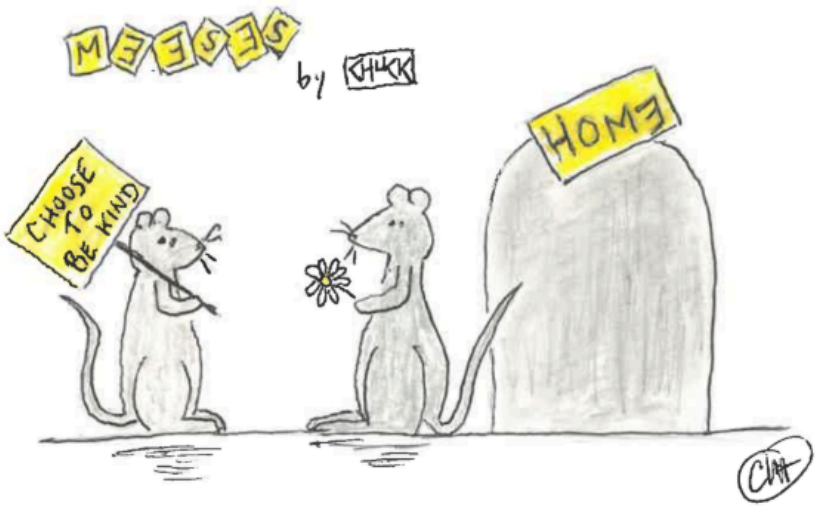
Prisoner Express

Theme Anthology: April 2026



Charles Van Horn

Letter from the Editor

This edition of the Prisoner Express Theme Anthology contains your responses to our April 2026 word prompt "Bottled Emotions" as well as your responses to the picture prompt, which was a moody picture of an old door with peeling paint, stone steps leading up to it. Or that's what it looks like to me anyway; it's always interesting to see how we all have different associations with these prompts, and of course on the flip side how sometimes our brains are sparked along very similar lines. Also of note: those of you who choose to take your PE Theme Program writing a step further and push your craft by, for instance, including as many "c" alliterations as possible ("The Door" by Daniel James Sigler, page 33); continuing a saga where each prompt is a new episode ("The Quiet: Eleven" by Jonathon Holeman, page 45); responding in poetry/verse (Alan Piwowar, Andrew Young, Aleasha Thiry, Timothy Scott, and many others); responding with lyrics ("Rap Write Style: A Burst Of Goodness" by D'Andre Morris, page 4); or even including drawings (like the one above, submitted with "Kindness" by Charles Van Horn, page 20).

Thank you as always for sharing your writing and creativity with us and more importantly, with each other. Please know that if you submitted an entry for one or both of these prompts and it's not included here, it's likely because it was over word count or otherwise wasn't aligned with our guidelines. See page 51 for a refresher on the guidelines and of course if you ever have any questions or want to check to see if we received something, please write to us at our P.O. Box or give us a call.

Happy reading & writing!

Jen G.

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April Word Theme:
Bottled Emotions

The Bottling Plant
by Alan Piwowar

Pent up rage
collected carefully
by your meek inner
switch board operator
that you hired to
route the daily
myriad of those
freaking Feelings—
"those feelinging"
Jimmy says
"feelings, let's talk
about your feelings
Alan"
and "How does that
make you feel?"
—make you want
to burst like
the dog snaps at
the annoying child
for tugging its tail
while he's eating,
or the water
balloon you have
filled too much
Or the guy in the
wheel chair who
was told, "I gotchu–"
one too many times
after he made your
girlfriend an
"I Love You!" card
when 5 minutes ago
you "spit" in his mouth
after you
gripped my hair and
accidentally busted
my lip.

The Rage that is
steadily bottled
on your mind's
assembly line of
bottled up emotions
will explode when the conveyor belt
malfunctions,
or when the
power surges.
Knowing your
repair strategy
before the explosion
helps—trying to
use broken bottles
when broken bottles
are all you've
ever been able
to afford
is not good business
practice either.
It's just as bad
as an "I gotchu"
But don't worry—
I got—you.

human
by Diego Ayala

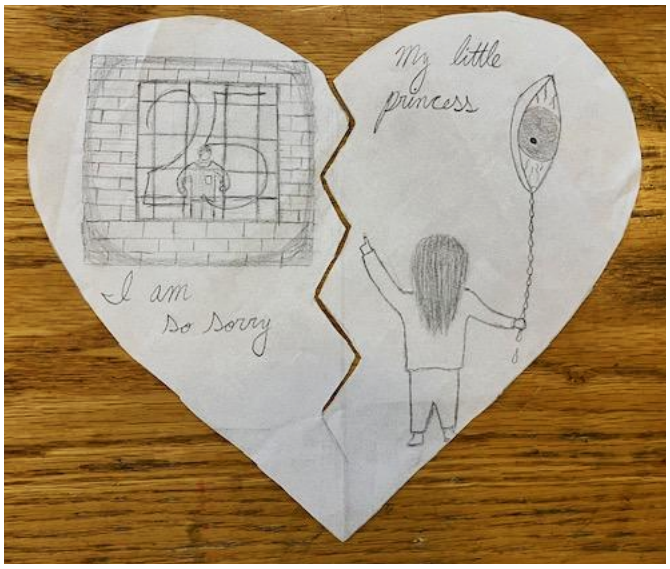
I honestly don't aspire to be a poet or a writer, I'm just a man who is finally starting to peel back all the layers around my heart and soul, the scars that only come from massive childhood traumas. When I was a kid I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up and I said bodybuilder. I longed to be powerful because my whole childhood I was powerless to stop anything that was happening to me.

In reality I never sat down to think about my future, I didn't have that luxury, I needed to focus on survival. In a house where none of the dinner plates were for me I survived by stealing food from those plates, lifting some of the plastic wrap from each plate and taking a little bit of rice and maybe a little piece of whatever meat they had, careful to put the plastic back and even out the spot where I took food so it wouldn't be obvious that I ate what was made for the people who were loved, unless I wanted to have more words that had already destroyed my self love completely. I survived by trying to avoid my tormentor so that they wouldn't let out their anger on me, but trying and succeeding are two different things so every single day I was broken down verbally, emotionally and sometimes physically. Sometimes I wished that I'd just get beat instead of having to hear everything that was said to me. So how could I dare think about my future when I was hoping that there would be no tomorrow?

Since before I was even born I've been unwanted, I had literally survived an attempted abortion, that fact was brought to my attention during one of the countless times where I was berated just for existing. I was a boy that was always abandoned and neglected, abused physically and sexually, broken mentally and emotionally, a boy that never got help for any of the traumas so I grew up to become a broken man with broken thoughts, but now everything that I do and write is for my little princess, the most beautiful little girl in the world.

The little girl that has the unique superpower to make me both smile and tear up every time I think about her. It's because of her that I'm willing to finally let everything out, to hopefully have some of the things I write published so that I can save them for her so she can see that she was my inspiration to become a much better man, to become the person that I should've been from the beginning if I had just been given a chance. I want her to know how much I love her, how much I'm willing to do to make her love me before she grows up and inevitably ends up disliking me, maybe even hating the fact that I'm her father but I hope that when/if she gets over these emotions, whether I'm still in this world or not, at least she'll have my words to read. To know that I'm not a monster, that I'm much more than just the biggest mistake I made in my life.

Hopefully this will also help others like me open up and release their pain and maybe help the rest of society to stop judging us and try to understand us. Why should my mental health issues be demonized while the world tries to be understanding of everyone else? I may be a "monster" in people's eyes but I know that I'm not. Monsters don't miss their child like I do, they don't kiss their baby's pictures before going to bed like I do, they don't lay in bed with their arm positioned like if their baby is laying with them like I do. Monsters don't cry like I do. That all sounds very human to me. I am not a monster!



Diego Ayala

Bottle
by Andrew Young

I bottle all these emotions down.
So much to the point all I do is drown...
I swim and try to break the surface
But I can't, all my burdens weigh me down
as I drown in this abyss of loneliness.
Where all my inner demons dance around
I've been looking for Heaven but Hell was all I found
I scream and I cry through these poems
But no one will hear a sound...
I wonder, will I be this way until I'm laid in the ground?
I'm stuck in a bottle of emotions that run deeper than any ocean
and I'm NOT the only thing living here.
Demon and beast who devour my soul like a feast.
They rob me of all my peace of mind
and they're with me all the time, always on the grind
to disseminate any hope I can find.
They enjoy the flavor of my pain.
They drive me insane and they go by many names:
Depression, Anxiety, Despair, Fear, Anger, Pain, Hurt
And they all love to flirt, leaving me feeling lower than dirt.
They're monsters forged from the dark.
They've been with me since the start.
Picking me apart.
And they live with me in this bottle I call
My heart.

Rap Write Style: A Burst Of Goodness
by D'Andre Morris

Hook: Bottled emotions, Bottled emotions. Constantly growing. So, I'm constantly hoping, the goodness is noticed + constantly rolling. Bottled emotions, bottled emotions.

Verse: I rain down on your wrath with happiness. Because my life is magical and happening. A smile urgent with purpose. That will clean up your anger, like washing dirty clothes with detergent. Well wishes and good greetings. No need to be nervous. Life is too good. That mean God is still working. Proud of success, is what my mind screams. I got the world, that's whatever be. That means anything. I got what I want + all I got is joy that don't stop. Feeling good and goofy. Joyous mind on duty. Feeling like the taste of mac and cheese, mac and cheese that ooh-wee gooey. Happy thoughts rule me. Yours truly. But, they never knew me. All me know is good times that come around. Only things that will ease the mind every time and a eased mind makes a pleased grind, every time.

Verse: Elated to see the sunshine. Elated to just feel fine. Elated to eat, Elated to keep, a life full of opportunity. Elated the possibility to have 10 toes on my feet. Elated to reap, positivity. When I wake up emotions flake up. Feeling great to see another day up. No time to lay up. Because I got to face, what? Good thoughts from lessons taught. Life is priceless but happiness is afforded by good deeds that actions brought. I bottle up goodness to one day give it back. Well done, like how toothpaste picks up plaque. Enforced by the brush. A good vibe is how I fuss. Goodness is needed, like pie with its crust. The menu is full of love I send to you. Good times to get into. Win-win. I win, you win, too. I bless you and the person you next to. You can bless, too. Pass it down, make a call, or send a text. I gone to the next move.

My Fault
by Aleasha Thiry

I made the mistake of gettin' in trouble
I am now stuck in my own bubble.
I have caused my family trauma
that I cannot take away.
Life in Prison is not easy
but I can't be lazy.
I gotta keep myself busy
or I'm gonna dread time.

Molotov Brewery
by Belinda Ladd

Where do I begin? Man, you have no idea. Or, maybe you do. In my 20's I had so much vehemence on tap that all it took was for somebody to wave that middle finger and I'd run them off the road and dare them to fight. Hey, I'm no warrior, and I'm not Billy/Betty Badass either, but they'd take one look in my eyes and back off. Then one day I took offense, drove up over the curb, jumped out and challenged this full-on biker dude to get off his Harley and get some satisfaction. He declined and I showered him with Mountain Dew, got back in and drove off. There were a zillion rush hour commuters watching us and he just rode away, his beard and chrome dripping, and ignoring all the stunned spectators with their jaws agape. I was stunned too. I couldn't believe he hadn't pulled a cannon out of his leather vest and blasted me.

Survival instincts told me that I'd better get some help. I went to a doctor and told him that I was angry and depressed. I showed him the needle marks and said I'd been self-anesthetizing, but it wasn't working. I explained that my mate frustrated me, that between us we couldn't make enough money to get ahead while supporting kids and one-on-the-way, that I was keeping up this facade of being an upstanding citizen but was also on out-of-state parole for an old crime, that my family and upbringing sucked, and that I had to keep all these conflicts inside because nobody understands. When it came to capping my emotions, I had more unlabeled bottles than a micro-brewery, and they weren't done fermenting.

Doc was pretty empathetic. He told me that people don't need a reason to be depressed, often, it can be a chemical imbalance in the brain. In your case, he said, you have plenty of reasons. He wanted to try the most common medication, Prozac. Told me that sometimes it takes a few tries until they find the right one for the person. Didn't work a bit. Then he tried another one and it did work, so well that I traded my extreme behavior for a foggy brain each morning. We tested the theory when I ran out of the pills a few months later and the doctor's secretary phoned the pharmacy. We filled the prescription and I continued taking it. A week later my mate accused me of not taking my meds, and said she could tell. I blew up in my defense and she demanded to see the bottle. It was the wrong stuff; the secretary had called in the first anti-depressant prescribed, the one that wasn't right for me. I took them for several years and managed to do much better. We bought some land, developed it, and things were working out. But I was still packing a case of twist-offs, each one waiting for someone, or something to pop a top. I wasn't dealing with my emotions, just keeping them in the cooler. Problems don't go away by putting them on ice.

When I returned to prison the medical provider took away my medication and tried to put me on some anti-psychotic meds that had me walking around in someone else's skin. I battled with the administration for several months and finally got the right prescription, but by then I was doing a year in the hole. Each day the nurse would come by the cell and give me a dose. Then suddenly she just walked right past. I'd beat on the door and yell I got missed, and she'd say that my order had expired, and I should send a communication form to renew. That would take several weeks, and two weeks later they would stop supplying them again. This was a drug that warned against discontinuing cold turkey, as the suicide rate became very high. I got tired of them turning me into an emotional yo-yo this way, and finally told them to just forget it. I would either deal with my anger…or not. In prison there's nobody to coddle you. If you continuously lose your composure, eventually somebody is gonna bust your glass.

Since then I have pulled my head out, you might say. I used meditation, prayer, and personal reflection to train my mind not to pop off. And good thing, because those medications ain't good for your innards if you take them long-term. So instead of running folks off the road and getting yourself shot, relax. Take little sips, and stop driving around with all those bottles in the trunk.

Ringing
by Timothy Scott

The noise of the day does hide it away
But no filter can rule the night
In silence it reigns over all that it claims
and mine can put up a fight

Bottle Emotions
by Charles Whitfield

How many times have we had things happen in our lives, our emotions become so perplexed we've got to bottle them up? One who governs his or her bottled emotions is judicious in the eyes of others. It's all about self-control: One who lacks such is like a city without walls, torn asunder (Proverbs 25:28).

One must bottle one's emotions to develop oneself because...you can't be free if you're not sovereign over yourself. Albeit your bottled emotions strain at your conscience to erupt, one must also have self-confidence in keeping them in check. Because if one doesn't, one's bottled emotions will surrender to fear, and fear is the heart's worst prison.

Pop Goes the Weasel
by Christopher Cross

Bottled up emotions
Crowding a closet-sized mind,
Building unto eruption,
Sharp, pricking seconds—out of time.
I know he will cross the line,
For rage has struck him blind.
Slaughtering down the halls of education;
Eleven p.m. news—a snack for the nation.

Bottles and Cans and Clap Your Hands:
a prose poem after "Two Turntables" by Beck (of "Loser" fame)
by Andrew Krosch

A deathly boring suburban childhood in a decent neighborhood in a pretty mellow state and tales of sadness from a family full of emotional and medical woes and bottles and cans and clap your hands and family fights and escalations and juvie and more bottles and cans it all boils over, the alcohol forcing the tipping point 32 degrees before the water meant to soften the burn. And bottles and cans and a sawed off shotgun and a near miss and more juvie, flirting with a certification to early adulthood and time in a prison for grown ups or at least for idiot kids who were over the age of 18.

And bottles and cans and clap your hands. A young adult in the '80's in a neighborhood the local rock and roll station called "The rockin' East Side" (of St. Paul). Lots of bottles and cans and clap your hands and a rockin' East Side lifestyle that lived up to its name for the most part. Lots and lots of bottles and cans and clap your hands and close calls. Bottles and cans and clap your hands and a marriage with children that makes the sitcom of the same name look happy, healthy, and normal. Bottles and cans and claps of hands and alcohol and emotions no amount of water is going to suppress for long. Flirtations with self annihilation and new lows and discoveries like how when the hole inside is big enough and the lighting is just right you can look down the barrel and not only tell if it's loaded but what kind of ammunition it is—a premium brand with hollow points that have a little post in the middle like a flower. To help it bloom I suppose.

And bottles and cans and clap your hands and no learning lessons from an earlier life of how bad a mixture of guns and all kinds of issues and a love of spirits in liquid form and what seems to be the inevitable result. Show down in flames.

And bottles and cans and clap your hands even behind prison walls and homemade knives and homemade spirits in a liquid albeit pulpy form. The solution. Soul pollution.

And bottles and cans and
And bottles and cans and clap your hands
Two turn tables and a microphone...

Grief, Guilt & Grudges
by Gary Farlow

Grief will consume you...
Trying to recapture that which was lost
Leaving you spinning in sorrow
In a fruitless pursuit of what once was

Guilt can weigh heavy upon you...
Like the sultry humidity of a sweltering summer,
A blanket of turmoil and toxic shame
Carrying the luggage of pain through the airport of life

Grudges absorb your creativity...
In what is the most worthless of all causes
Slights, perceived or real, become a noose
Strangling all positive energy

Uncork these bottled up consumers of life...
Rise from the rubble of the past
With the will of a phoenix
Lifting from the ashes

Rise with the possibility of new found wings...
A reality more than the debris
For suffering never knocks
Seeking your permission to enter

View life like the back of a tapestry...
All the knots and tangles, your adversities
That once turned over become the
Priceless work of art that is...you.

Bottled Emotions
by Amber Diaz

The things I used to allow, the yelling, screaming, the long nights we lie awake after countless fights. So I would put hands on a man I love. So much to the point of insanity. I have had to learn to keep "Bottled Emotions". I can't believe he is still by my side. I went to prison before I learned to keep them in. I have come close to exploding with rage. I just know that I do not want to lose him again. This is why my emotions remain bottled inside.

Nothing Could Be Worse
by Aaron Poe

As I was opening the front door to my house, I heard yelling. I figured it was the T.V. once again turned up too loud. Then I recognized the voice. It was my mother's. I slowly closed the door and proceeded to her room. I had no idea who she was yelling at.

"Is she watching something political on T.V.?" I thought. I decided to wait outside her room and listen.

"You lied to me! You said you would never leave me!" she shouted. Her voice sounded hoarse. This must have been going on for a while. "You promised me. You promised me forever," she said softer, almost to herself. I knew she could only be talking to my father.

For a second, I felt a bit of relief. I was glad it wasn't my brother or she was fighting one of her friends. Her bottled emotions finally exploded.

Thinking she might be finished I entered her room. She looked more hurt than I have ever seen her look. I rushed past my father and sat next to my mother on her bed. I felt so helpless as I sat. I pulled her into an embrace and kissed her on top of her head.

"You're alright now, I'm here," I calmly said to her. Her sobs became deeper and louder as I held her tight. Nothing could be worse.

I turned to look at my father. Tears started to fill my eyes as I continued to look at him. I held them back the best I could. I had to be strong for my mother. I wiped my eyes with my sleeve to remove the blur that the tears were causing as I stared at him.

The silver urn he was in atop my mother's dresser was moved. She must have picked it up a few times. I turned back to my mother and kissed her head again. She squeezed me so hard that I thought a rib was going to crack. I felt how much pain she was in through that hug. I never want to be hugged like that again.

Now she is gone as well. My brother and I spread their ashes together at their favorite hiking spot. With both my parents gone, who will hug me?

Bottled Emotions
by Bert Zamora

All of my life I have learned to bottle up my emotions. It just came simple and easy to hide my feelings and emotions. My big problem with bottling up my emotions was at some point I could not hold them in anymore and I would explode. The big problem with that is someone was always around when it would happen and it usually was taken out on them whether they deserved it or not.

As I have gotten older, I have managed to manage my anger. But still sometimes the monster inside wants to get out.

Hope
by Christopher Ridley

What a world it would be without fear, discrimination, and hate due to the color of someone's skin or cultural background. If minorities in America could succeed without all the structural and systemic racism built into the nation's healthcare, education, and business institutions. If we could heal the American divide by apologizing to the descendents of the African slaves — chained and beaten into submission, bought and sold like cattle, whose stripped back this country was built on—for the barbaric practice of slavery.

What an amazing nation America could be if politicians had the best interests of ALL people in mind in everything they do so ALL Americans could thrive instead of only the wealthy and special interest groups. Or they didn't consider those with different views as the enemy. What a slate of culturally diverse leaders America could produce without the political gerrymandering of voting districts. We could actually be the shining beacon of democracy the world believes us to be.

Imagine if we celebrated when a boy fell in love with another boy or a girl fell in love with another girl instead of displaying disgust, ridicule, or bringing violence against them. If we practiced as Native Americans and revered the two-spirited among us, letting their true self shine through.

What a peaceful place the world could be if ALL religions practiced unity, compassion, empathy and love for ALL every day instead of preaching fear and vengeance against those of different faiths or those that do not fit in the "box" created by the Bible or Quran.

What a moral and just place America could be if its criminal legal system was wholly concerned with truth, justice, and the whys behind crime instead of only retribution. If someone with a criminal record wasn't punished for the rest of their lives, even after serving their term of incarceration, given a true second chance. If there was no "Scarlett Letter." If American society actually invested in solutions to end poverty and the treatment of mental health, the true roots of crime. If the media quit sensationalizing crime, ended the "If it bleeds, it leads" philosophy.

Imagine if legislators crafted laws that actually provided for public safety, based on facts furnished by criminologists and social scientists instead of the emotions of victims or the "tough on crime" optics. If law enforcement acted with compassion, empathy, and understanding for the reasons behind crime. If they actually practiced their motto, "Protect & Serve" instead of acting as bullies with badges. If district attorneys were truly concerned with finding the truth about why someone committed a crime and then acted accordingly. If they pursued the truth as hard as they pursued convictions. If they were less concerned with their political careers and more concerned with ensuring the system was fair and equal for ALL. If they ensured Lady Justice truly was blind.

If judges were the true gatekeepers of justice. If courtrooms were a place where facts and truth came to light. If judges would pronounce a sentence equal to the crime and the individual who committed it. If they sanctioned those court officers—prosecutors, police officers, attorneys, experts—that broke the law, in the same manner as any other criminal defendant. If white collar crime was pursued and punished as vigorously as street crime.

If jails and prisons were true places of rehabilitation, not human warehouses. If mental health and addiction conditions suffered by most behind bars received the medical treatment they require. If ALL corrections staff were honest, compassionate, and engaged in wanting to see everyone return to society a successful citizen by providing the materials and support each reentrant needs.

Planet Earth–Clear blue skies everywhere. No pollution. Clean drinking water for everyone. No contamination. Flora and fauna protected, learned from, managed, only harvested to fill basic needs. Oceans respected for their power and bounty. Not treated as the world's landfill and sewer system. The power of the sun and wind fully harnessed instead of the decay of the past. No more exploiting of her natural resources, mountain tops blasted, open-pit mines dug, old-growth forests cut down, wetlands obliterated, superfund sites created, or other man-made disasters.

What could America look like if we had honored the Native Americans for their stewardship of nature and adhered to their practices instead of subjugating and trying to exterminate them.

What a glorious dream.

Does any of this only have to be a dream?

Bottled Emotions

by Cesar Hernandez

When facing any storm, you must lead with your internal values and stay the course in whatever you believe in. Lean into it since external support can't fill the internal void you're feeling.

It's best to give people the benefit of the doubt. You only get to see one page of their book. If you could see their entire book, you would completely understand why they are the way they are.

I am not a very social person but I have been very surprised when I have conversations with people I wrongly thought I had nothing in common with.

Everyone has a story to tell. Many times you can relate to them even if you've had 9 completely different lives.

Many times simply being a good listener helps. It still doesn't resolve the issue but it helps when a person shares their internal thoughts with someone else.

Many times I don't approve of a person's actions or opinions but I'm still able to be non-judgemental of my fellow human beings.

On Clouds We Will Ride

by Christopher Monihan

"Hey," I said. "If you feel any worse, promise me you will go to the hospital."

"I will."

"I love you bro."

"I love you too."

That was the last thing I said to my younger brother John. The next day he admitted himself to the hospital.

I am blessed with two brothers, John and Jim. They are twins. Growing up in rural Virginia was a boy's paradise. We spent sweltering summers dashing about Civil War battlefields around our home. We climbed about civil war cannons, and prowled the dilapidated ruins of plantation homes and slave quarters. When we weren't reenacting Civil War battles we explored nearby thick woods. Streams snaked like deep veins throughout the forest. We spent entire afternoons playing in the streams raising mud dams, trapping crawdads, and dodging slithering water moccasins.

We often returned home with clothes stained by Virginia's red clay. Needless to say, mom was never happy and we were often grounded.

But it was worth it.

"John's in the hospital," said my brother Jim. "He's having trouble breathing."

"Is it Covid?"

"No. They tested him three times."

"Is it the flu?"

"No. He tested negative for the flu."

"Hmm. Well, keep me posted okay?"

"Okay."

When I was eleven years old we spent four years living in Tokyo, Japan. Dad's job kept us moving. Tokyo was a boy's paradise. The Japanese love toys and video games. Seven-story department stores of nothing but toys and multi-story video game arcades were everywhere.

One day John challenged me to an arcade game. In the game you sat in a fighter jet cockpit, side-by-side to another player. You then engage in white-knuckle, adrenaline-pumped dog fight against the other player. The entire cockpit realistically shifted and jolted to your actions. Somehow John shot me down. Aside from a bruised ego, I was fine. John on the other hand beamed ear to ear.

"Hey," said Jim. "John's got some sort of bacterial infection."

A wave of relief washed over me. I knew he'd get the needed antibiotics. "What is it?"

"The doctors don't know. He's on several antibiotics now."

"Well that's a good thing right?"

"If they got the right antibiotics. Right now the doctors can't figure out what bacterium it is."

"What the fuck do you mean they 'can't figure out' the bacterium?"

"They're waiting on lab tests. Whatever it is, it's uncommon."

"Jim, it has been five days since he was admitted!"

"Chris, they're working on it."

I've been in prison for 31 years now. Thirty-one years ago, John and I were estranged. I led a tumultuous childhood full of trauma and rage. John was the unfortunate target of my emotions. My fists could never inflict the type of damage my unloving, hurtful words did to John. I was supposed to be the big brother that my younger brothers looked up to. Instead I was the source of pain and sadness. I will never forget the words John said to me over the phone during my first year of incarceration. They were as painful as they were unexpected. "I forgive you," he said.

"John's on a ventilator. He's not doing well."

"What about the antibiotics? What did they find?"

"They're still awaiting lab results—"

"Are you fucking kidding me?"

"Chris, listen, he's on every strong antibiotic and—"

"What the fuck is the hold up!?"

My brother became silent. The silence spun itself out.

"It's something rare, Chris."

"I don't fucking care if it's rare. This is the United fucking States, not some third world country. What the fuck—" I hung up the phone.

In that moment, I was again that wounded angry teen, except this time I wanted to help John. In reality my anger was directed at no one but myself. I was angry for having squandered a blessed life with the most amazing brother. Angry that I had been too self-centered to see God had blessed my life from the very beginning.

Most of all, I was hurting because I knew what was about to come.

Three days later on Friday, November 13th, 2020 John passed away.

That night in the shower, finally alone, I screamed. And screamed.

Bottle Up
by Terry Olney

Bottle up
Don't talk about it
Nobody needs to know

It's just between me and my mind
And yes inside I am crying
But nobody needs to know

Always on my own
This pain is mine alone
So I'll bottle up, not talk about it
Nobody needs to know, nobody needs to know

You might have come in close to see
And wrap your mental arms around me
But you'll never understand, can't understand
Why I'm bottled up, so bottled up

I always feel so alone
Even standing in a crowded place
Oh what I'd give to just know your name
To just touch your face
And know how you feel

But I'm bottled up I can't talk about it
Because nobody wants to know
Beware of those with open hands
They never give but only take
So for my safety and my own sake

I'm bottled up
Won't talk about it
Because nobody cares to know

It's just me in my mind Inside
I am dying
And nobody knows, nobody cares to know.

Bottled Emotions
by Scott Anthony Asalone

Have you ever put your nose over a glass of whisky, inhaled and smelled anxiety? Letting your tongue linger on the salty rim of a margarita has the tang of tears touched your palate? Taking a decent sip of an aged wine; did you ever taste melancholy? For those of us who drink to escape our emotions this is what our drink should taste like to us because our emotions are in the bottles we pour. When we finally accept the reality of the problem, drinking these flavors and more will come through in every sip, every drop when we use alcohol to cope with negative feelings.

There is an old saying that "denial is not just a river in Egypt." I've always loved that quote especially because I love puns and most of all because that is the way I lived my life, denial. Sometimes it seemed to me that running and hiding from trouble was the best way to cope with it. Running can involve moving (which I did a lot), withdrawing (I had my books), and finding pleasurable ways to avoid reality (eating, drinking, sleeping, etc.). But if I am honest, most of my running and hiding was caught up in my drinking. The more I aged, the more I had things to run from, the more my drinking became the coping mechanism.

Coming home at the end of a work day, or finding the clock turning 4:00 PM was always the excuse to "let my hair down." No matter what the day handed me I found the reason to pour myself a drink. It didn't matter what it was. Someone asked me once "what's your favorite drink?" I simply and honestly replied "alcohol." He laughed, but I was not kidding; I was being totally honest. My drinking would start at around 4:00, sometimes earlier and would last until I collapsed into bed. A friend of mine put it well once when he offered "we don't go to sleep, we pass out." He was right but at the time I was not allowing myself to believe it was a problem.

Sadly, and I really mean this, I've always had what others call a "hollow leg." From the time I first started drinking I could hold my liquor. Brendan, a good friend of mine, said "I've never seen anyone who could drink as much as you and not show it." That's not something I'm proud of anymore, as a matter of fact it might have been why it was so easy to keep drinking. We would go out drinking and I'd be the one to drive home because I seemed the most sober. Looking back, I was very lucky I never killed anyone, especially my friends. There were times I fell asleep at the wheel and woke up as the tires hit the gravel on the side of the road. Somehow, I survived it all. Still, I was in denial.

My drinking ceased when I was incarcerated. Of course, I was offered the "wine" that some of the guys made but I almost threw it up. It was awful. Then and there I chose not to drink while in prison. But I still did not accept I had a problem. I started going to Celebrate Recovery, a Christian-based 12-step program because some of my friends were going and it was a night out of the pod. I went through the first year, did the work, talked in the small groups and was not affected by it at all. In my mind others had the problem, not me. But midway through my second year while facilitating one of the small groups, I realized I had a problem. My denial was probably as large as the Nile. I did an honest accounting of what I had been drinking on a daily basis especially between my arrest and my final sentencing and it was way too much. Yep, I have a problem.

Accepting it took a huge weight off my shoulders. My family and friends had been worrying about my drinking but only hinted that I should cut back. When I finally admitted my problem, they jumped to support me, grateful that I had finally gotten off the river of denial.

We all have ways of dealing with our emotions. Now I focus on working out, writing and prayer. But I know that I have a weakness for alcohol and I will have that weakness the rest of my life. My emotions, good and bad ones, are more visible now. I don't bottle them up and won't use the bottle to forget them. Now there is no denial, just reality. It is a better way to live.

Bottled Emotions
by Stephen Burton

Bottled emotions are complicated, it may hinder your success. It can keep you from sharing your help, advice and love. Someone may need relief from pain and you might be the only one to assist them. Bottled emotions are no different than a time bomb and it's like being held underneath water. Bottled emotions are like watching your life like a movie. Only you can detonate or disarm that bottled emotional bomb. Only you can break free while submerged under water to swim to the surface to breathe again. You can be the director of your life so that you can decide what characters you allow in your personal movie. You alone decide when to yell "Cut" when you need a moment to re-evaluate. You decide when the time is right to yell "Action" when you're ready to resume your journey. Release your bottled emotions in a healthy way. Don't let your bottled emotions remain under the heat of circumstances or the pressure of life because it's dangerous. Regulate your bottled emotions so that you can live in the freedom God intended you to experience.

Bottled Emotions
by Trecen Sambrano

As you leave me alone in my thoughts I can't seem to figure out how to escape this lonely box. I'm finally starting to see how toxic you really might be. Leaving me to ponder if we were really meant to be or if this is just one dream messing with me.

Now I'm in a spot where you got my mind running a lot as I'm trying to climb back to the top. I got nothing but time to find out who's really on my side. When you got me on the edge wanting to jump from the ledge.

I'm tired of being miserable but it seems to me you aren't understanding the principle so what's left of us ain't going to be reasonable. I'm wondering why you keep lying and crying when you aren't the one laying out here dying as I watched you walk away without trying.

Simply you make me question your abilities but in reality you got me floating the ocean like these bottled emotions obviously. I don't want to keep living in reality when you make it a waste for me truthfully and that's me speaking out pure honestly. So go ahead and keep all those bottles full of emotion's cause I'm all out of patience for any capabilities.

Bottled Emotions
by Michael Medina

What a roller coaster I've had this year and it's not even April yet! First my work assignment. I was assigned to yard crew. My primary duties were to take out the trash from the buildings and just keep the yard clean. What sucked the most was the time. I wasn't able to take any night self-help groups because of a time conflict. After a year of trying, I finally got a job as a teacher's assistant in the morning. This comes with better pay, an A/C environment, and most importantly, morning working hours. I was ecstatic...until the college coordinator told me that since my new job conflicts with my face-to-face college class, I will either lose my job assignment or have to withdraw halfway through the class. That sucks.

Second, back to the college. I had a teacher last semester who was slow on feedback and grading, which worried me, but I figured they had things handled. Well... I received an "F" because my last assignment and final wasn't graded on time. But, I know teachers have some leeway to change grades, so I wasn't too worried. My new teacher also said not to worry because I would not be allowed into the Part Two class if I didn't pass the Part One class. And so, while taking the Part Two class, the looming cloud of "Did I pass or not?" hung over me. On the morning of the midterm, I turned to my Canvas page for my online part two class and saw that I was removed from the class. Turns out, the first teacher never changed the grade and I would have to redo Part One and then enroll into Part Two again! That stinks.

Third, my daughter lost her first tooth! Not lost like went "missing," but lost as in the tooth fairy is going to pay her a visit. I can still remember when she was a baby and she would gnaw on my finger with all her baby might. In a few months, her teeth came in and began to shred my skin, so that ended. All the food we tried together, all the times I had to cut her Cheerios in half are memories I will forever have. She's

growing up and going to kindergarten, learning how to read and write, and still trying new foods. And here I am, missing yet another milestone in her life. That burns.

How do I handle this? Before, no one would know about it. I would just stuff it, bottle my emotions, and pretend nothing ever happened. But that's how I got in trouble and made some pretty bad choices. So now, I let open my bottle, because I've learned someone has experienced what I'm going through and that I'm not alone. It's not "soft" to let your emotions out. Rather, it's strength to admit to something that makes you vulnerable and that makes you a stronger person in the end.

BOTTLED EMOTIONS

by Yankee Lawyer

Nitroglycerine is an oily poisonous liquid used medically as a vasodilator. It's seldom stored in its liquid form because it's so unstable. Alfred Nobel revolutionized mining, roadway excavation, and warfare when he impregnated sawdust with nitroglycerine and stored it in stick form with a long fuse. (He quickly became one of the richest men in the world.)

Some chemicals can be stored in plastic containers but not glass. Some chemicals react violently upon contact with even a tiny droplet of water. Other substances must be stored under unoxygenated water to prevent contact with air.

Be careful when bottling any unidentified substance.

In prison, we often keep our emotions bottled up. We men don't want anyone to see us cry. My father used to tell me to "stop crying, or I'll give you something to cry about." I cut myself a little slack at Christmastime. It seems like everyone cries at that time of the year. The rest of the year I must remind myself that tears or sobs can be perceived as signs of weakness.

Almost 13 years ago, I got two thick envelopes from my mother's sisters in the mail. One contained my mother's obituary and funeral program. That was a real kick in the teeth. The second parcel was a similar post-mortem discussion of my father. The people who put me here had killed them both. I have never had an opportunity to grieve properly.

Overlaying the basic emotions (fear, rage, seeking...) is a complex emotion known by various names such as "interest" and "curiosity." It affects the way the brain collects and analyzes data and information. A lack of proper control of interest levels can lead to autism, attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder, traumatic stress disorder, complex traumatic stress disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, and sleeplessness. In prison, its most common chronic effect is institutionalization.

Emotions are volatile. Keeping them bottled up can create an explosive situation. Many prison policies and practices exploit this condition. Often, bottled emotions fester for days, weeks or years and finally erupt in violent outbursts. Medical and segregation units stay full. Prison officials and profiteers have high levels of job security, but they pretend to be concerned. In public, they keep their gloating tongues bridled and their joy bottled up.

Bottled Emotions

by Ryan Lapp

"Bottled emotions" the term causes me to envision bottles of alcohol. Alcohol is literally a bottle of emotion. From personal experience I can say that it is a source of multiple types of emotions, good as well as bad, happy and sad. It can oftentimes be a mixture of these feelings or emotions.

I tend to find happy emotions within the bottle now that I am older. When I was in my teens and all thru my 20's life seemed to be one long binge-drinking episode. I was drinking very heavily in my 20's after the murder of my child. I eventually quit hard liquor drinking by replacing alcohol with meth, in a sense meth saved my life though it ultimately destroyed it as well.

I no longer drink to try to cure my depression or other negative emotions. I don't drink to get drunk and I don't start drinking if I am in a bad mood. I drink to be social, I drink to relax at the end of the day and to celebrate occasions.

Here in prison a 20oz bottle of jesus juice will run you anywhere from $60-$100 depending on supply and holiday season. It tastes like shit, but if it's good juice a half bottle — or 10oz — will fuck you up pretty good. California prisons, at

least most prisons don't really care about alcohol as long as it doesn't lead to more than normal amounts of violence. If you keep your emotions in check the C/O's leave you be, if you cant manage to bottle your emotions up they fuck your program and off.

I try to work out my bottled emotions with various methods. Journaling, head doctor visits, meditation to name a few. I can't see getting drunk at that price (usually $75) and acting out my negative emotions to the point I catch a write up from a C/O, or worse maybe take a whole trip and lose good time in the process.

Unbottle your emotions and have a good time, with or without alcohol or drugs you will feel better if you work your shit out. With that I'm out.

Bottled Emotions
by George Hesse

I live suspended / in Animation / Bottled emotions / Lyrical Razors / Chambers echo / in pain no exception / uncontested / this crown is Heavy / I have bottled emotions / most days a roller coaster / I have buried pain in my heart / I miss Ira and DJ / But I smile for the camera / I even call her up, a toxic agenda / I can't say it enough / I should have been an Avenger / Sounds in these chambers echo / sounds of danger, Deadpool / Pens deadly / releasing bottled emotions is there a rescue? / Crowns heavy I can just feel all this pressure Armor holding barely / I overdosed I needed compressions / Fill it to the top / Bottled emotions climatic / Alone at the top / RIP / I flow poetic / Am I even registered in heaven as I workshop he who was raised again? / If not / cannons echo at my 6 / head high in this Armageddon /

Angels chanting as they pour out liquor, the bottles / emotions bottled with sacrifices, missin you this is survival / Of the fittest its different / Hated for bein a Christian / Insides empty / exit wounds relapse belligerent I fix it / A bottled emotion from haters tryin to choke my necklace /
USMC enlisted, before behind this glass, pen grinds reminiscing / Feelings chosen, shackles on wrists many late nights / Stuck in this box editing / Re-wording / stage frights / Insurgents / Sober, Divergent! / Battles for my life / Lawyers / Attorneys / Clock running out / Reloading words feelin hallow Verbally, Lyrically, Spiritually I'm showing you unbottled emotions /

As I walk thru this valley in clouded formations /
en route to gallows / Hip Hop labels / wrecking bars close to tangible playlists / Fearless momentum / cruel foundation / lover old playlists / played in the tape deck rewinding to a time when this round table wasn't empty / Bottled emotions / Lights, camera flashes smiles golden / stayed faded, the way things went not surprised she ended it

Bottled emotions, losing best friends again this pain is endless / Overdosing again, hearing symphonies close to Heaven A perfect finesse / imperfections checked all the checklists / And I even understand this was a one way trip? / Switch off pain, infamous by mistake / Notorious where I shine, see my reservation / Diamond in the rough / Bottled Emotion / Bottles tilted up life was great, thoughts to myself / A testimony of emotions, trials, feelings of being sober / Wouldn't change it for the world, so I flow, Holy / Overflow, blood flows cold, a precognition my candle vigil / I'm letting it all out, unbottle these emotions /

World behind me got this flex pen whipping / Wrists shackled, gleaming when I wrote this / These Lockdowns to gangland hearing outlaw languages / I'm a bottled Emotion, a tenant, in this HellJ Oasis / Emotions Bottled / No Hesitation, slept off the medications / Shifted prescriptions watching X games Late nights / From hunger games to rap graduation / Consulted psychics, said I was schizophrenic crazy / If I keep emotions bottled up, could be a chaotic ending / If that's the case, just sayin I miss you, while I'm repenting /

Bottled Emotions
by Margaret Barker

I keep my emotions bottled inside, there's not a place for me to hide.

No longer do I cry, not one tearful drop in my eye.

My anger I try to suppress, by finding a nice quiet corner to rest.

Being in prison, there's a lot of bottled emotions around me, that's why I leave them alone, let them be.

My emotions, I don't want anyone else to see.

When I'm about to break I go in the showers to be alone, my heart aches, wishing for a way home.

If you show your emotions in here, they will use it against you then cheer.

I have to stay silent and bite my tongue, hoping for one day to freely run.

So no hollering or shouting, just do me a favor, let me be, all bottled up with my emotions inside of me.

Bottled Emotions
by Nkrumah Lumumba Valier

I wonder if anyone would understand, if they actually knew how it felt to be in prison innocent of the crime convicted for? No one showed up at my trial to witness the lies told to take my freedom away from me. I thought you said you love me? Surrounded by strangers all my life, I never knew until I needed them to be there for me. All those thoughts running through my mind, it was all lies claiming to be my friends when we was never friends. The truth came out in the end. Fake love was never real love is what I learned from every woman I was with that said they love me. They all vanished out my life like smoke as it goes up into the air to never be seen again. Illusions I once believed was real until reality woke me up.

Family forgot when it is no longer a benefit to be family. No letters, no visits, no money deposits on my inmate trust fund account and no one registered their phones so I can call them. Finally the truth came out how they all feel about me for real. I miss my Father so much and wish he was still alive, I would not be alone in this world. My Father was the only person that loved me, he never had to tell me that he loved me. Everything he did showed me what real love is. My mother hated me just because it was the only love she ever showed me. I was just a child support check she received from my Father for 18 years. I moved in with my Father when I was 11 years old, she still kept cashing those child support checks rendering no support to who the checks was sent for. Now she sits and waits to cash in on the insurance policy she took out on me, hoping I die in prison. Every woman I have a child with is just like the woman that gave birth to me. How did I end up with someone like her? I now regret those mistakes.

I am coming up on 20 years flat done on this 40-year sentence, emotionally wounded, suffering from PTSD, not able to trust anyone and I will never be with another hoe as long as I live. Everything someone tells me is a lie until it can be proven to be true. Trust issues will prevent me from ever falling in love again. Will I be alone the rest of my life? Wondering if the woman I choose to love be Muslim, prove that all women ain't the same? Life can be so lonely without having someone to love, someone I can trust and someone that can be counted on in a time of need.

Broken emotionally from all the hurt this has caused me, the pain it has caused in my heart has made me cry so many times. I tried suicide once, but it wasn't my time yet to die. I thought it would be my way out of this life I have to live, the hand I was dealt to play came from a marked deck of cards. The odds to win have been against me from the day I was born, being born a black male child. The system was designed to hate me for not being born white in America. Now I have to play the cards dealt to me the best way I can to try to win, playing a losing hand. Smiling every time you see me laughing like life has been so good to me, but inside I can't stop the tears from falling hoping they don't come out on the side of my face so everyone can see them.

I used to hate everyone that conspired to do this to me, but the change I've had within me over time has forgiven them all. The hate I had to let go of when it didn't change the outcome of my life. I just ask why now? Knowing the truth behind all the lies, the reasons for all of my bottled emotions....

Bottled Emotions
by Nicholas Fugate

I met a guy on the Appalachian Trail. He embraced his inner primal energy at least once a day, and always after climbing, by screaming. It was a powerful release of animalistic energy, so he said. I thought that shit was stupid.

Society has conditioned, or groomed, all of us to behave in certain ways. Most Americans have similar dreams in attaining wealth and raising a family — imprisoned by the very things we think can set us free. Despite those freedoms that people think we have in the United States, we live in quite a repressive society. Judgement and shame run rampant fueling a raging mental health crisis. We have so many anxieties festering inside us. How can we humans thrive and build a beautiful society when so much of us is bottled up and kept locked away?

Even though I thought that shit was stupid, I tried that screaming thing. I may have done it two or three times before I talked myself out of it. I had internalized enough of what society said was normal that I made myself uncomfortable

doing something as mundane as screaming, in the middle of the woods with next to no one around. How fucking absurd.

Fast forward thirteen and I'm sitting in prison, in a dorm, with 98 other people. To avoid conflict, to be "out of the way" I need to be reserved. I feel like I can't be myself in this purgatory. My love, my compassion, my happiness have been squeezed into a bottle and set adrift.

Anger and frustration reign supreme. It is taxing to hear the many ignorant conversations. It is frustrating to get hit with water from yet another reckless water-flinger. How can I find love and compassion for abusive assholes and pathetic junkies when it seems as if their mission in life is to annoy me?

I hope I haven't lost it. This place can drive one crazy. Maybe that guy was onto something... A release would be extremely therapeutic... AHHHHHHHH!!

Bottled Emotions
by Michael Blackburn

Don't bottle up your Emotions! You're too Emotional! Men don't Cry! Why are you so Angry?

These are just some of the comments I have heard throughout my life. Each one confuses me more than the last one.

There are days that I wish I was numb. Then maybe I would be easier to get along with, but then again I find it hard not to care about work, my art, friends etc...

These days people spend more time telling me "Smile, It only gets better!". But these people don't live in my head, dealing with my struggling views. The hate I have for myself and all of the lives I have destroyed with my choices. The hate that I will be spending the rest of my life in prison due to society believing that it is a great idea to give me a 120-year sentence even though this is my first offense.

There are days that I am quickly angered from feeling that I am not allowed to take a short nap after getting up at 4am to go work in the chow hall on top of having to deal with other people. I do not like dealing with other people. Yet daily I just bottle up the pressures of wanting to run away. Instead I give everyone a semi-fake smile until I am safely in my cell.

There are other struggles I have, but I feel that it would not be appropriate to express, because they may be wrong, and end me up somewhere I would rather not be. Not to mention that there is no one willing to listen and wanting to help me through any of these issues. As I stated before no one truly knows the bottled up demons that live in my head daily.

Bottled Emotions
by Kelly Messenger

Huh?! Crazy... I been here 15 years around hateful women. There is no more bottled emotions. Every bit of humbleness and peace I had in my soul is completely gone. People see and notice that I actually do fight and see how hard I been. Even the police fuck with me every chance they get. I'm in closed custody so I stay locked down 22 hours a day, level 4. The officer purposely provokes me with power and control by refusing me necessities just to get me to go the fuck off, so they can sit at that desk and eat in my face. Forcefully busting a claim on me so they can walk around proudly with that block 40 on hospital runs. Yeah I be in here doin push ups after every meal. And they continuously fuck with me every time it's time to eat, pushing that food cart around trying to blaze me and shit, so I end up goin hard as fuck on them. I'm not lyin, all kinds of crazy shit happens in this facility. I really don't get in trouble for most of the shit I do cuz I been doin what I want since I socketed through the door and I came in young and hopeless, and ummm, yeah, I be in the middle of a race/cultural mess, riot in this facility and a lot of the shit that's goin on is fucked up like hell. I really don't know how else to explain it. So there is no Bottled Emotions.

Message in a Bottle
by Karla Wooten

As I get closer to the door, I think about how I want to set my Bottled Emotions Free.

But the people that I want to explode on will they be able to handle all of the Bottled Emotions that are inside of me?

Can I de-stress?
Can I decompress?
Can I release?
Can I shout, rant, rave and scream?
Can I be thoughtful?
Can I be peaceful?
Can I just dream?
Can I be truly brave, happy and at peace?

Somehow can I show someone this person that real true individual that is me?

This is something that I have to ask myself?

Before I shake this Bottle that sets my soul free — I need to ask the world, are you ready for me?

Bottled Emotions
by Joseph Colon

I just got my parole packet. It's a guide to help prepare you for your upcoming Parole hearing Interview. Now scanning through it, I came across a line "Describe your crime in great detail."

Instantly a world of emotions flooded in. After twenty years of classes, courses, therapeutic groups and the like to get past my faults and make myself a better person, they want me to relive all the pain, hurt and emotional baggage I have, and have caused. Just to answer this question.

I had to hold back my tears and bottle my emotions and just write what they wanted. Damn the emotional trauma, damn the ripple effects on my victims, damn the hurt and anger I felt about myself, damn the last twenty years I've just wasted not seeing my kids grow up, damn these people for putting me through this all over again. Damn, damn, damn!!!

As I wrote the tears dotted the paper. Wipe those away, bottle those emotions, now is not the time to lash out. That's what they want. They want to see how you'll respond and if you're actually fit for society. What did you learn? How can they be sure? If you're gonna get emotionally distraught over this question, what's gonna happen when you get out and someone asks you about your crime or why you were in prison?

Here's where you show them how you've learned to channel your emotions for good rather than bottling them up for harm later. Show them that you have a strong emotional presence. That you're no Spock! That emotions whether good or bad must be expressed, not bottled or hidden away. So thank you parole board for asking that question.

The Bottle Exploded
by Joseph Bigelow

I wish I didn't have to learn so much in my life the harder way, this is another one of those times. I failed to discern the reality of bottled emotions until they almost destroyed me. When I felt anguish, fear, anger, loss, or depression, I would bottle them up all the while I was amidst some of my most difficult struggles. I disregarded these emotions and hid them like they were of no importance. What I didn't realize is that these emotions had a plan of their own. They wouldn't stay bottled up forever, and they were going to make me pay for neglecting them.

A pressurized bomb within my soul.

When I felt the explosion from the depths of my inner being I couldn't handle it. I wasn't ready, the explosion sending shards of my bottled emotions flying in every direction. I didn't understand why I felt the way I did and it was chaotic. The impact of the blast sent me stumbling down and expeditiously into a cycle of destruction. Depression turned to anger as I lashed out. Anger turned to sadness. Anguish turned to hate. Hate evolved to self-hate. I was mixed up in emotions that I couldn't decipher because they all came out at once.

Literally everyone I'm close to says I'm one of the strongest people they know (mentally and with my fortitude and determination). They've seen me overcome many struggles, some of which were life-threatening. At the moment of this explosion I didn't feel like the resilient man everybody knows. I was scared, drained, and broken. I shut down, didn't want to talk to nobody. I felt like, what's the point to keep living

if I have life without parole? What's the point of living if I'm not truly strong like people thought? Negativity was overriding any thought of positive possibilities. Throughout my whole incarceration I've been striving to succeed in some way that still matters to the world, but the mentality I was trapped in had deceived me thinking that success would be impossible. Who can really be successful doing time in prison?

As I isolated myself in my ignorance I decided the best way to die would be if I stopped eating or drinking water. This way maybe my family wouldn't know I killed myself. I went nine days with no food or water to the point I couldn't even get up. Staff found me unconscious and I was rushed to the hospital, given IV fluids and other treatments to stabilize me. After several days in the hospital I was transferred to a mental health program which I felt I didn't need. I've never been in one my entire life, and my only mental struggle was depression. I was raised to think it's a weakness to talk with others about our feelings or struggles, so I told everybody I was fine and didn't need treatment. I made no real progress on the underlying problem.

One day I met an amazing woman who was a social worker that really took the time to build with me and understand what I've been through in my life. She saw my breakdown for what it was, an explosion of bottled emotions. She helped me to understand the importance of dealing with our emotions properly so it never reaches that exploding point again. It took some work, but I got it together. I'm back in a regular prison setting, and forever grateful for the social worker who was a self-proclaimed country bumpkin, but somehow helped me understand myself better than I ever have.

Bottled emotions can be devastating, but when we understand and deal with them in the moment without bottling them up we can harness the emotional energy and use it for better purposes. The question is like everyone should reflect on — are you bottling up your emotions, waiting for an explosion, or are you using them to push your creativity to unfathomable heights?

I will for surely never bottle them up again... I enjoy eating too much..

Free Kasino !!!

Bottled Emotions

by Jose Torres

Why bottle up something that was made to be expressed? Why push down the things that were made to build us up?

Emotions in the purest sense were created as a good thing; to warn us, move us and help us. Yet we live in a culture that disallows the expression of our emotions, why?

Is there some sort of gain in making people "feel" wrong for expressing emotions? We call them weak, bipolar and countless other names. Why is it so bad to express or empty the proverbial bottle that we have filled for so long?

Could it be the lack of ability to articulate properly the emotions we are experiencing. Could it be the same shame or insecurity, we feel when we experience certain emotions we would rather not. Unable to stop feeling them because we plunged head first with a tenacity we can't control or understand, much less able to explain.

We could think of various examples; we all find ourselves "feeling" very well at any given moment, then when something "bad" (or we perceived as bad) could be a dirty house, something at work or school, we find our self entering a cycle of either suppressing our emotions or if our proverbial bottle is already full, we tend to empty it all out on whoever offended us, then the offended calls us wrong for not being able to stop or better yet control our emotions.

Therefore we feel shameful because we couldn't at the time stop or even control our emotions, so we throw up on the people we love or work around. We think if we learn how to bottle them up better or become desensitized to emotions, then we won't empty out on anyone. Sadly we even try to rid ourselves of this perceived "inconvenience" altogether. We time and time again find ourselves at the beginning stage, by just ignorantly suppressing or "bottling emotion" we find ourselves starting or restarting over this never ending cycle. Because emotions are not going anywhere they are God-given and the proverbial bottle will get filled, if we don't deal or express them how we should. We will empty it in one way or the other and thus restart the cycle.

Could we learn to not fill up the bottle, better yet learn to express them when they arise, in a healthy manner? We could, if we first have a

change of perspective on how we see or even think about emotions. When we turn aside from the old fable that emotions are bad, then and only then will we as a culture learn to express them in healthy ways that not only helps ourselves, but builds greater personal relationships all the way around. Ask yourself if you have been bottling your emotions. How full is that bottle?

Red Bull & Apple Juice
by Bonnie Vang

As a kid, I always thought Red Bull was an alcoholic beverage. Imagine my little sister's face when I found a nearly empty bottle and brought it to my lips. She was 5, I was 8. This was a new experience for us.

"It don't smell right," she said -- meaning it didn't smell like Coors or Bud Light. It didn't even smell like 'recycled' trash.

"It looks right," I said with a grin. It was inside a brown glass bottle. That was all I needed to taste-test it. I've never had a Red Bull before -- and I haven't since, but I remember faking being immediately drunk. This I always did with apple juice inside a non-descript clear cup. Then upon my overtly drunken state, I would spill the juice before anyone could smell the sweet liquids. Maybe it was because my dad was a junkie and alcoholic that steered me away from that lifestyle, but don't think I was never tempted. When he ran away and took my little sister with him, I locked myself in my room knowing I was weak enough to succumb to bad habits -- but not knowing I felt depressed.

Some people say they drink to forget a bad memory -- or to celebrate the good memory happening in the moment. But I know the truth. They drink to pretend. Whiskey to fill the nothingness inside them that they can't otherwise describe with words. White wine to build up barriers should be perfect -- this happiest memory hurt them down the line. While we pour the liquor into our bodies the emotions it lights up burn like gasoline -- turning our charred hearts and ashed-out lungs into an addiction.

Bottled Emotions
by Jonathan McCord

Soundtrack: “Substitute” by The Who

Being an Air Force brat, I lived quite a sheltered life. Despite the safety of my childhood, I blossomed into a real weed. Living on or around various Air Force bases I met so many good people who were so very full of light. In 1985 at the age of ten I moved to Hickam A.F.B. on the island of Oahu. I began fifth grade and during that school year I became inwardly aware of trouble on my mental horizon. I began a streak of underachieving which was astounding. I was passed on to sixth grade because my teachers felt I was smart and they felt holding me back was not helpful to me. I flat out flunked sixth grade. Hell, I flunked sixth grade again the next year but my teachers sent me on to middle school simply to get rid of me. During my second year of sixth grade I met a person who was so full of light that she could’ve helped me tremendously if I could’ve only let her in. Her name was Sammie Jo and she was an angel toward me. My only mental consolation is that I did not let her get too close to me as I was already quite disgusting by then. I was a twelve year old boy and quite aware of girls and she was crushingly beautiful but she had a special energy that trumped her appearance. I had a lot to get off my chest at the time and she would’ve been quite a shoulder to cry on. Actually, I can't say I even spoke much to her, nevermind actually having a real conversation. I was oddly introverted around her. At the time my mom was slowly dying. Toward the end of my time in Hawaii my mom starts dying at a frantic pace. The sicker she got the more distant I became to my mom.

I had someone I could’ve talked to in Sammie Jo. I needed a shoulder to cry on and could’ve really benefitted from opening up. I was the poster child for pent-up emotion. I have thought of her many, many times since we parted ways thirty-seven years ago. It is sad that I never could open up to her. Much worse than that is that I was never ever a friend to her. I was selfishly introverted to an outrageous extreme. I wish I had been able to let her in and that I could’ve been a warm and positive companion. I've always hoped she understood me to be a pensive awkward mess and it had nothing to do with her. I hope she has lived a wonderful life. I hope my darkness had no lasting effect.

Kindness

by Charles Van Horn

There is a stigma that surrounds the word 'kindness.' In prison, 'kindness' is often seen as a sign of weakness. However, I find kindness to be a test of one's mettle, especially in prison. To be kind takes strength and compassion. Anyone can easily condemn, yet not everyone can forgive, or empathize. To practice kindness is truly a test of the human condition.

Kindness does not require millions of dollars - just a simple moment of dedication and commitment can suffice. A simple word of kindness can change a person's day and mayhap, even their life. As an incarcerated individual, I have found this to be an ultimate truth. Prison is a place of anger and negativity. It is a true test of the human spirit, for which the solution is kindness. In prison is where kindness is most needed.

Emotions From a Bottle (of soda)

by Robert Tashbook

Even a soft drink becomes an "experience" for the incarcerated.

One Federal prison sells 12-pack cases of aluminum cans of name-brand soda. Another sells 12-ounce plastic bottles in an eight-pack. Both insist their selection is most compatible with the "safe, secure, and orderly operation of the institution"; a legal catchphrase used to justify all prison policies and practices - sensical or not.

Yet another prison (outside a medium-sized city) switched to a nearby-bottled, off-brand that was somewhat cheaper - even with the nationwide Federal Prison markup of 30% on the commissary items (and the kickbacks paid to secure the contract). They also offered different flavors. Perhaps Pineapple soda (no ACTUAL pineapples were harmed in making it) brightens your day.

My current prison just switched from the name-brand (Coke) to "Push Cola." Instead of eight 12-ounce bottles for $10.40 (exactly $1.30 each), the single 20-ounce bottles of "Push" sell for 95¢ (two-thirds MORE soda for 20% LESS money).

Since prison wages start at 12¢/hour, and for some their monthly wage is capped at a total of $5.25, every cent is valuable. All of that assumes you actually have a "real" job. Many of the rest are assigned to "no show" jobs; your "boss" doesn't want you to show up and your pay is nominal (between 1¢ and $1 per month), or perhaps "no show" as well.

BUT, there is one set of bottles that really affects your emotions - visiting room beverages.

Pre-COVID, many Federal Prisons had selections of food and beverages much better than in the commissary. Overpriced (visiting policy allows a 50-100% markup), but still a welcome treat since those items are not otherwise available to prisoners. Not only would you look forward to actually seeing family and friends - especially since visits were cut from five days a week to two, or less, and that is if nothing interfered with offering visits then - but visiting room food was also anticipated.

COVID shut down all visiting room food.

Post-COVID, things are slow to get back up. Yet another way the apocryphal "Club Fed" became "Club Dread." However, the one or two remaining, partially filled, vending machines still offer a culinary respite from the Chow Hall and Commissary. Then again, is mango-tangerine even a reasonable drink flavor?

Recently, after a "Narcotics Anonymous" meeting (an oxymoron as all of our names are prominently printed on our shirts and pants and staff record it [audio and video]), in the Visiting Room, I scouted the beverage vending machine. I didn't recognize one of the logos and a guy said it was "Mellow Yellow." Probably thirty or more years since I had one, so I planned it for my next visit. Alas, technical issues cut that visit to 20 minutes, so no drinks. Maybe at my next visit, in a month (or two).

Most non-prisoners don't realize the emotions provoked by a "mere" bottle of soda.

P.S. A completely radical idea - "Near beer" in prison commissaries. Enemies of prison reform will be absolutely apoplectic!

Imagine how drunk prisoners will get on the idea of drinking "beer" - even if non-alcoholic - while in prison. If the "beer" had the same 50% markup as tobacco did (when it was allowed in Federal Prison), yet more programs and activities for prisoners could be funded.

But, such an idea will remain bottled up within the emotionless bureaucracy.

Bottled Emotions
by Vinicio Garcia

Is this referring to alcohol released emotions? Are there more happy drunks than mean drunks? It appears the Europeans with which the white race term is associated has the most bottled emotions. For the Europeans weren't satisfied with killing each other for centuries but have exacted slaughter on every continent, including plants and animals.

I guess those capitol stormers had bottled emotions.

It also appears that unbeknownst to some the masters of this country had bottled emotions.

After the right to vote of women is voided perhaps the country can return to the good ole days and rescind the right to vote of people of color.

As for me, despite all my rage with difficult or traumatic events in their own way, some succeed and some do not. At least today there are groups who reach out to help those in need.

How many people go through the angst of feeling the futility and meaninglessness of one's life? Meaninglessness struck me profoundly at age 19, thought of killing myself. I had the gun at my head and perhaps it was cowardice or my future ex-wife's pleadings but obviously I didn't pull the trigger - the infinite jester has subsequently provided many episodes where death reached out to grab me as if taunting me and then it walked away.

Futility began at about age 24 where despite my finding the yellow brick road I believed it to be a trap.

Though it may be futile to fight injustice and evil it is something which represents what my inner self has always sought. Regardless of the consequences and whether it is vanity or delusional, doing the right thing is what matters to me.

I am put to the task when I see all the spoiled selfish inmates around me. I wonder if I should continue the fight. As long as they get theirs they don't care if others are mistreated by abusive guards. They will not help or write grievances to tell the truth.

Bottled Emotions
by Samantha Wohlford

Take a deep breath, let it out slowly. Add a drop into the bottle. Shove the stopper back in. Do it quickly. Don't let anything escape.

Now you see your wife spending time with the person she had an affair with. Swallow your tears. Put on a mask. Add more to the bottle.

That girl cussed at you? Tuck your shaking hands in your pockets. Brush it off. One more drop.

"I'm writing you up!" Another case. One you didn't deserve. Don't argue. Put it in the bottle.

Called home and really needed to hear your child's voice. Once again, you couldn't get an answer. Drown out your doubts with music and add it to the bottle.
It all feels overwhelming and you need a nap, but your neighbor is yelling, put on your headphones and add to your bottle.

Another pointless bunk search. They made a huge mess that you have to clean up. It's getting hard to push in the stopper.

You realize they took your favorite picture of your kids. Grit your teeth and put it in the bottle. Only this time some leaks out and now your bottle is hard to hang on to. Force the stopper into it.

You manage to spill coffee down the front of your white set. Soak it in cold water and scrub it with your anger. Put it in the bottle, only when you try to stopper it the bottle is too full. It falls and shatters. Months of anger, frustration, tears, and devastation explode in an overwhelming wave. Tears stream down your face as you yell, hit the wall, cut your skin. Cry it out, scream it out. Rage it out. Bleed it out. Half a night of an over the top explosion of every suppressed emotion. Cry yourself into an exhausted sleep.

Now your bottle is emptied and you wake up hollow. Emptied out, Brained and numb, Your bottle is ready to be refilled. Time to restart this toxic cycle all over again.

Bottled Emotions
by Akbar Jones

Penmanship Signature signed on the dotted line.
Poetic Justice Capital P and J
You can say, it's been in my flammable flare since,
Six eating my triangle shaped sliced P.P.J get your Memo
On what's been shaking my puzzled report today,
You can break loose from the chains,
or You can be a good "Rover" and stay
I'm yielding, when my instance occurrence are NON-finessing, their abilities to furnish
I've dropped waitress upon busboys
slowed up for appearance
Got jumped, and lost turns,
and still calculation not taking captive for clarence
equipped for the low down
But some row, they resistance inclined on not hearing him
Maybe they portrayed to the fact
When the clerk, from point A to point B staring him
Learning what's been pulling leash
Mr. Trove Hikes Givings Bata Bang Business Capec'?
Poetic Artist, commended, Chi-Town, Pac, Janet and Rosetta KING
Since nine-three-look at
What the driven inferno
Walking off sets, and sessions dream captures brings... Bottled Emotions.

One Day
by Allen Chisom

One day I killed a man. One day I took someone's life and I forfeited my own. One day my life changed forever. One day I decided that life wasn't worth living anymore. Because for years I endured the loneliness of not having my father in my life; for years I wondered why I wasn't worthy of being loved; for years I stared out of the window waiting for my father to show up. For years I endured the shame and embarrassment of not having enough to eat and not having nice clothes to wear to school; for years I endured the ridicule of my classmates and my homies. For years I dodged my friends' requests to hang out at my house for fear that they would discover how poor and destitute we were. For years I wondered why there were no white people living in my neighborhood, why white people seemed to live better than us; for years I wondered why my skin was a sin. For years I felt weak and vulnerable because I could not protect myself from my mother's boyfriends who would beat me and who would beat her. For years I didn't talk about my problems because I imagined no one cared. For years I kept everything to myself and I suffered in silence. For years I battled depression totally unaware that I was battling depression. For years I hated my mother because I believed she chased my father away; for years I hated my father because I couldn't stop loving him; for years I hated God for not giving me a fair shot; for years I hated myself just because. For years I bottled up my anger and resentment and rage. Until one day all those years of anguish culminated into one great big explosion and I killed a man who had nothing to do with anything that I was going through.

Sadly, I didn't learn about things like depression or childhood trauma until after I came to prison. In here is where I acquired effective communication skills and other useful life skills. In a place that some consider hell, is ironically where I found God. We can never know "then" what we know now. If so, we'd likely still find a way to make poor choices. What we can do however, is use the lessons we've learned from our mistakes to make better choices going forward and help make the world around us a better place. One of the greatest lessons that I've learned so far in life is that self-expression is one of the most valuable tools for maintaining and improving a person's well-being. Therefore, I encourage everyone to find healthy and creative ways to express themselves as well as to make yourself available for someone else to express themselves. Because you never know what someone is dealing with from one day to the next. One day for me turned into life in prison without the possibility of parole...just one day.

Yes, No, Maybe (Something, Nothing, Anything)
by Electronic Poet

We were never a yes,
but we came so close.
We'll never be a no,
just an almost.
We're far from nothing,
yet never a thing.
We'll never admit it,
but we'll always be something.
We never got an answer,
to what we could be.
Neither of us spoke,
so we're stuck on maybe.
We never did see,
where this might go.
We were both too scared,
so I guess we'll never know...

Bottled Emotions
by Danielle Armstrong

Being in a prison with 2,000 women is a struggle in itself. So many personalities, different auras & lifestyles. However, I feel it's bad for you to bottle your emotions. For more than just one reason too. But I'll name some. One, when you bottle up your emotions you'll eventually get overwhelmed. What happens next? Well suicide is the worst outcome but there's also the fact that you could take your feelings (anger? sadness?) out on the wrong person. That's not fair to them. You might also lose friends that way. I mean, think about it, who wants a friend that snaps out on them for no reason (that they know of!) Depression can also come with bottling up your emotions. Emotions are a lot - who wants to hold on to them right? Don't get me wrong- nobody likes a crybaby! So I'm absolutely not saying talk about your feelings 24/7. However, I am saying be healthy about it. Especially in prison considering there are certain things you can & cannot say to certain people. So yes people in prison have to bottle up their emotions more but at least find 1 trusted friend you can be open with because to keep bottling up your emotions is unhealthy. Plus, we as women have a lot of emotions too. So that's a whole lot of bottles!

Down Deep
by Chrissandra Brewster

I am told that I bottle my emotions. Probably, this is true. Out of my very emotional family, I tend to be the most logical minded. They say it's because I bottle my emotions and hide them down deep.

At times, I choose to shut down. That qualifies as a bottling type of tactic. If I don't want to delve deep or look closely at what causes certain responses from me, then why should I? Right?

I was not able to watch my sister's celebration of life service. I didn't find out it wasn't possible until the day before. I decided I didn't want to talk, not to my best friend and not to my mom. Even though my mom stressed how much she needed to talk to me.....

I didn't call her the morning of the service. I put on my sunglasses and lay in bed shutting out the world during the time of the service. Did I bottle my emotions? Probably. Again I'm not trying to look too deeply at what my actions mean.

Later, I was asked how the service went and if I spoke to my mom. My answer was a distinctive no and an absolutely not.

"You can't avoid dealing with this forever," said my best friend.

"Well, what's another day if it's not forever?" I answered.

She shook her head and I returned to my bed and hid under the covers. I listened to music and pretended to sleep. Does that qualify as bottling my emotions?

I feel like I walk a fine line between bottling and avoidance. Logically, I know prison is not a place to deal with the thoughts and feelings involved if I decide to call home. What I really don't want to deal with is saying goodbye.

So, I'll bottle those thoughts and feelings and throw them into the ocean of avoidance where they are safe from anyone and everyone including myself.

Did I just bottle my emotions again? I don't know. Do you?

Exploding Mentos
by Summer Vazquez

For most of my life, I've struggled with holding things in until I explode. Anger is the only one I don't bottle up. I let that one fly. I was taught to keep any weak emotions inside. I think this is where my cutting and burning comes from.

I do good for a few months until one day I wake up feeling like I can't breathe. I can't go another moment until I see my skin split under the blade. My bottle is full. It's full of soda and someone dropped a sleeve of Mentos in it and quickly replaced the cap.

The pressure is suffocating. My skin splitting open is representative of the bottle exploding with the cap flying in the air. In the end, I grab another bottle and slowly pour myself back into it. A sleeve of Mentos is by my side and ready to go.

A smile is on my face fooling everyone around me. I'm fine. Everything is fine. Can't you tell?

Bottled Value
by Gregory Shiga

Am I good at keeping things in? Does it require practice or self discipline. There are several points of view to a topic such as "Bottled Emotions". Who should care but the own self. Then should it not be important. Then to double check such a situation. Because usually, unwanted emotions are not true from reason.

Maybe even the lovable bottled emotions, may fall short of truth. How? Without interaction, the attained belief of thought never occurred. For example, what if the first bottled emotion was interjected to the special somebody? And the reaction being without. The rest of the bottled emotion may be untrue.

What if this special somebody reacted with more precedence or the opposite ignored. Same goes for any bottled emotion. It really might not be important to anybody. What is important for the normal being, is for the good cause. Other than what makes anybody happy. Being the important, as for any thought.

Such as my height, may have some sort of relevance. Yet what matters more is how I feel, as to being happy or feeling good. Self conscious dilemma, may be more agreed upon to as selfish immaturity. Developing the thought structure to figure the truth. As for what matters, can become maturity. Such as moral, hard work, happiness, and even just to try.

Then to practice with gesture. Then social interaction. To developing the skill of successful communication.

Time in a Bottle; or, Hey, Soul Sister
by I. Cee

What I really need (and is impossible) is a brunch-afternoon with a friend. Some sort of quick but lingering meal followed by any activity. An art show or a museum. Going shopping or doing volunteer work. Even binging trashy TV! Just time spent.

I've come to realize what I truly miss in human companionship, in friendship, are the small moments. The seemingly insignificant chatter which functions as the yarns that knit close friends together. The kind which simply cannot be replicated in texting, email or a letter; or even a phone call. It requires proximity. That time spent with another which leads to odd shared remembrances, and sometimes inside jokes, but most often is forgotten in the particulars in the wash of time; that which in the tapestry of fleeting feeling is forever colored too fast into the fabric of our days to catch but evanescent glimpses of, though it remains vibrant in our hearts for a lifetime.

I suppose, if I were in a women's prison I might — probably would — develop such a friendship. Or more than one. And although I have certainly formed friendships with men in prison I value that meet needs for general society, that emotional bond, that je ne sais quoi which develops between women and cannot succinctly sum up (though of course as a woman, you will intuitively understand) is, well, just not there. It's not the words, or laughter (or tears) or even those looks that say so much more bypassing the eyes having swollen up from the heart, but something shining ever brighter you really only stop to notice in the darkness of absence.

It has taken me quite a while to realize (I may be a slow learner, but I do learn) this is what I most long for. It is not freedom, not to be loosed from the strictures of oppressive oversight

or demeaning treatment; but, instead, shows a desire to be confined, tied, knotted in a close friendship which frees the self to pass through the walls which normally separate to experience a sometimes serious, sometimes silly, but always significant shared emotional present unbound by time.

Bottled Emotions
by Terance D. Wilson

As I pen this I got a compelling beat and reveries when Chris Brown seemed innocent, a melodic voice singing "with you" striking dormant heart strings. I'm waiting on my date to come, and all I can do is to regret the emotions that I'd bottled up all those years ago, afraid to be myself in the crowd of my homies at the time. Too young and dumb to perceive that too many of them only came around so often because, well, I had a way with the ladies. I didn't understand what exactly they lacked or what specifically some lacked. See, then it was all about the neighborhood, and the richest shades of blue, and we all seemed to have enough green. Some of my partners had babies and baby mothers and my older brother had just welcomed to the world my oldest niece. I would embrace the kids, all of them. That is how I felt the release of so much of my compassion. I just never took love seriously, and a decade ago in my environment some of the best and most admirable women would give away too much passion for the attention of some dudes that they close with, in my experiences at least. So I took the easy route.

Now most of the experiences that I shared with so called "homies" have transitioned to memories of deep regrets. We don't even share the same passions no more. I've got a few good friends who became honest contributors to society, those are the ones who write letters to the parole board, and half-way house and are waiting to welcome me home graciously. And they're the ones that are married and live at home as fathers to their babies. Something I always vowed I would and will do as a man, like I address and handle every other thing in my life. Those are my friends, like Seth, when I talk to that man I marvel at the transition. That's when I feel safe to ask the real questions about love and life. That's when I could shed a tear for the way that man adores, challenges and elevates his wife. He's everything that I want to be.

I joined the Crips in Los Angeles for the approval of the people that I thought that I admired when I was 9 and 11. Too young to make eternal decisions. Besides Nipsey Hussle and a few classics, all I really listen to is R&B, some Christian artists' songs. The same stuff that I could listen to in my strict mother's home where I had to go to church 3-4 times a week; before I left home at 13 to become a "man."

The only people I've really got anything in common with are influential women. The truth is that I never changed. I grew restless and angry. I bottled up my emotions. And when I was a baby at 24, and for the first time I was taking just one girl seriously. I was nearly a changed man, when one summer night in damn Colorado State after Nips did a string of three concerts and "homies" from Oklahoma, Seattle, Texas, L.A. it felt mandatory to be outside. So when a fight popped off and I got swung on, some of those bottled emotions crept up and one single punch got me stretched on a manslaughter charge.

Ever since then I've been waiting to reclaim my true self, holding back no sincere emotions for concern of some sucker I'll ever again share anything in common. Like Dru Hill, I was once "5 Steps" from Eternity with the only girl I almost loved. But I'm way past that. I get another chance. I will capitalize.

Bottled Emotions
by Jack Simpson, Jr.

Each year from elementary school to Junior High I was picked on, called names. I am no different than any other red-blooded person. At times I have good days and some really bad ones. I do the best to keep my emotions bottled.

There were days I got knocked around, spit on, and just walked away to keep from getting hurt deeper.

My mother would not allow me to fight back. She always said "Turn the other cheek." I can tell you my face stayed swollen on both sides. She next added, once they see you aren't going to fight back, they will leave you alone. People like that soon find other things for them to get involved with. At least I had always hoped so, since I had more black eyes than black shoes.

I always thought bottled emotions would fester like a boil and pop. Not knowing what the outcome would be. Sure am thankful it never happened when I was young.

After serving in the Army and getting married before twenty, there was a heavy load on my shoulders. I became a workaholic to keep my emotions under control.

I could still hear those boys calling me names. At times I can still feel their fists hitting me. Now that I am older I found a new outlet to control all of the bottled emotions.

I take classes and open up and spill it all out. That was my vent cap. People can control their bottled emotions without hurting people.

As for most of the kids I grew up with, they have moved on or passed away. No matter what we do in life, the way a person gets treated not only hurts them deep, it leaves a lasting impression.

Think before you do. The outcome can be worse than the giver.

Bottled Emotions

by Jacob Lester

Where did we learn that bottling up our emotions is a good thing? Why do we so often try to contain them all inside? Did society set us on this path?

This error in thinking can actually cause far more harm than good. Those pent up emotions remain unaddressed, stewing and building pressure as we try to ignore them or repress them. This is the wrong thing to do.

Have you ever added Mentos into a bottle of Coca Cola and then screwed the cap back on? If you have then you know that the pressure built and built until it finally exploded.

In this analogy we are the cola and the Mentos our emotions. As we bottle them up and repress them the pressure builds and builds until an explosion finally occurs. Something, anything can serve as the trigger for this explosion, often completely unrelated to what we have repressed. The emotions explode from us, their energy demanding to be expressed. How they show can vary greatly, but lashing out, physical confrontation, suicide attempts, attacking others or even destroying property are just a few possibilities. Instead of bottling your emotions up you need to learn to experience them and express them in healthy ways.

Shaken not Stirred

by Michele Lochridge

I storm into medical. It's 2:30 p.m. I despise the daily insulin ritual. Today, I half skip into the waiting area. The cop at the desk looks at me expectantly. "I'm doing diabetes!" I declare.

Immediately, I search out my friend. She is wearing a long dress sitting in her normal uptight posture and bouncing one leg over the other. I plop down beside her on the shiny metal bench. She doesn't bother to take her nose out of her book, *Ordinary Grace* by William Kent Krueger.

"I made it! I'm in!" I declare. Without looking up and in her perfect pronunciation she asks, " Whatever are you talking about?"

I smile mischievously. "I'm coming to Peer to Peer!"

The book goes into her lap. "People will tell you what to do. You know you have a problem with that," she warns in her professorial tone.

I laugh, "I got this LaFleur." Despite my reputation as a lunatic, someone thought it would be a good idea to introduce me to a more civilized environment.

Two days later, I burst into my new dorm out of breath and soaking sweat. Catherine spots me. She immediately makes her way over. "Behave!" She tells me in her mommy voice. "You have my old bed, 35. I'm in my new bed, 19, directly across from you." She seems proud of herself. It's not until lights out that I understand why. I've spent years tormenting her. In this moment, she claims an inch of revenge. LaFleur 1 \ Lochridge 0.

The dorm is completely dark except for the interrogation light directly over my bed. Catherine is sleeping lovely in her dark alcove. You s#ck LaFleur! Everyone who knows me braces for me to act out.

I don't.

It's hard. It's been days. I'm calm, cool and collected. I haven't cussed anyone out or even tried to buck the system. I hear J dorm, my old, bad, drug-infested dorm, has a running bet. I take to heart the wise words of 50¢,"Go get your refunds (bleep) I ain't dead."

Don't get me wrong, I regularly have to play the tape forward in my head - nod to Sandra Jackson. I hear her say "Slow down Shell, think of

the consequences." I never thought it would be this hard to keep my ADHD under control.

Tick...tick...tick...

Tonight was my turning point. I laughed for the first time in a long time. A real laugh. My proper uptight friend, LaFleur, drug her plastic-covered, two-inch thick mattress onto the center aisle walkway between our beds. It's sheet washing night. Catherine has her super sneakers on and is awkwardly kicking the mattress.

I can't help it. I have to laugh.

"W-what ARE you doing?" I ask.

"I'm fluffing this mattress," she huffs. All she needs is a British accent. OMG! It's so comical, I'm going to pee myself.

"LaFleur! Tomorrow that mat will be right back where you started, flat! Ha, ha, ha!"

Her determination to have just one night with a slightly fluffed mattress makes her continue the attempt. "Are you going to help me?" she challenges.

I can't stop laughing. "Sure!" I answer. She intends to shake it with my help. We look ridiculous. LaFleur does not care as our onlookers taunt us. I laugh so hard, I have to abandon her. Thanks, I needed that!

Shake and Bake

by Catherine LaFleur

Soundtrack: “Connected” by Stereo Mc's

My meditative reading at the dental clinic was disturbed by a perky voice announcing, "I made it, I'm in the Peer to Peer dorm!" Michele Lochridge slides onto the bench next to me. Dental and diabetes clinics have to share the same waiting room. I'm getting my fangs polished, she's getting shot up at the trap house.

I feign surprise. "Really? What bed did they assign you?" I know perfectly well it's 2135 single, my ex-bunk. Finally a worthy opponent takes the field.

Here is a description of the course of events.

For two years I've lived on bunk 2135 single. Pleasantly centered in a triangle of three fans and strategically located under the heating unit, It's cool in the summer and cozy in the winter. Additionally, there is a reading light on 24/7 so I can burn the midnight oil working at writing, art, or my lifetime literary bucket list. The only deficiency is the drawer locker.

Teeny tiny and a wee little space. In this locker I'm forced to choose between books and food. I'm hungry all of the time. Like a squirrel my snack stash is spread amongst my friends. I have the necessary charm to convince a staff person to take me to Asbestos Town. These are derelict dorms, vacant for more than a decade. They are also an Aladdin's trove of gigantic trunk-sized floor lockers many times the size of a drawer locker.

The fly in my oil of joy is 2134 single is unwilling to cede space for a trunk even though I offered to share it and give her the combination. 2134 can't bring herself to trust me even though I've been an exemplary bunkie.

2136 holds a medium-sized floor locker. Even if I disappeared the drawer, there is no space to fit a second floor locker, not even sideways. I must seek other accommodation.

I put on my red lipstick and start low with my dorm sergeant. He is powerless and emasculated by the carceral system. I ascend the chain of command even invading offices sans appointment with my unauthorized self. Deploying a charm offensive I finally net a top shark patrolling the compound.

"May we walk and talk, sir?" The Capt. in the Hat nods giving tacit approval. I smile engagingly and present my case. I emphasize that I am not asking for a locker, just a bunk change giving me the opportunity to network for a bigger locker.

"Come to my office after count." I flinch. This could be bad or good. I dutifully show myself at his desk. Capt in the Hat picks up the phone and speaks to the housing Sargent. Then it's done. I skip back to the dorm to move my things.

That night, I have to shake down my mattress compacting the mattress to fit the length of my new bed. It's a struggle and the mattress is firm. Lochridge asks if she can help. Grabbing the mattress on one end she shakes it up and down like bouncing a ball.

I'm standing motionless giving her a speaking look that asks the question, "Were your parents drunk when they conceived you?"

"What?" Michele asks as she drops her end. I sigh deeply. Must I do everything myself?

Cage Fighter passes by inquiring, "Need help, LaFleur?" She grabs the mattress hefts it over her head like an opponent and slams the mat down. "Perfect!" I trill out as I fold and tuck the empty top part of plastic cover around my now shortened mat.

Bottled Within
by Jeremy Harshman

Secured within the beclouded glass hull
of this vintage-frame keel,
lays scrolled a parchment-shroud cargo
lashed with a single-ribbon seal.

Cast adrift upon the eternal brine
to cruise the kismet currents true;
under summer sun, through winter chill,
braving storm wrath — a must do.

To sail beyond the horizon bend
for a bight haven of tranquil strand;
and await the embrace, from a fairer grace,
in an enthralling hand.

Blessed be that dawning day
when the 'crewed' cork be relieved.
For salvaged from this weathered wreck,
a treasure trove to be heaved.

Once unbound and unfurled,
this cache will evince rare splendor;
in a wealth of articulation
and the richness in its candor.

Such value to be claimed,
so coveted by any heart akin.
Priceless is the pure emotion...
bottled within.

Now They're Free
by James Risner

My time began in November of 2015, with a forty-year federal sentence, and a concurrent life state sentence. At that time, I had four family members still in my corner. My Grandpa, Dad, and my two rocks. My Mom and my Grandma. They always stuck with me through the good and the bad.

My mother could be very demanding at times. She was very overweight, and because of that, had a string of health issues, from diabetes to COPD. Because of her physical restrictions, she would attempt to 'live her life through me,' I once said. She would blow up my phone, one call after another (many I ignored), until I would pick up. I remember blocking her account on Facebook so she couldn't see when I was online. I just wanted space to live my life. I was a husband and a father and didn't have time for mommy's issues.
Two years into my bid, mom died from a blood clot in her lungs. While the news caught me off guard, I always suspected her days were numbered. From her weight and health conditions, to smoking a pack a day (while on oxygen, mind you), to the pain pills she was addicted to, yes her time was numbered. I just never thought they'd be 'That' numbered.

I remember laying in my bunk, staring up at the ceiling thinking of all the times I could've picked up the phone or shot her an Instant Message. Instead, I pushed her aside and kept moving forward. Now, that day had come that I would never hear her voice again, her laugh or just the soft way she'd say “I love you, Jimmy.” No, instead I get to reflect on the mountainous amount of shame I brought to her. She would never admit it but the day I was sentenced she died a little inside. She knew then that she'd never see me again. So I gathered up all my shame and stuffed it inside a bottle. Placing it high on the shelf right next to sorrow and regret. Emotions in prison can be dangerous. People feed off them like vultures on a dead carcass. Always looking for an angle or emotion to exploit. So I pushed on.

Four years later, my grandma died from a liver condition. That took both my second rock and breath away. My grandma had gone from fine to gone in just four months. She'd known all along. She didn't want to burden people with something they couldn't do anything about. My grandma raised me for a good part of my early years. I'd spend 12-16 hours a day at her house, while my mom was at work. She'd taught me a lot of important life lessons. Like 'Don't like or dislike someone just because your friends do. Get to know the person and you be the judge.' In many ways, I took my grandma's passing harder than my mom’s. Again, I bottled up my emotions and kept it push’n.

I know one day I will see them again. Both healthy, happy, and full of life. But until then, I write. It wasn't until I saw the prompt for this assignment that I knew. It was time to break those bottles and share my sorrows with you.

Bottled Emotions
by Jeniffer McHenry

Lying beneath the surface
Never showing in my eyes
The pain and despair
I often feel inside
Like a pressure cooker
About to explode
The tears burst through
With nowhere to go
My chest swells with sadness
As emotions suffocate me
The hurt all too consuming
Wounds buried deep resurface
Crying nonstop for hours on end
A hard exterior cracked beyond repair
The bottled emotions finally free
Now true healing can begin

Dedicated Emotions
by Amanda Butler

These words are dedicated to those who died
because they had no love and felt done in the world
because they were afraid to be alone and tried to stick it out
because they could not ask
because they were shunned
because they were sick and their bodies couldn't resist disease
because they played it safe
because they had no connections
because they had no faith
because they felt they didn't belong and wanted to die

These words are dedicated to those who died
because they were loners and liked it
because they acquired friends and drew others to them
because they took risks
because they were stubborn and refused to give up
because they asked for too much

These words are dedicated to those who died
because someone did not follow through
because a card was lost and a number skipped
because a bed was denied
because a place was filled and no other left

These words are dedicated to those who died
because someone was overworked and forgot
because someone left everything to god
because someone was late
because someone did not arrive at all
because someone told them to wait and they couldn't any longer

These words are dedicated to those who died
because death is a punishment
because death is a reward
because death is the final rest.

Darkness and Light
by Jeff Hovatter

She shone from within. The light, apparently organic, was like a flame to a moth.

She had been born with a face that would let her get her way! He saw that face and he lost all control. — "Hollywood Nights," Bob Seger

That light blinded him so. Even the glimpses of shadows cast incongruously by the misty charcoal darkness that leaked through the pretty facade were ignored, as he basked in the warm glow. Ignoring the signs of darkness became routine. He chose to see only the dazzling light, trying to stay in its range and path. In the light, all was well in his world, beyond it, his world was consumed by a need to get back to that source of brightness, warmth, and comfort. The world around seemed dull and cold if her light was not there to make it sparkle.

He struggled to be the object sought by the light, fearing loss of it if she directed it on another man, even momentarily. The light strayed at times, causing him to feel empty and chilled. When she turned her light on him again he was a happy guy.

Eventually the darkness became impossible to ignore, but he only acknowledged it,

while living only for the increasingly rare moments of brilliance. Those moments became few and fewer. The darkness, its core as black as total cave darkness, came often and stayed long. Still he clung desperately to hope that she would turn the light on him with the old intensity. She did shine it his way, but with a fading brightness that eventually became not a light, but a light-sink, that absorbed any glow, like old asphalt of a narrow country road, through dense forest, on a pitch black night during heavy rain, absorbs the dull yellow incandescent light from a 1960s vintage car. Even absent the light, he hung onto his faded, bruised hope beyond hope, futilely wishing to see that light.

He became, to his shock and surprise, fearful of any glimpse of that which he yearned for, unresponsive, freezing like a deer in the headlights. He could not face the cycle of light and dark, or actually of light offered, then pulled back, like a game of keep-away. The light still lived in her, and she shone it toward others, but for him had only darkness. Eventually dropping all pretense that she would shine her light his way, regardless of any sacrifice he would offer, she turned the light on another, like a Star Trek tractor beam. He froze in darkness, even as others directed their own inner light to him. He hid his emotions from others throughout her on and off provision of the light he couldn't forget. His psyche wounded, he hid, even from himself, the feelings elicited by the warmest light, though perceived by him as less bright, he had found. Hiding emotions kept him in residual darkness despite genuine light offered, by one who had suffered until distrust was impressed deeply into the psyche. Both overcautiously bottled emotions that should have been shared, until it simply became too late. However, false and misleading pretense of emotion is worse than when shared than any true feelings not shared. Unrequited love is still love, but better shared than withheld.

Tell that someone that you love / just what you're thinking of / if tomorrow never comes. — Garth Brooks, "If Tomorrow Never Comes"

Grief
by Theresa Batson

People deal with grief in many different ways. Some cry, some fight, some are silent and bottled up. Grief isn't only about death, it can also be felt when a child moves away from home for college or to start their own adult life.

Even though I still had connection with my son and daughter. I grieved over the fact they no longer lived under my roof where they were properly cared for and safe.

I had a miscarriage. Forty years later, I still grieve. What would that child be today? A boy? A girl? Would they look like me? I've lost two husbands. My children lost their father with the first. The second was the love of my life. We finished each other's sentences, knew what the other wanted, shared our music and enjoyed life. His death was unexpected. I still dream about him and miss him like crazy. I won't love another like that.

The worst grief of all was losing my mother and sister one month apart. I wasn't over the grief over my mom, still ain't, then my sister. I'm in prison and couldn't attend the funerals.

Bottled Emotions
by Omar Recalde

I wish the BOP did some sort of therapy or counseling. I feel like the loneliness, the hurt that I felt, coupled with my weak character, made a terrible combination when I was younger. I'm so glad and appreciative that I've realized how I convinced myself that being selfish, hurtful, acting on my lowest instincts, was how I wanted to exist.

I'm concerned that without therapy, without professional support, I'm going to slide back, just not in a criminal way. I feel like I'm still awkward and cowardly about expressing myself to others face-to-face. How do I find the strength to not be so scared? How do I tell someone that I don't like how they're talking to me, or that what they're doing bothers me?

My father was a bully, and pretty easy with using his belt. By the time I was 7 or 8, I learned to just stay in my room, be quiet (maybe that's the reason I don't like people who talk all the time, yapping about nothing or repeating themselves over & over. Noise = Danger?). Growing up that way, I didn't learn to express my hurt. I don't want to keep my emotions bottled up anymore, but I don't know how to release them in a healthy way.

Burp!
by Sherrideen Smith

There are many emotions I keep hidden. The world cannot handle the pressure of the words that are locked away. Bottled emotions are raw like a lion, flesh torn apart and exposed. I've learned to shove, shove and shove them down.

But every now and then I must burp the bottle so it won't explode.

I've Got 99 Bottles, But Anger Ain't One
by Jacob Preuschl

Welcome to Jake's Lucky Liquor Emporium! I'm Jake, your bottle buddy for today. Oh! It's your first time? Allow me to explain. The bottles that line these walls are organized by the emotion they contain. Different emotions offer different flavors. Bottle sizes vary as do the concentrations within. Behind every bottle is a story. Just like how pictures capture a moment. Their stories add depth and texture. I'll be mixing and matching to guide you through a profound emotional experience. Some call me a "mixologist," but this is more of an art than a science.

We have everything from Acceptance to Zeal. We keep the positive emotions up here on the show floor. The "bad ones" are kept hidden in the cellar. They aren't as popular so most avoid them. I think that's a mistake. The lowest lows give us higher highs.

The smallest selection we have is anger. It surprises many considering how common it is. One of my favorite bottles is located in this section. It's a vintage of only 3 years, however it has aged very well. Allow me to tell you its story while you experience a glass.

Our story starts with none other than me! That's right! Your most humble bottle buddy. I was in my street clothes for the first time in a year. It was a liberating feeling! Other than the chains around my wrists and ankles. I was 26 and sitting in a chaotic concrete holding tank in MCC Chicago. The mix of humanity was loud, dirty and nervous. You could feel it in the air and the actions of those around me. Pacing, scanning the room and puffing out their chests to look intimidating. In the midst of this was a quiet guy sitting alone with his black hoodie up. He almost looked to be reciting a creed or praying to himself. He must have felt me staring because he looked at me asking, "First time?"

"Uh yeah actually. Wait, is it that obvious?"

He shifts towards me. “To me it is, but I just finished an 8-year bit. So I can tell a newbie when I see one. If it makes you feel better, you are handling it better than most so far."

"What's it like? Where have you been? Do you have any advice?"

He smiles while somehow holding his serious demeanor. "Ease up on the questions. I was at FCI Leavenworth. As for advice, I can give you some ground rules. Rule 1: Mind your own business. Rule 2: Pay your debts. Rule 3: Check yourself." He pauses before finally saying, "do you know what oppression is?"

I'm surprised by the interruption of the prison gospel. "Yeah I think so... I've never tried to define it before. I'd say oppression is when someone is trying to keep you down."

He nods, "Close enough. Do you know how to tell when you're being oppressed?"

"I've never thought about it."

He folds his hands together. "Whenever you feel angry you're being oppressed. Whether it's at an inmate, CO or yourself. Even for no reason. Don't let them oppress you. That's how they change you and own you. Don't let them win."

There you have it! This mysterious guardian angel saved me from spiralling into the SHU on multiple occasions with this divine cheat code. Ready for round two? Here's a tall glass of indignation from just over a month ago. Cheers!
"Do you ever just feel angry for no reason?"

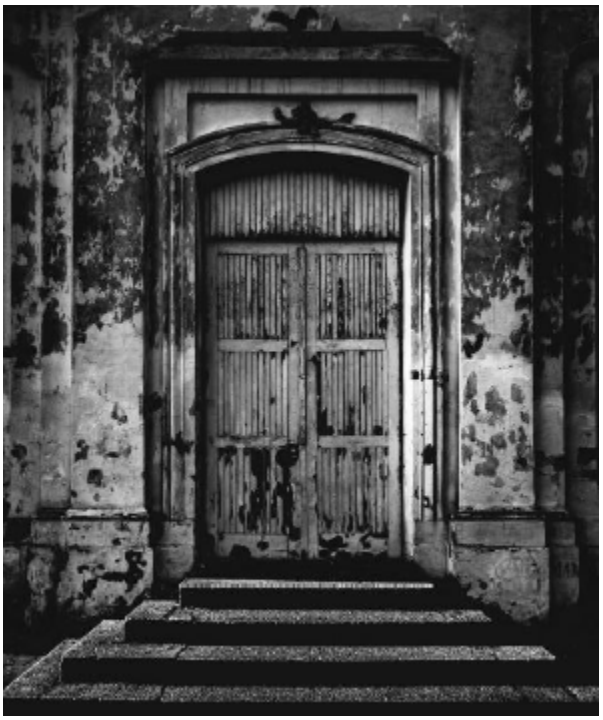
I look up at Wulf, a 26-year-old kid fresh off the bus and angry at the system. I empathize. "All of the time. It's constantly lurking beneath the surface threatening to ruin my time. Why do you feel angry?"

"I just feel like no one cares! I feel less than human, an annoyance for these people as they collect a paycheck. There's nothing offered for rehabilitation or developing myself. I understand that I screwed up, but is this it? I'm going to spend a dozen plus years of my life on pause. It frustrates me and then I snap at family and friends. How do you handle it?"

I feel the stress he radiates, knowing something is wrong, but being powerless to fix it.

"What you are feeling is incredibly common." I smile and ask, "do you know what oppression is?" Welcome back! As you can see, even our negative emotions can be used for good. Valuable lessons to grow from and pass on. The goal isn't to never be angry or sad or etc. That's an impossible goal. Feel them but check yourself to avoid traveling too far down that road. Once you do it becomes easier to do so. Always remember, if you can choose you can change. So choose wisely.

April Picture Theme



This Door
by Jacob Lester

This door, this door, what could it conceal? An oriental appearance aged with time. What mysteries beyond it lie? Wisdom? Poverty? Foreign sights? Looking at it, it is hard to tell. Should we explore this very interesting door or should we pass it on by?

Untitled
by Stephen Burton

Look at this menacing doorway, It stands between you and your dreams. This doorway embodies fear and it's intimidating. Will you allow yourself to be intimidated and frozen in fear? This doorway will try to convince you that your goals are unattainable and that you are inadequate but ignore the inner thoughts. It might be easy to turn around and walk away but don't do that. Your confidence and bravery is the key that will unlock that door. Keep in mind every step you take toward that doorway will be a struggle. Each step is a battle that pushes you beyond what you thought you could handle. Your confidence builds by every step you navigate. Reach deep inside and kick the door in.

As you walk through the doorway and past the shattered pieces of that door keep this in mind. It was only a battle not the war and with a new level comes a new devil. When doubt enters your mind don't look at what's in front of you, turn around and look at what God brought you through.

Bottled Emotions
by Promacro

I ain't going to lie I have been keeping all of my emotions bottled up in the jar of my body, like the whole world was against me. I'm a 42 yr old b/m from Quincy Florida, a small suburb town that is mainly woods. I got 2 brothers on my mother's side and I'm the knee baby. You talking about bad. I used to do 100% of the crimes and almost never got caught. Until it was my time and I couldn't stop getting flipped. I went to my first juvenile program when I was 12, second when I was 13, and graduated to prison at 15, got out at 21 and I'm at my 6th bid right now. I ain't going to lie, I thought something was wrong with me, like I was cursed or something. But this whole time I have been looking at everything through the wrong door. I'm a Cancer/Leo, I was born July 22, 1983. Emotional and super ego. An element of water/sun. So when I get mad I used to create a turbulence so high and violent it's like

I blew everything away. I was too emotional, too sensitive, too serious, had too many grudges, too much pain, too much pressure and too much everything. I realized that I done went crazy, I think I'm Mike Larry. I realized that life was like chess and I had to learn how to lose in order to get it right. I realize that the past never even existed. I realized that the moment never died. I realized I had the one power to live and relive my memories. That the only thing that could be affected in life is the future. The future is the only thing that's real, the rest is fake. What about the moment? What about, right now? What about the presence? I'm picturing the looks on y'all faces when y'all open up this letter and you see that each word that I construct is another seed that I keep impregnating y'all minds with. That's when I realized that when Adam knew Eve, they was not talking about sex. They was talking about the procreation of being fruitful and multiplying inside of the mind. I am Adam so I got to know Eve. I am a man so I got to know a woman. I have married Eve, that's my other half. You can't tell me that God is not a woman. Because God being a man don't make no sense to me. But I said to me. Jesus Christ is the visible image of God. So if God is invisible can he be both man/woman. I got a riddle for you. The reason people can't see the future is because you got to create it. Make it, manufacture it, fabricate it.

That's when the cap flew off the top of the bottle and I realized that God don't make no mistakes but all plans. God is the future! The devil is the past. The past is leaving the cap on the bottle, but the future is taking the cap off. The past has a dead end. But the future is infinity, infinity, infinity. That's when I realized that now I'm cooking with grease. If Donald Duck would have had a plan when he dropped that bomb, he would have had a lot to say. But he has nothing to say. Plus he don't make no sense. The reason the future is so dark, is because you got your light on the past. So let's turn the ball around, and create a touch down!

The Door
by Daniel James Sigler

This closed door is a conducive contrivance keeping us caged in cold corridors, continuously counting calendars, til' our cadavers are carried-out by Coroners.

Kangaroo-Court causation keeps us contained in Kong-type captivity, condemned to claustrophobia cubicles, constraining us condescendingly.

Cops kidnap us out our communities on incursionary conquests, causing countless accused criminals to coercively confess, then convey us through incarceration like a kidnapping contest!

Calling us incurable incorrigibles and catch us like catfish, increasing convictions, claiming we're culpable culprits!

Consequences of complexion, contumaciously callow kids with carrows, accumulating us for countryfied chain-gangs like a conjuration of Jim Crow!

As Congressional candidates campaign on cutting crime as a challenge, creating a counterculture of cutthroat cannibals and Komodo Dragons, clever crocodiles, constricting cobras and condors, combative Comanches, killer-bees and carnivores, chased by constables since childhood, criss-crossing the chessboard, in creased handkerchiefs and house-shoes was corduroy, chilling as Chucky, criminally-active kids, consolidated in Children of the Corn, cultivated cliques into close-knit clans, and out came cold-eyed Convicts carrying curved cleavers like Candyman.

Compunctionless as they compact us in concrete cocoons of compression, in concentration camps of carnage, we become our captor's crude collection, til' caskets we clash with, America's corporation of corrections . . . .

Rejected (True Story)
by Terance D. Wilson

When the first one lets you down for the last time, rejects you for the sins that you committed in a past life, all those childhood memories turn to reminiscing upon a tragedy. It's going to take the man in me to treat this as anything less than a casualty. To conquer the vanity of the times or the trajectory of a man's sanity—first you abuse, then abandon the ones you used to pay homage to.

Diamond in the rough—the prodigal son's sun rising up, so much beauty relished in silence than in stirring up the truth. About an adolescent youth, scorned by the pride behind a mother's anger. Outraged that a mere man could subject her to loneliness. The only outlet for that child that resembles *him* best: hit him at any time, convicting him of his father's crimes. Read into every line, the sublime words that were never spoiled by the tides of emotions you were never taught to show. Took every part of me.

The act that struck the final blow: God is Man, exposed to every temptation that I've ever known. Being alone is a battlefield for a boy trying to manifest an empire. All of his courage is a discipline in loyalty—born of royalty. Rich thoughts begin to emerge; learning from the pain and deficit of love. A child with substance fated to rise above primal love, always in some shit. Always running from something destructive. No prospect of a future where the hurt would die away. Everything would be okay. The prospect of love would be safely tucked inside a woman's arms. Embracing her thoughts, character, and her substance—impatient to say every thought before they would vanish from mind. Life isn't a rush. It's the recompense of her touch. Touch. Touch. Touch.

Still, I keep hope from the worst of places. Have I made mistakes? Yes. Her heart is the space where I go to forget about broken days. Once forgotten, I imagine a haven where I feel at ease inside a woman's perspective. Not a peasant, but a woman of privilege, status and class. Suddenly, I understand the fate of my mother's broken heart. I never had a chance—I was destined always to be rejected!

The Doorway of Souls
by The Lost Prince

Mom,

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

What am I supposed to do in a world without you, now that you're gone? I'll have to change, it won't be the same. How do I heal, how do I deal in a world without you near? How much of me did you take with you? Alone and hollow is all I feel, is all I am.

You left me alone, I wasn't ready, you weren't supposed to go, not yet, not now, not so soon. In a world of hate with an unknown fate. Your love you took, my heart you broke. The sun doesn't rise, the stars don't shine. Up in my mind the memories climb. The happy, the sad. The tears of joy and the sadness we shared.

Your acceptance of me my whole life, even after I came out to you, and you told me you already knew and you've known for years that you were just waiting for me to accept it myself. You were my greatest support. You were always there for me when I needed you the most. I need you now, I'm lost and hurting, I feel forgotten.

Mom, I miss you so much. I can't believe it will be two years May 31st. It hurts so much, I really do miss you.

Love,

MC

The Door
by Mark Lewis

Here I am anxiously waiting at the door. My escort has left. Its name? “Santa Muerte” aka Grim Reaper.

Santa Muerte has many different faces, some human looking, others – not! It’s never seen the robe scythe version.

While the faces of Santa Muerta are everchanging, the door itself remains the same. Old decrepit, and time worn. As though it has stood through eternity.

As I stand here, a thousand thoughts run through my head.

1. Will it be an abyss?
2. Will it be paradise?
3. Are my loved ones here?
4. Is it my eternal home?

As I’m waiting suddenly the Door opens, a slight crack is revealed, and suddenly:

A bright light!
A Voice!

And I hear: *Sir, your surgery is over, you are in recovery and there were no complications “this time”*!

I’ve been through this 5 other times and still have more to go through.

One of these times,

The Door
Will
Open!

The Forbidden Door of No Return
by Nkrumah Lumumba Valier

We must all be careful with the choices we make in our lives and never give up on believing that our prayers will never be answered by God no matter how hopeless situations in our life may become. We must have faith that our life will get better and a change is gonna come for us. And we must understand that every bad choice we will make always comes with a price we must pay. Please don’t make the mistake I made.

I remember that night very well, the one I will never forget. I was in my cell praying as tears rolled down my face asking God why has He not answered my prayers? Waiting for a response from God, but He is not talking back to me. The pain within me is slowly increasing as the thought reaches every part of my body that everyone has abandoned me. Even God. No one cares that I am innocent and I’ve been in prison for almost 20 years without any outside help from my family. Not even my children have been here for me to offer emotional support. How easily forgotten we become by all those who once said they will always love you no matter what.

I slowly got up off my knees, still crying, unable to stop the tears from rolling down my face because I was in so much pain. I sat on my bunk and began to talk to myself contemplating suicide, wondering if it would be my only way of being free from prison. When I heard a voice telling me, “Nkrumah you are not alone. You have never been alone. I’ve heard your every prayer that God never answered for you.” The voice frightened me because I knew that I was alone in that cell sitting in the dark and I jumped up off my bunk to look around the cell, but I couldn’t see anyone. It became completely quiet and a chill of coldness I started to feel all over my body.

I asked, who are you? Show yourself to me now! Then he appeared before my eyes like magic. I should’ve been afraid, but I was not. He told me that I had to invite him into my life for me to see him, and now that I did, I can see him. He was a tall slender black man wearing a black, very nice designer suit. He introduced himself as Delvion and he could help me receive what I’ve been praying for. He had my full attention then. I asked Delvion, how can this be possible? Delvion told me that nothing is impossible for him to give

me. I only have to give him what he wants in return. I asked, what is it I must give to be free? Delvion said, “Worship only me and your soul.”

Delvion snapped his fingers and we was no longer inside my cell. I was facing some steps leading up to a door with no doorknob. The walls around the door looked so old, like they had been standing since the beginning of time.

Delvion looked at me and said that I only have to walk up those stairs and push the door open and walk in. And once on the other side of that door, my prayers will be answered. The prayers that God never would’ve answered for you Nkrumah. I had to make a choice that would supersede Allah and me forever in exchange for my freedom. Delvion held up his hand placing his fingers together to snap them again. Nkrumah, I can make it easy for you if you love your Allah so much. I can snap my fingers and put you back in prison in your cell. So you can continue to wait for Allah to give you what I can give you right now on the other side of that door.

The hardest part of committing ourselves to do something we know is wrong is knowing what we are about to do is wrong. But what could be worse than being a slave in prison? So on that last thought I ran up the stairs, pushed open the door and ran through it. Everything went dark around me. I felt the worst pain I could ever know as my soul was torn from inside my body. Then it was nothing, like I had been transported to a void in time. When my eyes opened and slowly saw that I was not free and that it was something much worse than being a slave in prison. Being a slave damned in hell for eternity. After making the choice of entering the forbidden door of no return. Allah please save me! Help me, Allah! Please Allah!

I’m Game!

by Robert Blankenship

Oh Joy! and Joy-osity! Elation! and bliss! - ye’ who, “do not know!” The April One photo feeds the addiction and brings my blood to tingles down to the bone!

You are walking on a path, surrounded by trees, but you emerge into a meadow; there’s a freestanding object in the distance. As you draw near you see a door that has neither handle nor latch, but not just any door. This door looks ancient. Its inset stone facings look as if they came from some underground dungeon a thousand years ago.

You, and your party, pause. You can walk around the door — it’s the same from both sides. Anyone who's a “gamer,” knows, “you do not – ever – just open, nay, you do not ever even try to open said door.”

But. Do you cast sense magic, or magical traps, (which can set off a trap) can you perceive nonmagical traps, do you back off to range, cast fire, ice, or shoot an arrow at said door? Do you choose to throw the ax-of-never-lost at the door? Of course, the ax-of-never-lost is a chaos weapon, it will remove one – D6, times ten, percentage of an enemy’s health… but it will cost one-quarter of all stats to use; it’s a cursed weapon, once picked up — it’s for life, it can never be gotten rid of. “You decide!”

One can, A) guess said door may go somewhere very good, or extremely bad; or, B) guess the door may come from somewhere… what will emerge? Do we enter, if we open it, do we face what may come out? Is your party rested, healed, are you combat ready? Or… should you discover hoards of treasure — do you have space to carry it away? Are – YOU – prepared to die! “I – Game Master – await your decision.”

Looking at the April One photo I see a thousand and one possibilities; my mind awhirl, I can see hours, a day, possibly, weeks of adventure, a single door, another plot – I, “master of all before me,” yes, it feeds my addiction and, yes… I am aware of the addiction.

And here is why Robert (me) cannot play Pathfinder, Dungeons and Dragons or any RPG, uh, no, Robert (me) cannot even begin to play. “Come on, build one little character, it’ll be fun…” Uh, yeah, like hey, “try this one little hit of a very good drug…” we know where that goes.

And it begins. How many times have I, in prison, watched as a nongamer built one character in one game, and very quickly they progress into the abyss. They are making maps, doing conversions of editions, creating characters

and, eventually, their own games; no longer, "a player," a, "Game Master," in multiple games — obsessed.

How many people in prison have ever bothered to read their case file, or court file? How many would know there was no affidavit of probable cause, as required by the Fourth Amendment, and, thereby, the state employed a procedure it could not lawfully adopt… which results in the court had no authority to exercise its subject matter jurisdiction, which means the court had no subject matter jurisdiction and the judgement is void ab initio that can be filed, at any time – no time limitation. (But they don't know that)

But. Nope. If we watch "The Bang Theory," (middle earth barbie) when Penny has a gaming addiction; there it is. You sit in prison literally holding the "evidence" that proves you are innocent. And the Court says, "well, we just choose not to consider that." (because if they DID consider it they'd have to let you out.) Or you sit in prison, doing life, and you hold, in your hand, irrefutable, "proofs," (the court's own files) that you are falsely imprisoned, on four charges you were never actually charged with, due to extrinsic fraud. You file an Independent Action pursuant to (8.01-428(D)) on which the Court states, "…Code Section (8.01-428) does not apply to criminal cases…" Excuse YOU! (Wilson v. Com 108 VA Cor 91, 2001) (and about 20! other cases) show, not only does Code Section (8.01-428(D)) apply to, but also lead to criminal cases being vacated. So the Court meant, "code section (8.01-428) does not apply to – just YOU!"

Rage. Frustration. You, in this life, in this world, have no control. Ah…but just one little character in Pathfinder and, "I decide," who I am, my race, abilities, alignment, items, (I can choose my own god)… "I am God!" And this becomes, "my maps, my own characters, my own games or even my whole new game concept;" "I am … Game Master!" Into this world I slowly descend like singing in the, "I am in control," quicksand… I am now in control of my world… I escape.

The Door
by Ron Stark

Be not deceived by the door, for it hides what it is and what it protects. The steps leading up to the door are rigged to collapse unless you have the key to lock them in place. If you stand on the top step it releases the steps and jets of propane gas are ignited as you fall. Instant cremation. If you have the key to prevent that, the door is rigged. It's two inches of solid steel and those bamboo slats… phoney. They conceal optical sensors that scan finger and palm prints. If yours are not in the system, anthrax gas jets out from the side pillars. Sleep tight. Mine are in the system. The six panels are a crypto-lock numeric sequencing system. Push on the panels in the right order, you're in. I know the sequence.

Behind the door is a human – ? – capable of such evil I don't talk about it. The human – ? – is my father.

The Door
by Charles Whitfield

According to Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus, a door is a gateway, a means of access. Whenever we stumble in certain points in our lives, some of us postulate (assume to be true) that everything's FUBAR—(%0#!ed beyond all relief). Not so.

When things become querulous, we ascertain there's not a mouse hole anywhere to escape into. Nevertheless, the minutest star shines in the darkness. For the Good Lord has made available a door unseen by the eyes of our heads, but seen by the eyes of our souls.

Such a beauty this is, because it gives us faith, hope, perseverance; and the door unseen by our mortal eyes becomes visible, it opens to allow us through.

Yet we must endure: if you can't endure the bad, you won't live to see the good.

Haunted
by Kelly Messenger

This is a haunted building; do not enter. It is said that people went in here and never came out. Sometimes, when it's late at night, and people walk past this building, it has been said that people hear faint screams and a woman crying out for help.

The mayor of the city has been trying to have this building torn down but people have stood outside and protested against it. They claim these older buildings in their city have always been there, and it comforts them. Having places like this torn down and rebuilt or reconstructed would make them feel like their city has been intruded on. Though, once in a while, homes do get reconstructed in their city.

It's buildings like this, the older ones, that give the citizens in the city a sense of comfort. Some say it's because they were there since they grew up and their parents and grandparents too, but I don't know.

Nerves
by A. Satchell

A Door
An Accomplishment

Those stairs once so hard
yet so simple to step up
to climb up
to even sit on
even worse to stare at

"I did it"
I made it to the door but
just the door

Now
I find it difficult to just
simply knock

The Door to New Lyfe
by Angel Elayne Golston

We finally made it. In front of us was the door. There was a contest to find the hidden door. You could have up to four people on your team. You earned clues which led you forward. I'm not sure anyone knows how many teams there were. I just know that we made it to the door. We found it, now we just have to open it and find out what our prize is.

When we signed up, the prize was simply described as being so wonderful it would take us out of this world. The door was supposedly a magical artifact. All we really knew was the door had no handles. Our final task upon us, we had to open the door.

At this point curiosity drove us more than anything. We've come so close to our prize. All we needed was to open the door. It appeared to be made from bamboo**.** Though closer inspection proved it to be sturdy. We knew it couldn't be broken down.

On the right side of the door, there appeared to be a button. It was too high to be a doorbell, being two-thirds of the way up the door. Maybe it operated the door somehow though.

I called the team together and we discussed the button. I wanted everyone to be on the same page. We were trying to determine if we should push the button or not.

After some discussion we decided to push the button. What could it hurt? We needed to open the door. Being the team leader, I went to push the button. Nothing happened. The door remained closed. There wasn't even a sound.

At this point I pulled out our last clue to see if it held my hints:

You should find the door at the base of the Temple Mountain which has no name. This clue is your key to the door. Shall you find it, all else shall change your lyfe forever.



The clue makes a clear reference to being the key to the door. It also has life spelled wrong. The other thing is the symbol on the bottom. An eye, within a triangle, within a circle, within a square. None of the other clues had it.

I started to look around for anything similar to the symbol or somewhere the clue might go into the door. I explained my idea to the team so they could help search.

No matter how we searched, the door had no markings on it. It was also solid. We found nothing on the door or its immediate border. I decided to extend the area of our search.

After a little more searching, we found a trap door on the right side wall of the door's niche. When we opened it, by pushing slightly and sliding it upward, we found a spot to place our clue. It seemed simple now as there was a square of light, purple in color, that fit the symbol exactly.

Once the clue was placed with the symbol in the purple light, it evaporated and the door swung open of its own accord. Inside the door, it was completely black with scattered dots of light. Almost like looking into the night's sky at the stars.

We walked through the doorway together and our life changed forever. We were in a new world and hovering in front of my face were the simple words:

Welcome to New Lyfe!
Your Guide will arrive shortly...

The Doorway of The Stone Building
by Bert Zamora

A priest who has been on a long journey from his town has walked to pray at a sacred temple. He has never been here before but was told God is always there so he made the long journey to the place. He reaches the large walled temple. The walls are all stone and there is only one entrance. A wooden doorway. Two faded white doors stop his way in. He pushes and pushes on them. The doors are solid and he is a small, frail man. There is no way to break them down. No way to climb over the walls. They are too high. So he pounds on the doors and yells but no one appears. It took him days to get here now he is stopped by a doorway. He walks around the temple walls but sees no other way in. Eventually he sits on the steps by the doors and falls asleep.

Days pass as the priest sits, stands, and walks around. There is nothing around. No food, no water, and shelter. Hot days, cold nights, and he has no supplies left after his long journey. He cannot go back. He would be a failure and he would surely perish without food or water.

Days later, he is ready to die. Sitting on the steps laying against the stone wall. A woman appears and walks up to him. But she pays no attention to him. She walks up the steps and to the door. She pulls the right door open and walks in. He stares in disbelief. I am an idiot, he thinks. A handle right there and I tried to push it open. I could have gone in this whole time.

Door
by Cesar Hernandez

Relationships will be both the best and the worst things in your life. The same people who love you most will also cause you the most drama.

My wife loves reading *Cosmopolitan*. I hate that magazine. When I throw away her copy she simply buys another at Exxon down the street.

Every month, she makes me take the quizzes to see if I value love or pay enough attention to her. When I pass the quizzes, she's happy. When I don't pass, she walks out the door and goes to Meg's house.

I walk in our front door and inwardly groan when I see my wife reading *Cosmopolitan Magazine*.

"I need to see your phone."

"Is your phone malfunctioning?"

"Are you hiding something on your phone?"

"If you open this door, it can't be closed. I also want to see your phone."

I have nothing incriminating on my phone. I always delete everything instantly. It's the principle of the matter. I don't ever keep tabs on my wife when she is out and about. I unlock my phone and slide it over the table.

"Clarity affects every aspect of our life. From reducing friction to eliminating frustration. It's also the source of both when we don't have it."

My wife hesitates. I don't even reach for her phone. After a few moments, she says she doesn't need to see my phone. We hug and go eat dinner at Nick and Sam's.

Secret Door
by Christopher Cross

O secret door,
Holder of secrets
Hidden forevermore,
Within your recess.

Deceiving my mind's eye—
A master web of maya, illusion!
The buried, eternal Prize,
Dissolver of duality—fusion!

All strung from the same web,
Master consciousness, light within dark,
guiding intellect by whom I'm led—
Intelligence is your mark.

Door of Opportunity
by D'Andre Morris

I stand here at this door. I have a key in my hand. I am stunned. Because all the doors I may have walked through were not for me. Yet, I stand here to walk through another door. To continue, I must open it.

Before this, I woke in a room, exhausted from a long day. Before that day, there was nothing in that room but a key hanging from the door knob with a note attached to it, and the door. The note said: *This door will take you anywhere you want to go.*

I put the key in and walked through.

I am sitting in my car. Someone approaches to tell me I didn't get all the pizzas I was to deliver. I needed four more. I check the back seat. There was pizza, waiting.

I was a pizza delivery man for Joker Cruster... I had a son who was locked up. Stealing cars with his friends. I live with his mother and her best friend. I have my own friends. We hang out once a week at a local bar.

I was feeling good. I only want things to go right. Plus, I get to drive. I love cars.

I attended car shows, read car magazines, and print car photos from the internet.

I was looking at and admiring a car on the computer, transfixed. My spouse and her friend walked in the living room, where I am at.

"Drebree [our son] got into another fight. I need you to go see him. The visit is Thursday. Talk to him. I want him to have a future. He used to be such a good boy," Keisha said, talking to me.

"I'm working on Thursday," I informed.

"See, no good," her best friend, Tasha interrupted. "No money, a bad father, no people skills. He's a bad fish. Throw him back in the water."

I left the house without a word. After talking to Drebree, stress from my job, my lady's ridiculing best friend, piling bills, no family support. I figure that was not the life I wanted.

I woke in a room, where there was only a door, key, and a note. Once again. As I went through the door, I whispered to myself, "I just want to have fun."

Later, I found myself too tired to get up. I am on a couch in an unknown living room, with party residue everywhere. The place was trashed.

Brittany, my friend walks in. She's the most beautiful woman ever.

Brittany and I partied, smoked, and mingled constantly. But that is all we did. I needed more.

I would wake, thinking about my son, if my baby brother is doing good in college. I was flat broke and the only person there was Brittany.

I was tired of it.

I woke up in that room with the key, note, and door. Once again. Giving myself another window of opportunity, I stayed for a little while. Just thinking.

I need to place myself around people who are achieving things. I need to be an example for my son. I need to maintain a job, I need to talk right, I need to be a man.

I'm living and experienced. I need to turn my circumstances to benefits. Be positive and productive. I know the way.

I took a deep breath. Put the key in. I opened the door. I pursued success.

Doing Time, Doing Love
by Gabriel Perez

In the darkness we lay ever without a light

We have strength inside a dim
Circle unknown to the world.

A fool's love is a folly for two

One behind is one ahead an everlasting space
To envision our future is a grave mistake
Without a voice

My love for my love is breathless
is fate.

A Doorway To . . . ?
by Gary Farlow

The doorway, like the building itself, had stood for centuries, playing host to a succession of peoples, faiths, and even uses. It had been a synagogue, long before the diaspora and Babylonian conquest that sent the Hebrew people scattered across the world.

Ancient Moors had run a library and school within the old walls, imparting knowledge of mathematics and sciences to those hungry for education.

Christian missionaries established a hospital and pharmacy, dispensing healthcare and medications produced from the old monks' herb garden.

More recently, the old pockmarked and crumbling structure had been the haven for hundreds of orphans – the victims of war in Gaza as the two sides engaged in armed conflict that had reduced the surrounding city to rubble.

Yet, still, the old building stood. As if in defiance. It had survived invading armies for centuries and changed hands, offering solace to any and all. Inside, remnants of former occupants coexisted in peace - Christian icons painted alongside Arabic script. A Star of David engraved above an altar bearing a cross.

Explosions shook the walls as dust cascaded from the ceiling. Bits of fresco paintings flaked off to settle on the huddled children who cringed at each near miss of rocket fire.

Yes, the old building had bore witness to the march of human history, as battle after battle over this spit of arid land carried on.

Suddenly, shouts and yelling came nearer as a burst of gunfire riddled the old doors, springing them open to admit swarms of masked gunmen. Which side they represented, who could say? Did it matter?

Soldiers went from bed to bed, lifting blankets with the tip of guns to check for any adults hiding amidst the children. The handful of aid workers were bundled outside and into a waiting vehicle to be taken ...? Glancing around, the leader of the gunmen sprayed the walls with machine gun fire, obscuring the ancient paintings, crumbling icons, and flaking script.

Leaving as abruptly as they came, the soldiers left a crying, hungry, and now utterly alone horde of children amidst the sorrowful and neglected land called Gaza.

Intricate Paradox
by George Hesse

"How did, how can I survive this long in a place where .... ?"

I'm back here again? "Here again?" Like some inception, deja-vu. My mind is still fuzzy. Life is like a door after door but this one seems special. "You don't belong here!!" Loud voices echo when I get close. Scary, like maybe I shouldn't open it. But I feel like this door is a mirror of myself, imperfection perfect "perfect." "YOU DON'T BELONG HERE!!" The voices continue to echo, now that's sounding pretty rude.

A methodical paradox or am I on primitive pharmaceuticals?

I can feel, I can hear my heart beat *thump thump* Juggling options .... I feel ... symphonic ambition but ... now it's quiet, "too quiet," like magnetic attraction I'm being pulled toward the door. A complex destination "destiny?" I pull back, maybe this is an optical illusion. I hear, "tangible scripture," if I open the door now I lose everything. I pull away *thump thump* "BREATHE BUDDY BREATHE!!" someone shouts. I feel my stomach pumped. Chest compressions. The door disappears . . . .

Hubby is Busy
by Gregory Shiga

Ever enter a location without desire. Occasions being Halloween, to have to get through to the other side. As a group of friends, some more scared than the other. Which were you, the choice made for fun. Or the last, who did not want to enter. Or the one who went along, since everybody had their say.

What places were more popular, where everybody within the group always delighted to go? Yet there must have been a reason for not being the only place to go. Having a group of individual lives, in deciding which door to use. Comes first with ideas, usually of the future or past experience. Sometimes, yet rarely, can an opportunity arise with a new passage.

As doors can access new locations with different entertaining activities. What could create such unlimited desire? Some places, experience how it's being the worst time of life. As far as being never to be in that predicament ever again. Yet even from these locations. What can make a door to appear. Since it never appeared in any form for me.

The door I entered, is a place without. To enter nor leave by choice. My objective for liberation and its status of accomplishments. Kept this persona without a door to exit. Otherwise, what could I be feeling or believing. As I accept from my reality. Everybody can as well, on the outlook of prison.

Zombie Doors
by James Hochschild

On the surface, this looks like a set of doors that need a replacement door system. However, I believe the architecture and design should be preserved. Cosmetic work of stripping the paint; sanding the wood; fixing the cracks; re-painting the doors; and oiling the hinges are all that might be needed.

The zombie doors can also be used to symbolize one's personality and attitudes towards life. Think of the structure of the door as one's inner self or "soul" if you will. The ego, personality, and attitudes are like the damaged wood, chipping paint, and rusty hinges.

Some people don't like psychology and behavior therapy because either they don't want to be vulnerable or they're in denial or they believe it's all fake science, or some other excuse. Please give it a try!

The damaged wood can represent all the trauma, pain, and suffering that's happened in one's lifetime. The chipped paint can represent depression or lethargy causing one to lose interest in regular activities. The rusty hinges can represent the illusion that there are barriers in one's life that block one's efforts to succeed. Look at that "fear" to see if it's real or imagined. Even "real" fears can be managed with support. External barriers can be worked on as well, with the help of others. Don't give up! Persevere!

Please consult with a mental health therapist, spiritual advisor, or trusted friend to help with your life. I know that I have and it helps greatly!

Heaven's Door
by Howard Brown

When first seeing the Picture Theme of a neat old door, my thoughts turned to Heaven's Door. As I stored that in mind, little did I know that the words that now flow would ever have been written.

Being in prison there is a distance often kept between prisoners and correctional officers. However, we are all just human. When someone is a good, kind person, it's in human nature to like, respect, appreciate that kind person.

Early in the morning around 4:35 am some of us Kitchen Runners go to work in the kitchen. Lieutenant Hobbs would always greet me with a joyful "Howie's here!" I had to feel good.

Throughout the morning I could rely on Hobbs to get supplies that we may need. All I needed to do was ask. Often he was busy doing paperwork, yet would drop it to go get the supplies.

Sometimes due to blocks getting locked in, the full crew of thirteen Kitchen Runners was missing a few workers. At times Hobbs would be on the line helping us put the food into trays. Working side-by-side with Hobbs it was clear

that he was a decent, respectful person.

One day Hobbs didn't feel well so went home. He unexpectedly passed away. That's one of life's uncertainties. In his passing the world lost a good person. Now his greeting of "Howie's here!" comes no more from Hobbs.

A Bob Dylan song came to mind, so I'm playing a cover: "Knockin' on Heaven's Door (Studio Version)" by Avril Lavigne off *Nobody's Home*.

Mama take this badge off of me.
I can't use it anymore.
It's getting dark too dark to see.
Feel I'm knockin' on Heaven's Door.
Knock knock knockin' on Heaven's Door.

Our Day will come with us knockin' on Heaven's Door. We may find that whether or not Heaven's Door opens depends not on how loud we knock, but on how we lived our life.

Look For The Open Door
by Jacinda Lee Allenbaugh

Doors. We go through many doors in our life, going to and fro in our busy, frantic lives. Most of us are plagued at one time or another, by closed doors. Maybe it's a personal loss, such as a death or failed relationship. Or maybe an opportunity we once had is now lost to us. Too often, we are too focused on the closed door behind us to notice the open door in front of us. We grieve and mourn the loss of something or someone, and if we but look for the open door, we can find peace and harmony, as well as new fulfillment for our lives. For years, I was plagued by closed doors. It was only when I noticed the open door and passed through it that I found peace and contentment. I learned that for every closed door, there's an open one. All I need to do is look forward and be open to it, welcoming change and new experiences. Is it easy? No, but it can be done. May you find peace.

Old Door of History Beckons
by James Kor

In similar words, Santayana, Churchill and others have stated what should be deemed a basic truth: Those who do not learn from the lessons of history are doomed to repeat it. So, as a picture theme, the image of the door spoke to me of age, appearing to have seen many years. I have chosen to let it be symbolic of history. But, besides its appearance conveying age, all can be reminded about the most obvious thing;

It is a door.

So much of the serious and worsening wrong in our world has happened before. If I didn't already know the answer I would ask: How is it that so many human beings can be simultaneously blind to so many of the obvious, and ominous, parallels from the past? Another smart writer gave us the answer: "That men do not learn much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons in history." - Aldous Huxley

The lowest human garbage ever to darken the face of the planet have always used some of the same basic ploys. Create problems, harm, threats, crises, and use it as justification to increase power and to do what would otherwise be unacceptable. (Power always abused, never surrendered),

As a baby-boomer turning 70 in September I remember a very different America during my youth. The masses were not in danger of widespread brainwashing by armies of so-called "influencers," spin-doctors, political pundits, who, today, would put Joseph Goebbels and his Ministry of Propaganda to shame. And what kind of people, by the millions, imply that they're so weak-minded and lazy they need "influencers" to tell them what to think, who to vote for? FYI, there are these things called books. In fact, for a big part of the message, behind the door of history more Americans need to open, is this: Go to page 265 of the 30th Anniversary edition of William L. Shirer's 1600-page THE RISE AND FALL OF THE THIRD REICH: "Now we stand before the last election," Hitler concluded, and he promised his listeners that, "regardless of the outcome, there will be no retreat." If he did not win, he would stay in power "by other means... with other weapons."

Eisenhower, McArther, Patton, Halsey, Bradley, et al, the **only** reason proper remedy has not been brought to bear is because some eras breed greatness and others feebleness. Besides a military hierarchy who have consented to being a shit stain in history's underwear we have a judiciary doing the

same. History highlights the glaring absence of a Brandeis, Cardozo, Brennan, Wendell Holmes, or a Robert Jackson who prosecuted the NAZI hierarchy at Nuremberg. (Today's Supreme Court is complicit.)

I know people will be lazy, ignore history. But don't be double damned. There's AI today, a new door to compensate with. Here: I leave you with a clue as to what all are soon to be seeing; Use these two words, "last election," as having come out of both Hitler's mouth, and Donald Trump's mouth, in the same year. Tell the AI to focus on **context**. Tell it to also weigh Trump's discussion of war as a justification to suspend elections and his administration staff talking about 2028, 3rd term, or installing J.D. Vance. Those of you who naively think that there's Santa Claus, an Easter Bunny, Tooth fairy, EQUAL JUSTICE UNDER LAW, may also think that the massive usurpation of power isn't in progress undermining American democracy. HISTORY, the old, unopened door. Behind it also lies the truth that the very biggest factor enabling the NAZIs to do what they did was the average "good Germans'" WILL NOT TO BELIEVE.

And to you young people: you are the majority shareholders of the future. The notion that the culpable older generations should wield their corrupt authority over you, lying, cheating, killing innocent citizens as dictators? You tolerate it - you deserve it. BE THE MONKEY WRENCH IN THE GEARS. UPSET THE APPLE CART. OPEN THE DOOR.

Ventured & Gained
by Jason Centrone

"They probably give whole candy bars on Halloween," goes the quip, and it's out of the way, but I'm geared for pedaling up the wooded drive on a mixed parts mountain bike—wares slung over the shoulder, paperboy-style, and looking to the nooks for something like a Lexus to confirm the raw means of these folks, but no vehicle whatever.

Dismount and up the weathered walk between frilly trees-in-miniature, a stamped plate reading, "Acer Palmatum"—up into the shade of three neglected stories of "Hudson River Gothic," as my wonky father calls it—up the four shallow steps to the door like an eight-foot section of repurposed bowling lane, and what? No bell…no pull cord…no cast iron knocker—handful of knuckle bones so lost in the wooden hull that I fist-up and go three quarter pounds awhile.

Enough that she answers—sort of. The latching releases like a vault, but pulls back three little inches—I'm a compact five-eight twelve-year-old and this matilda is a full foot shorter and old as the door. Answers, "Yes, what do you need out there?"

"Yes, hello, I'm selling designer drinking cups to raise money for our Pop Warner football team, you know the Bird-dogs?"

The pause goes on like sat-TV when the picture freezes and you're wedged between realities.

"Burr-dogs?"

"Yep, that's us, ever go to the games?"

"You have this cup with you?"

"Yep, can show you…" down on a knee "…a selection…" struggling with the zipper.

"I buy cups and you go, yes?"

"Well, you order cups and I go, yes."

"These are cups?" a gnarled ochre finger aiming through the door.

"Yes," and pull the flap back for a timely reveal, "samples—taupe, kelly, damask, and… blue, I guess."

"These, I buy and you go, yes?"

"Well, I wouldn't have anything to show your neighbors, would I?"

"Young man, I buy all Pop Vendor cups—all cups, and you go?"

I'd like to make another sentence, but she's made it just so complicated and rustles there behind the slab of door.

"Young man, this is thousand. You leave zigner cup bag there and, vroom, you are going."

This is happening. "Ma'am, okay, ma'am, my number is in the bag if you feel like you've made a mistake."

"No mistake, bag, cups, and you are going."

"Thank you, really, our coach will…" but the latching reengages and nothing—nothing to be done but coast home—July on my face like "fondant on the fudge," as my grandmother has it.

The Old Doormarker
by Bonnie Vang

Stacks of doors lay atop one another
Like slabs of Earth
Awaiting their truest destination.
The lumber used is dark
Like a buck caught in the night
Galloping gracefully without worry.
The old doormaker drowns each one
With a fresh paint of rainwater
Because even in death,
The crave of thirst is so strong
That all dead things refuse to stay dead.

The Quiet: Eleven
by Jonathan Holeman

The door. It stood in my dreams, nightly. Was it a real door? Is it a place? Is it just some symbolic thing related to the ominous feeling that makes my heart jump every night when it appears?

The weather-beaten stone walls that it sits in seem almost familiar. Above the arches, some decorative fixtures. A bird, a bat? I can never make it out. The arches are offset, peering out of the wall. The two birds, or whatever they are, they are black, dark. Is it just my mind's subconscious leaning to the one time I saw birds since the world moved on? They flew out of an SUV across the lake, revealing the bodies inside. Does my mind now see birds as something evil?

Adam also sees the door. He uses his fire hands, his power, not just to show past events he's seen. Now he uses this ability to place images in our minds of something he wants or needs. If he's hungry, he will show a sandwich, and so forth. He's getting good at it. It's his way of talking, since he is deaf, and never learned to speak at all.

When I awoke last night. Deep in the dark, afraid for Eric, since he went over the western hills in the evening, looking for the men that threatened our safety. Adam came to my bedside right as I awoke, covered in sweat, heart racing, from the dream, the door. Adam put his little adolescent hand and placed it in mine. He showed me the door, almost the same, but in his vision, the door had four steps leading up to it.

Somehow the fact Adam could show me this, it quickly put my heart at ease. The fact his door was different, it makes me believe he has his own dreams of the door. The door means something, but what? Each time I see it, I notice more. The door itself is made of slats, not wood, but something says they are bark or ivory. It opens in the center. Is it what the door represents that terrifies me, or is it what is on the other side?

As I sit, writing this, keeping our written record, Adam and our older daughter Sydney are playing a clapping, 'patty cake' time game. The baby, Skyler, laughs along with the older children. Sometimes it seems like Adam isn't deaf. As if he can hear everything around him. It's just that he grew up that way. I worry about him though. Even more than our daughters. He's seen so much in his short years. So much pain.

Eric is out, tracking down the man who took Adam from the woman that was watching over him. I know what Eric will do when he finds him, but there is no alternative. I worry for Eric, not that he's in danger. Even without a gun, going up to a nutcase with a rifle, Eric's not in any real danger. It's just the damage to his soul. He hates violence, but, what else can he do? If Eric doesn't go after the man, the man will eventually come looking for Adam, if he hasn't already.

Once Eric is finished, once he's found the other man, I know he's planning on going out to find the girl who was looking after Adam. I want him to. Not just because Adam wants her back, but, her power. She can control electronics. She can turn on machines, make things work. Sure life has been pleasant enough without all the appliances Eric and I grew up with. To have a working washing machine though? That would be a gift from heaven. I just don't know how Eric will ever find her.

With all these worries, you might think I'd be a bit more concerned with them than my dream, but I'm not. Something about that door breaks through everything. What is it? Where is it? Is it a real door? I dreamt of Adam, before he came. Eric dreamt of Sydney before she came. Dreams are significant. Just then, while writing I became aware of something from another dream. All of us, the children, me, Eric, walking down a street. Not just Adam's hands glowed in the shadows.

I look to Sydney as her hands clapped against Adam's. A bright light filled the room. For a moment, I felt just as I did when waking from a dream, but I was awake. Sydney and Adams' hands were bright. A ghostly vision of the door faintly appeared at the end of the room. The door opened, spreading white light across the room, enveloping us all in warmness.

"Look at what we can do, Mommy," Sydney said happily, and the door closed.

Closed Minds Close Doors

by Joseph Bigelow

Obstinacy is a form of fear. A component of ignorance.

In an ever-changing world where people are becoming more and more conscious with our thoughts and actions, it's the people with minds open to learning, understanding, and acceptance who live the most fulfilling lives.

A closed mind is the same as a closed door: Restricting your path in life. When we close our minds, secluding ourselves to the knowledge and views we already possess, we trap ourselves in a dungeon with no room to explore. No path for us to travel and grow through new experiences.

Many people find themselves comfortable, scared of change. Scared of the unknown. They tell themselves, I understand these walls that surround me, I know what to expect. I can live my life just fine right here. They block out that quiet yet intuitive voice that wonders if there is more to life. They leave the door closed.

Some spend countless hours, days, even years staring at the closed door. Wonder creeps in, but then doubt overrides The Wonder. Doubt about the ability to be successful if they open the door. Doubt if the oh so mysterious otherside would ever be worth taking the risk of opening the door. Rather than admitting they're unafraid to open the door due to fear, they grow stubborn. They leave the door closed.

Others - The Pioneers of our World - explore. They open the door. They find some things to be better, some worse after the door is opened. They keep exploring. They see life for all the colors it holds rather than the simple black and white walls of the dungeon they were once stuck in. They continue opening doors. It becomes a way of life.

Are you currently facing a closed door? Is your mind closed to life and ideas outside your comfort zone? Are you in a dungeon surrounded by people who wish to leave the door closed?

If so, I implore you to open the door. See where life takes you with an open mind. I wish you the best on all of the endeavors that you embark. I opened the door, and many others since, and I'm here to tell you it was worth it.

Door

by Joseph Colon

Is that the doorway to freedom? It's dark, damp, and dreary looking, but what would you expect after twenty years. As I look upon it I see no keyhole or handles. Perhaps the key is me.

I walk up the steps and push on it, no luck. Why is this door here?

"Have faith," comes some words to my ear.

"Have faith in what?" I ask to no one.

"Have love in your heart," is now profound in my head.

"Love for who?" I ponder.

"Possessor of Hope is the keymaster."

"Hope you say. Hope is the key?" I ask inquisitively.

"No, not alone," comes a whisper in the dark.

Pusillamous, I fall to the ground. What must I do to break this barrier? With my eyes closed I reach for the sky. A sudden breeze which prickles my skin causes a mist to form. A shape in the mist long since gone, points and says, "You! You are altruistic and lofty. Be assured, you already possess the key." With that, the shape dissipated like steam in a sauna.

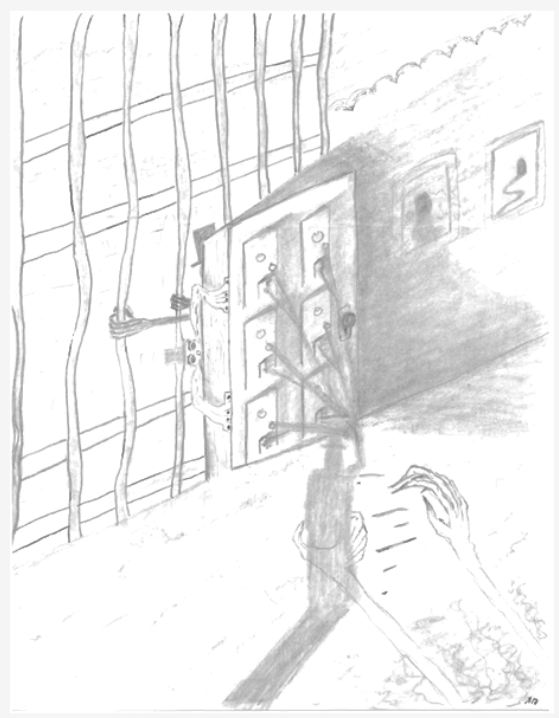
Then a light shined and filled my soul. The feeling struck me deep in my core. Have faith! I have faith. Faith that I can accomplish anything. Have love in your heart. I have love in my heart. Love for my family, love for my friends, but most of all love for myself. Possess hope. Hope is something I have an abundance of. In fact that's all I've ever had over the last twenty years.

With that realization my hands begin to glow. I reach up and touch the door. Instantly the door disintegrates. As I step through the sun blinds me, and the smell of honeysuckles penetrates my sinuses. With a deep breath I inhale freedom.

"Today," I say, "Is the first day of the rest of my life."

The Door of Opportunity
by Karla Wooten

When one door closes another one opens
When one door opens another one closes.
The Door of Opportunity is the one that you choose- so choose wisely, use discretion, pray to the God that lives, that sees everything that abides in Eternity which is the Heavens.
Pray to God that you will not choose the wrong door.
The wrong door can leave you desperate, devastated and poor.
The wrong door can leave you crying, dying and the victim of endless drama, the victim of endless stress and trauma.
The wrong door can leave you at the mercy of Drama Queens and Drama Kings, who will not stop lying.
The Door of Opportunity should be one that makes you Healthy, Wealthy and Wise, it should cause you to be restored, redeemed and transform your life.
When the Door of Opportunity is presented to you there will be multiple Doors that are presented to you-be careful and wise about the Door that you choose.



The Illusionist & The Door
by Marcus Flores

The illusionist was a magician who relied upon deceptive and illusive trickery to entertain and astonish onlookers by the conjuring of lesser demons and shadow-queer. The shadowqueer were lesser demons that would assist the sorcerer in undertakings specifically suited for his line of work: illusions. Not that they could not be summoned to enchant mankind for undertakings not specific to illusion, which was why we were here. The teacher thought it beneficial given my study of black magic to familiarize myself with all of the black arts. Namely illusions.

We came to the door of the illusionist. It was an aged wooden door with four steps leading to it. As we approached to knock, it was opened by a refined male who resembled a butler.

"Good evening," he said with a thick, unintelligible accent. "You have been expected."

We walked into an anteroom in what he called "The Grand Hall Room." It was impoverished of nothing;: impressive, provoking not the slightest disregard to taste. The floor was tiled with black and white, a foundation to very beautiful but obscure paintings. It was lightly furnished and had a very high ceiling. As we walked, he began explaining the symbology of the decor and tiled floor, what they represented, as well as the paintings.

"Light and darkness," he began. "Since the beginning of time, there has been adversity in the realms, this redundant good versus evil." He took us deeper into a corridor which opened to a series of delicately furnished rooms. The chairs and the couches looked handcrafted.

"Doors," he spoke. "Doors are the means in which we exit the body into the astral realm otherwise known as 'the Spirit.' We have what is called an ethereal that hovers over our physical body in REM sleep cycles. In deep and more rigorous forms of meditation, one can induce a spiritual environment needed to stir or loosen the ethereal body from its plane and enter into the spirit or the astrals. Once this leaving of the body has been achieved, it is said that one will be confronted by many doors. These doors are decisions. I am the gatekeeper to your first door. These arcane arts will allow you deeper access to states of consciousness so sublime it cannot be remarked. Now sit!"

As he said this, we entered a pitch black room lit by a circle of candles. There was a pentagram in the midst of this circle.

The Door
by Jack Simpson Jr.

When I was eight years old, my parents were killed in a plane crash. My uncle on my Dad's side whom I had only met one time in my life, Uncle Titus, had become my sole survivor for me to live with.

My parents had photos of his home and the front door always scared me. I had seen doors like that in horror movies. As the driver pulled close to his house, it was dead winter. Everything looked bewitched. A sudden stop brought me back to the present time and place.

I got out and stepped closer to the door. Suddenly, the car sped away without a word. Turning in the direction of the door, a tall man who was older than my father stood looking at me. No smile on his face, then he spoke, "You are here, Master John."

"Yes, sir," I replied while looking at the door, thinking it could use some paint. The vines ran all over the place, dead leaves litter the walkway. The vines like everything else were alive at one time or another.

"We must hurry, John," he said as he rushed me inside. "After dark, people get lost in the woods and swamp. They are never heard from again."

Inside the house was a different setting. It was so clean and bright. I really wanted to check it out. Up the stairs we went, coming to a room with the door cracked open. Light shined through, bringing the hallway to life.

"Wow," was all I could say.

The bed was big and I could crawl all over it. A person could get lost under these covers, I thought.

"Well John, how do you like it?" he went to say as he sat down my suitcase. "Make yourself at home the best you can. Dinner is at 7 pm. Be there and on time," he said while walking to the door. I noticed he left the door open.

I was really hungry by the time 7 pm came. We sat and talked. Come to find out, my Uncle Titus was real fond of traveling. No wonder Dad never talked about him so much. He was really secretive. Still I listened while trying to figure him out.

"Tomorrow John, we will be up early. We have a long way to go. There are some things I want to show you."

"Sounds great, Uncle Titus."

"You can call me Bob from now on. I know I am your uncle, but a first name basis is good for me."

It seemed like I had just laid down and it was time to get up. I really was tired from all the long travel. Bob had placed my clothes out and with a note, said "Breakfast is ready if you want to eat."

Bob had loaded the Range Rover with suitcases and camping tents. While I was eating, Bob came in and laughed.

"Can I ask you about how you kept this home going?"

"Surely there is no problem. I search for lost treasure all around the world. John, you would be surprised how much I have found over my lifetime. Soon, you and I will be looking for treasure all over again. The sooner you finish eating, the faster we start on our adventure."

"Bob, I can say that staying here and traveling for treasure is in my blood as well." It felt good to be able to have family take care of me and I can get an education most kids my age would never forget.

I do have one more thing to add about all of this. I love to live with my uncle. But I still get scared of the door on the house.

The Door
by Margaret Barker

I'm at the door with my shackles and chains, knowing my life will never be the same.

I walked in a broken woman now I am new, I am fixing to go through the door without these chains so no longer to be told what to do.

As I stick my head out the sun shines upon my face, exploring the world with my eyes it's just the right taste.

The wind blows as if to give me a kiss, placed on my cheek so I make a wish.

I vow to never see this door of prison again, with the Lord by my side my new life begins.

This is the dream I dream every night, God telling me to live my life right.

So I say my prayers for this dream to come true, for me and also for you.

Fragile, Withered Flower
by R. Micheal Urban, III

Who can withstand the impending storm?
No.
The storm, it is already here and amongst us-
both you and I
The chilled essence of rain is felt amongst the bare sirin of my naked body.
Intrusive thoughts masked behind the over-bearing barrage of deafening thunder.
Give me shelter against the cruelest elements of nature.
The nourishment is sustaining growth for the grass, but the subtle brutality of force gracefully weakens the stem of the brightly colored flower.
Open the door, let me in.
Where can safety be found?
With each drop of rain and each gust of wind-
The flower becomes ever-more fragile.
The dark and heavy clouds consume the horizon.
Soon, the fragile, withered flower will fade away.
Its memory belonging to the past.
Open the door, let me in.
Where can safety be found?

The Roman Door
by Vinicio Garcia

My thesis had taken me to Rome. Thanks to the efforts of my father, who was a patron of the Archdiocese of Boston, I had been granted permission to study the secret archives of the Vatican.

That was twenty years ago, and many of those documents have now been made public. I have returned many times to Rome, for there is an allure that captures my soul. There is something calling out to me.

Though dreams are disjointed representations of our experiences, they sometimes coalesce to show us a hidden reality. So it is this dream which led me to this old section of the city.

As I approached this old building, a most peculiar sensation overcame me. I heard the murmur of voices all around me, but I could not understand what was being said. Yet there was no one around anywhere.

I knocked and waited, determined to see what lay behind this door. I returned to this building, never seeing anyone. I investigated and learned it was owned by the Vatican to be used as a future repository for books.

I asked for permission to study the architecture inside. At first, I was refused but my persistence paid off. The man who took me there stated that there was nothing of significance to be seen, for it was just rows of shelves. Upon entering, I was overwhelmed with a sense of belonging. I knew this place—at the rear corner of the east wing was a wall with an intricate mosaic pattern, quite elaborate.

I said nothing but made up my mind to come here on my own. It took months of planning, but I succeeded. I immediately went to the rear wall and instinctively pressed in a sequence of points on the mosaic. Then, I heard a click pushed on the edge, and a small door opened. It led to a descending stairway.

There was a secret library.

But all of these were cylinders. They were in cuneiform. My journey had begun.

Upcoming Word Themes:

- **Due October 1, 2026:** "The Color Red"
- **Due November 1, 2026:** "Sacrifice"
- **Due December 1, 2026:** "Fairy Tale"

Upcoming Picture Themes:

Due 10/1/26:



Due 11/1/26:



Due 12/1/26:



Word & Picture Theme Guidelines

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

1.) **Word Theme** submissions must be **nonfiction** (true stories or your thoughts/beliefs).

2.) **Picture Theme** submissions can be **fiction OR nonfiction.**

3.) **Your writing should be semi-cohesive and *clearly relate to the theme*** consistently throughout the essay or story. The reader should be able to generate a connection between your writing and the themes at hand.

4.) On the first page of your submission, ***please clearly indicate which month and theme*** (picture or word) your submission is for.

5.) **Please include your name & page number(s)** on EVERY PAGE of your submission.

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

6.) Please **write legibly.** If we can't read your writing, we can't transcribe and print it.

7.) Please keep your entry to ***800 words* maximum.**

Send your submissions to:

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OR email: ***PrisonerExpressThemes@Gmail.com***.

Contact us with any questions.

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

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