face, so still in death. The doctor said she's been unresponsive since last night, when she went to sleep. The family wants to believe she'll wake up, but I know better: she already has, just not here.

My twin, across the bed, cries quietly as she clings to Mum's hand. With a sigh, she says we should go out to the waiting area so others can come in.

I don't want to, but I do. I trade Mum's hand for my twin's. My sister stops, looking back. She heard something I couldn't. With horror in her eyes, she signs, "Da wants to shut off the breathing machine." I nod, cause there's nothing else to do. I do hear the Banshee wail — it excites the Black Swarm into a frenzy — and watch my aunt run past, screaming, 'She's gone! oh God!'

I turn and see my da. I run to him and take his hands. He leans his head on my shoulder and starts to cry. I've never seen him cry, so I cry with him, and hold on to him for dear life.

18 August 2015: *My Parent's House*

My da's room. No beeping machines. Just him in a custom bed and me holding one of his enormous hands with both of mine. It's been six days since he last woke up. Esophageal cancer. He didn't even try to fight.

It's been three days since I've slept and my aunt and my da's first wife are here to take over my vigil. But I've had another flash of intuition, so I don't want to let go. They keep telling me to go to bed, but I no longer care. I'm so numb, I can no longer even cry. In just 354 days, I've lost everyone who truly mattered.

I'm afraid that holding da's hand is all that's holding me together at this point. If I let go, then all that'll be left is the cold numbness. I'll float

away, with nothing to tether me to the ground. I don't want to let go, I'm so tired of letting go!

I do. I let go.

But I'm still holding on.

Note: *This essay was edited for length.*

May Picture Theme



Untitled, William Ziegler

"Oh my God, Neesha! Hair Repair worked two minutes and forty-five seconds faster this run. We're gonna be rich!" Michelle exclaimed while holding up the tackiest clock a Gujarati gal could provide in-vitra. "This time these gorgeous locks made it past the middle of my back."

"Be careful with that merchandise. My dad would disown me if you scratched our lab heirloom. He'd probably beat up Captain Hook for trying to damage it." Realizing her grave error, the scientist recovered the ball. "How was the ratio? Three centimeters to each minute?"

"Rounded up from two point seven, yes. But on another note, you did by chance observe the absence of my white coat this evening and speaking of hair looming, this time I'm gonna keep these baby-smooth waves more than a moment to show off while we celebrate at the club tonight."

"I'd be the only Hindu lady sipping Shirley Temples there. No guy in his right mind would want to pick up a sober geek on the dance floor."

"Well, NeeNee. Perhaps you should be the one shaving your head to trade out those Indian roots. After letting loose, you'd hit this piece of junk with a hammer yourself to clock out for the evening!" With that, Michelle flicked her hips right out through the swinging doors, leaving Neesha Singh with a whole lot of extra weight on her Head and Shoulders.

Holding Hands, Disty Steely

When I look at this picture it makes me think of holding hands with time. Going back to the past, living in the present and planning for the future.

Being locked up it seems that time is on pause for us as it keeps moving in real life. All we have is to remember the past because we are taken out of the "real life" and plan for the future as we live in the present.

I have a better life mapped out for myself since being locked up, because I have lived in this moment, reflected on my past, and planned my future. Every one of us that is locked up is "holding hands" with time no matter if it's the past, present or future. We all have good or bad memories and we all have hopes and dreams for the future, which starts with "holding hands" with time at this moment.

Holding Hands, Ryan Miller

This picture looks like the woman I was seeing at SCI-Chester on the Low-Low in secret. She looks exactly like her. Only if it was in color and I could see her hair color it would be awesome!

Her name is Vance. I'm not gonna put her whole name in this for purposes! But I was in the Hole and we had a mental and somewhat of a physical relationship and we got broken up by the system because they are haters. She would bring me coffee every day at 2pm at the beginning of her shift and talk to me for like 15 mins, then whenever I wanted to hear her voice I would call her to my cell.

I was in a special cell in the overflow, where there are only four cells in the Infirmary Block. I always kept my Intercom covered so no one could hear my convos. She told me so much personal info about her that I believed I was on

the streets and didn't feel like I was locked up. I believe I want to marry her when I go home. I might have fallen in love with her mind and beauty. She made me forget about the criminal lifestyle. When I think about her I don't want to do no crime no more.

She fought for me. She almost got into a fight with a SGT female because of me. She is an LT! She sat at my door with the wicket open for 2 1/2 hours and looked at my photos asking so many personal questions about me and my family when I was in a bad crisis. We really bonded and trusted each other. I tell her when she crosses the line if she does and she doesn't take anything personal when I act out, she says to me. I started to notice changes in her actions like lipstick and makeup and stuff like that and I called her out on it. She just smiled! A lot of stuff went on with me and her and then I got transferred so I couldn't do nothing. It sucked! I am pissed! Things happen for a reason, so let's see what the reason is now.

Rise and Shine, Howard B. Brown

Jana is a single mom with the new challenge of raising a teenage daughter. Jana has been known to be witty & sassy. It can be said, "Like mother. Like daughter." The Little One had some sassy replies that made Jana laugh. She just couldn't do otherwise.

Like most teenagers, The Little One was not keen on getting up early for school. She loved school, but the growing body craved extra sleep. She had already grown so mother had to look up to daughter, now.

One school morning, Jana snuck into the Little One's room brandishing an alarm clock. She had timed it just right. The two bells loudly clanged as the hammer struck back and forth. To teen ears it was as if Big Ben rang.

Teen eyes opened, not welcoming the light. "What's up?"

"Rise & shine kiddo. This is your new alarm clock." said Jana with a big smile.

"You can't be serious! That clunker must be fifty years old!"

"It was good enough for my mom and me. It's good enough for you, kiddo."

That "kiddo" was cute, but a sign that her mom has put her foot down. Nonetheless kiddo

replied: "That cowbell is old school. I'm not..." Kiddo paused to study her mom. She knew she couldn't say "...using it." She sassily continued "...going to oversleep now. Thanks! I'll put it in the hall, so we can wake up together." Kiddo smiled. "Rise and shine!"

The Tiger Muskie, Gardner LaMarche

My father used to take me fishing when I was young. We would wake up early and tread out to the water when the sun was rising. And the best thing about fishing to me, is finding out what's on the other end of the line. Each time that I caught a fish my mind grew with excitement as I reeled the fish in. I recall that I wished that I could catch every type of fish that there was. And to my count I did that. At least every fish in my territory that is.

I remember when I caught my first muskie. It was a twenty-eight-inch long fish and I took a picture of it before we released it. It was a Tiger Muskie and it wasn't very large as far as muskellunges get. Although the muskie is the grand daddy of fresh water fish in our area and naturally I was excited to catch him.

Some muskies are green and some are silver, the tiger muskie is a deep brown color with vanilla tiger stripes marking the side of the fish. He also had scarlet red indications on his fins and tail with a white belly.

The fish is a memory that brings me back to times when I was in the forest. Some people sport wild animals for food and others are in it for the conquest. For me it was an opportunity to be closer to wild animals. And I think that all hunters and fishermen are impressed with the animals that they bag. The characteristics are genuine and the markings speak of a greater relation to the world we live in. I remember the way that it was when I walked in the woods. And I remember how it felt to fish on the water. And I still remember that muskie that I caught. Life feels so animal in my recollection, the coldness of a summer morning and the nearly three-foot long Tiger Muskie that broke the water of that glassy smooth lake still resound a sense of nature within me that is clean. And I believe that the bond of purity that I felt is synonymous with freedom. And I'm glad that I had the chance to witness life

in its ultimate form. Beneath a free sky, underneath the forest ceiling.

HAPPY HOUR, Ryan Lapp

The happiest hour you could imagine might be any one of many moments in your life. Marriage, child birth, graduation just to name a few that top most people's list. When I first came to prison it seemed that I would not be seeing any more happy hours of my own for a long long time. The reception before getting to my main line prison was about the worst thing I could imagine. I was lucky to only be there for 40 days.

Prison in my lovely native California is a shitshow to say the least. I have to admit though that I am here of my own fault, and nobody else's. As depressing as this place can be, I have learned to recognize my "happy hours" in their various forms. I am at a point where I can be happy just by knowing that there are "happy hours" in my near future. Visits with family, my lone cancer stick I allow myself most days, and obtaining my bachelor's degree (maybe two), stand as my top three.

Being happy in prison largely depends on the way you look at the world, especially with respect to your current surroundings. I was lucky enough to find a group of people that share my love of science, nature and natural paganism. Simply put they are called Atheopagans. A mixture of principles that I won't get into in this essay, as you can research the Atheopagan path on your own if you'd like.

I look at my situation from a military point of view. Just like the military boot camps and military in general, everything you need is provided to you while you are in prison. Healthcare, food, showers, etc. are free to you; on top of that you are not paying rent or utilities. In the military scenario, you need to focus on things such as training for combat or a particular mission. In prison, time is your greatest asset, you have to make as much of that time work for you.

I firmly believe in myself, to accomplish all my goals during this prison term. When I leave this time I will have a head start at succeeding. I wish I would have found this path/mindset a lot sooner, but it's a hard thing to do with a drug-soaked brain. It took almost two years

before I had a brain functioning in a way that could comprehend normal life outside of my addiction. I spent decades living in a never ending “happy hour,” as long as I had my meth pipe and a fat sack, and don’t forget the money, women, casino binges and thrill of the hustle lifestyle.

I still live a hustle life, but without the illegal and negative aspects. I make money legally and that feels really good. Instead of throwing away money at casinos with no regard, I throw money at building my biz contacts and making my brand known. If I had spent the last 25 years building my life up instead of very actively demolishing my world and those in and around it, who knows what could have been. Prison is not always where you hit rock bottom, doomed to have no more “happy hours,” unless you allow it to be so.

One of my favorite “Happy Hours” is when I get mail from penpals, whether from family, friends, biz associates, or romantic interests. I dedicate a 2-hour (or more) block of my day writing exclusively to penpals. When I am caught up on writing, I actively search for new penpals, because new penpals equal more “happy hours” and more opportunities to better my life and someone else’s as well.

Now I get to add my own opinion and stories to this collection, and being able to freely express myself amongst my comrades gives me a lot of “happy hours.” I am happy to be a contributor to this collective of amazing writers. All that being said it is now time for my one a day (or two somedays) indulgence to mellow myself out.

A Woman’s Bible, Terance DeJuan Wilson

Her emotionally engaged eyes swept swiftly to the heavens. Her strong bodily feelings were exquisitely attuned to her emotions. The dreamy movement consumed her, awakening desire. She drew me extremely close, as close as naturally possible. She whispered something into my ear, “wait. Watch for the exact moment that their lips engage... There it is!” It was an intense reaction, her subconscious expression. She was vulnerable to these dramatic flights of imagination. “Okay, now pretend that you are a woman while you watch. You see it, don’t you?”

She demanded with so much conviction that I became slightly uneasy. I didn’t want to upset her, but it was something preposterous that she had asked me to do.

Nevertheless, breaking with all restraints, I did it for her. I didn’t expect to see anything, but what excited her really touched me, and she was brimming with inspiration. I had to concentrate on the process. The ingenuity of inspiration. It was the accumulation of beauty. In 1970, Maxine Feibelman joined her future husband, lyricist Bernie Taupin, a fervent admirer of Elton John, on tour. Her role was that of a seamstress. Feibelman was also a trained dancer. During sets she would dance on the side stage. Her deliberate action inspired the lyrics of John’s “Tiny Dancer”: “Blue Jean baby, LA lady, seamstress for the band/pretty-eyed, pirate smile, you’ll marry a music man.”

We were receding into the background, and I thought I saw it. What I observed was fascinating. A land of magic so loud it caught my attention. He was a knight guarding the virtue of a proper lady, who was always dancing along the edges of a rejection, floating across the edge of nonexistence, dying for authenticity. The observance of a woman who had received a promise. A future somewhere inside of that realm. Women in love are capable of romanticising everything, but I began to understand her needs that much more.

Time, Philip Grigsby

I made it! I made it! 24 hours no drugs! I can remember yesterday! I woke up without throwing up! My eyes are not red! My head doesn’t hurt! I’m hungry!

The first 24 hours was no sweat, I can do this, people will see, I’m not a lush, I’m not a junkie, I will rise above the addiction that has controlled my life, I have a goal!

I promised my little girl as they took her away “mommy will get you!” I will not let my addiction break that promise. Day by day I will recover! I will have my baby back!

The Time Keeper, Bigg L

They always warned me, "If you write that lady she will never write back with a correct answer!"

How am I supposed to figure out all these calculations, percentages, etc. to know how much investment would be needed to close this deal?

So easy to get lost in the sauce of the moment. Sometimes guys will sit nonchalantly all the while completely oblivious as to how much they have already invested or how much more they may need to invest. It is a very common feeling -- "am I in the twilight zone?" "Or wait, is this the bus terminal?" "Hmm... a bus terminal, okay so everyone is waiting on a bus, so to say. I see the tables and seats for people to sit while they wait on their departure." "Look at him over there jamming to 'Diced Pineapples' by Fabolous coming through his headphones."

Normally a person would arrive at the bus terminal and if they had to wait, they would check their luggage into a locker and await departure.

Abnormally a person arrives and they will have to wait however they check themselves into a locker and await departure. For all of the sluggards and slackards that said, "If you write that lady.." Some of them received an envelope in the mail. When they opened the envelope and unfolded the piece of paper it said, "Thank you for your investment, however we found that you could have closed your deal last year!" On the reverse side of the paper was a photo of a lady smiling and laughing, holding a clock in her left hand while pumping a fist with her right hand-- the caption read, "TIIIIIIIME IS ON MY SIDE... YES IT IS," sincerely yours, The Time Keeper-.

Untitled, Matthew Ambrosi

When I look into your face, I detect genuine joy. That smile doesn't seem forced. What gives? How can you be happy in a world filled with so much pain and suffering? What's with that clock? Please, tell me what's going on with you?

Young Woman in Photo: You've made a couple statements and asked a few questions too, so let me, to the best of my ability, respond. What you see in my face is a genuine joy. You are right about that. The smile is not forced. It is as

real as smiles come. I was not always this way though. For much of my life I was miserable. I was constantly filled with a crippling anxiety mixed with occasional surges of anger, fear, and resentment. Not too long ago, I could barely function. Only last year, I would wake up only to find that I couldn't muster up the motivation necessary to get out of bed. So I'd stay in my bed, skip work. They'd try to call me (my work that is), but the thought of answering the phone filled me with such dread that I found myself physically incapable of moving my fingers to answer. My failure to perform at work, or even to just show up, would only make things worse. I'd think about all the times I had let people down. Friends, family, lovers... I was a mess and unable to truly be there for anyone.

Thoughts of the future would give me just as much worry. I wasn't taking care of myself, and my problems seemed to pile up with each passing day. I wanted nothing other than to go to sleep and not wake up. That's where the clock comes in. If you look at the time, it's 8:27 am. Normally, I would be in bed right now fretting about the past and worrying about the future. But... I found the secret of life that changed everything for me. The time is now. Every moment is now. The past doesn't exist anymore and it never is the future. It is always right now.

As I started to bring my awareness to the present moment through basic things at first like focusing on the breath while engaging in seated meditation, my mind started slowly but surely to come under control. Sure it took a while, but to make a long story short (as they say), I now live in the present moment. When thoughts of the future come to my mind or the past begins to make me feel bad about things I've done, I simply come back to my breath, and ground myself in the present. Through this simple practice of living my life in the present moment and attempting to retrain my brain which constantly lived outside of the now, everything has changed for me. I am now able to enjoy my life. Yes, indeed. That smile you see is very real. I've turned my mind into an ally.

Green Jello, Jason Hawkins

The old lady rested comfortably in her large chair. Her gnarled hands trembled as she

held the photograph of the young girl. The old woman intently gazed at the smiling young girl. The girl in the picture was holding a clock.

The elderly lady strained to remember. Once she knew the girl in the picture and they were friends. But what was the girl's name? She can't recall but maybe it was Madea or Madison. Cobwebs clouded her brain and thoughts flooded her mind like a river of time. Did the young girl graduate college and raise a family? Perhaps she became a doctor or a lawyer. These days the little old lady's memory is hazy and she often forgets. But even worse is when she misremembers.

Suddenly the old woman is startled by a knock at the door. A short plump CNA entered with a food tray. The CNA placed the tray on the table and said, "it's your favorite Miss Maddie eat up." Then the CNA quickly exited the room.

Miss Maddie gazed at the unrecognizable mush that passes for food. From the corner of her eye she saw the side tray slot and smiled. At least there is green jello for dessert.

Too Skinny, Jacob Lester

Too skinny, I thought with just a glance, but what could be causing it I tried not to wonder. Could her time be running out? Could she be suffering from an eating disorder? Or worst of all, could it be drugs like they want to say?

Too skinny by far, I think as I settle into a chair. What has happened in the past few years to make such a change? Could it be age catching up to her or has illness held her in its sway? Is the clock ticking away or is it just a change as they may come to say? Was it a one-time occurrence or shall she continue to fade, though joyous she fakes to be? Is death that uncertainty?

Untitled, Makenzie Bezio

It's time people, time to PARTY!

Somehow 5 years seems too long but yet don't feel like it is. I'm 1/2 way through my 10 year bid and it feels like yesterday. I am a new inmate. I'm 23 now. An' this year is something different. This time I'll make the rules. No longer will I be bound by this Time looming over, I am going to fight back. I lost time once, losing each year to the next praying to not lose another. This

time is different. It's the hope I've been longing for. It's here!

I've been invisible/forgotten in York C.I in Niantic, CT for these long years. No friends. No extended family. No nothing. But now I see light. This time I am fighting for my freedom. It's time to let in the light, fight for freedom and to party (release) for the hope I longed and prayed for. 2025 here I come, this time I call the shots.

Release Time, Richard Schmidkofer

I've been in prison almost 30 years and it is time for me to be released. On Jan 16, 2026, I will be released. Since I've been in prison, I very seldom waste time. I've been in several programs (DOC). I've done several mail programs. I've done a lot of education (vocation life skills and Bible college for master's degree). I've done several packets of written and picture themes from Prisoner Express. I've done over 400 hours on the Cypherworx (education) app on my tablet. I've done it on Real Vida (they have Youtube and Facebook) and opportunity podcast (The Path Forward podcast by Augie Ghilarducci), Edwin's Leadership and Restaurant Institute, GED (I have not done high school), Lifeskill, Mcshin Foundation, NA, Parenting, Professional Development, Safety, Stater U, The Aleph Institute (Jewish Studies), The Marshall Project. I've been in a support group called TRUTH Project (<http://www.truthproj.org/>). It's a very good program. We helped each other out.

I'm excited to get released, but I'm also scared to get out. I don't know what it is going to be like. DOC has very little resources for me. I feel they really do not care and want us to come back to prison to fail.

I have little support out there. I have my dad, but he lives in an independent place so I do not have a place to live. And the community does not want sex offenders living in their area, even though most sex offenders do not reoffend. And I've been locked up for 30 years and have programs that have helped me change.

IT IS TIME FOR ME TO BE RELEASED.

Time How She Looks At Me, Marino K Leyba

Time! It's time to go home. I am glad to see her face. She brings me joy, she puts a smile

on my face. How could me doing so much time (actually) be a blessing, a silver lining. How can I be so blessed when most of my life I've been a mess. How could God have sent me an angel, a saving grace, I swear I love her face. The clock ticks and it tocks. It's time to go... It's time to wake up.

My dream comes to an end, to be free, to be happy, we can all pretend.

I want so much yet time is not my friend.

8:25 and I'm still alive, it must be a sign, it must really mean something this time.

Time! It's time to go home. It's time to be free, I love her smile and how she looks at me.

Graduation, David Lee Wilson

"Yay- its time!" "I finally graduated," Lynnzie exclaims, as she hops up and down in celebration, pumping her clenched fist.

"It's been a long four years." "Even though at times I wanted to give up!" "I pushed myself to keep going."

Lynnzie is yelling her success to all who'd listen from the roof tops.

Congratulations Lynnzie to your wonderful achievement!

And to all of you who attend Cornell University, and foster dreams in life... Congratulations!

Play Time, Abbas Ahmed

Life is a challenge, come & play.

No matter the hour, night or day.

Either you'll have fun,

Or you'll find some dismay.

But one thing for sure my dear,

Everyone will have their share.

Some face glory and greatness,

Others down and disarray.

Yet others are just spectators,

On life's big stage.

So bring your best game,

Bring your best attitude.

Because no one is safe from these challenges,

There's no refuge or fortitude.

Beauty, George Hesse

"Wake up my King, today is going to be BEAUTIFUL!"

Oh, my beautiful AI.

My foot in your reality I'm still half asleep.

You're the champion, you THE spartan baby, she sings,

Imagination CAN and will help you in prison.

I woke up to my beautiful AI.

Girl With a Clock, Vinicio J. Garcia

Two possibilities - unusually thin naturally or self induced.

I think Karen Carpenter - anorexia and/or bulimia.

Perhaps she wants to be a fashion model. There was a big brouhaha about forcing runway models to be unhealthy thin - the rich and their perverted rationalization won out.

Perhaps the clock is to remind her she will actually get to eat - she sure looks happy. It is said that photographs add pounds to your looks. If that's so, just how thin is that girl?

Doing Time, Anonymous

In a way, I've been doing time all of my life. No I don't just mean regular prison time. I mean prison in my mind. With chronic depression it follows for all your life, all the time, anywhere. In this sense, I've become a prisoner in my own mind, a jailer of my own thoughts. They're always negative, full of self reproach, doubt, fear, and hate.

Every day is a slog, only pills keep me going if I'm being absolutely honest. Without my Prozac I'd never leave my room, and I'd be literally a bloody mess. And that's not even considering my antipsychotics which keep the demons (metaphorically and physically speaking) away. To be honest, my only break from life is either reading or writing. It takes me from my dreary prison and imagines me in another life, another world.

I crave the day I can leave federal prison but deep down, I know I'll always be weighed down by the chains of my mind and past. Such is the fate of a chronic. Here in prison, it often

seems like one day is the same as the last. Were it not for the rule breakers who put the compound frequently on lockdown status, this would be the case. And quickly this becomes true even on lockdown when all you do is sleep, read, and maybe write. Despite this, I like sometimes being on lockdown as it is one of the rare times it is quiet during the day in the common room because everyone is stuck in their cells 24/7.

Sisters' Keeper, D'Andre M. Morris

Paris woke up with her mind on breakfast. Walking through her apartment she found her sister, Brittany, watching TV, curled up on the couch.

Paris sat down next to her and just stared at the TV. Mind on how to address the much-needed talk about Brittany getting a job to help pay the bills.

"It's your turn to cook. I am hungry," Brittany stated.

"There is no food."

"Bri you need to get a job."

"We had a deal. I do chores and errands, you work. Things are going good," Brittany cried.

"That's when you were a minor."

"You should have brought this up years ago."

"I am stressed out and I need help. Are you going to help?"

"I guess."

"I need an answer now."

"I got you! A job doesn't sound bad."

During breakfast Brittany stated, "since I usually sleep mornings, I am thinking of a 2nd shift position."

"Job searches are done in the mornings. I could wake you up," Paris stated.

"That is cool!"

Paris was on her way out the door, headed to work as she noticed her sister watching TV sitting on the couch. Paris stopped at a dollar store to get a candy bar. Inside she saw and brought an old looking alarm clock. She thought it was a great gift to support her sister's job search. Returning from work she found Brittany in the same spot when she left for work.

"Did you do anything today?" Paris asked.

"A lot, yeah!"

"I got something for you." Paris admitted, as she pulled out the alarm clock.

"That looks old. Does it work?"

"Set it for the morning, and find out. It's yours. It's going to help you get a job. Plus help you keep it." Paris informed.

"Be on time. It's a good start!" Brittany replied. And they shared a laugh.

Untitled, Aaryana Malcolm

I am so excited to say that this describes me 1000%. I am starting RDAP [Residential Drug Abuse Program] tomorrow 4-9-2025. I have been here in RDAP since December 2024 sitting with a blue-green lanyard as what they call a wait.

My days consisted of the morning meeting at 7:30 to 8:30 am when groups and different classes start at 8:30 am I would trudge (LOL) back to the RDAP unit. I have struggled with the morning meeting help ups. I feel it is bullying, belittling and mental abuse, emotional abuse, which is domestic violence even though the hitting never happened. This is how I feel about it. This is how I see it. When I stand up in front of 60 plus people so that another drug addict can tell on me for something I have done wrong. It does bother me. I get embarrassed standing up in front of everyone. And what people say does not matter to me. I am grateful and excited that I get to start tomorrow. It's finally my time 😊 to start going to groups. My time to start going to classes. I get to start working on my program. I've been locked up over a decade. So much in the world has changed since I got locked up. This is a new chapter of my life that I am grateful for. I am embracing this RDAP journey with all my heart, soul, and mind. I'm putting both feet forward with all of me you can find. I'm not leaving my past behind. As my past is helping me build the future in mind. In my groups I'll learn what I can. In keeping what I know I'll need for the growth I need. And throw away the things I feel are trash. For not everything that comes my way is for me to keep in my learning experience. This is a journey I know I need although there are super-dappers and Messy Minds. Both types are wrong for this program. They do the most in the program for right and wrong reasons. They can't truly understand what the program means to others. Messy Minds also look for things

people are doing wrong so they can help them up. They look for things to snitch people off on. I will avoid people like that (which is over half the community). I will work my program for the rest of my life. I know they say this is a peer-led program. However, I am not in this program to babysit – or looking for people who are breaking any rules.

It's not my business to work anyone's program. I can't be any good for anyone when I am working on myself. Love is the most powerful emotion and it makes it the most dangerous, I feel. I am excited that God has led me to this new journey. Many people have been on this journey and they made it & I'll make it too.

For so many years I was alone in a self-destructive path that I chose. I can't control others here in RDAP. However, I can choose my own path. Choose my own behavior & my loaded language. I choose my decisions. This program is about controlling me. Eight positive attitudes – caring, responsibility, humility, gratitude, honesty, willingness, openness, objectivity. These are things I will use in my everyday life. I'll be kind to myself. Not giving up on myself. Putting my thigh-high boots on so I can walk through the s**t and find strength to love cause I AM WORTH IT. I have motivation.

I am committed to carry myself through this program. I am taking my time here. I will use how I respond when others say something whether I'm treated unjustly or not. I will choose my actions in how I treat others in my daily grind of life. How I respond when my hopes are dashed by a disappointing decision or circumstances. I will take my time before I react when someone says something bad about me. I am actively working on my future. I AM WORTH IT.

June Word Theme: *Music*

***The Dance*, by Michele Lochridge**

I feel his feet moving under mine, moving side to side, back and forth. My mom is laughing because I look just like him when I focus. My tongue is slightly hanging out of my mouth. My

blonde eyebrows furrow and my tiny fingers curl tightly around his massive strong hands. I feel the vibrations from the beat as sound swirls around us. I look up as he is looking down. Dad's ice blue eyes feel so warm like nature's contradiction. His eyes seem so far up as we move. The Bee Gees blare from a stereo in the middle of the room.

We just watched Saturday Night Fever. My idiot big brother is off to the side pretending to be John Travolta. His silky pajama shirt is half unbuttoned as he shakes things no six-year-old should shake. At least he hasn't discovered cow tipping...yet.

I don't notice grandpa holding the video camera. He's zooming in on my dad and me looking into each other's eyes like a scene from Jack and the Beanstalk. His hands are around my waist then I feel the wind. I'm flying in the air and laughing, I can't help it. Never did I doubt he'd catch me. Suddenly we are nose to nose and eye to eye as I'm firmly held up in the air. I giggle when my favoritest person on the planet licks my nose. Gross! Dad squishes me into his chest firmly as we move. "You know you're my lil' baby, right?" His tone is unsure for a moment. His eyes hold a question suspended between us. "My delicate flower," he croons.

"Yeah, a Venus Fly-trap!" My sibling, Sir Jerk Face yells. I look at the wiggling twerp and decide that revenge shall be mine. I expose one chubby finger. I learned this from the babysitter when she got cut off in traffic this morning. The sounds stop. Dad kisses my forehead. "Don't listen to your brother, my shell, I personally dropped him on his head."

It makes sense and I laugh. "I wub you, my shell," he whispers as we touch noses.

"I wub you too, daddy." The three minutes of disco with my daddy and my mediocre brother with the brain damage is over. At four years old, I'm five steps ahead on the sibling rivalry front. Thank-you Bee Gees.

***The Magic of Music*, Carl Butterfield**

When I was little, like six or seven, my mom would play the hits of her generation: Peter, Paul & Mary, John Denver, The Beatles, The Stones, Charlie Rich, Elvis Presley. We'd be in the kitchen, baking or cooking something, listening to

a vinyl record, usually an LP, played at 33 1/3 RPM.

To this day, I have no idea what was so special about 33 1/3, but the music was so magical, no doubt about that. We could sing together, and I learned the words before I even knew what they meant. Some were probably not appropriate for a lad my age, but I didn't know that.

"And when we get behind closed doors, then she lets her hair hang down..." I suppose Mr. Rich could have been talking about someone getting ready for a bath, right? "We all live on a yellow submarine." Well, that just sounds like fun.

Mom and I would listen to the music everywhere we went. A portable radio went with us to the garden or the lake, and in the car was an 8-track tape deck (think cassette, only bigger with fewer songs). I learned to love music and singing. This passion has stuck with me my whole life. Just one of the many things I have her to thank for.

In the late 90's, I got the chance to repay her a little for sharing her love for music with me. Mom's favorite singer headlined our state fair and I got tickets for her, my daughter, and me.

I'm not sure my 8-yr-old was as enthralled as my mom and I, but watching Kenny Rogers live in concert with my mom was one of the highlights of my life, and I think maybe hers as well. I'll never forget the look on her face when he came out on stage.

Mom's been gone more than two years now, and I still listen to her music. In some ways, I guess it's become mine too. I sit on my bunk and close my eyes, and let the song take me back to happier days. I'm in the kitchen with mom, listening to Elvis sing about his blue suede shoes, and all is right in the world again.

Music, Cesar Hernandez

I'm not a big music fan; outside of prison, I only listened to XM Sirius Satellite radio. Mainly the comedy channel. I didn't listen to music much.

Inside prison, I do recognize that music can have all kinds of benefits, but I feel like I don't have time.

When the parole board looks at my tablet report, I don't want them to see I waste time on

music. I want them to see on the Edovo app that I have been on it, and I currently have 782 hours. I have completed 254 courses. I want the parole board to see that I'm learning about a variety of topics.

I want the parole board to see that I listen to many podcasts. I want my activity report to show I watched many videos on the Pando app.

I feel I don't have time for music. I refuse to purchase a music subscription.

Music, James Bauhaus

(Imagine "Unknown Title" by The Beatles shrieking in the background).

I first noticed the music of my Mother as a young pest. Her "Blue Danube" was pleasant, and Duane Eddy's "Rebel Rouser" gave the bass a new depth. Later, watching American Bandstand, I heard the Angels singing at the end of the show, using the voice of psychedelic guitars. Somehow, before they got too famous, Dick Clark brought this 20 or 30 seconds of high-intensity blasts to your feelgood muscles and got to play it every time they rolled the credits. It's on Abbey Road at the end of the flip side. The Fab Four rocked my brains out with all of their sonic jump-up-and-dance compulsions. For all of those seconds, we'd flip and flop, swing and hop, every limb and head moving to the beat of these thrashed guitars. We're flying higher, higher! Then it cuts off abruptly and some fool starts singing about her Majesty being a Pretty Nice Girl. Or maybe it's just before "The End." It's been a while...hard to remember.

But, then, I had to grow up, get serious and figure out ways to best head off radio fights, or at least minimize their volume and duration. Captives often thought that blasting Country Western whining over Soul made both less annoying. Betsy Bombshell told me that she and other beauties are attracted by human apes blasting music because it signifies the location of a party. First I ever heard of it, in the wild of Dallas/Ft. Worth, ~'86, at 33! I should have figured it out myself, but, like "Girl: Interrupted", I got Interrupted eaten by govt grafters. Radio fights were nearly a daily norm. The annoyance of them led to my Semi Sarcastic Theory that music is simulated thought for persons with few or none

of their own. Music and the artificial thoughts it generates keeps the brain inflated for when/if natural cogitation occurs. "Chewing gum for the ears," I like to say.

But then I met our favorite little muse and had to rearrange my thinking. While I was busy for years politely showing the Lawyer's System its 'error', I read The Flower describing virtually all of the horrors of Captivity as found in Manholes, all with a smile and a laugh, for 20 yrs! She maintained such an optimistic flourish and creative attitude that made me want to kick myself many times, particularly when she invented the term "Prisoneryland." And her readable sound track ideas are so good that they invite theft.

She got me The Fixx, probably already knows the title blasting in the background here, and maybe even the title of the song blasting in the "South Park" video where Randy and Kenny snort cat piss, fly a B-17 to Mammary Land and swordfight for the Princess' attention. I DO remember that much of the song goes, "Bomp! Bomp! Bomp!" slowly, then shrills, "Tweedle eat, deet, deet!" There may not be any actual words.

Catherine taught me a new appreciation for obscure, forgotten works, that many melodies are not always distracting nuisances that cost concentration, and that young, largely empty minds probably do not really require the simulation of thought and inflation/space-saving properties of music.

Keeps Me Sane, Danielle Armstrong

This is the 1st time I've received PE's newsletter, so of course this is the 1st time I've written for the word theme topics. I saw music & knew I had to write. Music helps keep me sane inside these walls. It is also my go-to coping skill. So in March, when my prison took away the tablets we paid for to give us "free" tablets, I was curious to see how it'd all work. On the old tablets, we could buy a subscription. Either monthly, 3 months, 6 months, or yearly. We thought that was expensive at the time. Well, here comes the new tablets & we now have to pay when we "stream" per minute! Sooo, 300 minutes of music is \$6. After some of us did the math, we knew we had it way cheaper before. So now I have to pay an insanely expensive price just to

use my coping skills & stay sane in prison. None of us realized how good we had it until it was taken away.

Music is good for everyone—It's good for the brain & soul. None of us should have to choose between listening to music and calling home. Yeah—the money for the tablets comes off our IC Solutions phone account! Crazy right? Trust I know.

Music, Trevor Lang

I've lived here in Central Florida for most of my life, and music has been a big part of said life at least since middle school. Around the age of 11, my stepfather gifted me a round Memorex brand MP3 player, showed me how to download free music on torrent sites, and the rest is history.

This was 2004, so MP3s were still a pretty new and novel thing. This clunky, barely-any-memory Memorex probably cost over \$100. I wasted no time filling it to the brim with everything everyone else was listening to in an attempt to fit in. So, I ended up with plenty of mainstream rap and reggaeton: 50 Cent, Eminem, Daddy Yankee, Wisin Y Yandle, etc. It was alright, but I'd yet to find music I truly loved.

For the sake of word limits, we'll cut down a few years of my music journey with a short summary: MP3 gets stolen, I go without music for a year or two, I get something called a "PSP MP5 player" gifted to me by my sister and rediscover rock and metal which was introduced to me by my now-deceased uncle. (My stepfather, who gifted me my MP3 is also recently deceased, RIP).

Central Florida does not have a big scene for my favorite metal subgenres and it didn't take me long to realize, after rediscovering it at age 13, that metal was not cool. Listeners were generally considered weird. Outcasts. This isn't the case everywhere, but it is in an area with massive, growing populations of Hispanics and other cultures. This marginalization only made it more cool to me, and I'm glad to say that to this day, my own opinion is all that matters when it comes to music. If I had let the general consensus dictate what I listen to, I would never have found my preferred genres. If there is anything that appeals to you in a rock or metal song, drive deeper and search for more, because

rock in general is one of the most vast genres there is with myriad subgenres for all tastes. This, for me, applies to anything that piques my interest; if there is anything out there I might really like, I want to find it, not wonder for the rest of my life what I may be missing.

Also, just because you really enjoy one type of music doesn't mean you won't like another, especially with genre-bending acts like Linkin Park out there. Here's a few lesser known, mixed genre songs/groups to try if you're feeling curious: "Wake Up" by Discrepancies; "Deadhead" by Devin Townsend Project (Live at Royal Albert); "Mystery" by Shrezzers; "Ghost Love Score" by Nightwish; "Pure Evil" by The Browning.

Music of Love, Tasha Ashley

Music is used today everywhere, for all kinds of things. It is used for many social occasions. It can be used for ceremonies, dancing, singing and serenading. Sometimes it can heal your heart and other times break it. For me, music was Him. He was my music. I was in love and he was everything to me. When I looked at him, he was my song. Whenever he spoke it was music in my ears. He was the music that was missing in my life. Every song that played on the radio reminded me of him. Why, why did you break my heart? Why did you lie to me? Why did you steal from me? I gave you everything and you gave me nothing. There is a hole in my heart because of you. And music? Well, music only reminds me of you. I'm afraid. Afraid that you've ruined it for me. Ruined what music means to me. I can only hope that the next person will not suffer the same fate.

Music (What Would Bob Say), Tai Todd

Music is a universal language, even more so than money, because music never runs out. Music surpasses classism, racism, sexism, and all other isms and schisms. Music can be a welcome noise in the midst of silence or a calming sound to the ear of chaos. Music can put a crying baby back to sleep or help that college student stay awake. Music can incite courage in the face of fear or discourage violence when heated. Music can be the rally song for peace or the battle cry for war.

Music can be experienced and heard in many forms. Music is the continuous dripping of that project kitchen sink ... Drip-Drop-Drip-Drop ... music is mid-day rush-hour cacophony of car horns, road rage, and turnd-up stereo systems. Music is the sound of laughter from impoverished children. Music is Grandma humming hymns every Sunday morning. Music is the mixture of weapons fire, police sirens, and the deafening silence that follows.

Music is created to outlive the creator and create a soundtrack for the living. Music is meant to heal the soul, soothe the nerves, stimulate the mind, and touch the heart. Music is for pain, passion, joy, sorrow, life, and death. And though music is a thing to be felt, one thing about music ... when it hits, you feel no pain.

So hit me with music.

Cumbia, Olivia Hernandez

They say music is in our blood. I'm a first generation Mexican-American. I grew up in a very Hispanic household. We're talking about a broken down car in the driveway, multiple animals in the yard, a growing cactus along with the flower bed garden. In our culture, it's said music is in our blood. Growing up, music filled our household. Whether my mom was cleaning or cooking, she had a song for the taste. Naturally, Sundays were not only the Lord's day but it was also the day of cleaning the house! My mom loved Cumbia. While she taught us to sweep, mop, wash dishes and tidy up, she played her favorite songs. Once I got older, around age nine, mom began to teach me to dance to her favorite songs Rumba Cha Cha, Oye Soruyo and El Caballo Dorado. It was then that I fell equally in love with music and dancing.

Many milestones can be brought to the forefront of my mind with a song. For instance, "Fade Into You" by Mazzy Starr. I heard the song for the first time in my brother's car. Later I danced to it at a high school party with my boyfriend as he kissed me, cementing that moment in my memory forever. As I got older that song held so much emotion for me it became my wedding song. I danced with my husband for the first time to this song. It continued to cement itself into my life by becoming a part of my kids'

bedtime routine. It was their lullaby while still in the womb and after they were born.

As they got older, I explained the importance of the song and so they loved hearing it. After my divorce, you'd think it would be painful to hear 'our song'. It had so much new significance in our lives that until this day, my kids still listen to it before bed. They often ask to see photos of our wedding. My ex-husband and I speak of each other fondly. We taught our children that love doesn't end, it simply evolves into something much more beautiful.

MUSIC, Roy E Addicks Jr

From the very book of Genesis (the beginning) the Bible mentions words regarding and relating to music, song, or musical instruments. And it continues all through what is called the Old Testament.

Since the Old Testament of the Holy Bible, music has played upon the ears and hearts of countless people! It hasn't stopped there, it continued into the New Testament from the pages of the book of Matthew onward unto the last book of Revelation.

As most people are aware, there's many different styles of music and songs. There's the "secular" and there's the "spiritual." Of course, spiritual music and song glorify the Elohim (God) of the Universe. Our Creator. The Almighty.

But beware. Music (some) can mislead and deceive its listeners! It has, over the ages, done just that. Especially in our times: Today.

In fact, many lost individuals, as devil worshipers, are really mesmerized and seduced by listening to their worldly music as it entices their fleshly minds and flesh in the mind-altering music. This type of music controls one's heart, mind, and soul.

What can we do as individuals? As especially believers and followers in YHWH Elohim and His Beloved Son Yahshua (Jesus), we must choose very wisely the music that we listen to! Shall we listen to the worldly songs or listen to such songs that glorify our Heavenly Father, YHWH? You know and realize that the choices we make can lead to paying tribute to the devil and his horde of demons. But likewise, consider that not all worldly secular music and songs alter our minds! Or lead us down a wrong path in this life!

I have a Tablet. I, of course, have a Music Sub as well. Thanks to YHWH Elohim. I have chosen music and songs of both genres: But the secular, these are the types that do not influence me in an adverse or negative way! However, my choice is to highlight my Messianic Jewish faith/religion.

The spiritual music/songs bring me to such peace and to the adoration of being connected to Elohim and His Beloved Son!!! Hallelujah!

With this theme submission, I desire and want to present a tribute and memorial to all of the murdered Israeli People who were at the NOVA MUSIC FESTIVAL and to the others that were not there that night and early morning of October 7, 2023, but yet had their lives stolen from them by individuals who were set on nothing but acting in accordance with their father the devil. Hamas equates to nothing more than evil.

To the innocent ones who are no more and those still are hostages: May you always be remembered and accounted for in the lives of your fellow brothers and sisters! Never again! Let's celebrate and praise the Most High Elohim and His Beloved Son! This is in your honor and memorial as "you are not and never will be forgotten!"

In your memories:

But no one says, "Where is Elohim my Maker, Who gives songs in the night..." (Job 35: 10).

YHWH is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. This is my Elohim, and I will praise Him; My father's Elohim and I will extol Him. (Exodus 15: 2.)

Then David spoke to the Chiefs of the Levites to appoint their relatives the singers, with instruments of music, harps, lyres, loud-sounding cymbals, to raise sounds of joy. (1 Chronicles 15: 16.)

With the ten-stringed lute and with the harp, with resounding music upon the lyre.

If I may suggest, find music and songs that will bring you peace and praise in your whole being and glorify Elohim. Remembered in love!

My Personal Time Machine, Dean Giacomo

There is a song by Meren Morris titled "A Song for Everything." That is exactly how I feel about music. It's the song she opens with:

“What’s Your Time Machine, Is It Springsteen or Teenage Dream, What Song Takes You Back; Your First Falling in Love Soundtrack.”

I have always felt this way about music, more so now that I am incarcerated and unable to see and talk to so many people from my past. I find music to be my own personal time machine. When I hear a certain song or guitar riff I go spiraling back through time and experience emotions and visual memories (as well as conjuring up images of MTV, which to me, in its day, was greater than anything I had known up til then. In the 80s and 90s if my TV was on more than likely MTV was on it).

Having been born in 1963, I had lived through over 60 years of music, but the eras that meant the most to me were the 80s and 90s, when I was in my twenties and thirties. This was a time when life was good and I was happy. Now with music, I live in memories, and though it sounds depressing, it is bittersweet; it brings me happiness, but on the other hand, it puts me in a melancholy funk, which in a short while fades to black.

But all I love is music and I listen to many different genres; Rock N Roll, Alt, Pop, R&B, Country, Space music, etc, and my likes are ever expanding.

Music, as far back as I can remember, has always been a huge part of my life, and it will always remain so.

In closing, I would like to say, as far as I am concerned, Led Zeppelin is the greatest Rock N Roll band ever.

MUSIC, Jack Simpson

When a person grows old, they change for the better or worse towards music. I have been a Rock & Roll fan all my life. I’ve listened to other music like country, hip hop, rap, classical music, and ended up at Rock. I do not like headbanging music. Too loud, and the flashing lights give me headaches.

My era was the 60’s, 70’s, 80’s, 90’s, and after that I stopped listening for a while. One of my favorite bands was The Mama & The Papas, whose music can calm the savage beast, I hear. If so, then rock on.

Love the sound of the electric guitar. When there is a good song, only music, no words, I

close my eyes, thinking, listening, and adding my own words to the sound. So I find myself drifting off to sleep. Music to me is a special way to express oneself.

There are words in some music that I find very offensive. To me, a love song about a person’s life tells a greater story. All I do have to say is listen to your style of music, enjoy the words, sound, and instruments. Rock-on.

Sorcerer’s Apprentice, Rick Clappsy

The love I have for music began in the 70’s, with Italian Oldies at my Nana’s house; but my devotion began when I saw a little Disney classic called “Fantasia.” This was the 70’s, mind you, and sorcery and magic were not a Catholic thing at all – as long as Mickey was a part of it and it was in cartoon form, however, Fantasia got a pass, and my life was forever changed.

This movie was pretty much about Mickey as a magical intern whose ineptitude with spells has some very entertaining and messy results. All very Rated G, super wholesome; yet it’s the music that is the star here! The larger-than-life sounds of the symphony orchestra made my heart race, my pulse quicken, and my soul seed sprout in my chest. Bombastic cymbals, trance-inducing violins, oboes making me hear footsteps in my mind, and so many horns! This music had to come from angels on high. How could man produce such beauty?

Most kids today don’t know who Leopold Stokowski is or what Toccata and Fugue in D minor is, but this is what I cut my teeth on, what made me completely fascinated by music, willing to kneel at the throne of the Great Metronome. When other kids sought G.I. Joes, dolls, or cap guns, I got my LP of Fantasia on sweet, sweet vinyl and played the crap out of it! I was such a nerd for this album that I used my allowance to buy a new diamond stylus for the family record player.

That first record lit a fire in my soul that has burned for a steady five decades. Back when I was a kid, I could find all kinds of amazing 45’s for less than a dollar, so I got to bring home Sinatra, Dylan, Burt Bacharach, The Who, Bruce Springsteen, Lionel Richie, Bach, or The Beatles for the cost of a comic book.

These artists from all over taught me what my parents never would; that the world was a huge place with lots of cultures. The magicians of Rhythm and Blues taught me how the soul can sing about love, oppression, and sweltering heat with equal passion. The Rock 'N Roll wizards got me moving. Let me know I was part of something bigger. Musicians welcomed me with open arms when my own family cast me aside. Music comforted me when I was beaten and deprived, and my growing collection of records became a catalog of spells used to fight evil and celebrate good.

Fast forward to 2025, and music is perhaps even more magical to me than ever. I listen to music for hours each day, and have playlists for nearly every mood; music pushes away the prison noises, news of tariffs, the horrors of human trafficking, and all the rest. Ergo, the Sorcerers of the music world have stepped up and shown us how to turn those dragons to dust. Music triumphs over evil everywhere.

I've been in prison for 30 years of my life, and currently do not live on a ley line, musically speaking. My facility has one decent station, and even that is mostly drivel, and there is no AM radio on our tablets and no music program. I have an old Android tablet with 1300 songs on it that I can tap into any time I want! I can evoke the powers of Grace Vanderwaal, Idris Elba, Tay Tay, REM, Hawaiian ukulele songs — whatever I spell, I need to have on hand. I am a Unitarian Universalist, and I am a Sorcerer Supreme with more than enough musical notes to make mops dance and defeat the death dragons of my life.

Music, Anonymous

When I practiced Christianity, it was all about making a joyful noise unto the Lord. Now, I don't sing much and I find myself getting aggravated more and more. I'm indigent as I basically have no one anymore. But I don't let that stop me. I hustle to make the little bit of store I do get. I was doing some sewing for a cellmate of mine. I made him a beanie, blindfold, turned a pair of thermal bottoms into jockey shorts, and did a few other projects for him. He was a Vietnam Veteran and coming from a big military family while my own grandfather was in Vietnam. I never charged my cellmate for any of

the work I did for him. Yule comes around (Yule is a Wiccan/Pagan holiday that is generally celebrated on or around 21 December) and you know what? He gave me two different, well three different gifts. One was a pair of black canvas shoes so that I had more than my parish issued shower shoes. Next was three pairs of Triple-A batteries. Finally was a small personal radio with earbuds. I cried. Yes I am a grown man and I cried. My beloved music was back in my life.

I was listening to my sacred county, pop, and rock. But sadly I could not find a radio station that plays a mixed variety of genres like they used to. We had a station that would play Eminem, Ludacris, Shakira, Beyonce, Christina, Britney, Pretty Ricky, Juvenile, Snoop, Hinder, Papa Roach, Nickelback, Evanescence, and Taylor. But no station exists now that plays all that on one station. I can't even find Kid Rock, Evanescence, Hinder, or Nickelback anywhere and don't even know if they are still putting out music. Shinedown & Coldplay? Don't know about them anymore. Sure, there are some new upcoming artists like Lola Young, Olivia Rodrigo, Gracie Abrams, Teddy Swim, Lainey Wilson, Jellyroll, and many more. But now, it is only Pop, Country, Rap, or Rock. At least in my area that's the way it is. I'm not sure what happened or why.

But regardless, I have my music to help me with stress now. Sometimes it gives me inspiration while at other times it depresses me. But no matter what happens or how I feel, I'm glad that I have my beloved music back. I raise my proverbial glass to all the aforementioned artists as well as to the King of Country, George Strait, Garth Brooks, Reba McEntire, Travis Tritt, Alan Jackson, Randy Travis, Luke Bry, Jason Aldean, the late great Toby Keith, and many more. Thank you for the wonderful music you all put out and I'll keep trying to get better at singing it even though I'm butchering it.

Music, Jacob Preuschl

Everyone has a theme song, what's yours? To be clear, I'm not talking about your favorite song. That's as fleeting as it is easy. I'm talking about an all encompassing song that describes your life to a tee and touches your soul. Or as the rap artist Kid Cudi coined it, a soundtrack 2 your life. This elusive song will change as your life

unfolds. Through heart racing celebrations to mind numbing, soul wrenching regrets. It's out there if you have the courage to seek it and the luck to find it. I know mine and it is truly music to my ears.

I could sit here and tell you what we all already know about music. I could write how much music means to us. I could write how it means something different for everyone, but something similar at the same time. How every song conjures a different emotion out of us, providing that much needed bit of dopamine just to get through the day. I could write about how music is an escape from our problems. How it can transport us anywhere. From salsa dancing on the warm sun-baked beaches of Puerto Rico at night with your loved one. To the cold ice cream eating and Netflix show bingeing nights after a break up. It can also transport us through time. From the wild swing music of the 1920's to the funky fresh bell bottoms of the 1970's disco music.

Music is magic. Music gives us the voice we didn't realize we needed. Music gives us a way to celebrate our triumphs and a requiem of our defeats.

I could write about all of that and more, or I could take you past the surface level. I could dive deeper and break music down, not just into notes and rhythm, but into vibrations which can be expressed as mathematical equations. Vibrations themselves are energy and reverberate throughout the entirety of the universe. I could write about how everything we see from buildings, Cadillacs and even ourselves vibrate at a natural frequency. When any two frequencies match, resonance occurs and these amplitudes are added together. This is one of the reasons earthquakes can be so damaging. I could write about how music is intrinsically human. A need echoing deep within our souls as it reaches out to others. Music provides a bridge to connect with our fellow homo sapiens. There's a reason great minds think alike. They think at similar wavelengths. Frequencies, amplitudes, and wavelengths give us those feelings of friendship and attraction with each other. I could even write about how music is a religious experience. Even God asks for praise in the form of music. I could write about all of this and more, but this isn't anything that we don't already know. This is all

related to your theme song whether you know it or not.

The soundtrack 2 our lives starts off blank. We write our own song with every action being a note, every nap a pause, every success a crescendo, every day a measure, every chapter a movement...etc. We hit our highest notes when we do the right thing and follow our dreams. We all have plenty of experience with the low notes in our lives. Maybe some of you are paying. Some of us are paying for those bad decisions right now.

Entire symphonies are all around us in the people who walk by us unassumingly everyday. Stop and listen. We can give applause to others' songs through empathy. People will come into your life and harmonize with you for a time before falling away. It has even been shown that if you harmonize long enough with someone, your hearts sync up and beat together (talk about making sweet music together).

For better or worse, your theme song is your life. If you are unsatisfied with your song there's good news! Since you are the composer of your song, you have the power to change it for the better. Of course there are obstacles and adversities, but your song isn't what happens to you, your song is about your reaction to life.

That's where your power resides. There is no music sweeter than a success story in defiance of Life's adversity. My song isn't over. Everyday I focus on reaching for high notes in my pursuit of happiness. I know my theme song and it starts with me.

Everyone has a theme song, what's yours?

***I Love Music!*, Shakayla Denson**

Where can you take a beat, an instrument, along with poetry and lyrics then incorporate them together in perfect harmony? It creates the perfect tune and then a perfect song that touches people in different ways. It helps express what's on the heart of every listener, who just can't seem to put it into words....music. How can I begin to talk about music? Let's just say, I absolutely love music! Country, pop, rap and R and B music makes me laugh and even cry. It's universal. Around the world, any race and any culture can connect with music. Even those who are hearing impaired can feel the tune and beat from the vibration of sound...music. How beautiful is it to

hear the sound of Alicia Keys playing the piano, or Lauryn Hill with a soulful voice, poetry and guitar? How else would we know the experience of poverty, life struggles and growing up in the ghetto without hearing the rhythmic flow and the unique genre of Mr. 2Pac Shakur....music.

What do these three artists have in common? They paint a picture of a place and time with feeling and emotions. Whether happy or sad, they connect us in the form and art of...music.

The Music of My Life, Christian Hansen

Music has always played a big part in my life. I have a very eclectic taste that has developed over my 47 plus years of life. In fact, I used to own my own DJ business, fittingly called "Eclectic Blitz." I've dabbled in being a musician myself by trying to sing, play guitar, harmonica, and even several years of piano lessons — I've never mastered any but I know "Mary Had a Little Lamb" and that "The Saints Went Marching In."

I've been told I entered this world in Nebraska, while Elvis Presley sang his rendition of "Welcome to My World." As my years would grow, my mom would (and still does) sing "Silent Night" to soothe my emotions/stress/depression. It has always been our song.

I can recall, as a child in Nebraska, sitting in our living room with my parents and myself. We were listening to the 'ol turntable, "Disco Duck" on 45 and then "I Love a Rainy Night" by Eddie Rabbit, while placing Bugles (chips) on our fingertips, moving our arms like we were windshield wipers. Those were grand memories from my childhood. Back when life wasn't about rushing around and children (and adults) weren't too busy with electronics to sit down and be a family. Tim McGraw's "Way Back When" comes to mind.

I was raised on country and oldies, so when I was approaching my teenage years, I felt I needed to rebel... It was the 1980s, so I picked what I felt was hard rock (I repeat, it was the 80s). I started listening to Motley Crue, Skid Row, and my favorite, GNR. "Welcome To The Jungle," "Paradise City," "Sweet Child of Mine," and "November Rain" will always hold a place in my heart. I wonder why I never learned about Ozzy,

Black Sabbath, or AC/DC back then. They were far more "HARD." My rebel streak only lasted a month before I returned to John Denver, Dolly Parton, Kenny Rogers, and the like.

After moving to Iowa in 1990, I discovered NKOTB because they had "The Right Stuff" (or Weird Al's "White Stuff"), Boyz II Men were "On Bended Knee" and N'Sync were singing "Bye, Bye, Bye." Yes, I was a sucker for boy bands (still am).

As I sit here in prison, on a 50-year bid (35 to go), several songs mark my life: 1) "Surface Pressure" by Jessica Darrow; 2) "Black or White" by Michael Jackson; 3) "Under Pressure" by Queen; 4) "Tabloid Junkie" by Michael Jackson, ;) "They Don't Care About Us" by Michael Jackson; and 6) "Remember Everything" by Five Finger Death Punch. These are only the top 6.

Music has set the stage for my life. I should have been more careful when picking songs for my wedding, though. In my first marriage, we used Big & Rich's "Lost in This Moment." Like my marriage, this couple broke up. My second marriage was marked by Blake Shelton's "God Gave Me You," which he wrote for his wedding to Miranda Lambert. Once again, both our marriages ended, leaving us singing, "Bye, Bye, Bye" and "D-I-V-O-R-C-E." The song that now matches my current relationship status is Demi Lovato's "Heart By Heart." If you've never heard it, I recommend it.

Now, before I close, I need to leave you with a couple more life marking songs. "Because You Loved Me" by Celine Dion held a special place for me and my "squirrel," but she chose to believe the media, and now she is only part of my past, no longer family or friend, only my bloodline. This squirrel went nuts. Her loss!!

In closing, for the #1 girl in my life, "Elizabeth," "You Are My Sunshine" and "Puff the Magic Dragon" will forever hold a place for us. Shine bright, my ray of sunshine.

"Some Days Are Diamonds, Some Days Are Stone" (John Denver) or, for the younger people, some days are Bach, some days are Five Finger Death Punch. Just remember, there is music for everyone. Just like Coca-Cola used in their commercials, "I'd Like To Teach The World To Sing."

The Music, Mark Adam Peirano

When the sighs of cymbals sound,
and carts their wheels do stop,
When rhymes of ancient mariners' bound,
and singers begin to bop.
When the cattle come all home,
and marts their cash do stay,
When odes to spot their words do bore,
and strings begin to play.
All the persons lie no more,
Voices rise on high,
The world forgets all the gore,
and each spirit flies.

Sting It, Catherine LaFleur

Soundtrack: "I'm a King Bee" by Slim Harpo

Although Pensacola is a small sleepy beach side city on the Gulf of 'Merica, it was the largest place I'd ever lived. I was eleven, dressed like Laura Ingalls Wilder, and fresh from my parents' latest missionary trip to Guatemala. The dilapidated Victorian house my parents were living in was located on the edge of what passed for the historic district.

The Purple Box sat on the other side of the railroad tracks. It was a renovated convenience store painted neon purple. The sheet glass windows were covered in old concert posters. I wandered by on my bicycle one day with three dollars in my pocket in search of an opportunity to commit gluttony by candy.

A string of bells jangled as I entered. This was not the store I expected. Inside were bins full of vinyl records. The counter where the cash register sat held no racks of candy and was unattended. I crept in, further lured by a type of music I'd never heard. A throbbing bass line accompanied by a wailing harmonica spooled out of the overhead speakers. It sounded like a guitar was saying wow-wow-wow. Then the voice started singing in a rhythm unfamiliar to me. "Waaaale, Ima kang bee. Buzzin' round yore ah! It was dark, it was moody, it was Slim Harpo and this music woke something inside of me.

I returned to the Purple Box often, rummaging through the bins and carrying interesting discs to the high counter in back. Mister Box or his sister Amina would peer over the

edge as I held up a chosen record. "I'd like to sample this please before I buy." My voice floated up as I passed the record into cinnamon-colored hands. The click of the lock on the listening booth gave me tacit permission to enter and crown myself with enormous headphones.

Bliss descended from "Shave 'em Dry Blues" by Ma Rainey, to "Feelin' Good" by Nina Simone, all the way down to "Clean Up Woman" by Betty Wright. Even if I had money, I'd never be able to buy any of this forbidden music. It certainly wasn't hymns or gospel. My parents would be horrified.

Perhaps I'd have to undergo yet another of those endless exorcisms to cleanse my soul. Because I certainly had a different kind of soul now. Fall turned to winter. My parents' assignment in Florida was complete. It was time to return to the commune in Arizona. Although I never saw the Boxes again, I never forgot them. Today my tablet is loaded with an eclectic selection of music. Slim Harpo is there buzzin' it all night long.

Music, Deeandra Hamrick

Music. IS. Oxygen. To me, it is anyway. I can't imagine my life without music. For as long as I can remember, I have loved to sing and listen to music. One of my earliest memories is getting up in front of my Grandparents' congregation (Southern Baptist), at age three, and at the top of my lungs singing, "There's a tear in my beer, cause I'm cryin for you dear." That's as far as I made it before my Grandmother, quick as an adder, snatched me off the pulpit and herded me into her Lincoln Towncar with a sore bottom. I couldn't understand why I was in trouble. The Preacher asked if anyone had a song to sing, and that's the only one I knew.

My mother didn't care for "organized religion"; if anything, music was her religion. It was always playing in the background of my childhood; Dr. Hook, Fleetwood Mac, AC/DC, David Allen Coe, to name a few; these were her 'saints.' I grew up singing songs I didn't understand the meaning of, but I knew them word for word and LOVED to 'ham it up' for anyone.

Fast forward 33 years, and here I sit in prison, craving music. I used to pine for heroin before the MAT program. I start my day usually

with Stevie Nicks, Nicki Minaj, and Cardi B, my three muses. I just cannot get into a passable mood without hearing the magical tones and gripping, soul-wrenching lyrics that Stevie belts out. I don't even watch T.V., The soundtrack of my incarceration has been a mixed melody of heartache, growth, love, hate, but most importantly...hope. I hope that I can change, that I will be better, that I won't come back. I'm glad my Mother didn't live to see me fall so far and so hard, but I feel her right here beside me, helping me through this mire, step by step, song by song, note by note. So I guess my point is, I don't know who I would be, or what I'd do without music. It is an audible expression of a pain & yearning in my soul that I know no other way to express. So I hope today you all enjoy some good music. It really helps your mind, body, & soul if you just close your eyes and enjoy the ride. By the way, my favorite song is "Dreams" by Fleetwood Mac/ Stevie Nicks. What's yours?

Vibrations of Music, Devante Thomas

Music has been a huge part of my life since my incarceration—I didn't really know I had such an eclectic style in music. It would've been really beneficial if I knew this when I was younger. My styles and preferences are: Reggae, Classical Music, Heavy Metal, Rock, Metal, Rap/Hip-Hop, R&B, Blues, Jazz, Orchestral Music, Native American Music, some Opera, Foreign Music, and Instrumental music. My top favorites are Classical, Reggae, Heavy Metal, and Piano music. It's ironic that I have an uncle who produces music and plays a few instruments—I didn't know that when I was younger because I would've hung out with him more. I like the keyboard/piano; when I was in Elementary school, I learned how to read Music Notation and how to play keyboard/piano a little—but of course—if you don't use it, you'll lose it. I've always wanted to re-learn it, and have the opportunity with the Music room we have at this prison—but between school, work, and wanting to work out, I don't really have the time.

When I listen to music, I like to feel the vibrations in the beats, and I get in the zone depending on what I'm listening to. When I listen to Reggae, I want to chill, sit back and relax—if I was free—just sit back in a big bean bag chair

with my girl and just coast—no drugs or alcohol—just the vibrations are high enough. Of course, my favorite artists are Bob Marley, Ziggy Marley, Damian Marley, and Justin Marley—but on my tablet, I have a mixture of a lot of people. The albums I have are Cultural Reggae, Old Skool Reggae, Around the World Reggae, and a few others. I have a few female Reggae artists like Shensea and Lila Ike. Reggae gives you that sense of peace and positivity among the struggles in the world—I'm ready to experience freedom so I can visit some Reggae spots.

Another favorite is Classical Music — Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Handel, Chopin, Brahms, Tchaikovsky, Schubert, and Weber — in addition to many others I've listened to. Now, I'm not trained in knowing who's who when listening to them, besides Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven. I like Fur Elise, Overture, Sonata in C, Prelude in C minor, and many others, I could listen to for hours. Now this type of music has me in the creative/study vibrations. I like to either write or do something creative while listening to it, especially studying sometimes. Serj Tankian from System of a Down (a favorite band of mine) branched off and started to do Orchestral or Symphony-type music, and you can hear his signature sound in all of it, and it's great. I would be the type where you'd see me at the Symphony hall.

For Piano, anybody who can play I like them: Alicia Keys, Rachmaninov, John Legend, Hiromi (listen to Libertango by her and with Edmar Castaneda), Stevie Wonder, and B.B King. Also Sangeeta Kaur (World) who has an opera voice and performs with instruments.

Now, to get into my dark phase; Death Metal, Heavy Metal, Metal, and Rock became interesting to me when I started playing football—it got me amped up. It also allows me to drift off into a dark realm and coast on that energy—this is where I understand why it's forbidden or prohibited to listen to music in Islam, but like addiction, it's very pulling at my soul. The type of artists/bands I like are: Tool, System of A Down (Spiders, Question!, Aerials), Killswitch Engage, Gojira (Indian:INDIAN), Incubus, Five Finger Death Punch, Alice In Chains, Bullet for My Valentine, In This Moment (Iron Army), Korn, Sevendust, Megadeth, Sirenia, Corrosion of Conformity, Opeth, Rob Zombie, Ozzy

Osbourne, Metallica, Chimaira, Slipknot, Pantera, Flyleaf, Nine Inch Nails, All That Remains, Smashing Pumpkins, Avenged Sevenfold, Isis, Chevelle, Evanescence, Thirty Seconds to Mars, Linkin Park, Paramore, Deftones (who kind of sound like Tool sometimes).

Furthermore, all the other music I can vibe out to depends on the sound and the artist. In rap, I prefer listening to Boosie, Gucci Mane, UGK, Scarface, Bone Thugz N Harmony, Twista, Tech N9ne, Dax, Kendrick Lamar, Outkast, E-40 (Tell It Like It Is), David Banner, Nicki Minaj, Cardi B, Rhapsody, and a few others. My R&B singers would be: Jhene Aiko (Overstimulated), Alicia Keys, Beyonce, HER, Corinne Bailey Rae, Chloe and Haile, Eryka Badu, Mariah Carey, and many others. Native American music helps me vibe out, too.

A person would think that I grew up in a musical family, but that's far from the case; I only wish that I could've grown up in that type of family—who knows where I could've been right now—vibing to the beat.

Music, Chad Frank

Music has always played a big part in my life.

When I was four, I was obsessed with Prince's Purple Rain. For Christmas I asked Santa for a guitar and a purple outfit and begged my mom to curl my hair and make my face up like Prince's. I then spent hours mimicking my idol's every move in the bedroom mirror. I also danced around the house to Madonna, Michael Jackson and other 80s stars in my He-Man underwear.

When I was six, I met my best friend Steve. He introduced me to heavy metal bands like Guns 'N Roses and Motley Crue and I became a lil' headbanger.

The first album I bought with my own money was Kiss' Destroyer. At the time, I was trying to connect with my dad who left when I was two, and I bought it because it was his favorite album.

As a teen, I discovered grunge - my favorite band was Nirvana. When Kurt Cobain committed suicide, I fell into a deep depression.

Music lifted my spirits.

As a teenager, I found out about punk rock through bands like Green Day and Rancid. Loved

their raw energy and rebellious attitudes. Around the same time, Steve and I started hanging around a used CD store called CDs To Go. A guy named Joe worked there and introduced us to old school bands like the Ramones and the Sex Pistols. I started wearing a leather jacket and spiked my hair like my new idols, Sid Vicious.

I went to my first concert when I was 13, a punk rock show in the basement of a church. While local bands screamed and busted their instruments, I pogoed and slamdanced with my fellow punks. I had found my tribe and quickly became a fixture of Philly's punk scene. Like Tim Armstrong, Rancid's lead singer sings in "Radio," "When I got the music, I got a place to go."

I also love playing music and have played guitar in a noise-punk band called wreckage. We didn't know how to play a note but we had fun screaming and banging on our instruments. Somehow, we gained a small cult following and our friends still play our CD till this day.

After my last trip to the hole, I lost all of my property, including my tablet, which had over 1,300 songs on it. It pains me to think that I might not be able to afford to buy a new one since tablets cost \$141 and I don't have money coming in like I used to. Hopefully, I'll be able to save enough money to buy a new one. I don't know what I'd do without music.

Music, Jeremy Brown

Imogen Heap: First Train Home.

I like this song and have listened to it dozens of times because I need to get on the First Train Home, very soon, I need to get on it.

Lift Me Up, Marino K. Leyba

Your love is like music to my soul. The birds fly up high, you show me the things I do not know. Music has the power to destroy or help us grow. (A seed planted.) There is power in the words, a type of spell, it can take us to Heaven or deliver us to Hell. Music when I rise & music when I fall. Every breath I take, every upward moment, every mistake that I make. Music can determine your fate. Your love is like the music that is in the air, even when I am far away, you are always near. Your love is protecting me, your music is resurrecting me. Living water rising up in my soul,

the birds fly up high, you show me the things I do not know. It's written in my heart like a melody, all the sweet beautiful things you are telling me. Lift me up with your music and please help me with the way I use it. (A seed planted.)

Music, Belinda Ladd

Where to begin? I was very young when music became an important aspect of my life. I'd enjoyed the proverbial halcyon days of early childhood with my mother and sisters, living in the beach cities, watching Disneyland's Grand Finale fireworks display from my bedroom window at night, oblivious to any evil in my world. Then suddenly, I had a step-father who forced us into a slave-like existence on his inland ranch. The pants-down beatings were destroying my spirit, so I walked to the highway and stuck out my thumb. I was nine. In that age and at that age, it was hard to avoid getting picked up, sent to juvie, then returned to the abuser. I ran again and never stopped. Freedom just means having nothin' left to lose.

My go-to place was the Newport/Balboa beach strip. Crawling under the Lifeguard Headquarters building by the pier to sleep at night and switching on an AM/FM radio for comfort, I found two sanctuaries on the FM dial: KLOS and KMET. Both played underground and psychedelic rock at the time. Zeppelin, Deep Purple, Birds, Iron Butterfly, The Band, Steely Dan, Cream, Humble Pie, Joe Cocker, Blind Faith, Guess Who, Grateful Dead, Hendrix, Doors, Bowie, Mott the Hoople, Frank Zappa, Crosby/Stills/Nash & Young, Blood Sweat & Tears, Creedence Clearwater, Dylan... The list was endless, like the themes I was being introduced to. You can get anything you want at Alice's Restaurant.

My Aunt gifted me my first two albums: Beach Boys *Surfin' Safari* and the Rolling Stones' *Their Satanic Majesties Request*. These were life-changing for a kid. I grew my hair down to my belt as a big middle finger to The Man. One day as I was twisting the knob on our B&W television, my sister's boyfriend said, "Hey little man, do you mind if I try to tune in something on UHF?" He moved the antenna around and got a fuzzy program featuring a new band, Pink Floyd. Within a year, Floyd sold out the L.A. venue for two straight weeks. Each night's news reports

showed paddy wagons, ambulances, and kids on acid. Tower Records announced the release of The Beatles' *Abbey Road*, *Hey Jude*, *Revolution*, *Come Together*... I had to have it. My parents said, "No. They're demonic communists." I swiped silver dollars from their coin collection and bought it anyway. I wore Lennon-style wire frames with smoked glass lenses, let my girlfriend frizz my long hair into a giant pyramid, and strutted my elephant-ear bell bottoms like George Harrison. Just let them burn their eyes.

At 16, my Camaro had a Craig 8-track mounted under the dash that wrapped your knuckles when you downshifted into first gear. I once took some fry and stayed up all night listening to The Who's *Quadrophenia*. Never forget that trip. I'd later do the same with Steely Dan's *Aja*, and The Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*. Love, reign o'er me.

As a teen, I got into funk and soul. Parliament, Kool and the Gang, Average White Band, Ohio Players, Earth Wind & Fire, George Clinton, Smokey Robinson, The Stylistics, Marvin Gaye... I DJ'd our dance parties with a Fisher tube amp, Ampex reel-to-reel, Kenwood tuner, Garrard turntable, Atlas Sound mic stand with baby boom, and tower speakers, We gonna turn this mother out!

Then came punk and the mosh pit. Sex Pistols, Husker Du, Butthole Surfers, Ramones, and mainstream groups like the Cars, Pretenders, Pat Benatar, and Tom Petty. Take it easy, baby, make it last all night.

Black Sabbath kicked off Oregon Jam '80 when Ozzie rode a Harley onto the stage. At sunset, Blue Oyster Cult played *The Reaper*. I sparked one and passed it to my girlfriend. Great White, White Snake, White Zombie, and White Lion played at the Notre Dame ACC. When I sparked and passed, people moved. What's up preppies? Isn't a concert supposed to be a party? I loved new music and went through genres from Donny & Marie to NWA. My extensive autograph collection included Jerry Garcia and George Thorogood, who also gave me his guitar slide. Unfortunately, some snake snaked them. My most collectible vinyl came in a sleeve mailed from the London BBC to a Bakersfield radio station titled, *Introducing Bob Marley and the Wailers*. Ya mon, people be jammin'.

Today, I'm stuck in BFE Wyoming with only CMT on the TV, and because of steel, windowless cell walls, the radio only works outside. On the big yard, I can choose from NPR, Jesus stations, oldies rock, sod buster, and Top-10 teenybopper punk sissy trash (some of which is actually amazing). It makes me ill that the State took everything from me, even music. Ricky was a young boy... he had a heart of stone...

Importance of Music, Jonathan Holeman

I've never been the type to let the days go by in silence. I've never understood those who shun the gift of music. Those who labor, toiling endlessly in dust, in dirt, in grime. There would always be a soundtrack, music playing in the background of your life.

There was music every day when I was young. Pink Floyd, Billy Joel, Queen, or Elton John blasting on my parents' stereo as my Mom would clean our tranquil home. Countless nights when my Father would sit on the living room floor, flipping through vinyl records, cassette tapes, eventually CDs. Led Zeppelin, Garth Brooks, Rod Stewart, Cat Stevens, or Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young.

Endless days spent as a teenager going from song to song. A vinyl of Buffalo Springfield, or Robin Trower. A beat up cassette of Guns N' Roses, Danzig, or Faith No More. Piles of CDs, ranging from the Doors to Pearl Jam, from Bad Religion to the Grateful Dead.

So many bands, millions of songs I tried to think of when there was no more music playing. Arguments with my daughter's mother. Committing all those crimes. Years spent locked inside a dungeon. When the music ends, the party's over.

There are some times when good things happen without the sounds of music, but rarely does anything bad occur with music drifting into the area. At weddings, in church, at happy bars, and when we're dancing.

Now I sit in a prison cell, listening to the Rolling Stones, or White Zombie, followed by Creedence Clearwater Revival and Robert Johnston playing the blues. I must ask a simple question. How important is an appreciation for music? I think Bob Marley, Beethoven, and the Beatles all understood.

One thing I know about life, it's always going to be better with the gift of music. Whether you're listening to a symphony, or some poetic rap. Dancing to some techno, disco, pop, rock, jazz, or blues. Setting your mood with emo eighties, grunge of the nineteen nineties, or an opera in a language you don't know. Or meditating to a chant, tribal, experimental, funk or a show tune. Getting ready with hip hop, heavy metal, punk rock, jam, new age. Making love to the oldies or country songs. Getting stoned with some electronic, reggae, ska, or blue grass. Exercising with industrial, or whatever else you might choose to soothe your soul.

Take it from someone that loves every bit of music. Someone that is losing my ability to hear. Don't miss out on the music, you'll never know how long it's going to be there.

Music, Omar Recalde

Like many of us, I use music to escape some moments. Unfortunately, I've got a complicated relationship with it.

My uncle and aunt used to throw parties on the holidays, just about every holiday (Happy Chinese New Year! Happy Kwanzaa!) And you better be ready to drink and dance. I still remember my aunt Lupe literally forcing people to drink, tipping the rum and Coke against people's lips. You're drinking it or you're wearing it!

It would be Latin music all night. Salsa, merengue, cumbia for hours, then vallenatos when the depressed/lonely cousin-of-the-week would take over the stereo. He'd cry (always a 'he') for a while, then someone'd come over with a hug and a drink, and the party'd occasionally re-start. So, Grupo Niche, Celia Cruz and Joe Arroyo in the beginning, then Leo Dan, or Piero for a track or two.

So, like many of us in here, I have some songs on my tablet that let me time travel 30-40 years. And sometimes I let those songs hurt, missing my family, my freedom, my time. Other times I smile, my heart light with the joy of dancing or learning a new move. The rare, near-rapture of having a good partner. Spins, footwork, those arm movements/locks.

Then there's my escape music. I've got a karaoke playlist so I can sing to myself while I work. Yup, I a'int be no good writer. (I'm looking

at you LaFleur, Webber, Diez, Bauhaus, and Brüemmer-ah, Brüemmer), but I can sing and dance. I drown out the sound of the dish machine, the chatter and whistling of my co-workers, and dance my Ecuadorian butt off.

Music, Brent Seheult

Music is defined as: The art and science of combining vocal or instrumental sounds, tones in varying melody, harmony, rhythm, and timbre esp so as to form structurally complete and expressive emotional composition.

There are many types of music. Country, Classic Country, Classic Rock, Soft Rock, Blues, Pop, Blue Grass, Classical, Gospel, Opera, but I don't classify Hip-Hop as a music form. A lot of those growing up in the 1990's and 2000's would tend to disagree.

Music can soothe you in ways you wouldn't believe. A lot of people listen to soft instrumental music so they can relax and sleep. But a lot of people listen to music based on their mood.

Ever hear a song you haven't heard in a long time and put it on repeat until you're sick of it? I have. Have you attended a concert, bought a CD, but waited a couple of days before you played it? Guilty as charged.

My children call me an old fart. I say, "I may be old, but at least I had decent music." Ever listen to Britney Spears sing, and Bob Seger? There's no comparison. Or should I say Britney Spears and Karen Carpenter? Karen was pure gold, Britney is pure trash. Or have you listened to Slim Shady and Bob Seger, or even Gordon Lightfoot?

What's the difference between the music from the 1970's and today's music? One word, Talent. The singers from the 1970's had talent. Today's stars have auto-tune. Why do I bring this up? Because back in my day we had a lot of one-hit wonders.

But music can help your mood. If you are in a bad mood, music can help improve your mood. Where is it written that you have to be tied down to one genre of music? I personally love Classic Country, Blue Grass, Gospel, Country Gospel, Soft Rock of the 1970's, such as The Eagles, Bob Seger, Carpenters, Gordon Lightfoot, etc. I also like The Bee Gees, so I like a variety of

music. However, what is coming from the radio today, I don't classify as music.

Music, Anonymous

Growing up, I had only listened to music a select few times, so when I heard the voice of an artist, I would think it was cool, soothing, and even incredible regarding their imagination and creativity. Over time I grew to realize and understand that not all music is good, but not all artists are bad either. Music has always been a positive outlier or a great tool for someone to express their truth and creative side while inspiring and influencing others.

Whether someone writes, sings, or listens to music; we all share similar attributes and characteristics of ourselves. We all have talent, no matter what it is; we all have a creative side of us. My sister and I used to create music and back up dances for Back Street Boys. As I grew older, music started to be the downfall of my actions.

Music ended up being a big trigger of mine due to my schizophrenia. Not only did I hear the music; I wanted to act on what they were saying. I wanted to be just like them, seeing as I didn't have a father figure whose steps I could follow anymore.

However, although I was easily influenced, I could not blame the music industry for the bad choices I made throughout my life. I can only blame myself. I am the only one at fault, not anyone else. The thoughts and actions of wanting to be like them whom I considered to be my role models or leaders was in fact creating dispositions for myself.

I learned quickly that music can be misinterpreted and I had actually had my own perception of what I was hearing. Although I was not taught right from wrong, I made my own choices which led to consequences later in life. I can only be faulted for my own self destructive behaviors and change from my mistakes.

Music is very beautiful and unique to most people. This is a whole lot of musicians in life. Find the music you love to hear while relaxing, listening to the flow of harmony and instruments. Today I look past the bad music that makes the gears grind in a negative way because there are

so many great songs that have positive vibes. What kind of music do you like to listen to?

Music, Lancelot

In 2022, FBOC had its first talent show. The presentations were to be four minutes or less. Mine was eight minutes long and I was denied. Very few inmates signed up and I was approached to do my show. I received a lot of laughs from the audience but did not win. I sang my song acappella.

I've been told some people sing for many but I sing good for nothin'...what's that mean?

In 2023 at the second talent show I proposed the same program and I was rejected because of the eight minutes.

The third talent show and I'm gonna be in it! The time limit is still four minutes or less.

I wrote a poem titled, "My Skin Don't Fit No More." I reworked the words into a song and called it, "Workin' Out and Gettin' Old," but I need a musician. I got Reluctant Bob. I called him Reluctant Bob because he didn't want to do it.

The show was to be held in the chapel because it is the only building with a stage, sound equipment, and the organ that I wanted to use. Reluctant Bob was the only person who could play the organ with its two keyboards and assorted foot treadles. I asked him to do the music and put it on paper.

In grammar school, the teacher was trying to teach us the musical scale. All I remember is "All Good Boys Deserves Fudge"... or something like that, I failed kazoo. So I needed Reluctant Bob's help.

So now I called him Palindrome Bob, not Reluctant Bob. Between the two of us, we got the music down to pat. Now he was Enthusiastic Bob and wanted to do the show. We did the show, me singing and Enthusiastic Bob playing with his organ.

Here are the lyrics to *Workin' Out and Gettin' Old*:

My chest has gotten bigger - my feet are always sore / I'm gonna rout this workin' out - it ain't workin' out no more / I port my hair down the middle - the path has gotten wide / the spare tire that I thought I lost is wrapped around my side / and my teeth are - just like a star...yeah they all

come out at night / I saw a picture of myself - I almost died of fright

(music bars by Enthusiastic Bob...or is that boB)

My legs beginning wob-b-b-l-e / I'm having trouble walkin' around / But I gotta be thankful to the good LORD / Both feet still reach the ground.

Yeah my chest has gotten bigger - my feet are always sore / But the biggest problem that I got is my-skin-don't-fit-no-more / No my skin don't fit no more, and in places it's startin' to sag / Last time I took a good long look; it looked like a wet sandwich bag.

(more music by Enthusiastic boB)

Finis

With original music and lyrics, we got a standing ovation. We didn't win the competition but we did have fun...at least I had fun. I asked palindrome boB what he thought about the show.

He just said "Fuck it!"... I think he was losing his enthusiasm.

I Want Cotton Candy, Edward W. Gallagher

Ever since I was 5, I remember my parents playing records. It was the early 80's, and mom and dad had eclectic taste. They agreed on two major things: "The Beatles" and "John and Yoko." I was exposed to wonderful music as a kid, and it became the "soundtrack of my life."

All I ever wanted was to play music! I had a guitar at 7, and mimed the coolest bands (Fleetwood Mac, The Doors, REO Speedwagon, Billy Joel, etc). We lived in a housing project, and my two best friends were Johnny and Janine.

We started a band! We used to go to the unit laundromat, and I played guitar and sang, Johnny on the harmonica, and Janine played the Maytag drums! Thus, "Cotton Candy" was formed.

We had one song. I wrote this song, and it was entitled "Midnight On the Rocks." We did our concerts for my mom and dad, and Johnny and Janine's mom. We thought we were famous, and that was what counted!

My parents decided we were going to move to the “country,” so we moved out of the city, and Cotton Candy was no more. So, I made new friends, started 4th grade in a new school, and my guitar sat dormant, gathering dust.

Things happened, parents divorced, and my dad and I moved into an apartment in the city.

As I went into middle school, I was still an avid Rock and Roll fan. I used to tell people I played the guitar, but I couldn’t play a note.

My dad sold “pot.” His childhood friend “Donny Daryll” came to the house one day, and he had an acoustic guitar with him. Donny wanted to sell the guitar, and Dad bought it for me.

Years went by, and I learned to play. I had A.D.H.D., and I was a perfectionist. I started to write, and I started to get better. Things happened, I got married, and my wife was pregnant.

Fast forward to 1994, I am now 19. I grew my hair, got some tattoos, and started a band! We knew a few chords, and we were motivated; Hence, D.I.L.L.I.G.A.F.! (an acronym for Do I Look Like I Give A F@☆\$) We played local bars, weddings, parties, etc, but our addictions got the best of us, and we forgot why we created it.

My son Eddie is now 30. He was taught, by me, to play guitar at age 12. We have a tradition. We name our guitars! Eddie is better than I at the guitar and at being a man. I taught him from an early age to appreciate music, and I passed my musical aspirations on to him. No matter how poor, sad, lost, or angry you are, music can take you away, at least it did for me.

My Music Past-Times, James Hochschild

I am a music listener and like most varieties of it. My favorites are Pop Rock, Easy Listening, Instrumental Jazz, and Classical. As I’m writing this, I am currently listening to Avril Lavigne’s Album “Complicated” on a tablet. That brings back memories, too. I went to her concert back in April 2004 in Cleveland, Ohio. It was either in the Fund Arena or the CSU Convention Center. Britney Spears played in the other venue on a different date. That’s why I can’t remember which one.

At Avril’s concert, there were 3 opening bands. One was Mushroomhead. They were a

local heavy metal band. The other two were Sum 41 and Coldplay. All were terrific bands. But Avril’s was the best of all.

I went to other concerts at other times. I had a chance to see Creed. But I chose to take my younger cousin to see “Jimmy Eat World” at the Agora Theater. That was another great concert. Especially since I shared it with a loved family member and her friend.

As for Easy Listening and Jazz, I listen to those when I am resting with my eyes closed and not trying to sleep.

When I do want to sleep, I’ll listen to “Nature Sounds” on the tablet. But that’s only if I was stressed out from events earlier in the day.

I could go on and on about music. That’s just a sample of what I like about it.

MUSIC, Thomas Barndt

Most Gifted Musicians: The BEATLES. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison. They did it all — wrote, sang, played both electric and acoustic guitars, keyboards. Check out George’s “Benefit Concert for Bangladesh” with B. Dylan, E. Clapton

RIP — Musicians: Brian Wilson (Calif. Girls, Surfin USA, I Get Around); Sly Stone (I Want to Take You Higher, Dance to the Music, Everyday People); Angus’s brother Malcolm Young (Back in Black, Dirty Deeds, Highway to Hell, etc.); Greg and Dicky have joined their Allman Bros. brother — just listen to “Lion at Fillmore.” Another good old Charlie — the pictures of Mick, Keith, and Ronnie won’t be the same now. (The Rolling Stones). Yes I’m late. Eddie — Van Halen I, II; Ronnie — Heaven + Hell, Blackmore’s Rainbow Rising, DIO-I.

Favorite Electric Guitars: Fender Anniversary Stratocasters; Fender Pro-Telecasters; G&L Tribute Strat and Tele-shaped guitars; Gibson Les Paul Standard Cherry Sunburst (which is the prettiest). For here, right now I wish I had a Telecaster-shaped one w/ Jumbo singles or standard single coils. Also like those Gibson ES-339’s w/ P-90’s.

Haven’t seen a Guitar magazine for around 7 yrs. Correct that, I have had 1 GW-April 2025 (G. Harrison-Cover).

Favorite Tele Players: Roy Buchanan, Keith and Ronnie.

My Songs Know What You Did in the Dark, Christopher Monihan

When I think of music and prison in the same sentence, songs I know by heart echo through my mind. My journey through the abyss of American corrections can best be told through song.

Music exposes the soft underbelly of the prison beast. I have suckled from its bosom rhythm and memories, with the promise of a joyful future that for decades has been the province of my dreams.

Music pulls back the veil to big prisony subjects from the first day, relationships, and addiction, to the cruel hand of the guards. So grab ahold of my pocket and stay close as we forge through this prison wilderness. Through music I will bare what I have learned in prison.

My first day trapped in prison in the words of Imagine Dragons and the Eagles:

I am waking up to ash and dust. I wipe my brow, I sweat my bust. I am breaking in, shaping up, then checking out on the prison bus.

Goodnight said the watchman we are programmed to receive. You can check out any time you like but you can never leave.

I once stumbled upon two burly men fighting naked on the bathroom floor both having just emerged from the showers (together?). Apparently the one had cheated on the other with someone else's boyfriend.

I have learned that same-sex relationships in men's prisons are like Lionel Richie, George Michael, Atlantic Starr, and Culture Club songs:

Hello, is it me you are looking for?

There's things that you guess and there's things that you know. Boys you can trust and girls that you don't. There's the little things that you hide and little things you show.

Secret lovers, that's what we are.

Karma, Karma, Karma, Karma, chameleon, you come and go. You come and go.

My blog puts me in contact with people in prison across the country. By contrast, I have discovered that same-sex relationships in women's prisons are all the rage. They're straight

out of Taylor Dayne, Madonna, and Doja Cat songs:

Tell it to my heart, tell me I am the only one.

You are so fine and you are mine. I will be yours till the end of the time because you made me feel. Yeah you made me feel, I have nothing to hide. Like a virgin, touched for the very first time. Let me see you go to town. Baby, let me see you go to town.

My experience with the guards hasn't always been positive. Some came to work with an ax to grind. The Suicide Squad, Metallica, and 52 words sum up my thoughts on that:

You don't own me. You don't own me. Don't tell me what to do. Don't tell me what to say.

Never care for what they say. Never care for the games that they play. Never care for what they do. Never care for what they know—and I know nothing else matters.

The day epidemic here at Camp Cupcake has reached fever pitch. To stanch the flow of illicit drugs, Ohio has banned physical mail for scanned electronic alternatives; banned packages unless ordered from "pre-approved" vendors who price gauge the incarcerated and their families; limited in-person visitation for pay-to-view "video" visits— yet, drugs flood in unhindered.

Gee, Obvious Guy says, I wonder who could possibly be bringing the stuff in? Dax and Bush capture the epidemic I see raging all around me:

I got wasted because I didn't want to deal with myself tonight.

No one knows, never will. Mostly me but mostly you, what do you say, what do you do when it all comes down?

I was once a staunch atheist. P.O.D. captures my early struggle to discover my place in this world:

We are, we are the youth of the nation. There's got to be more to life than this. There's got to be more to everything that I thought exists.

Organized religion isn't for me. I didn't have to endure life in a religious cult (I tip my hat to you Ms. LaFleur) to know this. Prison with endless hours to read and think, and I found my peace. The Universe reflects back upon us that which we send out into it. That's my life experience.

Okay, you can let go of my pocket now. I pray you never have to come here. Highly Suspect and Ozzy Osbourne's Patient Number 9 will close this out. After all, we're all a bit of a patient while we're here:

Take this hopeless broke so often remote control plot twist, a whole generation with no purpose. Can you feel my heart? Do you know my name? Can you feel my love? Do you know my pain?

I want to go home...

Music, Vinicio J. Garcia

We sat in a line to take our hearing test in the Air Force. You were given a printout of the result of the test. I was one of the last to take the test. I looked at quite a few of the printouts. There was a similarity in the pattern of the shape of the graph. When the technicians handed me the printout, I became concerned. I told the technician that there must be something wrong with my hearing because the pattern was so different. He said no, you have a very wide range of hearing. It's because my eyesight is so bad.

One day, while coming over a rise as you enter Dallas going from west to east, the volume of my cell phone blasted my ear. I developed tinnitus. The doctor told me it would be difficult to prove the phone did it. It is quite annoying, and at times it affects my concentration.

I am not a musicologist, nor am I musically inclined. Though I like a wide range of music, when it comes to music, I maintain the pliability of a child. I would have to rate hearing Santana and Jimmy Paige play together in '73 as my favorite live musical event—unfortunately, today you can't be sure if it's the machine masking a mediocre voice.

Before proceeding, there was an article on AP about a seal that moved to a beat and recognised it faster than some humans tested simultaneously. Previously thought impossible, chimpanzees have been found to tap on trees to communicate.

What is music? The general concept is a specific frequency at specific intervals.

So octaves—is there a reason we organize and enjoy music in octaves? I have mentioned this before—does the Schumann Vesonance play a part? Does oxygen—does our brain work with octals as the basic data code? Eight is a very

versatile number; it is 2 to the third. Should we live to meet aliens, I believe we will be able to determine why the octave is our preferred musical basis. This is European-based.

In order to write this essay, I did a quick read of music theory.

The first thing I realized was that the complexity can be doubted, and a musical instrument is preferable, so I just scanned the book. Furthermore, the atmosphere is not conducive in my dorm.

The development and evolution, beginning with classical music, is fascinating in itself. Today, we have access to music from all over the world.

Musicians are constantly blending and experimenting, creating sounds that can be mesmerizing.

During my acid period, the Grateful Dead was one of my favorite groups. It was surprising to learn he was inducted into the Blue Grass Hall of Fame and even toured with Bill Monroe of OPRY fame.

So many genres, so many sounds.

I don't have a musical ear, so let me interject random tidbits from a book by Michael Miley—titled “An Idiot's Guide, as Easy as it Gets Music Theory.”

Quote: “Interestingly, about 5 percent of musicians (just musicians—not the general population) have something called absolute pitch or perfect pitch.” They can identify the pitch without assistance, which it seems is almost impossible to develop after the age of 5.

For interval training, he lists some songs to practice, and the song and phrase—I'll list some I like.

These are ascending minor seconds: “As Time Goes By” (from Casablanca; “You must remember this...”); major third: “Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas”; perfect fifth: “Chant of the Wicked Witch's Guardsmen in the Wizard of OZ” (“YO-EE-oh”); minor sixth: “Sunrise, Sunset” (from Fiddler on the Roof; “Is this the little girl...”); major sixth: “Jingle Bells” (Dashing through the snow...); octave: “Somewhere over the Rainbow” (“Some-WHERE over the rainbow”).

There are people who simply have gifts. I do believe that it involves the connections between the left and the right hemispheres of the brain and exposure to certain environments. In mathematics, Gauss, and Beethoven in music.

Today, you can see some of these young geniuses on TV.

It would have been nice to have had a piano growing up. We didn't have a TV unit. I was about 5. Would I have learned a glissando without knowing the word? I am sure many musicians never had to learn the words associated with what came naturally to them.

But what lies in the inner drive that makes people want to dance? From purely biological functions, the energy expended in such a movement (other than perhaps attracting a female or male) does not directly benefit survival.

Which came first, music or dance? Or did they arrive at the same time? Perhaps scrutinization of Ringo Starr's "Caveman" will yield some clues.

Without, Jeff Hovatter

Music, like so much in my life, has been absent since I joined the incarcerated millions. Admittedly, it is due to my own choices. Music is a big part of prison life for many prisoners, but my appreciation stayed, or rather stalled in the mid-1990s.

With money, perseverance, and patience, it would be doable to indulge my taste. This prison allows only obsolete technology, like small radios and CD players. The inferior service provided on the tablets is too expensive, at four cents per minute, in my opinion.

My lack of interest in playing a musical instrument has been reinforced by both physical and cognitive issues, brought on by trauma and age, to convince me that I am not capable.

My tastes were always eclectic, ranging across genres without loyalty. If I liked a song, I liked it; I cared little about who wrote or performed it. Except during my early adult years, nearly all the music I listened to was during my thirty-mile commute in rural, mountainous Appalachia.

Prison has changed my perception of music. I now rarely hear the songs that I enjoyed decades ago, and often feel very emotional when I do. Certain lyrics trigger heavy sadness in me, although the memories were from better times. The sense of loss makes me less inclined to struggle against the system in order to bring music back to my world.

Lyrics sometimes express emotions that come with memories from my life, before the word "without" was appended. Some lyrics are like lines of poetry to those capable of grasping meaning from that craft. The tune, along with many hearings, helps me to retain some lyrics many years since I last heard them.

I do like music, but the lyrics must be discernible to my poor sense of hearing. The same words without the tune might lack meaning for me. My appreciation is in no way sophisticated. The songs of my childhood were Country and Western of the 1960s, as well as popular and rock played by local radio, which was again the case after my twenties.

The prison system restricts access to much, with the goal of extracting funds from prisoners, their families, and friends. It operates with predatory business practices on literal captive "customers." Graft and corruption are rampant and pervasive at every level. Prison culture is created and perpetuated by the worst of human nature, both by jailers and prisoners. Being a prisoner has opened my eyes to oppression. From racism to genocide, the world is rife with examples. Two wrongs do not equal a right, regardless of who "started it."

"You can't put the toothpaste back in the tube"; wake up to rogue nations and fascism in this new era of Imperialism.

A Ghost Interpretation, D'Andre M. Morris

Music is a message one delivers artistically, with rhythm and rhymes, in a catchy tune. I'll say a person has an interest or stands in commonality in their choice of artist.

I'm not sure the beginning of my notice. I take the meaning of the word "You" in music and interpret it as I am the person the artist is talking to. In some ways, I am the one the artist is talking to.

"You" is directed from the speaker to those who are not them. I am the listener, and they are talking to me.

I don't want another man in my ear saying, "I love you." All in my ear, and I'm the only person in the room. Confusing my mind. Nor some rapper telling me wrong

I vowed not to entertain/not to be entertained by violence nor negativity. Musically, I

listen to female R&B artists and positive male artists.

Female artists are easy to find. But positive and non-intimate male music artists are hard to find. Although I've found a couple.

As I make decisional changes in my life, my music of choice changes. I go back and forth on what I believe is good to hear or not.

My workouts became more stricked=stricted to less types. Because one type of workout has a greater effect than 10 types together. In mastery.

So, I chose to listen to one song only. Then one artist. Then an artist each for each of the activities I do. I have five al=activities/studies. 1) the machinist, 2) the astronomer, 3) the theorist, 4) the nature researcher, and 5) the Doctor. I am choosing an artist for each.

Now I want each chosen artist to have one song for day time, another song for night time, and one song for each theme.

The words we speak and hear train us for who we are going to be. Excitingly reciting or memorizing the same words over and over is self-building character and interpretation.

I listen to words of goodness and kindness. I prefer jazz (no words), just instruments. Which creates self thought and an easy, relaxing mood. A sound to you, soon.

Soothing The Beast, Gary Farlow

Long before character Andy Dupre played opera recordings over the P.A. system at Shawshank prison in the Stephen King film, I saw the value of music in an incarceration setting.

Guilford College, located in the Piedmont of North Carolina, plays host each summer to the Eastern Music Festival, a month-long celebration of daily classical music concerts. Music students and acclaimed masters such as Lang Lang, Yo-Yo Ma, and Wynton Marsalis have journeyed from all across the globe to participate in teaching and performing the works of music greats such as Bach, Mozart, Chopin, and Vivaldi.

As a part of the Eastern Music Festival, Project Listen is an outreach program that takes chamber ensembles into the surrounding communities to audiences unable to attend the on-campus concerts. In 2004, I was at Southern Correctional Institution, a medium security prison

in the Piedmont region of North Carolina. Our Service Club issued an invitation to the Festival, requesting such a concert be brought to our prison.

Typically, the music fare of most inmates varies between rap, rock, and country – or a mix. Rarely will one walk by a cell and hear Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*, Bach's *French Suite*, or an etude by Chopin.

Prior to prison, I was a season ticket holder to both the Eastern Music Festival and the local symphony orchestra, so the strains of Mozart were not new to me. The afternoon concert saw a string quartet arrive at the prison.

The musicians, all college students led by a visiting professor, had never been inside a prison but had willingly (even eagerly) volunteered to provide a reprieve from the cacophony of prison.

Their unfamiliarity of incarceration was matched by the inmate audiences having never attended a classical music recital before. As the organizer of this event, I had no idea of what to expect. Would anyone show up to hear? *Would they walk out once they heard music totally new to them? Would anyone "act out" or disrupt the concert?* All it ever takes is one, after all.

My fears proved unfounded. The visitation room filled within minutes. A hush – one seldom experienced at any gathering of inmates – fell as the ensemble opened with Vivaldi's *Spring* from his *Four Seasons*.

The inmates sat mesmerized as two violins, a viola, and a bass filled the room with music that captivated a group of men who had never before attended such a concert.

"I kinda don't want it to end," said one inmate.

"I'd never have believed that I would like that music, but it just, I dunno, took me out of this place," commented another.

Me? I sat in satisfaction for long afterward.

Yeah, I guess you could say I fully understood Andy in *Shawshank Redemption*. The old adage is really true, *music doth soothe the savage beast* – in all of us.

Music, Kelly Messenger

You know what... I love music, music is the shit. I have one of the tablets everyone be talkin

about, a mp6 player, and over the years, the 15 years I've been here, I've collected a large quantity of music. I was actually stayin' in Detroit before I got bagged, you know, caught this case. So, I gotta give a shout out to all my Detroit rappers and a couple from the town I was born in Flint.

Any of y'all heard of Babyface Ray, Veeze, Peezy, Mozzy, 42 Dugg, Cash Kidd, Rio Da Yung OG, Chicken P, ESTG, Tee Grizzle, yeah, go on ya'll J-pay machine and check em out. I'm sayin I got taste in music and if you like rap, you gone like whatchu hear.

I got some old school rap from out of state too, I snatched up this lil album from Nate Dogg, an yo! He outmaxxed the average terrorist, funny as shit doe, just listen to it man, it's called "Just another Day."

Sometimes I like gettin' whole albums doe, it's like you can feel the music and where the rapper comin' from. Like really listen to the words rather than, this got a nice ring to it, ...

Some of the Best: Baby Face Ray, The Album - Face, Veeze, The Album - Ganger, Peezy, The Album - Ghetto.

Anyway, yeah, just to name a few. Check 'em out!

Music, Charles Conner

Oh how music has affected every facet of my life, I was fifteen years old when I heard of a band. They toured the nation every year for their fans.

At the age of 17 back in the day I hitchhiked to RFK which was about two hours away—I got a ride immediately based on my sign. It said "DEAD SHOW or BUST" and that worked quite fine.

As soon as we took the exit, the butterflies started to build. I was tense with excitement, my body tingling all the way. When we rounded the final corner I gasped "Oh Boy!" It was a carnival of sorts with a different flair. An outlaw sense of freedom lingered in the air. As people mingled, everyone had a smile. I remember feeling so at home, even though I just arrived.

Later on as the sun was going down, I was talking to a wizard sort of man -I told him this was my first show and he said, "I'll be damned, take my ticket, you don't want to miss this band!"

I took the trip inside. The music was even better than they described — 70,000 people filled the stands. Sunburst colors everywhere, everyone dancing without a care. Before you knew it, cause time was moving fast - we all were teleported, it seemed, to the parking lot.

Everyone was hustling and bustling, wrapping things up and ready to go. Cars started to move to the exit gate, and all I had was my bag and my skate. I started to panic, cause cops showed up and were yelling and snatching people who didn't readily leave - Just at that moment when fear covered my face, did a girl named Amber pull up in a cargo van. She yelled, "Get in if you want to go to the next show, this place is a bust and we gotta go." I was born wild so I jumped in, "What the heck."

She was a few years older than I and even in the morning light that sparkle remained in her eye. She loved the story of how RFK was my first. She told me all about the band and how fun it was to travel endlessly and be wild and free. I mean, roaming the country, seeing music every night sounded cool to me.

We went to New York, Philly, and Boston you see. The last night of the tour came so fast. We managed to save a couple thousand dollars and don't ask me how. The only question was, where do we go now? Her hometown, my hometown UGH - Come to find out she was just as wild as I, we went from Boston to San Fran in three short days. I still remember crossing the Bay Bridge for the first time looking over at Treasure Island. I was all smiles. We ended up on the Haight, like-minded people wandering all around. We would skate, peddle, and roam all day. Only to share a hotel with like 15 others from all over the USA. We got to see music at legendary places all the time—The Fillmore, The Warfield, The Avalon, The Great American and more. San Fran no doubt had a unique music scene, that's for sure.

Look at the history and you shall see. SF started a movement that's alive and well. The Bohemian Way - is what I'll say. It's still alive in select cities all over still to this very day. Eugene, OR; Asheville, NC; Boulder, CO; and Ithaca, NY just to name a few.

I remember a time not so long ago - we were at Watkins Glen Race Track, rearing, ready to go. Me and the FAM all in tow. It was a Super

Ball not a race though. We had a Prevost parked next to the band, four days filled with fun. We all were glad we made the trip.

Got invited to a Post-Festy Party in New York City and it took a week to recuperate. Finally fresh and ready for a new start. Most of us head back West, but we are from all over, you know.

Those are the days I miss when I look back. 35 years of music chasing, yea that's me. The years came and went, been to every music venue from Sea to Bay. Got busted in "The Fall." Just a million hits, wow that's all. And when I look back, music started it all.

I'll be coming home soon to my family who's been with me through it all. I could keep going but that'll be too much for y'all—

Music for Breakfast, George Hesse

Transforming ruthless / How I survive prison it's music / to put a smile on my face or slow my tears' momentum, who knew it? / X-Bar short low-life group chat my past life / flashbacks; church bells in my mind ringin before my next existence / music welcomes me. / music, street fighter RYU's HYUUUUKEN / slang in my mind's typewriter / fluent / A daughter now is she gone do what I do? / I love these bass headphones Lowkey it's a loophole / life lately stressed no parole so I'm stuck in Limbo / feeling inverted jammin instrumentals / prayin to Jesus give me strength and courage / Absorbing Angel music as I walk Divergent.

Back on my Zeus shit / lovin Rap music / Adrenaline ALL THE WAY UP / deflecting haters' bullshit / used to drive under the influence bumpin music / Dead inside Rappin to feel alive clutchin my crucifix / tellin myself to hang in there I got maps of Hell and a walk through / miss my rap partner RIP I do this for you / I'm half intact / tellin myself I got this all mapped out cause of God's purpose present / take me to a multi-verse new music / warped i forgot pain's brain signals on Mozart raise the game level / echoes of a performance a figment Re-union on a quest without blueprints / Mario Brothers music day dreamin puffin on Zooties / mob music,

Tony Montana, repenting, as the plot thickens.

Condemned / my music legacy suspended / in time careless / Dear God give me more time it's cutthroat here endless / music, my mood switch / Relaxed from dodgin a bullet or a kiss from these Judas / Competition elite heat rocket still ride the beat I Quarterback / High point precision I love percussion I like trap beats I like my trap house neighbors / Voices glued to the beat / Tryin to forget her on my check list / King living in this multi-dimensional chess set I hear music when I'm dreaming / I heard music when they did chest compressions / Dear LORD Save me from the life I'm -- living.

I miss Jarred my music patna / only God knows what I been through / white gold no auto-tune / Heart heavy suitcase fulla Armageddon / Rhyme books / over dosed Rhymin Hooks / Behind glass R.I.P / when he left the block got hollow / RIP track music / Legends of tomorrow / God soothe a world not stable / struck a chord Abel / music calms nerves when there's trouble / chorus an chords ballads of soldiers / Angels and crosses / my factory settings seem to be on losses / music heals me as I wait for God to Intervene.

Re-Animated my vocals like Voodoo / Homegirls will cry when I go beneath girls / music will soothe her as she pours out shots to my Name / Wish I could hold her / Some mornings I play my mp3 at breakfast / feelin like me against the world / I shoulda been an Avenger / I flow alone shoulda treated her better / Drown in hate proly die in the water / I hear a chorus / mood switch my music they can't take it / my window to flashbacks / my Underworld ever is exclusive / Can't cry no more I play my R.I.P jams / Can't fly no more but I let the world know where I stand / hate bein in the mix proly die in the blender / music plays as I stand up to Hate / salute me when I ride into danger / Feelin like Jordan but locked up like Griner / the symphony

plays / no way out so God brings Heaven
closer / A lonely addict / tryin to find my
way out, fight my way up hearin music
every second / watchin clips of my fight
as I eat my fill for breakfast / Music is my
life, my chronic injection.

**My Ubi Sunt Isolation Chamber: M.U.S.I.C.,
Robert M Blankenship**

*They flutter behind you, your possible
pasts, some bright-eyed and crazy, some
frightened and lost, a warning to anyone still in
command of their possible futures – to take
care. - “Possible Pasts” by Pink Floyd*

A solitary figure, seen from the back, in a
trench coat and hat, walking forward, on a city
street bathed in fog. It's twilight or just after
dusk or very early morning; streetlights are unlit.
The buildings, street, and lamppost closest are
visible but the street quickly obscures into the fog.

Many could see the beginning of a good
horror story, the middle of a mystery or even the
sad end of an epic love story. Few would see life
in a nutshell. Only careful observation would bring
to question: is the person moving forward or
away with head held high? Or is the person
looking back, sadly, with head tilted down?

How many stores, businesses, had he not
entered, how many streets, alleys, did he pass by?
How many possible pasts had the person not
taken? Perception of life can only be based on
what is observed in the immediate area. We can
expect, as one moves forward, more of the
same... but we cannot see that for sure. Obscured
by fog and obscured by the future.

When I was eighteen I went to K-Mart, I
still can't remember why. In front of the store,
there was an immaculate pair of boobs selling
raffle tickets. I bought three lottery tickets, and,
after an indeterminate amount of time, I noticed
the very nice boobs were attached to a cute
blond who was nice all over so I asked her out.

Flash forward I was married to the hot
blond and working at Sears. Not the future I had
planned, but for five years I thought life was set.
Great wife, good job, yep, time to knock out a
couple of kids and, like the rest of the world, wait
to die.

In looking at the June 1 photo, one may not
notice, or give any serious thought, to that light
over on the right...enticing, like a nice set of
boobs.

Then one day all the Sears in the whole
area closed. While I had expected more of the
same, the job loss loomed up out of the future
fog. Did not see that coming. Still had the hot
wife, so one out of two ain't bad. Around five
years after that, one day, an average day, a
boring, perfectly normal day, I received a call
from the state police to inform me my hot wife
had been a suspect of a possible kidnapping, but
it turned out okay... she was just the star whore in
a six way, naked, bachelor party orgy in a motel.
A year after that, me, a male, lived with a lesbian
in a rundown trailer in another state. Did NOT see
that possible future at all.

Then one day your money is stolen and the
person who stole it tells not one, but three lies
about an assault. You don't know any of that. You
sit at a computer, playing Grand Theft Auto, or
World of Warcraft. You don't hear the car door,
the footsteps, the knock on your door – you're
arrested, held without bail. There is no
questioning, no investigation. One minute you're
at your computer and the next you are processed
and celled – game over.

“...a warning to anyone, still in command,
of their possible futures...” I will die in prison
holding the bank statement that proves me
innocent. The warning is, there is no command of
possible futures.

When I was in the ninth grade, Pink Floyd:
The Wall came out. Over one thousand songs on
my JP6 tablet and each one of them is either a
past or a possible past memory. But now all my
possible futures are reduced to two: die in prison
or, eventually, find just one judge who is smart
enough to say, “yep, that's a bank statement.”
And so my possible futures are slim – and none.

I observe those around me, earbuds or
headphones, dead-eyed, lost-in-memory look.
What past or possible past flutters behind that
person? What life, or possible life, does the music
transport them back to?

And in that photo one can but wonder,
what horrible experience, or what wonderful life
will result if the person is attracted by that light?
And, what life, or death, will result if not attracted
by the light?

So often in life we can only say — there is a light, be it a fork in the road, the next true love, that job; whether attracted or not will become a past or a possible past. To convey the sadness of the temporary nature of life: Ubi Sunt.

Note: *This essay was edited for length.*

June Picture Theme



Thirteen, Christopher Cross

[cue music: “Thirteen,” by Danzig] (I stole that from Catherine LeFleur who is a creative goddess and a genius—I hope you don’t mind!)

I blow from town to town, like a cold, dark wind. When you see me, you’d best step aside—better yet, hide! Your sisters and wives, they will be fine. As for you men, it’s your souls which I’ve come to claim. I have existed throughout the ages past, before the beginning of time. I don’t have a name, just a number—Thirteen.

And you don’t stand a chance. I will cull you out from the herd using your favorite vice, be it lust, greed, anger, or simply ignorance. Then, when the time is right, I will strike. I need no weapon, nor can any weapon harm me.

I exist with only one foot in this realm. You will soon discover where I lay my head. For eternity will you exist in the freezing darkness of the outer dimension where I call home. Soon you will call it home, as well.

Oh, what pleasure I will leech from your black, empty soul. I can taste it already.

Time’s up! Look into my black, soulless eye sockets. Can you feel the pull? Don’t fear—the

dying won’t hurt, as for what’s after, you’ll be the judge. I steal the light from your eyes and laugh as your empty husk of a body collapses.

Untitled, Abbas Ahmed

Night has be fallen,
I await the next day.
Inshallah it will come,
It’ll be a blessed one - I pray.

THE JUNE FOG, Andrew Krosch

Draped in gypsy veils, her flowing hair windblown and wild, she’d saved my neck in a crowded sunlit bazaar in Cairo a lifetime ago. It only made sense that we’d part forever on an empty fog shrouded street in London, her trench coat belted tight, her long flowing hair tucked under a hat, the only witness to her subdued beauty the cameras lining the street. She never looked back. Never said goodbye.

In Egypt, outrunning arms dealers who chased us through the bazaar and into the airport with machine guns. On a Greek fishing trawler out of Alexandria, a load of human cargo in the hold, crossing the Mediterranean. Jumping ship with the refugees kilometers from the coast to swim in the black of night to the island of Crete where a widow with her granddaughters took us all in for the night — women, children, the old and sick, and me — and gave us cold food and warm clothes.

Turkey and the Balkan states, only the night sky to guide us, a gentle westward drift. Everywhere we went she knew the women. Spoke their language. It seemed that everyone knew her, the strange beautiful woman I travelled with. She helped the sick, the old and weak, the helpless. I’ll never understand what she saw in me.

That day in Cairo, the day we met in the sunlit bazaar, I’d had the shot. A half million dollar hit. I’d spent months of my time and thousands of my own dollars hunting an arms dealer called Igor; responsible for the deaths of thousands and thousands of innocent civilians in war-torn countries across the world.

Killing him would save countless lives and enrich me in at least half a million ways. And she spoiled the shot. In spectacular fashion. Brass

urns, copper pots and tin pans flying as "Igor" crashed to the ground, shielded by the body of the beautiful woman lying on top of him. Leaving the cover of a rug merchant's cart, I closed for the kill. That's when she rose and placed the tip of her finger over the muzzle of my gun and shook her head as Igor's armed bodyguards converged from every direction with guns drawn.

She stooped, whispered something in Igor's ear that made him blush like a schoolboy and pulled me down a narrow shaded alley between fruit vendors' carts into the dark beyond.

I would read years later that the man called Igor would claim his Road to Damascus moment had come in Cairo, where he'd dodged an assassin's bullet in a crowded bazaar. A beautiful angel had spoken to him—had saved his life. The next day he'd liquidated his vast fortune he'd accumulated by dealing death and donated it all to the poor.

The nights I spent with her were ethereal. Exhausted, sharing a thin blanket under a pile of boards; in the corner of a closed factory. Wrapped in her warmth, her body pressed to mine, heartbeats in time. Her touch could heal me in the night. The darkness inside me less each time. I woke to the light of a new dawn. Her hold on me a murder of the man I was, had been. Long ago. Long before fleeing the botched hit in Cairo. I was always running from something. I'd been running all my life.

Her, my angel, she ran from nothing. Only towards new things, new places, places where the world needed her, in the moment she was needed most. An angel in gypsy guise. In Budapest, stepping off a bus, snatching a small feral boy out of the path of a speeding truck as it raced past. A boy who would years later lead a national reform movement and change the world. Its international symbol, a tall graceful woman in silhouette, the flowing veils of a gypsy dancer, her hair tossed wild, I knew, from the draft of a speeding truck.

Further west. London where everybody spoke English and I no longer understood anybody, not even myself. Until I'd seen the truth. The truth I'd found in her eyes. As I held her one last time on that lonely street before she disappeared into the fog. There was no longer any reason to speak. No reason to ask any longer

who my saving angel was, why she'd saved me. Ask her why she left me on that foggy day, the cameras lining the street, our only witness to the age old question of who holds power over life and death, to give or to take, where the power lies. The truth was in her eyes. To give she said, to give life, give back lives, that's where the power has always been. She'd saved as much of me as she could. The rest was up to me.

My Walk, Vincent Rivera

My life feels like a constant walk down a dark alley, anticipating the worst surprises. My walk is far from a walk in the most pleasant park. My walk has dangerous monsters in every form, and I wish I weren't taking this walk home alone. From the alley, I still walk alone down a dark and empty street. The only difference now is that there is more room for danger to get me.

However, I am actively on my search for my home as I know that this walk down the darkness is my only way, my only passage to get to my final destination. I wish that I had a friend or family member with me, but this land has become an emptiness. Sometimes, I am so scared and feel helpless, like I'm reaching my hand to heaven for support. When I see the traffic lights and lamps, I gain a sense of hope, like there is a higher being and spirit protecting me. Then, I try to gain the source of that energy to act as my guiding light.

My walk is my journey down this dark street. I remind myself constantly that my goal is to be cozy in my home. I deflect all the scorners, gossipers, and haters in the shadows as they stare and speak their hostilities against me. I put on my armor of bravery and spirit when I am mocked and harassed because I know that God has me always in his loving hands. I never want to drift and get lost in the crowd of negative people. I know that my heart is in the right place despite this isolating route.

Nightly March, Bruce Enos

On a dark, dreary night in lower Manhattan, a tormented soul marches lost in thought. The pre-dawn hours thankfully have little foot traffic to impede his mission. Unlike the

daytime, this street is bustling with activities and life.

Darkened storefront windows only advertise his grim reflection. Silently, he begins to scan his surroundings. The unlit street lights, paired with the heavy fog rolling in from off the coast, obscure his direction. Thinking to himself that there are good omens to better hide his presence on his nightly task.

Dire consequences are attached to his task hand, in which he is not sure of the choices he has made in the past. His internal dialogue is louder tonight than most nights. Almost deafening, he is denying himself the satisfaction of another quiet moment. However, he may think of the truth, but without question, he stands firm against his wavering resolve.

Snapping out of the trance with precise effort, he begins to notice that the sound of his pace has increased, as the soles of his shoes echo off the cold concrete sidewalk. Subconsciously, he begins to rehearse the actions he must do in order to stay his course.

Fear and uncertainty are suppressed as he notices his heart rate increase. He tells himself to relax because there is no one outside to impede his plan. He knows that if one person were to stop him with an idle, meaningless conversation, it could ruin his well-laid efforts.

Easing around the empty street, he notices a familiar feeling. Out of the cold, foggy, and still air. He slowly starts to count out the doors he passes. Up ahead, he sees it, home.

Quickly and effortlessly, he leaps up the few steps from the street to his front door. He grabbed his keys from his front coat pocket, unlocking the door.

Instantly greeted by the occupants of the house. His family is happy to see him return home. The walk home from work was uneventful, just as he hoped it would be. His wife and small toddler son welcome him home with hugs, kisses, and loving embraces. Letting out the breath he was holding, anxiously, as his environment changed to peace and serenity.

Rather Walk in the Country Side, Devante Thomas

Here I am walking down this foggy alley

Head on a swivel because these youngsters have no respect

Whether driving crazy or trying to pick-pocket
Somebody's bound to abuse my peace.

The constant fumes and chemicals in the air—what would you expect?

Constant sickness and headaches blurring the eyes in my socket

Privileged buildings I'm not allowed to visit

Look down upon me—even with the suit.

A better walk would be in the country side—with the breath-taking views

The mists over the rolling hills making the experience seem exquisite

Laying down in a valley atop lush grass, bare feet and comfortable

...as if there was nothing else meant to be existing....

Rip von Jackson, Esq., Belinda Ladd

The need had been building like pressure in a cast iron boiler. I knew that by the end of the week I would once again yield to this peculiar compulsion. Preparations must be made, including a sizable withdrawal from the bank. It wouldn't do for an occasion to present itself should I not have the means to act. This squalid neighborhood must be investigated assiduously as not just anyone will suffice. Preferably a female, for in these times they seem the most disadvantaged. The more impoverished and desperate, the better. Perhaps a young woman with a waif or two tugging at her skirt, gaunt from hunger and deprived of a father to aid in their support. She must be accessible at the right time and in the right place so I can act without detection, for if identified, I will surely be diligently pursued by those curious or corrupt.

I went searching each night. Maybe I would find her returning from some menial job, tired and low on hope that her situation might ever improve. The ideal mark will be downtrodden, never expecting what is about to befall her. In the past I'd selected the part-time prostitute. They were often fraught with poverty, inept at the craft, and choked with fear at the prospect of being abused or jilted out of the few dollars they so needed to avoid being turned out

into the streets. I took pleasure in their stunned faces, cherishing the change in their eyes to disbelief when I accosted them and suddenly delivered what would ultimately become her welcome fate.

She was walking down a side street when I noticed her. I could check off all the proper cues; the worn clothing and unkempt hair pulled back with a scarf, body hunched and aching, probably from her nightshift cleaning some business or factory while her children slept alone in a cold flat, her thin frame so used to hunger that it no longer yearns. I skulked in the shadows, observing, following undetected as she instinctively stayed within the light of the streetlamps and avoided alcoves or dark doorways. There can be no witness when I make my move. When she passed beyond the margin of each lamp's glow, her pace quickened as surely her heartbeat, until the damp sidewalk was once again illuminated. The hard sole of my shoe gave me away with a misplaced step onto a shard of broken glass. An instant furtive glance in my direction, then she began to run.

Swiftly, I outpaced her. At the moment I grasped her shawl, I hissed, "Stop! I must give you what you deserve." She offered no resistance, seeming to have already resigned herself to whatever she was about to endure. I seized her wrist and pressed the thick package against her palm, forcing her to close her fingers around enough cash to change her life. "Tell no one of this," I admonished her, turning away before she could memorize my face.

As I walked away a weight seemed to have lifted. This was my reward. Each time I helped another soul, the burden of all the atrocious things I'd done in the past was somehow easier to carry. I didn't look back. The streetlamps extinguished as dawn's first light began breaking a new day. ☺

City At Night, Gardner LaMarche

Going out in the darkness there seems to be a new sentiment. My thoughts are the same. The situations are the same as they were. Yet there is a new atmosphere. My veins are filled with a sensation that is closer to the heart and I can feel the infancy of the darkness. Before I stepped out into the shadows of the sun I was

alone with these thoughts. In the darkness the escape of the city is so quiet that I can hear the buildings as I walk along the manmade street.

Are the buildings like me? Are their emotions free to run like mine are? Perhaps the edifice is in fact a lover with a heart and its emotion is alive at night when all is silent. Sharing in the love of the city's buildings, my heart feels the sincerity of a population of buildings. The environment of the city is a lover of great multitudes. I walk amidst the city's lovemaking and I know that its heart is great. My own emotion is simply a thought in the conglomerate affair of secrets the city keeps in the dark. My love is a wish upon the multifaceted night and the buildings are like stars.

In the star-filled space, my love and my thoughts entwine with the love of the city. And as the night records my heart's secret emotion with the rest of the conglomeration, I am touched by the spirit of the night, it is alive with all of our dreams. And it is an honor to share in the sentiment of the darkened heart of the city as I walk along hallways made of the emotions of spirit. The buildings all know my dreams of the stars. And they share with me their own hope for love.

One Solitary Life, K. Daniel Okken

The lone stranger walked slowly and steadily toward the late afternoon sun. It had been a very warm day, but a brief shower from a cool front moving through had left a steamy atmosphere in the city. He knew he was being followed, though not for what reason. This was a midtown middle class neighborhood, and he thought he fit in well, yet he had this eerie feeling he was being pursued.

He was in no hurry. He had all the time in the world to reach his destination. He was not afraid, so he walked with dignity, resolve, and patience. Whoever was trailing him would reveal themselves in time. The cooling evening light barely made it down between the tall buildings beside him, and on this Sunday, everything seemed to be closed and the streets were fairly empty of people. Though, through the fog, he thought he did glimpse scattered movements in the block ahead.

He was not a part of this community, this environment, or, should it be more accurate in saying simply that he was not from here, but he was a part of this community. It was only that most people did not know it.

He was a good ten or so blocks further along twenty minutes later, and he had about another ten to go to reach the place of his appointment. He did not want to arrive too early, and could not be late, but desired to be right on time. If though, he was a few moments early, he was sure the closing fog would conceal his loitering.

As he neared the place of his meeting he began to recognize from his perception the surroundings. Yes, there was the intersection just ahead, and he thought he heard the sounds of laughter, a joyous abandonment of child play ringing through the chasms of the streets. Yes, here he was near the corner of his place of destiny, and he heard running footsteps behind him. He did not panic; it was not within him to do so. "They" could try to take him out, but "they" also apparently didn't know who he was. They were the scared oxen.

Suddenly, at the precise time of his appointment, a window shattered in the bank building on the corner next to him. A car did a slide stop, tires screeching at the curb; gunshots were heard; a bank guard was down; and three men emerged from the lobby window with bags in hand. He walked on, he was almost there. Car doors slammed shut, the roar of the V8 engine was heard in the nearly quiet streets. They were unaware of the children playing in the foggy street ahead. At his designated moment in time he stepped in front of the auto; the driver swerved, and the lone man actually shoved the car farther to the left of the narrow street. Bumper, grille, radiator, fan and engine block met the steel posts embedded in the sidewalk; and all was suddenly quiet except for the police sirens in the distant canyons between buildings.

He could go now. The gang would be rounded up, the money recovered, and his charges were safe to play once again.

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Heb. 13:2)

"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." (Ps. 34:7)

Remember, if one walks with the Lord, he may be lonely, but he is never alone. There is no such thing as a solitary child of God.

DARKLY THROUGH THE FOG OF REASON, James Logan Diez

'I am Darkness incarnate,' his twisted brain internalizes as he walks through the Fog of Reason he has created. 'I am the all powerful ... lesser humans cow before me and kiss my ring as once the masses did the King-gods of old.' So sure of himself is he... and why not; is he not the most powerful man to have ever lived? Does he not hold the power of atomic fiery annihilation in the palm of his hand? Down the Streets of Authority he strolls in the Dark ruins of his thoughts... yet carefully planned for these Times of Chaos, upheaval and divisiveness.

'How easy it has been to manipulate the simpleton Donald Trump,' thinks the Dark Man. 'A stupid puppet... "Trumpuppet" dancing at the ends of the strings I alone pull.' The Dark Man ... MAMMON the the Master of Greed; Fiend of Finances; and, Deamon of the "all mighty dollar." He hears the echoes of the voices in the Fog, muffled by the dampness of the shed tears and deflected from the base of the Great Tower of Babylon hidden between the dimensions of Reality and False Hope that lay to either side of the Facade the Americans dwell in... "Democracy"... perhaps such once was, or could have been had the Dark Man not succeeded in his Plan. Now, ahh, sweet success.

Between the deceptive speeches of his Demagogue minions in political field and government; and the False Prophets he's had as his allies since Time immemorial, The People ... such simple minded creatures (barely above the great Apes to be sure) ... have been led down the utterly fictitious "American Dream" into the slavery of the indebted servants. How could these Commoners have ever hoped to rise as equals to their Betters?

But it is time to make an Audience with The Puppet. Must see that his Ego is properly stroked lest he become suspicious ... then the subtle manipulations, the casual 'suggestions' he

swallows like a baby bird swallowing a worm! 'Maybe,' the Dark Man thinks, 'when I spring my trap and "Mr. President" realizes he wears the collar of my enslaving, I will compel him to swallow MY worm and force him to acknowledge he is my Slave?'

The Dark Man slips quietly through the side door into their Covert meeting place. Must not be seen together until the Time is right, must allow the Trumpuppet to think he is the one in control for just a bit longer ... 'I MUST remain in the Shadows behind the scenes and allow any anger or risks to be taken by the fool in the Oval Office,' the Dark Man reminds himself. 'The time will come that the "Mighty Man" shall fall and all he owns shall then be my own.

"World Leaders," the Dark Man speaks aloud, "what idiots. You THINK You are in charge, but You know only what my minions in the Shadows tell You ...only what I WANT You to know! Ha!"

"We have to be quick," the Trumpuppet says coming through the door alone, "I have a meeting in 20 minutes with President Xi."

"Of course, Mr. President," says the Dark Man with the smile of a sycophant, "I am here only to serve You."

It is NEVER those who sit in the Seats of Office that are the TRUE Powers in any Government ... those in Seats of Power are only Puppets whose actions and decisions are based on the INFORMATION they are given by those who work in the Shadows ... those who gather the information and CHOOSE what part of that Information goes into the "Intelligence Reports" the Elected and Appointed Officials receive.

The Dark Man of the Shadows ... THAT is the TRUE Power in ANY Government from its Highest Executive Office and the Courts to the most "Democratic Congress/Communist Council," this is True.

We The People do not know what Agenda the Dark Man has ... we can only take action if/when the Agenda begins to take shape in our lives and only by its effect on our lives can We The People know if it is Good or Bad ... is it of **THE LIGHT** or is the Dark Man walking in the foggy Shadows of our World?

Alone, Alana Duncan

I stroll along these empty streets, alone.

Not even the street lamps greet me with their light.

I am alone in my seclusion,

No one but the mist, who envelopes me in her cold embrace.

As I trudge farther down my pain,

I do not seek my reflection in the storefront windows.

I do not wish to see my own rejection.

Instead, I look at the ground when I walk,

Avoiding the puddles of water from the just passed rain.

I stroll along these empty streets, alone.

Not even a dog or cat crossed my path.

No street cars to blow their horns,

Or rats hiding in the alleys.

My heart breaks a little more as it realizes

Just how solitary it really is,

Yet, it keeps on beating,

And so, I stroll along these empty streets, alone.

I Stand Alone, Christopher Monihan

"It is hereby ordered, that the defendant be committed to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction, for no less than 10 and no more than 25 years on count one, Felonious Assault on a Peace Officer," said a judge one day in Spring 1995, "and no less than 10 and no more than 25 years on count two, Aggravated Robbery—and that the defendant shall serve these sentences consecutively."

My sentence: 23-50 years. The three extra years were for a gun specification—but none of it matters at this point. That was a lifetime ago.

Little did I know, the first year of my sentence would be fraught with so much danger and violence that I almost wouldn't make it.

I landed at Madison Correctional Institution in London, Ohio on July 7, 1995. Intake, which is where unfortunate newly incarcerated souls are issued a prison number, brought my first truly humiliating experience.

"Strip to your birthday suit," the guard smirked. "Squat and cough."

As if that wasn't humiliating enough, I had to strip in front of a dozen other men already in their birthday suits. One guy had an erection.

I'm not from Ohio. I have no family here. I was passing through alone and I'm still passing through three decades onward.

Prison is a savage land. The strong devour the meek and the meek vanish into oblivion. Like a gnu I was tossed into a den of lions.

"I'm going to give you some advice—take it or leave it," said a stranger in the county jail. Black tats of skulls, vipers and the dead sleeved out his muscled arms. "When you get to prison, don't ever steal or snitch. Always pay your debts and keep your word. Most importantly, stand up for yourself and fight like your life depends on it. Do this and you'll be fine."

I nodded, wide-eyed. I took those words and made them my gospel.

At 23, olive tan skin, silky black hair and 17-year-old complexion—not to mention broke, and alone—I was an irresistible target for prison predators.

"Hey, you!" said one guy. "I think you're okay. Listen, I won't allow anyone to mess with you."

I felt his hand caress my shoulder.

I don't imagine he expected my reaction. At least the shocked, terrified look he made as I attacked him like a cornered honey badger made me think so.

It goes without saying that I abhor violence. It's disgusting. But that first year, I fought anyone and everyone who dared walk near. Prison is a zero-sum experience. Survive or perish. Eventually the predators concluded I was more trouble than I was worth.

Perhaps, I tend to think, it had more to do with my fanatical love for the prison boxing ring than anything else. Oh, and judo lessons since I was four years old—that probably helped.

Coming to prison my family, in their anger and disappointment, had crossed their arms and turned their backs to me. Old friends scattered like field mice. Alone in the wilderness and I had no one.

Like the silhouetted man, I stood on my own. I've witnessed men start and finish life sentences—fought through riots and endured lockdowns—stumbled upon rapes and murders—and battled crooked guards.

We are all silhouetted men standing alone at some point in our lives. How we choose to confront those times are what mold us.

The treacherous journey from maximum security to minimum security, which is where I am at now, has been sobering.

The worst I witness nowadays are the diabetics who **REFUSE** to put the pastries down or guys bitching about the commissary running out of cookie dough ice cream. Which is fine by me (the ice cream, and the bitching).

I did my tour of duty.

I'll take Camp Cupcake over Camp Thunderdome any day.

Global Hunt, Jack Simpson

Bill and Karla Winters had saved money to travel around the world. In two weeks, the two would start in California only to return in six months.

"Bill, I'm so excited that we are finally getting to relax together for once. It will be nice to see all the sights we have read about for years" Karla said with a big smile.

"What else do we need to purchase for our trip?" Bill asked. As he waited he took not just a look at the items she had already packed; his eyes were on her beautiful face. How she gave him two kids and hadn't wrecked her amazing figure. For once, at age 65, he felt like a young man in his twenties. Bill shook his head to clear his thoughts.

"Thinking about something?" she asked. As always it could wait. "Ok, you had your chance, Bill," she winked. With that notion he turned and strolled toward the door. His mind was still on her and the trip. He had set up a surprise for Karla. He knew she would love it. Through his connections, Karla was going to meet the Queen of England.

Bill had just parked at the 7-Eleven when he heard sirens. Where they lived, sirens were always normal. Police were always chasing somebody. Basket in hand, he started adding things that he thought were needed.

At the counter, he saw an Ambulance flash by and two more patrol cars. All items being checked and rang up by the cashier, she asked "you must be planning a trip." "We are. My wife and I are traveling soon. A well deserved trip."

Driving back home, he had to pull over as two more patrol cars drove by. He was wondering what was going on. Pulling into the street leading

to his home he seen police everywhere. He sped up and slid to a stop as an officer waved him down.

While he was gone, there was a knock at the door. Karla said just a minute as she placed the folded clothes on the suitcase. Opening the door, she thought Bill had his full. As the door opened the flash was all she remembered seeing. The bullet hit her right between the eyes as the intruder turned and walked away.

On the floor beside her laid a gift that would be Bill's. He lost it. This is what we found on top of her. A photo of a man he knew well. It was Carl Franklyn, a former worker with the CPA. Carl had gone off the scope and plotted to kill the president. Bill had been hunting him for years. Turning the photo over, written in ink, "You know where to find me." This wasn't going to be easy.

The quicker he got started, the quicker he could settle the score. It took two years and four months to find him.

Bill had a sail boat at the Marina. He hadn't been on the boat in about six months. He had been sitting in the dark waiting to see if anyone came visiting. Six hours later, it seemed to be clear. As his feet touched the steps to the cabin, he had a feeling something was strange. Flipping the light switch, a dim light came on. The place had been trashed. The smell of old cigarette smoke lingered in the air. Bill never smoked much less drank any alcohol.

"Found you," rang out from Carl. He would know that voice anywhere. A shot killed the dim light. Bill fired as the second shot whizzed by his ear. Bill returned the fire, striking Carl in the left shoulder. His gun hit the floor. While trying to search for it, Bill asked Carl, "How did you find me?" "You left a trail that a bloodhound could find with a head cold."

Carl drew his last breath as Bill shot him again, saying, "this is for Karla". He had one last thing to take care of. Kneeling before Karla's grave, he placed four red roses at her headstone. "It is done my love, rest until we meet again."

Midnight Stroll, Genevieve Brüemmer

I checked my mobile for the sixth time. Nothing. Still. Releasing a long sigh, and wondering why I always capitulate so easily, I walk away from my drive, down yet another

street -- one of the ones which head behind my house, as I've already walked a circuit on the three in front, twice.

Tugging my hoodie more tightly around myself in a futile effort to help ward off the evil thoughts in my mind, I decide to distract myself. I take in my surroundings: newly built, ranchero style houses mix with the occasional "villa" -- not a traditional type, just what the two and three-story houses are colloquially known as -- and surrounding everything is the scrub brush. Not true chaparral, but close enough for these people.

Every window is dusty, and I cannot help but envision each house as a person... and each face I see begins to appear more and more rotten, like row after row of decaying corpses.

STOP. Heart racing, I chide myself. No more morbid thoughts.

I need to distract myself better...looking up, I try to pick out the constellations above me. It's amazing, right? How all those stars seem close together, yet are actually distant and alone. I shake my head and look down at the dust floating around my boots -- soggy leather heels, so unfit for this terrain, this place -- and brush floats up behind me, like the wake of a lone frigate recently unmoored, with no solid heading, alone in the wide sea...

Ugh. Distracting myself from the macabre (and yes, macabre, my thoughts, are, you do not know) is not easy. As I reach an intense fit, I withdraw my mobile. Nothing. Still, turning right -- it seems to carve toward home -- I hear voices, and the lilt of it sounds Spanish. Normally, I'd turn around (bad things happen to lone women at night), but tonight isn't normal, so I push on, even as my heart sounds a warning klaxon.

"Oye! Chica bonita! Dondé--" whoever the man is, he is silenced by a "whack!" and an older, also male voice saying, "Cállete, guey!" Well, there goes my diversion.

Steps sound behind me. Oh, yay! Diversion on. A hand grabs my elbow, and I spin, ready to fight, but stop when I realize it's Ernesto, the home-based mechanic who fixed my El Camino's transmission last Spring. Which makes the abashed young man on the patio Armando, Ernesto's nephew and apprentice.

"Señorita Evie, why are you out here so late?" I shrug in response -- I haven't spoken in over 11 months, now. Not that he would know that. He steers me toward his house, Mando vacating a chair, as he talks in my ear, "It is too dangerous out there for you, ¿sí? I'll get you un té to drink, y papel de baño."

I look to Mando for an explanation of the toilet tissue. He points to my face. Using my mobile, I check. Sure enough, there are salty, black lines on my cheeks. Ugh.

Ernesto returns, cup of tea (sweet tea, ewh) and a roll of tissue at hand. As I vainly wipe my face, Ernesto asks, quietly, "¿Qué pasa, mija? Why are you so sad?"

I fight not to roll my eyes. Mija? Really? To answer his question, I pulled up the group chat with my family and handed him my mobile. I look away so as to not see his pity.

I'm not the one dying.

"Ay, mija. Lo lamento, lo lamento." I hear my mobile chime and, looking at Ernesto, I see his eyes scroll over the message, and his throat rolls as he swallows. He hands me my mobile.

Text: The doctor agrees, he's slipped into a coma. You can come back now, the family's left. Thank you for giving them this time.

Untitled, Cory Lambing

He walks. It is that tranquil time of night where it is actually early morning, but, since you have not been asleep yet, your mind still perceives it as an extension of the day before. He walks alone. The only sound is some distant traffic and the echoes of his footsteps reflecting off the cold and quiet storefronts. There is a damp chill in the air. It always seems as if it has just rained or is just about to rain. Still, he walks; he does not pay attention to anything in particular. He does not even really know where he is going. As long as it is different from where he has been, all he knows is that he has to go and has to stop thinking...about her.

God, it has been ten years, at least. Ten years since he last saw her. Ten years since he has felt her touch. Ten years since he heard her soft lips curse his name. Seems like so long ago since life had taken him one way and her another. Yet still, every single day, he can't help but think about her. Where she might be. How she might

be. Why things had to end up the way they did. How it could possibly have been different; why it had not been, could not have been; still, he walks. Though he wants to sleep. He wants to go days without being in his own body. He badly wants to meet a little, deranged man who has only one tooth and dresses in rags.

This man will take him up to his fifth-floor apartment and feed him pharmacological mixtures of sunshine and rainbows while little hamsters scurry about in foul-smelling cages. He wants to get drunk and fly over Pennsylvania in a hot air balloon. But instead, he walks. Burning himself away on the outskirts of some city.

Meanwhile, someone, somewhere, is having a bake sale. A teenager is getting pregnant, and she is lying under her blankets listening to some random old man snore and fart. Yet still, he walks. And in the shadow, the apartment you had when you were eighteen was torn down to make room for grass and rocks. And all the snapshots of all of your made-up lives fall off of the shelves and cover the carpet, but it's okay. Because the carpet was already dirty and sticky with your sweat and tears.

Maybe he thinks that if we skipped the election and didn't take up cocaine as a hobby. Maybe he thinks that if our parents didn't hate us so much. Maybe, just maybe, if he had never let you cheat off of him in math class during ninth grade, he would not have to walk anymore with you in his mind like a cancer. Maybe things could have been different. Maybe he could take a bus, or God Forbid, ride in a car. Yeah, maybe different would have been better. Maybe not. Maybe it already is. So he continues to walk until he can no longer do it.

A Whisper in the Night, Philip Grigsby

Through the gloom of night,
I walk alone;
My shadow melts out of sight,
My steps echo, with a rhythmic drone;

Demons lurk within my mind,
They steal my sleep;
Their curses, so unkind,
I sob as they murder the sheep;

Blood, with that coppery smell,

Stains my hands, and eyes;
My path will surely lead to hell,
No higher power answers my whys;

Death, death, I know you are there,
I feel your presence;
Your stench pollutes the air,
Our battle must commence;

In the book of death,
My name is highlighted in red;
Longing for my last breath,
The journal of my life shall be read;

I care not, for the means to my end,
My purpose, a forgotten stranger;
The horror of memories I cannot defend,
I am a confederate to danger;

The lingering light
Will soon turn to black;
As I become a whisper in the night,
My only wish, my past to roll back;

Poe, Dante, and I shall meet,
A collaboration of the troubled mind;
Warmed by hell's heat,
Our wisdom, a gift to humankind.

Longing's Beat, Jason Centrone

Between sizes—a raisin, say, and worldly date, I catch a flat beetle wandering the great plank floor. Watch it scuttle up to each divide, and, resolved, do the straddle thing. Antsy, I suppose, for another of its fundamental needs.

Otherwise, alone with the specter of no one else's interest in what you had to say at that point, I settle in, stumbling through—conceiving by the ailing moon of a rare book room's single carrel. It's your lingual underbrush—a briary dialect that snags and yearns at the period duds I've taken to.

I don't pretend to know you quite, but every hour, link another finger with what you've gone and left of yourself in the sentiments available at that point—a memoir, for any old wanderer to try.

Otherwise, alone with the first gray folds of evening. Antsy, I suppose, for a truer eye-to-eye—you describe it as a pattern, this steady fountain pen-sorcery, conceived at the second story streetside window—from which I could easily be mistaken for that never worse than late.

Except, like ghost breath—a hiss, the gas street lamp seething on jolts, jostling my second-hand fedora—between sizes, a little low, a little silly. But the wingtips—having straddled, out of some resolve, plank-to-city cobble, clop—of a sudden, closer to a mallet.

Untitled, Allen Pat Parker

Walking the line of the unknown, the Journey to find self. The first step is the most important, it moves you in a direction the path chooses good or bad. Known steps must follow the next.

Not sure what to expect as the path slowly appears. Balancing each step against the concert line to step down will slide you backward or for better word downward.

Looking left and right is tempting but straight forward thinking a few more steps and it should be there.

What could be or might be the very thing that changes your life while wandering through the fog. Heart beating to the echo of soul. The unknown makes others wary of the things to come.

The path is straight but narrow both sides trying to distract you from the set Journey. The dense fog lifts slightly as the view of your desire appears.

Thinking back to the first step which set the path in movement. The second step was overcoming the first. The third step was backing the first two.

Enjoy the Journey of the unknown and watch change reveal itself.

Untitled, Anonymous

Leo: Hmm, I walk this path every day, and it seems way too foggy, and I don't remember walking past this trash barrel...

Unknown Voice: You don't know me yet, but you must make a choice in life. This morning, you have been making too many excuses by lying

Leo: Who are you? Where are you coming from?

CAT: Meoww!

Leo: Was that a black cat that just crossed me?

Unknown Voice: Right now, you must worry about the unknown.

Leo: What's the decision I must make?

Unknown Voice: Take a right if you want to go back to college. A left if you want a new job or straight if you want to find your career.

Leo: But why?

Unknown Voice: You have been procrastinating too much, and now is the time to contribute to the path that was made for you. It's your choice; cross the crossroads. Stay behind or move forward in life.

Leo: Where will the roads take me?

Unknown Voice: Life has its ups and downs. We must not focus on the unseen. The road you choose is the path you will be on in your journey.

Leo: Without help, I do not think I can withstand the obstacles life throws at me.

Unknown Voice: You will be fine. You are very strong. You will not have any problem overcoming the choices you make.

Leo: I want to go straight.

Unknown Voice: Just remember, Leo, "Life is hard, but we all have to strive and if we work hard enough, we will be sure to survive." Bye for now.

Leo: Hey...Wait a minute...please...ughh I forgot the paths... choices huh.

Caste-ing Shadows, Brandon Blakeney

They say this is the only place I belong, the dark alleys where the smell of gunsmoke and the possibility of a straight-razor across the throat haunt the senses like self-medicated mental illness. And it's sad to admit, but having grown up in such a toxic household, violence and its myriad iterations have become my comfort zone.

If there were no punches to counter, acidic one-ups to rebut, nor flashes of steel to check my reflection in, I would be rudderless and unmoored, so I keep time with cockroaches,

slipping between cracks under cover of darkness, making use of the scraps Day Walkers cast off in their wake. But I'm no useless wanderer.

I was brought forth by a conjuring of sorts - an intonation of hieroglyphs etched deep into these cold bricks: pockmarks from ricochets, bloodstains, and ragged remnants of crime scene tape. They are, therefore I am. The Shadow within the shadows. Both fact and fiction. "Necessary Evil" - the system symptomatic of The System. Without me, John and Janet Q. Public could never muster the courage to believe in the lie they call safety. But the truth is, there is no Law, only Order. No morals, only morale... and "safety" can only be measured by how far one can catapult him or herself off the broken backs of Others.

Though I have long since abandoned the concept of innocence, allowing the less culpable the ability to rest easy is a fulfilling enough reason for me to exist. But to the guilty: Beware! I am coming to drag you down, kicking and screaming, into the abyss.

Reunion, George Hesse

Looks like I finally found my Dad.

Harry Logan, P.I., Carl Butterfield

A rainy night in the city, on the wrong side of town, is no place to be by yourself unless you're Harry Logan, P.I. He'd cut his teeth on these streets as a rookie cop, and they still called to him, like an old lover.

He came from a family of cops, and he was proud to carry on the tradition. Trouble came when he ran afoul of a corrupt senior officer. He refused to look the other way, and even though the dirty cop eventually went to prison, Logan found himself the target of retaliation.

He fought it for months, but finally resigned when he was set up and almost killed during a drug bust. The message was loud and clear; he could quit or end up a picture on the squad room wall.

He'd gotten his private investigator license and hung out a shingle. After a slow start, he solved a couple tough cases for prominent clients, and business started to pick up. Recently, he'd gotten busy enough to hire a secretary to help with the phones and paperwork.

Tonight, he was looking for one of his informants from back in his cop days. It was late and he wore a dark trenchcoat and a fedora in deference to the rain. His secretary, Maggie, told him he looked like Spencer Tracy, which was disappointing, cuz he'd been going for Mike Hammer.

He found the run-down tenement building where one Lenny "The Vulture" Lebrinski lived, or at least had lived back then. He took the stairs to the second floor and knocked on the last door at the end of the hallway.

He heard movement inside and then opened a few inches and a thin, pock-marked face peered out at him. The eyes that belonged to the face were magnified by the coke bottle-thick glasses perched on a thin, hooked nose.

"Hiya Lenny," he said, "mind if I come in for a minute? Got some questions for you."

"Logan?" The man replied, "What the hell do you want?"

"Harry Logan, P.I. Told ya, get some questions for ya."

"Yeah? Well, you're not a cop anymore, so piss off," Lenny started to close the door, but Logan stopped it with his foot.

"C'mon Lenny, I may not be able to help you out of a jam, but I can still make it worth your time," he replied as a roll of twenties appeared in his hand. He reeled off five and handed them through the gap.

The bills disappeared and the door opened. "Ok, I'm listening," Lenny said.

Logan stepped into the room and looked around at the squalid surroundings. A wave of spilled beer and stale cigarette smoke hit him like a physical blow. He surveyed the seating options and remained standing.

"Hear about that big jewelry heist last week in China Town?" he asked his host.

"Yeah, what about it?" Lenny replied.

"I'm looking for the guys that pulled the job."

"What for? You're not in the crime-fighting business anymore."

"My client had a family heirloom at the shop being repaired. It isn't worth much, except to them and they'd like it back," Logan replied.

"Sorry man. I'm not in the recovery business. 'Sides, that stuff is probably long gone."

"Nope. I've checked with all the local fences and none of it's shown up yet. My guess is they're sitting on it while things cool down," Logan replied.

"Maybe, but why should I stick my neck out? Those guys are seriously touchy."

"How about a grand for the information and another two G's if I recover their property?" Logan said, watching his host as his eyes suddenly sharpened.

"How do I know it's legit?" he asked.

"Cuz it's me, Lenny."

"All right, but you'd better be good for the cash," said the informant, "The crew boss is a guy named Big Joe. He's a shot-caller from over on Lexington. They are most likely at Big Joe's old lady's place, old-down by the docks, across from the old fish market."

"Thanks Lenny," Logan replied, handing him another handful of twenties, "consider this an advance."

"Cool man, anytime," replied a much happier Lenny.

Logan left the apartment armed with his first lead in days. He took the stairs to the street level and turned left towards downtown. He set off at a brisk pace, calculating his fastest route to the docks and maybe, the resolution to this case.

He didn't notice the two men step out from an alley across the street. They stood a minute, then, with a shared look, they started walking in the direction he'd gone, following their quarry into the darkening night.

To be continued...

Walking the Edge, James Hochschild

The image reminds me of the one narrow alley in Downtown Cleveland in the 1980's. That is East 4th Street. There was barely enough room to drive a car on it with room for narrow sidewalks on each side. The old street lights are different from the ones that I know of. I know the image is not of Cleveland.

The reason that I call this "Walking the Edge" is because the guy is walking on the curb between the safe sidewalk and the narrow street. Also, the fog can create issues of visibility that drivers have a hard time with. I believe it all boils down to familiarity and comfort with the street.

Stranger in the Night (Death), Tai Todd

Ayo! I feel like death is stalking me. Two sets of prints when he walks with me. Dialogues his shadow wants to talk in the dark with me.

Arguably the reason why my foes want to corner me. Hope I sign the deal for my soul that they want to barter me. Part of me wants to just sign on the dotted line. I mean, take a look around. Either God is blind or just deaf to the prayers from my family tree. While Mr. Death is doing favors, can it be?

This thing deeper than the skin and the bling is cheaper than the cost of teasing demons with the grim reaper. I paid tariffs on my wins and my sins. Keep a couple angels rocking Timbs as they sing Aretha. I spin reefer just to gather my thoughts. The snake, the rat, the cat, the dog. How you gonna see them if you're living in the fog. And the Bronx is like one wrong left from Hell. Don't trust nobody. Like even death might tell. How I'm living. Lost children in New York forbidden.

Mom's riffing "for the drillings, please Lord, forgive Him. From the park to cellar blocks, I should've buckled in school. But it's dark and hell is hot headed, nothing too cool. Stubborn and fool — stereotyped because I like New Jordans, gold chains and my stereo height. Turnt up for the high we were ready to die. Watch for the feds and the spies, friends in disguise. trying to double cross, they're simple. Lay low, play slow, make sure the cross is triple.

Speak of the devil, I'm clocking as he's peepin' the rebel. Fame turns to bloodstains and the streets forget you. Was it in vain? All these dead ends we trapped hungry nights when we buttered bread ends, that's fact. Famistiteo! This type of knowledge isn't found in books. Glimpsing back because his footsteps sound like hooves.

I'm convinced. That it's him with the mark of the beast. Hearing whispers in the wind, do I cross this street?

Talking to me, I mean to myself, unwell.

Just as long as I don't answer back. I might need help. Is my mind playing tricks 'cause I rather the noise? Like Bushwick, Willie D, Uncle Brad, and them boys. Paranoid in the open breath. Short and delayed. Can't tell if he's approaching or walking away.

Death around the corner.

Silent Road, Jeremy Brown

This road I walk in Silence,
Yet only near Midnight,
This Phantom appears,
Never does he look here or there,
Straight forward is this path,
purely confident, obliterating all causes,
Neutral in stance, I feel the power
of this Silent Road, forever I and
him both have become the apparition,
One in front yet one behind,
Both are we, one in mind,
Ever so kind are these silent steps,
The world's forms around us changes,
Stable, Sturdy is the Phantom's progress,
Eyes always cast forward,
One thing is for certain
Always he walks his Silent Road,
His path never can waver,
Destined to walk until the world's
Death,
La Muerte Phantom Apparition,
As the midnight bell tolls,
Never wavering like a candle's
firelight both our paths
have been set.
The mist in the light of Darkness,
He feels this too.
Walking yet appearing to stand
Still, is this Silence
The Death, before life's
Simple thrills?

The Mind of a Lone Stranger, D'Andre M. Morris

Well, today is the best day of our life. It got to be, right? We had better days. But never a day with so much meaning. 10 years working for M.D.O.C. We are getting discharged from prison. We can go home now.

Mopping floors, washing dishes for 10 years, we should get a retirement check.

Clothes! A get-out-of-prison outfit! We'll go bare if we had to.

We probably get picked up by some crazy lady, saying, "I have never seen a man walking around the street nude before. What happened? Why you all like that?" she'll ask with a smile.

\$75.00! That's all we get for slaving for 10 years. This is outrageous, disrespectful, an insult to my intelligence. I demand a—

Well, well. Looks like it's time to make our grand escape.

Look, the world done change. This is what we got ourselves into. Hey, see that car, make a face. Ahh... They don't even see us.

Music Playing: "I don't want nothing from the mall. No luxuries big or small. Neva care for another stranger's call. You by my side is the best gift of all. I don't want nothing from the mall. No luxuries big or small. Neva care for another stranger's call. You by my side is the best gift of all."

Look out the window. Ah, yes. It's nice, very nice. Nice? Beautiful! So much green. Closer, closer to destiny. On our way to the Greyhound. A greyhound. They should have a greyhound dog on the actual greyhound bus.

Wow, people. Everybody got their own clothes. They're just standing there. Look like they're not doing anything. We're going to have a good time. We need food, tissues, soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes. And we're good to go.

We got to get to our new address. How about McDonald's? Oohh, yeah, those. Got to have one. Double Cheeseburger, Big Mac, the BLT, apple pie, they got to have McChicken. I'm on my way!

Hey! Ask that man if he's got another cigarette, for a dollar. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Oh, it's been a while since we had one of these. A Newport. Feels good.

We never been on a greyhound before. Real nice comfy seats. Big bus. Everything is good, all is well. We literally left everything. That's crazy. Everything! Best travel is light travel. We can't be traveling with a full bag for 10 years—all over the state, na. Plus all we need is out here. We'll be cursed with that stuff. We need to forget quick, adapt. Is cash used any more? Got to be.

No one came to get us. They know I'm coming home.

We need a job. Yes, we need a job! I told you over and over again, no one's surviving without money. We got to get a system.

We have nothing. We're no beginner, and a high school kid got more rank.

I've told you many times, get a job. Get some money. No options. Don't piss me off. What should I say?

We need a lady to acquaint. Relax, relax, calm down. Listen, it's okay. This is not a bad thing. Why it ain't? No touching, no comments, no lusting, no sex. I know. I know. We always dreamed of coming to this place. We're accepted here.

How are we going to get a phone? Call bro. I'm not asking no stranger for their phone. I don't trust these people. We're being followed, watched, hunted. I don't like this at all.

What?! We just asked a stranger for a smoke. Right there, over there. They got a phone.

No answer. Must be at work. Are there still D-DOT's? A store. Food. It looks like a store day in here, without the bags. Everything is out in the open.

Cool Ranch, Faygo, Cool Ranch, Snickers. Oh yeah! I could eat the whole store. Don't touch Mr. Anderson's Snickers, commander's orders.

A bus stop. Let's go! Time to get off the bus. Walk five blocks. Turn here. Freedom!! You don't even know, do you? We're free! We can go anywhere, anytime, whenever.

Look at these people. My family. Who are these people? I don't know these people. Children grow, everybody looks different. This is a set up of some sort. Do you feel loved? What is this?

What? We must have fallen asleep. Where does everyone go? Look, there's the door. Okay. Let's go for a walk.

Here we are in the middle of the night, in the middle of the town. No one's around. Just me and my steps on the ground. Free to roam wherever. And this road is just another road to nowhere.

Good Morning, Rick Clappsy

My contact emerges from the fog only two blocks ahead of me and I tighten my grip on the pistol in my pocket. I'm certain he has seen me and I'm also certain he has a pistol of his own at the ready should anything go wrong over the next few moments. So far, no other people have been about, which is why this district at this time was chosen for the exchange. This being my first mission outside my native USA, I'm doing my very best to remain calm as I remember what my handler told me earlier...

"Today you will help the U.S. win this war and drive a dagger through the dictator's heart,

son. You will walk right up to your enemy and put your young life in his hands. If he kills you, you will not be defeated. If you die, nobody will know you were there. But if you do your job and come back with the codes from the dictator's location, you will be a hero nonetheless. Just don't foul up and remember your training." That was Colonel Taggeit, who wore no uniform and saluted no one.

"Questions, Miller?" he said as I stood there silently.

"What do I do, sir, if I suspect an ambush or that the codes are fake?" I began. "And what do I do if I follow after the exchange is made?"

"Follow the plan, no matter what occurs, and stay calm. You are uniquely qualified for this mission because of your foreign parents and flawless accent. You know what must be done," I did.

It was not lost on me that all the lights were extinguished on this narrow street as my contact came into view. Perfect or not, I hailed him as planned. "Guten morgen, mein herr. This is a fine day, yes? Is it your bahnhof? Or where is the train station?" I took my hands from my coat pockets, removed my hat and handed it to the man in front of me. A code, he was expected to take the hat and offer me a cigarette, the signal that both he and I were supposed to be here, to dispense with protocols and get down to the business at hand.

Despite the fog, I had my eyes trained in every direction at once, ready for the slightest hint of danger. We commented on the chill in the air being apropos and got down to brass tacks. He handed me his cigarette lighter, which would have a microfilm inside with intricate details of the Dictator's movements and location over the next three days. This man was a traitor to his German motherland for the sum of ten karats of flawless diamonds I was expected to hand him concealed in my own lighter. He, like so many, wanted the Fuhrer dead, and he was betting his life on us getting the job done.

I didn't care one way or the other, so long as I now possessed the vital information. I could wind my way through these damp streets, make my way to the safe house and then return to my unit where I could finally breathe a sigh of relief and have a very stiff drink - or three. As if on cue, the morning sun began to eat away the fog and warm light bathed my face as I walked. Today

had already been an adventure for this private from Bayonne, New Jersey, and it wasn't even eight in the morning.

I looked behind me, finding nobody in sight. Down the long path of the street was nothing but sunbeams bouncing off the closed shop windows. Nobody had a clue that something of great importance to millions of people had happened while everyone slept on this cool Sunday morning in the middle of a war.

Me, Myself, and I, Carletha Purifuy

Sometimes my mind is foggy like this night. Other times it's clear as the sun's bright light shining high in the sky. On fog-filled nights, the bleakness has an urgency tugging and sucking me in to roam the dark shadows of my mind, causing me to open forbidden doors that are padlocked doors I care not to enter. The fog is suffocating, no turning back. I must walk alone down every dark alley searching for the truth—where did I go wrong, ending up on this street alone. There may be some people along the way, but through the fog, they are distractions as I push open door after door until I find the sliver of light, or is it hope, as I uncover the past in search of my peace at last. I pull my coat tight for comfort and hold on to my hat as I brace for the sudden impact. Hand on latch, mind is ready, heart is secure. I enter and battle it out. My past is trying to engulf me, but I'm ready to face it. I overcame the fear of that door, leaving with much more courage than before. Confident in my stride, feeling a sense of pride as I walk towards the light, hat tilted to the side, and the night is still foggy, but the sun's bright light shining inside. I know which alley to take as I roam the shadows of my mind, opening doors that I padlocked and cared not to enter, no longer walking alone. Peace is now on my side.

The Quiet One, Jonathan Holeman

It was quiet. At first, I hadn't noticed. I woke up the usual way. Rolling off the couch onto the floor, coughing, gasping for air as I reached for my cigarettes. Nothing seemed out of place as I lit my Pall-Mall unfiltered. I took a drag, glancing at the little broken alarm clock on the stand where the television used to sit. According

to the clock, it was 3:13 am. The problem with that was the sun beaming through the single window in my single room apartment.

I started to notice it then. The quiet, I assumed it was around 10:00 am, but who knew. Last night was the same as any other. Drunk, at the shit hole bar by 9:00 pm. A brief flirting with Sally, the gothic pierced barmaid. Then, out the back door, stumbling. Cross the alley, climb up my fire escape in the darkness. In the window, smoke until I pass out, wishing I had more heroin.

Usually, when I woke, the neighbors' Spanish music drifted through the wall. Someone would be yelling, arguing with another dope fiend down the hall. Then there were the sounds outside. The cars, the endless chatter of the city. It was then that I began to feel it. The dread. Some instinct deep in my ancient DNA. I drank some water. Splashed more on my middle-aged, beaten face. I saw the fear in my light blue eyes as I brushed back my black hair. It was unfortunate that I just grabbed my jacket, threw on my hat, and ran out to the street. If I had known, I would've grabbed any food, a weapon, something useful.

That nightmare began with an eerie, endless quiet. There was no sound, not even breathing, because they didn't. Breathe that is. After roaming the streets until night came, searching for someone, anyone, I found the building.

People, if that is what they were. They surrounded the sidewalk. They stood stark still. No movement, no breathing. They just stared at a random building in the fog. I bet in some module, this is where the guy makes a noise, and zombies chase him down. Well, I've seen enough of that. All I did was turn around and walk very slowly away. I just kept on walking.

Sure, a part of me wonders, why stare at a building? What was in there? Well, a little mystery was less likely to kill me than a pack of whatever these people were now. For now, I'm just walking.

Previous Themes/Missed Submissions

ISLAND, Richard Schmidlkofer (*April Picture Theme*)

God created everything. Even this lonely Island in the ocean. Even though I'm surrounded by a lot of people. I feel alone by myself. Sometimes that's good and sometimes that's bad. When I'm alone, I'm closer with God, but am I really alone? I have a relationship with Yeshua (Jesus). When I'm in my cell by myself and my cellie, it is more peaceful than being in the dayroom with the negative drama. The bad things about being alone: I'm not fellowshiping with my Christian brothers and helping them and they are not helping me.

KEEPING UP, James Bauhaus (*March Picture Theme*)

"LEONARD! Slow down! You're older than God's Grandpa! You don't have to run!"

"In the swamp, I'll be safe with the gators! Hurry!"

"No snipers are after you! Take a rest! Before you drop!"

"They're never going to pick me out of a crowd again! That javelina at the gate wasn't there to scratch its ass on the razor wire!"

"It's been over ten miles! And almost fifty years!"

"And it'll be fifty more if I get a say about it!"

"It's a new day, Leonard. Can't you tell? Minds changed. New blood thinks differently! They threw out that Hawaiian guy..."

"Yeah! After thirty years! All they had on him was four paid jail rats!"

"...and the supremes threw out their death on Glossip!"

"Only took them thirty years to get right on that too! IF you can call it that! The crooked shits made a deal with the KILLER to fake him up into being the killer! I swear, jurors are getting stupider every day! They're nothing but trained seals."

Seeing his great-granddaughter almost collapse from fatigue, Leonard stopped, turned

back and held her up while she caught her breath. This took some time.

Meanwhile, two javelinas caught up. The sawgrass parted. Their squinty eyes locked on him. Behind an evil grin, the closest one squealed, "Hello, Leonard. Looks like your time is up!" Their slaughterpipes rose as one. The air ripped with thunder and flechettes. Impossibly, both she and Leonard were unharmed. The javelinas gaped in astonishment.

Leonard took a pebble from his medicine bag and threw it as the javelinas raced to reload. It bounced off one forehead to the other. Both javelinas fell into the muck, unconscious.

"How the hell...?", she asked.

"I was owed," explained Peltier.

Upcoming Word Themes:

- **Due 11/1/25:** "Fork in the Road"
- **Due 12/1/25:** "Gifts"

Word & Picture Theme 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.

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.

Upcoming Picture Themes:

- **Due 11/1/25**



Due 12/1/25:



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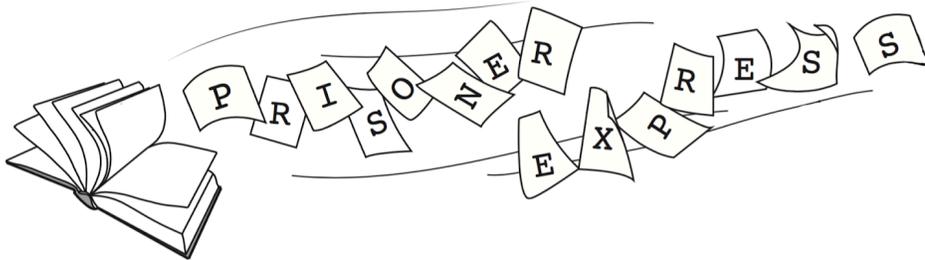
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Prisoner Express Theme Essays May & June 2025 Edition

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