

Prisoner Express News Summer 2021

Welcome to Prisoner Express and our Summer 21 Newsletter. In these pages we will review the projects from our last programming cycle, Winter 21. You will also find a description of the new programming we are offering this Summer/Fall 21 cycle. Along with this information, this edition of PE News will highlight a selection of the poetry, art and theme essays submitted by PE members over the past 6 months. If you have received a copy of the newsletter, consider yourself a PE member. We very much enjoy reading your submissions and it can be difficult to choose which ones to highlight given the wide variety of responses. I and the PE staff and volunteers do our best to present a range of materials that we hope will inspire you to put pen to paper and perhaps send in some work of your own.

Many people ask for pen pals and I am sorry to say we do not have a defined pen pal program. What we do have are interested volunteers that read your journals, poems, stories and view your art. We encourage those volunteers to write back to you to let you know they have read your work, and perhaps share something of their own life with you. Over the years many prisoners and volunteers do share a number of letters usually focused on the submissions you send.

There is no group of volunteers waiting for your profile to write back and establish a long-term pen pal relationship. Sorry we can't provide the service. I know how important mail can be for most of you. If you want to hear from PE volunteers, the best way to do it is by submitting your original work to us through one of our many programs. These programs will be described later in the newsletter. We offer a variety of projects, hoping to provide something for everyone.

Prisoner Express began as a book mailing program about 2002, and we sent our first newsletter out in 2004. There are a few of you still participating over all those years. I certainly hope our efforts have made your experience a little better. I know what we do is a drop in the bucket for what many of you need, but I believe every drop is something and that over time, some benefits will accrue for you.

This is a difficult operation to run as each state, and sometimes within a state each prison has its own rules for what is allowed. Our project is national, and PE has to constantly adjust what we are doing just so some state or individual prison will accept our programming. What is also difficult is that I often don't know who does not get a mailing we sent out. Our last newsletter received way less responses than the previous two. Typically, we send out close to 4000 newsletters at a time, and I can see how many people return their registration form to get an idea of both how well received the programs are. I also see patterns when every program has less registration than usual, and I know that something happened that prevented people from seeing the newsletter. I sometimes think that perhaps we are missing the target when a program is not popular, but when all the programs

have low registration numbers, even ones that are continuations of previous popular programs, then I feel certain that something is amiss.

I found out that the artwork in the Winter 21 newsletter was considered as tattoo patterns in at least one state where we have many members and that kept everyone in the state from receiving the issue. Funny that 1 of 50 states would make such a ruling. As you can imagine it is demoralizing for us, and I imagine it is even harder on those of you who look forward to a bit of mental stimulation and enrichment. I hope to start documenting these censorship tactics, though as you know all this takes time and adding more tasks to our PE agenda is not something I easily embrace. I have also seen that many book packages we sent this last June and July have been rejected. I often don't know which individual get their book packages. To do so I have to pay the return postage for rejected books. As each book package can cost about \$7 to mail, it is doubly demoralizing to pay postage, and then pay it again to get back the selection of donated books that are rejected. Instead, the post office sends your packages to the dead mail section of the building. The same person at my post office handles the bulk mail and the dead letter department. When I go in and send out these newsletters and educational packets, he sometimes updates me on the numbers of packages returned. I do get lots of letters from you all thanking me for books, so I know most go through and don't want to stop doing what we do because of censorship. I just want you to understand that we are not in control of your mail and sometimes the things we send don't get to you. I am not in a position to contact individual PE members when this happens. Often, we cannot tell when mail is rejected whether it is because you are released, transferred or we have just been censored. I say all this to you so if you do not hear from us you know to write and let us know that. Right now, we are just beginning to fill book orders received in April 2021, so sometimes the delays are on us. I know that puts you in a position of not knowing why you haven't heard from us, and that would make anyone uncomfortable.

I share all this with you so we can all be on the same page. We are still committed to providing you with information, education and opportunities for creative self-expression.

A few months ago COVID seemed to be fading but now we are hearing that numbers are climbing again. I figure as a vaccinated individual I may still get it but I will not get very sick. That is good enough for me at this point to feel comfortable being most anywhere. I hope I am not being too cavalier about this. I hope you all have had a chance to be vaccinated.

I feel better for getting out my complaints about the mail and am ready to focus on what we actually do rather than the difficulties we have doing it. For those reading this for the first time PE is a project of the Durland Alternatives Library, and I, Gary Fine, am a library employee. I started this program about 20 years ago from a single letter received from Danni Harris in TX. Danni convinced me that sending books to prisoners helped in ways I

had not realized. That a book can be a window to the world, especially when you are in a cell 23 hours a day made a big impact on me. From being just a book program, we have evolved over the years to the programs you are being invited to join in this newsletter. For those of you who have been with PE awhile, it is a pleasure to write to you all. Sometimes I get requests for personal responses back to your questions. I know it would feel good to write back to individuals, but I can't do that and do my regular library job and manage PE all at once, so please accept this newsletter as a response.

As I write in every PE news, we send out our distance learning programs by USPS bulk mail. That means each program gets mailed out once each cycle. If you wait a long time before responding you may miss the opportunity to receive the packets you sign up for. I am hoping that the packets for this cycle will start being mailed in late Oct thru November, so you do have some time, and yet I encourage you not to dawdle in sending your registration forms back to PE. I know many of you get a hold of our newsletter late in a program cycle, then write and never hear back from us regarding those programs. The good news is that you now have this current edition in your hands and have enough time to respond and participate. Even if you were a member of say our Chess Club you must re register with each new newsletter. People move around so much in prison that I found I could not effectively run long term programs so responding to this newsletter is your chance to let me know you want to remain active in PE. By simply writing to us we activate your membership and put you on a list to receive the next newsletter. So, if for any reason you have not heard from us in over 6 months at any time, write to check and see if your registration is active. Remember if you are waiting for a packet and it hasn't come for a few weeks past your expectation there is no need to worry. That happens all the time on our end. Organizations as sprawling as PE, utilizing volunteers to do much of the work can run into logistical issues. But if you feel it has been many months then certainly write. We are not going anywhere in the foreseeable future so check in, when in doubt. I know some of you are now receiving tablets and that makes communication with people on the outside easier for you. I imagine that if you could have access to the internet through your tablet you would not need the educational packets and books we create. All that info is online, and I hope sooner than later corrections officials will realize that internet access will help all of you continue to educate yourself while confined. I would not mind changing the focus of PE if you could get the information we provide electronically. Currently though it is much more expensive for us to use the electronic system that is set up to communicate with prisoners, than it is to use the US Postal Service. Go figure! The tablets seem to be another way for-profit companies can deliver needed service to prisoners. The focus seems to be more on the profit angle than the rehabilitation angle from my vantage point. While you may think I ignore all the electronic requests for contacting you, it is just that I don't want to use the funds I have for short emails and then not have the money needed to mail these packets. It is hard to believe that it can be cheaper to print and mail a 28-page packet than it is to send it through one of the tablet providers, but when I last checked it certainly was. If any of you want to do some research on this topic and can show me ways to connect with tablet users at a low cost, please write.

Summer is abundantly manifesting in upstate NY. We have had a lot of heat and thunderstorms this summer, but that is typical. Compared to much of the US this area is paradise. No tornados, earthquakes, fires, or drought for us. We have had some crazy winds that have knocked over trees but that seems tame compared to some of the extreme weather conditions around the world. Having children and also writing to you in prison I want to stay upbeat about the possibilities of humans to grow and prosper as a species, but sometimes it feels like the tipping point for a sustainable society has been reached, and that discord runs the show. If ever I waiver in that thought I think of former President Trump and his message of divisiveness. He set a low bar for future leaders, and that 70+ million people wanted 4 more years of his behavior has shocked my system into seeing what the hopes and dreams of many Americans look like. I certainly know corruption exists everywhere, but for someone who pays attention to current events the incompetence and lying nature of that administration and these claims of election fraud shakes the foundation of democracy.

So how did I go from celebrating summer to another sad view of society. I guess my insides will come out no matter what the topic. I will try to be a little more upbeat for the rest of the publication as I know you have a lot on your plate already and don't need the burden of my discontent. It is just that I do not know what your sources of information are, and sometimes I listen to FOX news and hear the obvious lies that are told and wonder what you all get to hear.

Back to upbeat!!! Last cycle PE offered a range of programs and most all of them have been mailed out except the newest packet on Mental Health. Sara who wrote the previous packet is still working on it. She graduated and has been studying for a big exam in Sept called the MCATS. All people who want to go to medical school take this exam. She wants you all to know that as soon as the exam is over, she will work on the next issue of the Mental Health distant learning packet. I am saving the list of people who registered for the packet and hopefully it will be mailed this fall. We also mailed our first installment of the Role-Playing Game packet that Jamie created. Rather than discuss that here, Jamie will share his plans for future packets in this genre later in the newsletter. We mailed out the 2nd packet on philosophy this cycle and I am collecting your responses and sending them to Kylie. We also mailed out a few hundred copies of "How to Write a Screenplay" packet. I would really appreciate hearing your feedback on the Philosophy and Screenplay projects. I am taking a break from offering more packets on these two topics this next cycle as I know that your responses to the packets can generate lots of reading for Kylie and Mathew [who each created one of those projects] and figure this break will give them a chance to read and respond to your replies and consider if they have a third packet in the series they would like to create. As you can imagine I have to manage volunteers so they don't get overwhelmed by the amount of tasks that have to be done in a project. Tara continues to crank out Meditation packets and will report on her latest effort in the Fall 21 programs section. We had an online art show highlighting artwork chosen by PE volunteers. The show was arranged in an online gallery format, so it was like you were walking through an art gallery. As much as the pandemic has shut down the library and our ability to gather and

look at your art, it also opened it up considerably as we made your work available online.

Please remember we decide on programming often by your suggestions, or by seeing how responsive you are as a group to programs created by volunteers. Every time you respond to one of our programs, we take that as a sign that it was worthy of your attention and we infer that you would like more.

Here at PE your words and ideas matter. Even though you are locked up, we provide you with the opportunity to share with free world people what your experience of life looks like. The more we understand one another the better our chances of working together for sustainable solutions

Fall 21 Programs

We have a bunch of interesting programs for you this cycle. Some are new and some are ongoing. Sign up for those you will do. There is no shame if you don't complete and respond to any given program, but please don't just sign up casually. Consider if you will really follow through on completing the packet. Some are read only programs while others will ask for a written response. The reason I ask you to choose carefully is that finances are limited and everything we mail has a cost. By choosing only what you will really do, you allow our meager funding to supply more people with lessons. We are in this together. When I was a kid in the 50's and early 60's there was a book, I once had called 1001 Free Things. You could mail away and get calendar, posters, things that corporations would give with their logos [pencils, pens potholders etc.] I loved that book, as I had very little and once got some nice travel posters from an airline that I hung up. I believe that experience effects how I have created PE. Everything we offer is free except for our Expedited book program, which will be explained later in the listing. I hope you receive as much pleasure from these packets as I get from providing them to you.

Expedited Books-Sending books to prisoners was how this whole project began, and it is still an important component of Prisoner Express. We receive donated books from many sources. Most of the books are used and still have a lot of life in them. I sometimes wonder how many times a book we send into a prison is read. The program started off being completely free. You sent in a request. We created a book package that best matched your request using the donated books we had and then we sent it off. Within a few years we had a waiting list of over 1000 and we did not have the funds to cover all the postage. That is when we modified the program to how it still is today. You send us a letter letting us know the types of books you like. Specific titles are not the best strategy as we have limited selection. Letting us know types of books is a better way to get a good match. Of course, you can be super specific if you like, but be sure to give us some backup choices. If you only mention one book or type of book and we don't have it, you have not given us a clue as to what to substitute.

We aim to please, but you need to give us enough information given our limited supply. Also tell us how many books are allowed in a package at one time. Some of you have little restriction on this and others can only receive a specific number. The signup sheet at the end of the newsletter will have a place for you to give that info as well. Do not sign up for this program if you need it to

be fast. There is already 100 plus people in front of you waiting and the pandemic has slowed down the whole process. This program is best for those who are patient. We do send out great books, and we take pride in making the best matches we can. We ask you send us a donation of at least \$4 to cover the postage cost. A package typically costs \$7 to mail and we cover the rest. I wish we didn't have to ask for your help, but if we don't, we run out of funds very quickly. I do know that often packages are rejected by certain prisons as they consider us an unauthorized vendor. I am not sure why as 90% of the state and 100% of federal facilities seem to accept our library packages. This program is a service of the Durland Alternatives Library and as a library we have been sending books into prisons for 20 years. Check with your local prison administration to be sure books from us are allowed. I know how frustrating it can be to send us funds for the books and then find out the mail room is not willing to deliver the books to you. Lately we have had trouble in particular with some prisons in MI, so if that is you be sure to check. If you are moved, your book package typically will not follow you and ends up in the dead letter office at the USPS. If you write and ask about your package or have a problem, let us know the types of books you requested in case we try again. Do not assume we remember what you asked for. We receive hundreds of letters asking for books. Remember to check with the authorities in your institution to find out if you are allowed to participate in this book program.

Journal Project-We began the journal project right after we started the PE program. It is one of our first projects. It is clear that writing your thoughts down is a useful tool in maintaining good mental health. So many people write to us about the struggles they are having while incarcerated. It seems like the folks who regularly write in their journal have some breakthrough moments where they break out of a cycle of negative thinking that spirals around in their head. Regular writing can help you get a clearer picture of where you are at and what you can do to improve your situation. Volunteers at PE come and read your writings and often write a friendly letter back to share their own thoughts with you. It isn't meant to be an ongoing pen pal program though some people do correspond over long periods of time. Mostly it is a chance to exchange letters and ideas with PE volunteers who care about what you are thinking and experiencing. If you register for this program, we send a starter packet of ideas on how and why to keep a journal. We have been scanning many journals and putting them in an on-line archive where anyone with internet access can read them. We also put poems and art on this site you can share this info with your friends and family, and they can see if any of your journals, poetry or art are posted. Because we receive so many submissions, we cannot scan everything. We are stills developing the system. There are still over a 1000 scanned items on the archive and we add more every week <https://prisonerexpress.org/read-prisoner-writing/> Sign up for the journal project and find out about a simple practice that can change your perspective and your life. You can start this program before receiving your starter packet. Please date each entry and write Journal on the outside of the envelope.

Poetry Project- The members of Prisoner Express are prolific poets. We receive thousands of poems every cycle. Thirteen
prisonerexpress.org

years ago we began selecting some for our poetry anthologies. They come out every six months and the poems you submit this cycle will be considered for Poetry Anthology Vol25 or 26. We are still collecting for Vol 25 but we are getting close to finishing. Volunteers read your poems and select the ones they want to reprint in the anthology. Everyone who submits a poem for consideration will get a copy of the anthology mailed to them. We also post it on our prisoner express website. Just like the journals, student volunteers will read your submitted poems and often choose to write a friendly letter to the poet about the poem or anything else they feel inspired to share. It is nice to know that people on the outside are interested in your creative process. Please understand that with all the poems submitted many are not chosen, and it is not a reflection of your skill as a poet. Every issue of the poetry anthology is created by different volunteers, and they more reflect the personality and interests of the anthology editors than as a measure of an individual's skill. What I do notice is that the more people write the more their writing skills develop and improve. Here are a few poems submitted for consideration for anthology 25 that were chosen to share with all of you in hopes of inspiring you to participate.

“Cloud” by Jason Blad

A strong updraft and a little moisture,
I am born.

Young and full of vigor, I drift over a small, verdant valley.
The colors of the earth amaze me in a way that I know
I can never achieve,
or even touch.

The lush green, yellow ochre, and bluish grey of nature below me
dazzle and mock my stark and uniform whites and greys.
Jealous, I float by in stunned amazement.

A small rise, a sudden drop, a hot blast of air,
and I am now floating above an arid plain.
Its once green trees stand decimated and gnarled,
turned brown from sand scouring winds and lack of nourishment.
I realize that I am able to help.
I absolutely long to be jealous of its beauty and life.

I begin to weep for its life lost,
and the ground drinks up my tears with thirsty vengeance.
Life begins to bloom as I pour out my heart,
no longer in sadness,
but in joy.
Nearly spent in emotion, the bloom reaches a euphoric climax...

and then I am no more.

“Bird Brains” by David West

Little zipping sharp eyed sparrows
Darting now like brown fletched arrows
Cheeping greetings to the dawn
Flitting all across the lawn

‘Til the grackle’s raucous cry
Drives the sparrows from the sky

Gathered in a black clad throng
Repeating their ascending song

Aurora’s rosy fingered rays
Usher in the summer days
Glowing like a burning ember
Yet the birds all still remember

Deep within their lizard brain
Tiny dinosaurs remain
Across the ancient sky they soared
Creation trembled when they roared

Now reduced to a mere twitter
As they hop about and flitter
Calling out their sharp refrain
Perhaps their time will come again

“The Faith Group” by Jevon Jackson

When the room goes silent
and despair ripens in the air
like the old dead fruit
of carrion flowers,
We are there
to pluck the bud away;

When the shadows
gather like gangs in the scour
of the night,
coming to rob you of willpower, safe
and hours,
We arrive in the moment
on a sliver of light
to remind you of grace, allotted;

When the weight of what you own
becomes monolith,
titan, overgrown,
We surprise you with this here—

you won’t carry it alone.

“Drawn to the Light” by David Hehn

Sunlight on my cell floor
How far did that sunlight travel to get here?
What did it pass along the way?
And it came to rest on my concrete floor
3 inch wide window, 7 feet tall
A sliver of humanity
That’s all we’re worth
That’s all we’re allowed of the outside world
And I used to look out that thin window
‘Til it got too sad to watch
The view faces the guard’s parking lot
I’ve seen the makes & models of the cars change over the years
Now, I don’t look outside
I just watch the shaft of light move across the room
And sometimes I put my knee in the sunlight
And stare at the beautiful work of the sun

Other times I'll muddle in the shadows
And get lost & remember the world I left behind

"Morning Glories" by Taj Alexander Mahon-Taft

why do morning glories hate sunset?
for they can only sing their
splash of color arriettas
in the certain glow
of endless possibilities

by the end of the afternoon
the conspiracies of freedom
have drained the ultraviolet
from our minds
dwindled and tired

they are secret poets
daring each day
to dream
climbing prison fences
anointed on barbs
to see us in need and regret

Art- Treacy has led our PE Art program for the past 10 years. She is a creative person interested in sharing vast amounts of information about being an artist and creating art. No matter what your skills you may enjoy her perspectives. Below she shares with you her thoughts for the upcoming art packet

Greetings! I hope you are all well and able to keep your creative spirit vital in these times! I am looking forward to being back in the physical domain of Durland Alternatives Library on the Cornell campus where we will again be able to share your artistic accomplishments with the Cornell community.

We are planning an art exhibition at the library and hallway outside the library. We will use both current work you have sent and older work from the archives. This will be a rotating exhibition by which we will switch art out and add new work as you send us things.

We anticipate that the Monday evening session with the Cornell students will be re-initiated and you will receive letters of support and praise from them beginning in the Fall of this year. I know this was a valuable experience for students to see your art and to write to you about art.

For the next ArtKnows newsletter I plan to take another look at outsider and primitive art. You may remember the ArtKnows newsletter on this subject from last winter. This innovative and personal art from artists both trained and untrained seemed to have found a resonance in many of you. There is so much art that is created by individuals who do not reach the fame of Frida, Kahlo, Bob Ross (?! Did I say Bob Ross?...some of you may remember my feelings about Bob's art.....not Bob as a person....I'm sure he was a great guy....)

In the next newsletter I will explore the work of more unknown outsider artists and look at their work within traditional art

concepts. How does the outsider artist approach aesthetics concepts like flat and form? What do those terms actually mean? How does the outsider artist give "authority" to his/her work and make the rules of art irrelevant? Why can some artists break the rules of drawing and painting with their personal authority while other artists do the same thing – albeit without authority and understanding – and their art just looks unaccomplished? And as always – I hope the ArtKnows will have lots of images and ideas to inspire your own work.Like this soap sculpture created by Reed Roberts, entitled "Surveyor" who I believe did it in response to a discussion in a previous ArtKnows on anthropomorphism..... Creating hybrid imagery of human and animals..... which is another kind of art that I will explore in the ArtKnows within the context of outsider art.

Take care, Treacy



Art by

Reed Roberts

"Painting is poetry that is seen rather than felt, and poetry is painting that is felt rather than seen." – Leonardo da Vinci

"Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life." – Pablo Picasso

"The one thing that you have that nobody else has is you. Your voice, your mind, your story, your vision. So write and draw and build and play and dance and live only as you can." – Neil Gaiman



Art by Brandon Rushing

Meditation Project-Tara has been leading the meditation project for 10+years. Every cycle she creates a packet describing different meditation techniques. She started out focused on Buddhist meditation and then branched out to cover other traditions. Lately her packets have again been more focused on Buddhist techniques. I find being able to close my eyes and withdraw from the continual chatter of my mind is refreshing and useful.. With all the stress you face in everyday life meditation is a chance to soothe your soul and rest your mind. It is good to take a vacation from the everyday challenges of living and a short meditation can help your being come to balance.

Greetings, my dear friends. Hope you are well! I often focus on Buddhist meditation practices because of their great simplicity and accessibility. I believe meditation is about helping us become better human beings, and all religions are included in this heart. I'm deeply eclectic, from over 40 years of learning and meditating within different cultures and religions. My favorite Dalai Lama quote: "Loving kindness is my religion". In the next packet I'll be offering Buddhist meditation teachings, and teachings on Christian Contemplate Prayer. It seems to me these practices are two wings of the same beautiful bird.

There is also the ongoing opportunity to take Refuge from Afar with Garchen Rinpoche, one of my extraordinary Buddhist

teachers. [Garchen Rinpoche was imprisoned for 20 by the Chinese in hard labor because he was a Tibetan monk. He has a special place in his heart for teaching Buddhism and giving refuge to inmates because he so deeply knows the benefits of practicing meditation in prison.]

This great blessing is available to everyone who wants it for free. More details are in the packet.

May all beings be safe, healed and peaceful. Best to you Tara

Chess Club- Chess packets have been a part of PE for a long time. We discovered how many people are interested in chess through the many requests we get for books on chess. We cannot find as many books as we'd like, so starting a chess club seemed like the way to go. Chess exemplifies what we hope to create with all PE projects. When people are engaged in a chess game, often the outside world disappears as your mind and body focus on the chess set in front of you. You get a chance to escape from your environment for a brief respite, yet you are engaged and focused. I believe the standard way people try to escape the prison environment is to shut down and go inward. I believe that leads to being shut down and numb to life which leads to despair and unhealthy thought patterns. Being inward and creative, as a chess game can demand, is the antidote to shutting down. Instead, you are tuning into the fine machine your body and mind can be. I hope all our PE programs can deliver this type of stimulus where you tune in to yourself and the depths of your thinking and creative abilities. We have two volunteers, both named Robert, who are at work creating another lesson in chess strategy, puzzles, history, and whatever odd facts about chess they can dig up and share with you. If you are interested in developing your chess game check it out.

Travel and Leisure-Grace who has been managing the journal project this summer came up with a new idea for a project. It certainly is different than anything we offered before. I hope it interests many of you. I do know that many of you think about the kind of work you might get once released. Certainly, the travel and leisure industry always has job openings. Below is Grace's intro to this project.

One of the largest industries in America is the tourism industry. Every year, millions of Americans flock to national parks, amusement parks, and historical landmarks. People might stop at roadside attractions and take home some souvenirs.

By the 1850s, the American tourism industry was well established. Over the past 170 years, domestic travel has grown to what we think of now. New modes of transportation allow Americans to travel wherever they want faster than ever before, and new genres of storytelling, like road trip movies, shaped the public's imagination of trips to new destinations.

Come along with me to explore the history of the national parks, historical landmarks, amusement parks, and roadside attractions. Along the way, we can stop for souvenirs, think about travel representation in popular media, and dream up the perfect vacation.

Here's just a taste of what you can expect from this travel packet:

Fun facts:

- Congress established Yellowstone National Park in the Act of March 1, 1872. It was intended to be a “public park for the benefit of and enjoyment of the people.” More than 100 countries have established national parks and preserves following the model created by Yellowstone.
- Today, the National Park System covers more than 84 million acres in all 50 states and territories.
- The National Park Service is made up of more than 20,000 employees who care for America’s 423 national parks. Career paths with the National Park Service include park rangers, education specialists, wildland firefighters, and park upkeep.
- A unique facet of Americana is roadside attractions. These stops range from the Georgia Rural Telephone Museum in Leslie, Georgia to a 17,400-pound ball of twine in Cawker City, Kansas.
- The idea of amusement parks originated in Europe and debuted in the U.S. at Coney Island, Brooklyn, NY. Once reserved for New York City’s elite, the growth of the working and middle class transformed how people thought of amusement parks.
- Coney Island is home to America’s first roller coaster. Known as the Switchback Railway, it was opened in 1884 and traveled about six miles per hour.

Interactive writing prompts:

Additionally, I think it would be fun to include some creative writing prompts that follow along with topics in this history packet. Some prompts include:

- Dream up the ideal road trip. Where would you go? What would you do, and where would you stop and see?
- Write about a trip you took or a local attraction you remember going to or hearing about. Maybe there was a stream along the side of the road where people stopped to fill up bottles or a tiny church that claimed to be the smallest in America near where you grew up.
- What makes a National Park? Are there any areas you think should be protected as a state or national park?

I hope you'll join me on this journey around America. I'm looking forward to diving into the stories behind these destinations and finding out what makes a great American road trip. There will be plenty of opportunities to get creative with your writing and lots of fun facts to share with others.

Astronomy-Kate has agreed to create a packet exploring things not of this world. With all the pressure of living it can be hard to remember that the Earth is smaller than even a drop in a very large bucket when compared to the cosmos around us. That perspective helps me when I find myself overwhelmed by the issues life is always tossing up. We are all just tiny specks on our own Switchback Railway [thank you Grace] moving along at our own snail's pace. The lesson of the cosmos is for us to relax and enjoy the ride

Greetings! I am so excited to share the astronomy packet I have been putting together. I am studying environmental science in school, but astronomy is one of my hobbies. I have always had a deep curiosity about the night sky. I see a lot of connections between our Earth and the planets and stars beyond. Space can be bizarre—with black holes, frozen worlds, supersonic winds, and supernovae to name just a few phenomena. But I think we can glean a lot about ourselves from looking beyond. The longer we look, we see connections—the same elements, the same invisible forces are everywhere. Looking at the night sky, I see the faraway stars, with planets of their own. And then I think back to myself, on this Earth, looking up with my own eyes, the product of nearly 4 billion years of evolution, and marvel at the serendipity. I wonder how I got so lucky to be here on this verdant speck of dust circling a blazing Sun at the perfect distance. For me, looking at the night sky makes life on Earth even more precious and drives my desire to protect the beautiful and fragile world we have. Carl Sagan, one of my favorite astronomers, summarized the connection between us and the cosmos in a beautiful quote: “The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of star stuff. We are a way for the universe to know itself.” I just think that is the most beautiful thought ever.

If you share my curiosity about our solar system, light, physics, the history of astronomy, and what lies beyond our planetary cluster, this packet is for you! After sharing some of the science as a baseline, I want to hear from you! What do you think about the existential questions— How did we get here? Are we alone? Is time travel possible? How did the universe begin? How will it end? There will be lots of opportunities for you to get involved: like math and physics exercises, Einstein-ian thought experiments, poems about your favorite star or planet, your thoughts about the meaning of life (if you think there is one), or write back what you enjoyed learning about the most and want more of. Learning should be an interactive process because everyone has unique thoughts to contribute. Outer space can remind us of our shared humanity and the value of the connections we can build in our world. -Kate

Health and Fitness- Cora has put together a packet helping you to tune up your body and your health. I certainly can use some inspiration to focus on my own health and fitness. FYI- **Cora is off to Spain for 6 months beginning this Sept this packet, so if you have been writing to her, she will be out of touch till she returns.**

Hello! I hope this newsletter finds you well. My name is Cora, and I am a student majoring in Biology and Society and am interested in becoming a physical therapist. Fitness and exercise have played a huge role in my life, and I have heard many of you express a similar passion. Apart from being essential to physical health, exercise can help improve mental health and overall wellbeing. The Health and Fitness packet will include some basic information on the anatomy of select muscles, building strength, and improving conditioning. It will also include a guide for certain stretches and proper form to prevent injury. These exercises have been selected to require little to no equipment and can be

performed in almost any location. It is never too late to begin exercising and reap the health benefits.

Role Playing Games [RPG]- Like chess this project began because we could not come close to supplying our Expedited Book Request participants with the RPG books they requested [think Dungeons and Dragons.] Luckily Jameson is here at PE and he has a passion for gaming. He created a game for the last cycle of PE programming, and he is working on creating another. Your feedback to Jamie helps him understand where his games succeed and where there can be problems. Here is what he asked me to share with you all.

"In this next instalment to the RPG Program, join me to enjoy learning about the fundamentals of tabletop gaming (for newcomers), familiarize yourself with a new pre-written world, and jump into a new full game. This time around, there will also be bonus content and bug fixes for the first instalment—and if you'd like a chance to have a short game of your own featured in a future mailing, please send it in! We'd also really appreciate any thoughts, feelings or feedback you have about the first RPG mailing."-Jamie

Design and Creativity –We are stepping into new worlds with this packet. Anna wants to help you design solutions to any area where you are facing problems. Rather than focus on the specific, this packet explores the development of your creative self. This can look different for everyone, yet from Anna's perspective there are underlying principles that she can share with you to help develop these skills. For anyone who read Anna's Computer Science course last year, you know that she is thorough in her explanations and can provide clear and concise instructions. It will be my pleasure to see how she can take such a wide topic and focus it down into a packet for all of you,

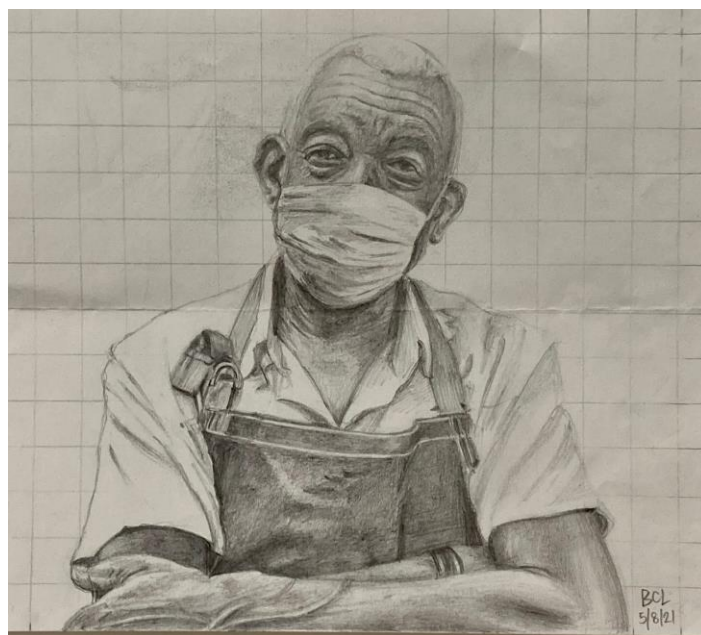
Problems and issues exist all around us at every level. What if you wanted to design or create solutions to these problems? Have you ever gotten stuck on how to actually start? Or have been intimidated by the idea of having to come up with something completely innovative? I know I have. This course packet will be introducing the process of designing solutions and products to different problems, and the creative process. Through this packet, I'm hoping to share some of my design knowledge and explore the different ways design can apply to many situations in our lives, such as through creative expression or communication. I hope that this knowledge can be taken and used in diverse ways, and I'm looking forward to sharing it with everyone!-Anna

Play Writing- We have offered a variety of creative writing classes through PE over the years. From early on it was clear that writing is one powerful way to explore your inner world and help bring some balance to the many stresses you face in everyday life. Knowing oneself may be the only real assignment life gives us, and writing is certainly one way to know oneself. This cycle Marianna has agreed to develop a packet for those of you who see life as a grand stage and have a story to tell. I look forward to seeing the lesson she creates for all of you.

It's hard to produce a movie. Putting on a play with your friends, however, is an attainable goal that can be a fun and fulfilling experience. After taking multiple courses in playwriting and having put on some of my own plays, I find that once you learn how plays are written there's no form of creative self-expression quite like it. In this program, I'd like to take you through the things I've learned on how to write a one act play from scratch, including guidelines, format, and tips to make the play as polished as possible. Once completed, you'll have a finished one act play, ready to be performed with others! -Marianna

Theme Essays-The themes essay section this newsletter is my favorite. Early on in this project many of you wrote to let me know how important mail was to you. We began a monthly theme writing program. I give you a writing cue and a word limit [800 words] and you write a true story or essay focused on the theme and send it to us. We in turn type every theme submitted for that topic and create a packet of reading that is mailed to everyone who submits a story. I have been so moved by what many of you share, and by seeing how much better people can write and communicate by participating in this project. The stories are heartfelt and display the humanity of all of you. Your writings help us all to see you as flesh and blood people who matter, rather than a numerical statistic. I cannot share all the writing with you. Six months of theme writing would fill a book and I just have this short newsletter.

I read through the theme packets submitted over the past 6 months and have created a compilation to share with you in this packet. If you like what you read, and want to receive a complete packet for a month's theme you must submit a writing of your own. Don't worry about it being perfect. Just the art of writing, and doing it regularly will help you develop communication skills that can serve you over a lifetime



Art by Ben Long

Upcoming Themes are

Getting Started due 9/1/21

Accidents due 10/1/21

Success due 11/1/21

Holidays due 12/1/21

Heroes due 1/1/22

Feet due 2/1/22

Censorship due 3/1/22

Partners due 4/1/22

Here is a selection of the themes sent in during our last cycle. If you want to read more, send in some original writings of your own and you will get a complete copy. Please consider prison censorship rules and try not to write stories that will cause the whole packet to be censored. We also discourage generalized hate against random groups. If you have an issue with an individual and want to write about it, that is fine, but please don't just start ranting about people based on gender, religion, ethnicity, and race.

Rescued

by Mathew Ellington

It was a crush I had on my best friend during my junior year of high school that changed the course of my life. There wasn't anything that really set those high school years apart from much of my childhood, except we'd managed to stay in the same area for an unprecedented 3 years - long enough for me to come out of my bookish shell and develop my first solid friendships. For once, home didn't seem like some foreign ideal. I felt like I belonged somewhere.

That place was at school, in the AFJROTC program. I'd originally signed up my freshman year just to fill a required elective. Three years later, they were my family - a cadre of semi-serious student soldiers, unified in our shared sense of purpose, but also by the fact we were normal teenage kids with normal teenage problems.

When I met Christie, we were both freshman cadets and I was infatuated with her almost from the start. She was beautiful and popular, with this ebullient personality that disturbed the air around her - like lightning as it strikes the earth. Long before I could fathom the confidence to do anything else, I accepted a spot in her "friend-zone" and did whatever I could just to be able to spend time with her. For the most part, this entailed multi-hour marathons of *Friends* on her living room couch. Her family grew accustomed to my constant presence, and before long, I grew to cherish their loud, slightly eccentric, yet loving home as much as if it were mine.

In stark contrast, my own home life seemed anything but stable. Poverty had been as constant in my life as my father's absence. My mom battled constantly with low-wage jobs to keep my brother and I fed, but the strain was manifesting itself in ways I'd never noticed when I was younger: drugs, alcohol, various sexual relationships. When she stopped being able to work because of physical disability my sophomore year, I got a part-time job at the

McDonald's on the naval base on the other side of town to try to fill the gap.

One day, I came home to my mom crying and the news that we were being evicted. We were 3 months behind on the rent and had no one to ask for help. My mom started talking about the possibility of homeless shelters and I knew it was real.

I cried and cried as I told Christie how I was probably going to have to drop out to support my family. We hugged each other tightly, trying to squeeze the broken pieces of my life back together. Then something unexpected happened.

Christie's mom, overhearing my situation, sat me down and gave me an invitation to live with them through my senior year; to have the chance to graduate without the burdens I'd been facing. I didn't know what to say. These people owed me nothing, and yet, they were fully inviting me into their home - into their family.

That last year of high school was tumultuous in its own way. Unfamiliar home expectations, coupled with my ever-prevalent sense of abandoning my mom and the tricky technicality of turning 18 made me about as insufferably rebellious as a teenager could be.

Still, they treated me like one of their own and gave me the support to graduate - without which, I honestly don't know where I'd be. I still talk to Christie and her family over a decade later, especially her mom - the women who rescued me by letting me into her family.

by Vicki Hicks

This may sound like a cliché to many, but prison rescued me from more than my crime. I have been married 28 years and am actively going through a divorce. Although we had many happy years; most were filled with my keeping quiet when I didn't agree with something or sitting back and allowing my husband to discipline my son too roughly many times. Had I not come to prison, I would still be trapped in a marriage that was making me lose myself one day at a time. Sometimes it was to the point where if we were arguing and I spoke up, my husband would ignore me until I apologized and spoke first. Our children are all grown and have a life of their own and sadly since I was sentenced to prison only one of them still speaks to their father. It feels good when the other two children tell me that I was the backbone that held our family together. "None of them can plan anything even as simple as Thanksgiving Dinner," says my son. It is crazy when you have time to sit down and reflect on the past. You realize how unhappy your life was, but at the time it was amazing. and I guess the good highlights (high school graduation, births, weddings, careers) all have one thing in common: three beautiful children we raised. If we never had children, would we have found happiness together? Probably not. I did and do take my vows seriously, but when you are just not enough for your husband anymore and he finds comfort with your sister and turns his back on you, it is time to move on. Prison has taught me that. Therefore, it has rescued me from misery for the rest of my life.

by Thomas A. Littek

Call me loner. The tag fits impeccably; so, I'll take no offense if you use it. After all, I am one who steers clear of almost all prison diversions - gambling, gossiping, rumor mongering ... AKA ordinary prison recreation.

Not that I'm a snob, a recluse, or an anti-social type. No, mostly I am nauseatingly outgoing and friendly. I love edifying conversation, good-natured company, and all kinds of social activities. But, I'm also quite comfortable within the space of my own head, alone, with just my thoughts and imagination for companionship. Around here I'm well-known for saying, "If I want intelligent conversation, I'll talk to myself."

In prison, negativity and adversity abound. It's as though they take wing, constantly dashing to and fro, constantly, from every possible direction, like a hornets' nest poked with a stick. Hate without cause, violence sans reason, racism, gangs, jealousy, prejudice, and always an abundant measure of simple mindedness. In a flash, seemingly harmless activities, a game of spades, for example, can turn ugly. Openly risky situations, e.g., too many "friends," gambling, horseplay can get you hurt. So, I prefer to fly solo. To that end, I make every conceivable effort to avoid all things risky.

I cope by writing. The moment I started writing, I knew I found my catharsis. I also learned that when I didn't have an invigorating story from Camp Prisonery Land to delight and enchant me, I could look inside my head and find a tale from the Graybar Manor.

Night is my time to write. I sleep through the days to avoid the grind and commotion. I have taken deliberately to this habit and found meaning in my humble existence. I suppose you could say writing rescued me from drowning in the fishbowl known as Graybar Manor.

Running

Running From Nothing by Delvin Diles

High school was out for summer, and I was stuck at the house doing chores. In the middle of a hand-washed load of dishes, I sighed and looked at the old, cracked sink, kitchen counter and wire dish rack, out the paint-chipped wood framed window at the weedy unkempt backyard I'd have to mow.

Then, I took a longer glance at Mama's car keys.

I thought she was taking a nap, so I put the car in neutral and pushed it past three houses before I cranked the engine. No way that awakened her. But somehow, seconds later, she appeared in the rearview mirror running in the middle of the street screaming, "DELVIN! GET OUT OF MY CAR!"

I accelerated.

For no good reason, as a kid and teen, I repeatedly ran away. I wasn't physically, sexually, or even verbally abused at home. Mama was a quiet, responsible, hardworking single parent, undeserving of the grief I gave her. Did all she could to raise me right. And I took her car that day out of boredom.

Initially, I was just gonna go see my girlfriend, Linda Kay, face the music later. Not knowing Waco's streets well enough, I got lost. As the sun set with my hopes at finding Kay's house, I changed my plan to go back home. My new plan included driving 30 miles south to my hometown (where it's impossible to get lost), picking up friends and getting dead face drunk. The rest was unplanned.

A week later, I was in jail, separated from Mama's car by over 50 miles after its engine died on Highway 6, where we left it before hitchhiking to Waxahachie to visit a friend's mom.

To start my new life as a runaway, I went into a clothing store with a group of boosters and got caught trying to steal a pair of Docker's slacks. The store owner actually chased me around the parking lot in his Honda Accord. I outran him, caught up with my crew, blocks away. "You slow," one of 'em chided. Suddenly, red and blue lights flashed with a siren blast, and my accomplices scattered into alleys/backyards/manholes somewhere. They knew the area. I was arrested.

After being bailed out hours later, my uncle drove and yelled, while in the backseat, Mama grabbed my collar and punched my eye one good time. A tear didn't fall until my uncle warned, "You best not hit her back either!" Broken, I sobbed, "I can't believe you think I'd hit my own Mama."

"You stole her car!" he pointed out.

"I didn't steal it," I explained, wiping my face. "I just borrowed it." Mama actually chuckled at that, shaking her head. With a barely concealed smirk, Uncle Gene concluded, "That ain't funny, boy."

I was 18 when I decided to leave my hometown for Dallas one night. I was bored with small town life again. Mama didn't think that was a good idea. That I was moving too fast for my budget and experience which was close to zero on both counts.

In less than a year in the city, I found myself hiding out in a dark motel, wanted for murder. I spent five teenage years running from boredom right into a life sentence.

I should've just finished the dishes.

by Raymond Smalley

Growing up with a physical disability is hard, even harder when it is almost invisible. I was born with a rare type of neuro-muscular disorder called Hemi-Cerebral Palsy. Much like standard Cerebral Palsy or CP for short, it causes some birth defects, the most common is a missing or pre-natal atrophy of a muscle; for me, it was my left tricep. Throughout my childhood, I was mocked for my lack of upper body strength, at least until freshman year of high school.

I originally wanted to join the soccer team but missed tryouts, so on a whim, I joined track and field. My mom was ecstatic about my athleticism and although she warned me of how much harder the training was, she too ran track in high school, supported and trained me to push through every mental and physical barrier.

I was picked for the half mile or 800-meter run, which to be fair, is a half mile sprint if you want to win. I wanted to do my absolute best and although I never came in first place, I broke down barriers and even a few egos. I had a teammate, Malcolm, who ran the mile and 2-mile who also pushed me and even paced me to beat my speed of 3:45 to get down to 3:15. One day as I was at a meet and running as hard as I could, a young lady made the comment, "Look at that white boy, he can't even run," to which Malcolm told her, "How dare you, that boy has Cerebral Palsy and is running his heart out and God granted you a perfect body, yet he still beats your time." My mom relayed the events to me, and I thanked Malcolm who told me, "Just keep running."

To this day, I love to run and enjoy the wind as it blows through my hair. I don't run for anyone but myself. Run your race, break down your barriers, and ignore those who seek your failure.

by Rickey A. Bright, Sr

In 1955, I climbed out of my playpen and hit the ground running . Like the iconic Energizer Bunny, I'm still going. My race began in earnest when - at the age of four - I ran out of the house behind my beloved grandmother fully expecting to go for a car ride. In those days, a car ride took second place only to grandma, the woman who practically raised me from the day my mom brought me home from the hospital.

Much to my dismay, grandma wouldn't let me go with her. My little heart shattered, its pieces lying all around me on the cold sidewalk.

Shedding crocodile tears, I begged her not to leave me behind. In the end, I lost my appeal to accompany grandma - the woman I loved more than chocolate - to her mother's house. She sent me back inside, promising to return soon. Soon? What is soon to a four-year-old if not an eternity?

Crying, I stood in the doorway and watched grandma slowly drive away with my heart. She turned onto Clinton Avenue and disappeared from sight, but not my mind.

In my mind's eye, I saw the route grandma would travel, and realized I knew the way to Ma's house. I don't know what my mom was doing at the time, but I walked out and began my first journey out into the world alone. Soon, I was walking along Kanawha Turnpike, which is a narrow two-lane road with a 45 mph speed limit.

Since it was the fall of the year, many sights begged to be explored in the naked woods on the opposite side of the highway, but I didn't slow to watch the playful squirrels as they scampered tree to tree while gathering their winter meals and didn't stop to ring the bell in the Methodist Church's towering steeple.

At Chestnut Street, I turned right and continued my grandma-chasing journey until I came to the railroad crossing where a slow freight train delayed my progress for the longest time. As soon as the train rumbled past, I crossed the four sets of tracks and continued on my merry way - until I reached the Spring Hill Bakery.

No boy can pass up the sweet aroma of hot, fresh donuts and cakes and pies and cinnamon. I stopped and stared hungrily at those big glass windows at the display cases filled with mouth-watering treats: donuts of every shape, size, color, and flavor known to little boys; cream horns, cinnamon rolls, cherry pies, birthday cakes, chocolate cakes, and more. My blue eyes were bigger than my stomach, and my pockets empty. If only grandma was here, I thought, I would have one of those delicious cream horns.

Saddened by my lack of a tasty pastry, I continued my journey. I ran into trouble; however, the moment I crossed Kentucky Street and strolled right past the school crossing officer, who thought I belonged in school.

"Hey," she called to me, "where are you going?"

"To Ma's house."

"Aren't you supposed to be in school?"

"No, ma'am."

I could tell she had reservations about a little boy running around by himself. She buttoned up my coat while questioning me, but ultimately allowed me to continue on my misguided journey.

I walked to MacCorkle Avenue - better known as U.S. Route 60 - where I had to cross four lanes of traffic on South Charleston's main thoroughfare. Barely able to reach the crosswalk button, I pressed it and waited for the speeding traffic to come to a halt. I'm sure some of the drivers were mortified to see a four-year-old cross the highway alone, but no one voiced any concerns.

I was now two-thirds of the 25 blocks to Ma's. I picked up my pace because the air was biting cold when semis blew past at 55 mph. Ten minutes later I walked into Ma's house and horrified everyone.

In hindsight, I risked my life just to be with grandma, but I'd do it all over again for just one more of grandma's loving hugs. I love you and miss you Grandma. I can't wait to see your open arms in Heaven, and you know I'll be running.

Learning to Run the Right Way by Bryan Noonan

I love running, and I always have. Technically, I guess that's not entirely true. I used to hate physically running. I could never figure out what motivated people to LIKE suffering through oxygen deprivation, hurting legs, shin splints, Achilles heels, and the numerous other common runner injuries. Haven't these people heard of cars, bicycles, or taxis?! Secretly, I suppose I admired

their tenacity, grit, and determination, but I preferred ... well, more comfortable and quicker means of travel.

Loving to physically run has only recently become, in the last eight years or so, a pleasure for me. Occasional injuries aside, I now find the freedom of running mentally stimulating and physically rejuvenating. I might be physically exhausted after a run, but the mental energy I feel ... wow! I get why people like this crazy activity. I just wish I had learned to appreciate running when I was younger.

I did my share of running as a younger fella, though. It just wasn't the one-leg-in-front-of-the-other kind. I've been a life-long conflict avoider, and "cut and run" was my go-to. It started, I suppose, as a child when my parents' arguments and fights used to get too intense. Voices getting too loud? Time to go. A hike in the woods for a couple of hours will do the job. If it's raining, getting lost in a Charles Dickens book, curled up in a remote corner of the house for a few hours will do. As long as I'm not HERE, where life sucks right now.

When I was old enough, I became a long-distance runner, so to speak. A few states of separation will do from the family drama, thank you very much. The only problem is that I'm human too, so conflict followed me. It's an inevitable part of life, I discovered. It also has surprising benefits for strengthening and deepening relationships if it's done right. I wish I knew this stuff before I harmed a marriage and other relationships by running from the tough stuff.

Running from conflict can take many forms, but other than avoidance, my go-to move was time-ried passive aggressiveness. I learned to speak fluent sarcasm, and I walled people off with a snide remark or backhanded comment. Oh, I'd often couch my sarcasm in humor to soften the blow, but I didn't mind cutting someone off at the knees when I felt it was needed. The mental gymnastics kept me on my toes. It also kept people from getting too close.

Nearly a dozen years in prison now, I've discovered that it helps to have people in your life who truly care about you. That requires treating people with respect and dignity. It also means leaning into conflict as a way of saying, "You are worth the fight." Prison has humbled me enough to be okay with being wrong sometimes and to be gracious when I am right. It's also helped me to realize what is worth fighting for in the first place and to not sweat the small stuff.

Today, I know that confronting conflict can be healing. Avoiding conflict says, "You're not worth it." Addressing conflict in healthy ways affirms the other's value. It says that their story, their experience, and their opinions matter. As Stephen Covey famously said, "seek first to understand, then to be understood." Others first may not work in a race, but it's a darn good policy for relationships.

These life lessons haven't driven me to run towards conflict. I'm not crazy, after all. But they have conditioned me to handle the stress of conflict better, to value relationships more, and to live

my life with more confidence and humility. Winning is not everything but running well ... that's what really counts in the end.

How to Fly a Kite by Karen D. Lee

Being Catholic and growing up in the 1960s was exciting. There was always something going on at the Cathedral. Living in the West side of Houston it seemed like the activities (mostly outside) were unending. Once Advent is over with the celebration of King's Day in January - the preparation for spring is underway.

My two older brothers, myself and my little sister, Ginger, all started on the construction of our kites. A lot of work goes into a good kite. The right paper, size, design, not to mention the frame and the tail. Construction is based on uniqueness and creativity. All are judged on presentation, set up, lift off, length of time spent flying, and how high it can go. Every kite has to be inspected for originality and confirmed that you made your kite yourself. No professional or parental help is allowed. Kits are sold for the younger ones, but the paper is white, so it has to be decorated on your own.

My two older brothers always make those box kites. But this year - 1970 - they wanted to experiment with a dragon kite. They both studied all year to get the design just right. Of course, they kept it all hush hush. Boys. My sister and I stayed with the simple design. Just the diamond shape. Decorated with flowers and a peace sign. The tail was multicolored. I liked it and it was sturdy. I made sure we had plenty of string and it was tied off to the next roll. One year I forgot to rewind the string and tie it off. Yes, the kite flew away - we were disqualified. This year I was ready. Though I did not actually get out and practice I explained to my sister that she should have to be the runner and I would be the handler. Once the kite was up, I would take over. She was nervous and scared. I am a year older than her. Actually, fourteen months and 15 ½ days. Anyways we always worked as a team like fraternal twins.

I could not run anymore. I was hit by a car when I was small, and it messed up my right knee and right hip. I walked with a limp. Though I tried I just could not run. I could not participate in any games that required running. I could not even roller skate. It was torture as a child to sit on the side lines and watch your friends play ball and you can't. Still as an adult, I can't run.

So here we are, Us four kids. March 17th, St. Patrick's Day. Out in this huge field that seems to go on for miles and miles. Every team of two set up and was ready to take off when cued by the judges. My sister was so nervous she threw up her lunch. But I assured her all will go well. Just don't think about it.

We got our cue, we looked at each other and my sister just froze. I told her we can't back down now. So I took a deep breath and told her "I'll try to go and if I fall I will get up and keep trying." I was thinking that we were going to be disqualified.

Now I don't know what guardian Angel showed up but one did. I was a runner and my sister was a handler. I checked the line and off I went. I'm doing this step swing right leg step sorta limp run

and just then, after a few steps this breeze comes out of nowhere and lifts the kite up. I literally have tears in my eyes. The kite is in the air and staying there. I had it up in the air for almost an hour which is great. We did not win or even place, but I just could not believe we got the kite up without running. Running is just one of those activities people take for granted. As a child it is more than a part of everyday life, running is being able to fly on your feet. Running is freedom, it is really living. Whenever I am down. I remember this day. I was really free.

I can't run at all. But after ten years in a wheelchair, I am learning how to walk, and it is a very freedom feeling.

Why Did I Run So Long? by Jordan Berg

Shortly after the Supreme Court legalized gay marriage I finally came out to my family. In steps of course. The first person I came out to was my aunt. She is deeply religious; however, she's supported me through tough spots, so I figured it was the best choice.

I knew she was coming to visit since at the time she was a regular. As I was channel surfing and drinking my morning coffee I came across a TV show talking about suicides. This episode was dedicated to LGBTQ+ individuals and the sad statistics that go with it. That show opened my eyes, I was determined NOT to be a statistic.

My Aunt Kelly arrived, we hugged and sat down. I went to the visiting room bakery counter and retrieved some items for us. I informed her that I had something to get off my chest. I broke down in tears to the point of sobbing. She started asking me questions and when she finally got to gay I looked up and said "yeah."

The first thing she said was "Your brother I could see, but you, no." We started laughing. A weight had been lifted and running from my true self stopped. (Full disclosure, my brother told our mom in a Mother's Day card.) I realize 100% that the courage it takes to stop running and hiding in the closet isn't easy and not everyone has the support I do, but to those that's okay. When the time is right you will know. Don't pressure yourself. Feeling safe is the #1 priority.

To the haters: because I'm gay doesn't mean that living in the same cell will somehow make you gay by catching my cooties. This is 2020 and we're adults. Stop letting others dictate who your friends are. That person could end up being your best friend. We're people too.

by Joseph Green

It had been raining all morning and the heavy thwack of my shoes hitting the saturated pavement was narcotic. The icy drops prickled my face and arms, creating the illusion they were asleep; but I was far from asleep. Arms and legs pumping like four finely tuned pistons caused my mind to rev with combusive thought.

I thought about the water, how the falling drops surrendered their shape to my form; but also, how - with enough concentration and pressure - a stream of water can cut clean through steel and stone. I ran through a puddle and noted its lack of resistance to my weight. Instead of fighting me for that space, it merely deferred, humbly returning as I left. I thought too how water is not always so accommodating. It can be immensely destructive, laying waste to entire civilizations.

Later I would read this quote: "The highest motive is to be like water. Water is essential to all living things, yet it demands no pay or recognition. Rather it flows humbly to the lowest level. Nothing is weaker than water, yet for overcoming what is hard and strong, nothing surpasses it." - Tao Te Ching; Lao-Tzu

"I can't run anymore," wheezed the man jogging next to me, "I gotta stop." He'd already given up and was slowing.

"No!" I urged, strangely inspired to be inspirational. "You've got more," I breathed out heavily, "You just gotta dig down and find it." I lifted my eyes in search of a marker we could strive for.

"The goal post!" I said excitedly, "C'mon, we can make it to the next goal post!" With a reluctant grunt, the man reengaged his muscles, and we painfully trotted in silence to the mark.

This experience taught me two basic life principles. First, that I have - as all do - the power to influence another. This may seem so obvious it's not worth stating.

"You cannot get through a single day without having an impact on the world around you. What you do makes a difference, and you have to decide what kind of difference you want to make." - Jane Goodall

Another principle I've learned this endurance race called life however, says, "You cannot see things till you know roughly what they are" (C.S. Lewis; *Out of the Silent Planet*). Much of what we know through vague impressions escapes our ability to apprehend until we can define it.

The second thing I discovered is that all difficult journeys seem hopeless without a goal to set our minds upon; but with such a goal we're able to endure far more affliction than we previously thought possible. Mankind is notorious for reaching the lofty ambitions upon which he sets his heart.

If in this current leg of your race you find your strength failing, might I suggest lifting the eyes of your soul to scan the horizon for an object after which you can strive? And once you have it, mount up like a fierce tsunami that you may reach. Then find another, till you have crossed the finish line victorious. You may feel spent, but you're not! There is power in you yet undiscovered; you need only choose to mine the silvery veins of your soul.

Jesus of Nazareth had a tough race to run. It was full of hardship, suffering and grief. The path of His journey ran right through the cross! His strategy for victory? "For the joy set before Him, Christ endured the cross... and is seated at the right hand of the throne

of God" (Hebrews 12:2). His race was arduous. To win the prize Jesus set His hope on the joy His victory would accomplish. We too can win, if we follow Him.

Prisoners Lives Matter

You Matter by David W. Pollard

Put them in cages and throw away the keys
Returning again and again put 'em on their knees
Inside walls and fences now numbers not names
Slaves of the system no more fun and games
Outside the world continues oblivious to their pleas
Nobody ever grows up thinking they'll go to jail
Every boy and girl has hopes they'll never fail
Reaching for the prize some take the wrong turn
Suddenly freedoms removed as they watch dreams burn
Losing everything and now only looking forward to mail
It's a lonely existence where everyone is so cold
Victimization abounds when dignity and honor are sold
Every now and then a lone figure stands tall
Speaking a truth that accepts one and all
Making some reevaluate the lies they've been told
Are you not in charge of your life, master of your fate
To choose your own attitude, picking love not hate
Telling yourself there's nothing you can't do
Eager for one more chance to live this life true
Realizing you're vital to make a difference is never too late

Too Quiet by Delvin Diles

Being forced to wait on picket bosses and gatekeepers to push a button for a cell ingress used to piss me off. Bad. I'd cry "C'mon dude!! You got ONE job! Open the F***** door!!" Sometimes aloud, which would usually result in a longer wait.

After a couple decades, I reasoned: If I'm going from locked space to locked space, why am I in a hurry? I became an expert at waiting in silence. Some C.D., in a booth or at a gate, wants to stall? That's cool. I'll wait. Look around and wait. Breathe and wait. Listen to an imagined playlist of "Wonder Wall", "Clocks", etc... and wait.

In my first year on this unit after a transfer, I expect some C.D.s to test my patience. I wasn't surprised to be the only inmate standing in the hallway waiting on a door guard to finish his conversation with a picket boss. I was in the middle of the 2nd verse of "My Immortal" when he looked my way with a start as if he'd just noticed me. "Yeah, right" I thought.

As I walked through the doorway, he actually reprimanded me for waiting quietly. "So, you were just gonna stand there? Why didn't you say something?"

Throwing up my hand, I told him, "Hey man, I'm just an inmate trying to go back to my pod."

Then he called me to the bars and in a solemn African accent informed me "You are not an inmate. You are a human being. If you had said something, I would have opened the door."

Maybe sometimes I'm too quiet.

by Jeremy Brown

I'm sitting in a cell that floods when it rains. Prisoners matter.

I'm living in a building that should have been condemned 15 years ago. Prisoners don't matter.

I'm eating food filled with starches, fluff, sodium, and TVP meat. Prisoners matter.

I'm surrounded by stupid, ignorant, uneducated ganged out idiots who kill each other over a soup made in India, a digital TV channel emitting particles and waves, who cut and slice each other for a reputation of evil to see who can be the most dangerous, all for a mental reward that exists in the neural synapses and dendrite connections.

I'm surrounded by people whose reptilian brains have overridden their compassionate original nature. Prisoners' lives don't matter.

The good food that we are supposed to be getting is hoarded and stolen by kitchen workers because the state of Florida does not pay, it enslaves. I may be 'in here' but I refuse to mate, be there bloody mate or be checked and mated with their cursed logic on the prison chess board. Prisoners' lives matter. Therefore, we can now deconstruct the name inmate and slave and come back to our origin which is just human. Prisoners do matter, but only to loved ones, friends and a small circle of individuals who actually care on the streets. Our lives to 90% of the employees, staff and administrators of the system only matter as much as the profit we bring them.

Yet without us, these small ass, little Godforsaken inbred towns, would be nearly nonexistent and extremely poor. So prisoner's lives matter! Woohoo! Eh I need a drink...

The Ugly Truth by Leo Cardez

Prisoners' Lives Matter? In my humble experience, all evidence points to the contrary. I can't say I blame 'em. Not if I'm being truly honest with myself.

In nature, those that don't conform to the social order are treated harshly and usually end up dead. Similarly, we, inmates, are also considered dead- for all intent and purposes- just not buried. I can't blame anyone, but myself. It's no one's fault beyond my own. It's not like a Black Lives Matter scenario- people don't have a choice in their race. I can't speak for anyone else, but I deserve to be here- a home for weak men who didn't have the strength to say no to their worst instincts.

I'm sure my victim hates me, but no one can loathe me more than I do myself. I can't stand my own reflection. My life only matters in the sense that I should be forced to live this nightmare. And I do. I do my time humbly and in the small act I hope I can begin to repay the debt I owe.

by Reynald Carey

At times, I can't express how abandoned and forgotten I feel. But then, one baronial day, I'll go to the officer's podium and my name will be printed on the unit's mail list. In that moment I cannot accurately describe the feelings of exhilaration I feel, because I don't know what the mail is. Always, not sometimes, always when I receive mail, I'm eternally grateful because it makes me feel like I'm not completely forgotten.

When I receive mail, that means that a person somewhere in this world had to not only read my name, but they had to either write or type it and put it on an envelope along with my address, then send it to me. I know that I'm not alone in the aspect of not having anyone on the outside and know just how valuable mail is to the heart and soul of many prisoners. In those moments, we actually feel like prisoner lives matter.

By James. Bauhaus

Prisoner lives *can* matter, but not by wasting time watching TV, slamming dominoes, or gossiping about others. Getting covered with permanent skin graffiti is worse than a mere waste. This is actually harmful, like shooting yourself in the foot. Nobody wants to hire a circus freak to represent his business. Nobody wants to be seen with your skulls, spider webs, swastikas, or marijuana leaves. We only pretend to be impressed by them because you shove them in our faces like a dog that needs petting. We pity you and wonder what is wrong with you. Why can't you read a book that isn't about cowboys or dragons? Education matters. Writing matters. Experience matters. Teaching people matters. The lawyers have you trapped but they don't have their chains on your mind or your fingers. Write about their system for putting people in cages. Warn others about how to avoid being caged. This is only one of the ways that prisoners can matter.

Yes! Now that all of you have been infected with the coronavirus and survived, you are valuable to us and *you matter!* Your feed will not get any better. Your junk food will continue to become more expensive. You will not be given any opportunities to see the outside or breathe outside air. Everything that is not forbidden will remain compulsory. However, your blood is valuable to us. Your voluntary donation of blood will be converted into products that will help save lives much more important than your own! Your blood products will also be used to further extend the lives of geriatric politicians such as Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Mitch McConnell and other gluttons of privilege and power who should have died of debauchery and excess years ago! Be proud! Be ready! Have your arm extended fully out of the bean hole when we bring our collection cart down your line of cages! Prisoner lives now *do* matter!

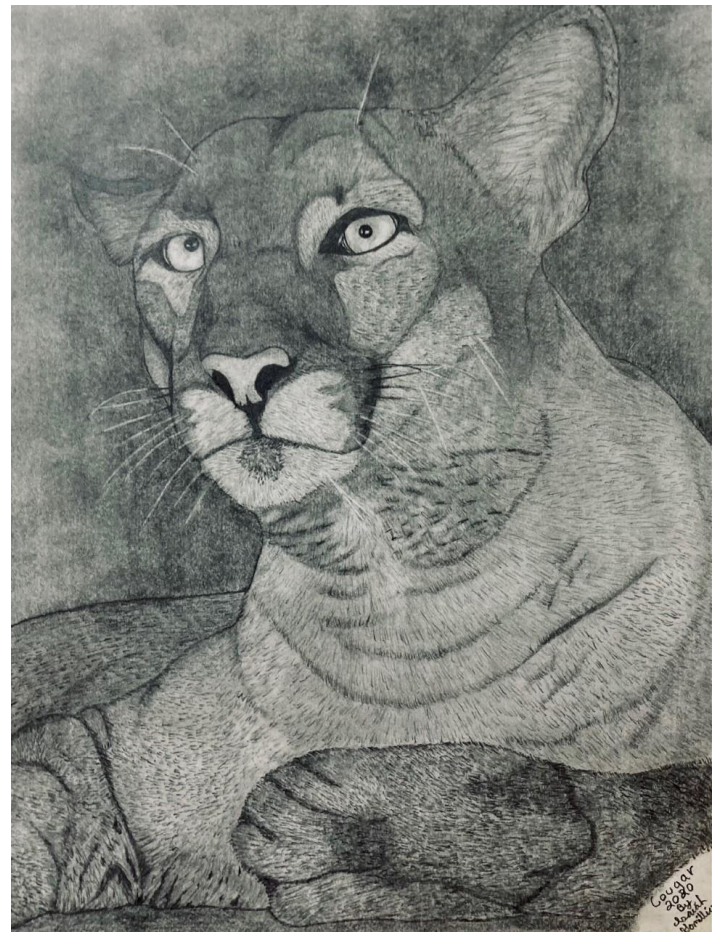
By Roderic Pippen Sr.

I'm a prisoner serving a life sentence. Before I was a prisoner, I was a son, brother, uncle, father, and friend. You may assume that my life has lost value in my current state, but my life is being used as a guide for my son and nephews. Countless people ask for my guidance from the outside world and in prison.

Since the pandemic began, I've been able to build stronger bonds with people in general. It is because everybody feels like a prisoner now. Lockdowns and curfews make your houses into your cell. Even still you have more at your disposal than I can fathom. If you can't handle that, can you imagine how I feel?

I can proudly say I survived covid-19 but I didn't do it the way you think. I didn't get a cell to myself but rather shared one with another covid positive prisoner. I didn't get all the treatments and meds, just some basic vitamins. The facility has been on lockdown since March, how did I contract the virus in May? With all the technology in the world, I haven't seen my son or family in over 8 months. The facility can punish me with non-contact visits but won't use them to help me. My mental state was shaky before all this, but I won't allow something we are all fighting to break me.

I am a prisoner and my life matters, and this won't be the last you hear from me.



Art by Wm. Gomillion

The Morning After

by Leo Cardez

The morning after my arrest is a blur. Hours upon hours spent navigating the three-dimensional maze of corridors, bull-pens and holding cells. It was a 360 degree assault of my senses. A nonstop chorus of clanging, banging, screaming and yelling. The stench uniquely grotesque permeating every corner -

inescapable. Prisons are designed to break you - creating an atmosphere of fear and negativity so powerful you lose your ability to reason and blind clearly. I was quickly falling deeper into the well - the dark blackness surrounding me - until I could only vaguely see the light.

Eventually, once mercifully, I was thrown into a tiny, dark, dark cell - "In-processing" was finally over. My new living quarters, originally built to house a single inmate, was shared with two other inmates who split a bunk bed while I shared the floor with a couple of friendly, fearless mice and an army of roaches. I didn't care - my exhaustion overwhelmed me - I fell into a deep, dreamless slumber.

I awoke to a nightmare far beyond anything I could have imagined - it was beyond my capacity to comprehend. I simply wanted to give up - the coward's solution, I know, but even a rock will turn to dust with enough pressure. I was not alone in my despair.

Cook County Jail, in Chicago's south-side, carries the unique distinctions of both the highest rates of violence and suicide of any American jail. Suicide seems like something other people do. I was as far away from ever considering suicide as I was going to the moon - it wasn't something I ever really considered - until now. Don't judge me or think me weak unless you've been in the same heart-wrenching situation - you cannot imagine the mental strain. I can't find the right words to describe it - there are no words by enough to accurately convey the deep-down hurting, the crying behind the smiles, the feeling of emptiness this punishing environment conveys. Only one thing kept me from taking the easy way out: Katie.

Katie is my only daughter. One thought of her precious face and my heart feels the squeeze of unconditional love. That love helped me forget how bad it really was, it allowed me to live somewhere else in my mind. And from that point forward, that is how I survived: Day by day - living only in the present.

I have since moved on from jail to prison, but my mentality has not changed. I have endured 548 days buried alive in human warehouses and have 1,752 days to go, but I know I'm going to be fine. I keep thoughts of Katie and my family hidden in secret chambers of my heart - they keep me moored - and I live one day at a time, one moment at a time, one breath at a time.

by Matthew Minton

I awoke as the bars rolled over signifying the arrival of breakfast. I unraveled myself from my blankets to jump up to grab the three trays for my cellies and I. As I eat the oatmeal and coffee cakes, images from the day before pass through my mind. My mother in tears on the stand, fighting for her son. My aunt, my godmother, and close friend adding their voices and tears to hers. The cadence of my lawyer's voice as she tries to convince the judge to have mercy. The dead look on the judge's face as she listens to the prosecutor. The tired feeling, I had, fighting for three years with too few victories led to this day with the only option to put my fate in the hands of the judge alone. The sudden and quick

conclusion. That hope was flared and extinguished as the judge said I qualified for a downward departure... but that she was not going to grant it. And the look on my mother's face as I left the courtroom.

I finish my breakfast and stack the empty trays by the door. I wait for the guard to come collect them. I must find out - when can I get out of direct ops and go back to my regular pod? I told them after they brought me back from sentencing that this was not necessary, that I was not suicidal. Truth be told, extended stays in direct ops will cause a person to become suicidal. The room is cold and only having shorts to wear makes it even colder. I would rather be around the members of the pod I was in, playing cards and watching television. The guard lets me know I will be taken back to my pod in a few hours, I just have to wait.

To keep warm, I begin to do pushups, sit ups, and squats. The time passes excruciatingly slowly. In my three years in county jail - this time is by far the worst. There are no books, no television, no games, and nothing to do in direct ops. My glasses are even taken from me - to protect me supposedly. It is a personal torture to not be able to see. My cellies are detoxing and coming down - and are heavily asleep. I am alone with my thoughts. As I push-up, I analyze how I really feel. I recall praying the night before sentencing, as I do each night anyway - but that night felt different. I pleaded with the lord to show me if this was the right path to take, if these choices were what he willed. And I recall the silence as another prayer went unanswered. I knew the possibility of my sentence, in fact I expected it, but the disappointment lingered. The realization that when I get out, my grandparents will be gone. At the end, I feel resigned but strangely at peace, I know now and there is no more waiting. Lunch is served a bit early and after I am returned to my old pod. As I walk through the doorway into the pod I think, one morning done, nine thousand fifty one to go.

by Vernon Warfield

I can't believe I went in, did it again! Every time I say no more, every time I promise I'll stay strong and say no. I find myself in the same sad situation. Time after time it never fails. How can one person have so much control over me? It's nobody fault but my own! I know. Yet I just can't seem to say no.

I mean really. I say no all the time. "Aye, you want to grab a beer?" "No, I am good." "Did you catch the game last night?" "No, what happened?" Yet every time she calls, it's like I forget how to say no. It never fails, it's like the sound of her voice renders me thoughtless. And all I can do is agree with what every crazy plan she's come up with.

"You want to watch the ants build an ant hill?" or "can we watch Frozen again?" Then you got my favorite, 'Hey, let's run for a mile, jump for a mile, skip for a mile, then hop for a mile?...Umm wait a minute. How far is a mile?' Like my knees don't hurt already or my back don't snack, crackle and pop enough as is, but guess what. I find myself doing, guess what I find myself saying, "A mile is 5280 feet, you ready?" Knowing I will feel every

step, hop, skip, and jump the morning after. Knowing I will feel every bit of a hundred years old.

Do I regret it? At the time, no way. Why? I guess it's seeing that big, beautiful smile cross my granddaughter's lovely face that makes it worth every excruciating ache. Even if I can't get out of bed the morning after.

by Thomas Black

On Monday, Sept. 30, 2013, my dad, my wife and I agreed it had been too long since we'd had catfish to eat, cooking some fresh caught fish sounded good. Pop and I decided to put out trotlines to catch a few for the next night's supper. For those who don't know, trotlines are a nylon or cotton bodyline to which short drop lines with fish hooks are attached ever so far apart. Various baits are used on the hooks, we normally use perch, crawdads, catalpa worms, or shad, depends on the type of fish you want to catch and what bait is available. One end of the bodyline is tied to a root or limb, the other end has an old window weight tied to it. You run these out from the riverbank, stretch them a bit and then drop the weight to sink it down. We went and put out a few short lines.

The next morning, Oct. 1, 2013, well before sun up, Pop, my wife and myself were heading down the White River to check our lines. It was a real treat for the wife to tag along with us, often our schedules didn't allow her time to come along. It was possible now because I'd been fired from my job.

I had pleaded guilty to a felon, took a plea. There was a morality clause for supervisors, so after 26 years of making shoes and boots, I was fired the day after court.

But it worked out for the best, I was given a recognizance bond till time to go to prison. I got to spend a little over a month with my wife and got several tons of scrap metal hauled and sold from out of the backyard. That helped a lot since I had no paycheck coming in. But anyhow, back to the subject, I wander off like that once in a while, ok it happens often, I'll admit it!

It was a beautiful morning, really enjoyable, and we caught some decent fish. We got back to the little fish cleaning shack at about 8 A.M., weighed our catch, 110 pounds, not a bad haul.

My wife went to our house, just a couple blocks away, while Pop and I got set up to start cleaning the catch. I picked out the biggest of the bunch to start on, I have a theory they'll only get smaller after that one.

I heard my wife drive up, she was hollering my name, sounding quite distressed. I went out to see what the issue was, thinking something might have happened to one of the kids or grandkids. "What is wrong?" I asked. "The sheriff's office called." I had a real sinking feeling at that moment. She said they were "on the way." My dad asked, "what's going on?" I could only tell him, "It's time." "Time for what?" he asked. "Time to go to prison," I said.

Fairly soon a couple guys from the jail arrived, they checked out our fish, and it was time to go. I gave my wife and dad a hug, kissed my wife. My wife's crying, Pops crying, not a pleasant scene at all.

The jailers ran me to the house, let me shower and change clothes, said bye to the dog, and off we went to county jail, left for prison the next day.

When I got to call home, I asked how the fish tasted. My wife said Pop was so upset he gave the fish to his neighbor.

I thought of this moment a few years later, a ministry group Kairos fed us catfish, it was good, but not the same as being home with family around the table.

Never Again

By Tamara Angelique Allenbough

Growing up, I was abused in every possible way. What could possibly be done to a person without killing them; it was done to me. I vowed to myself that never again will I allow anyone to hurt me in any way. Truth be told, I held on to my anger and rage, and lashed out at nearly everyone who attempted to get close. Paradoxically, I craved love and acceptance. My anger had the best of me for years resulting in my crimes that led me where I am today. I failed to realize that by lashing out and holding on to that hurt and anger, that I continued to be hurt. I allowed all those that abused me to control me and my feelings. The Native American chaplain taught me the greatest lesson I've learned so far. I must forgive in order for me to find peace. Forgiveness does not mean that the abusers are off the hook, or that what they did is okay. Forgiveness meant letting go of the hurt and anger I held for so long, and thus being able to finally begin the process of healing. In the summer of 2017, I finally made the decision to forgive, and I am flourishing. Not to say I still don't have my moments, because yes, they do come. I'm human, after all. But I'm able to make a new vow. This time, it's Never Again will I allow my anger to control me. Never Again will I allow any person to dictate how I feel. Is this easy? No, but it can be done. A line from one of my favorite poems says "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul. I've found peace and the key to happiness, and I hope others do too."

"Naive Anger" by David W. Pollard

Never again anagrams to naive anger, something that has gotten many people into trouble in their lives. Sometimes they are angry over an incident that just happened--someone said or did something that made them feel belittled or disrespected, or maybe it was an action that triggered an instant reaction of 'seeing red'. But more often than not we are walking around with this bottled anger that grows more and more as we feel like we haven't been given a chance or that we've been unfairly discriminated against or that we've had it harder than most growing up or that everyone is against us. That is naive anger that leads to bad thinking, bad decisions, and bad outcomes.

Why are you so mad? Do you even know? Is it because you don't feel the world has given you a fair shot? What does the world owe you? Nothing. It was here long before you and will be here long after you and it's neither for you or against you-- it just is.

You are granted the same 24 hours as everybody else on this planet and the only difference is what you do with them. But even more important is the attitude you have throughout the 86,400 seconds of every day. Waking up with naive anger only sets yourself at a disadvantage as you look for someone to blame or complain to or expect to be coddled because life is so hard.

Life is what you make it. Jump into a fast-flowing river and you can expend your energy trying to swim against the current while getting angry that you're getting nowhere or you can go with the flow downstream and enjoy the journey. Life is like that river and it doesn't care which way you choose to exert yourself... it's going to keep flowing.

Your anger likely brought you to prison and until you choose to let go of that and not have it rule your days, you won't be able to say never again to prison.

by Jacob Keiter

I once tried crystal meth, this little experiment just happened to last about five years. When I first ingested the narcotic, I felt elated, peaking well above Cloud 9. As the chemical ran its course through my body, I became superhuman. Without a doubt I could have challenged Scott Summers to a stare down or defeated Bruce Banner in an arm-wrestling contest. My shy awkwardness completely faded away and I instantly became the life of the party. My confidence, strike that, my cockiness allowed me the opportunity to achieve success in ways I didn't know were possible. My artificial life made me feel perfect, to say the least.

Until I finally crashed.

That feeling of euphoria transitioned into a state of paranoia. My self-claimed superpowers slowly deteriorated, along with the entirety of my body. I now could hardly carry a bag of ice to the car. I became disconnected with reality and my original awkward self, came back into existence. I slowly lost my possessions, my friends, my family, and my freedom. I have finally hit rock bottom.

Never again will I ingest this poison that attempted to take away everything that I love.

Never again will I be enticed into a fake reality detailing false hope.

Never again will I allow something to overcome who I truly am.

Today I am four years clean, and never again will I try crystal meth.

by Darren Butler

As a rule of law, fire is never hot until we touch it, until we are close enough to feel it tingling and prickling across our skin as it intensifies into stinging pain. As children we have a certain innocence. A freedom to play to the fullest of our attention. There is nothing beyond the chase. Nothing can hurt us in this world of imagination, until something does. And just like that, there is never again a safe place to go to be ourselves. Never again can we imagine the fire to be anything other than painful. We put our hand in the fire and vow to ourselves; never again! Yet, tenaciously, we try to hold onto that past innocence. We just have to do that one thing that defines the most painful experience of our lives, over and over. Maybe this time I can get away. Maybe I can touch that forbidden fire and not feel the flame. Maybe never again is too long a wait. I imagine that my innocence hasn't been seared away. I imagine that I will never again feel the flame. My hand deep in the heart of the inferno, I'll never be innocent again.

By Joshua Rose

I used to be a fairly happy person in tune with some part of myself that defies explanation. I was a loving dude, something like a fat hippie just livin' life. Well, somehow, I ended up with a beautiful woman who came with a not so beautiful drug habit. From my carefree consumption of cannabis and perusal of psilocybin, I found myself suddenly degraded into a dependency on dope. Benzos, opiate, meth, I wanted it all and would stop at nothing to get it. Well, I found myself doing more and more reckless things, not only to stay high, but also to impress the girl, which led to my 20-year sentence for armed robbery.

Once incarcerated, surrounded by heartless cold, criminals, I too became a bit colder, maybe in order to survive. Or maybe some part of me died over the years. Alone, cold, and sharpened by a cold world, I became violent, manipulative, and joined a gang. I tattooed my whole face just to look mean and show people I don't care.

Then, as the years passed after so much anger and so much destruction, I found that part of myself that I can't explain. That little feeling that says, "All You Need Is Love" and makes you just smile. I didn't find it outside of myself but rather locked in a solitary cell for years. I came to a peace, a contentment that I will never lose again. I see all the different contributing factors that caused me to be lost before, so now I am prepared. Never Again. :)

The Pleasures of not Giving a \$#!+ by Catherine LaFleur

Tis I, your faithful correspondent, once again reporting from ground zero in Camp Prisonery Land. Things have been a little rough with Covid-19 restrictions. The general library was closed in February of 2020 and has yet to re-open. The law library has been up and running since June. For five months we were terror free and operating under different management. Although there were some mild restrictions such as social distancing, wearing a mask, gloving up, etc. we had no problem getting the clients in and out during our full workday 9-11 and 12:30 to 3.

And then Der Kommissar returned in October. Suddenly the law clerks were restricted to two hours of work per day and only allowed one at a time in the building. Lorelei and I were told it was a new work restriction from FDOC. Strange since the Education Department was cycling two sessions of 100 students per session divided between ten rooms each day in the Education Building. Now its a problem for two law clerks to be in the Library Building in two separate rooms at the same time?

Added to that, Der Kommisar did not want to let the inmate clients into the building. She wanted me to interview them while I spoke from the front door while they stood outside. Not much of a confidentiality breach, right? Then our typist got transferred to another camp. Lorelei and I now had to do all the law clerking and all the typing. She is pretty average. I'm a speed demon.

To recap, we were expected to do all the interviewing of clients, the case review, the research, the drafting of motions, the intake of administrative grievances, the research and writing of such, the copy services, AND the compound's typing requests in two hours a day? We are both excellent at our jobs but there are just two of us and we can only do so much in two hours.

It's true, my parents put me on the performance monkey treadmill early in life and I've never been able to completely get off. However, while I was at the Covid-Cabana at leisure, I read a life changing series of anti-self help books: The Magic of Not Giving a £*√x Get Your \$%+ Together and You Do You.

Really, they are life changing. Ever since I came to prison, I've been living a life of atonement. And it's been difficult. Even the fun jobs became labor because of my performance monkey mindset. Covid sapped me of my boundless energy. The recovery from my stay at the Hotel Covid is taking a long time. It's months later and I'm still dragging myself from pillar to post every day. In short, I can't tackle all the side jobs I used to take on for the dubious reward of an 'atta girl and a pat on the back.

So, I asked for a job change. Here's a tip, when LaFleur asks to leave there must be a serious problem. That is the last 'copter out of Saigon, the last lifeboat off the Titanic. The ship is going all the way down. I helpfully included a list of deadlines that would not be met. I also said, in writing, that I may appear magical but that I am not actually magic. That got some notice. And I got some censure for taking my problems out of the house, so to speak.

But things also changed. Lorelei and I have a fully workday scheduled. I think Der Kommissar just overreacted a bit. She's in a high-risk group. Not every inmate who comes to the library adheres to hand washing and some wear their masks under their noses. I changed too; I no longer stress about how much work gets done. I am only staying in my law clerk lane (thank you Terry the Typist).

Never! Again!

I will not take on the burden of stressing about decisions which are beyond my control. Ultimately, it is the Institution's responsibility to get the law clerks to work every day. I plan every

deadline thirty days in advance. As to the extra typing, on Wednesdays and Thursdays, I'll be in the back room typing those motions at 120 WPM. Thanks very much.

NEIGHBORS

No Exit by Catherine LaFleur

I am a solitary creature. Do not infer from this that there is a lack of friends. If friends are to be had, have them I will. I socialize. Just that I need to have a lot of quiet time. I read and I am a writer. During COVID, I was trapped in Plague Dorm D. The usual friends were not available to me. Those friends are used to my quirky personality. They can tell when I've had enough share-time and understand when I must retreat to my hermitage.

Isolating myself can be dangerous for me. There are many dark days. So I force myself to participate in life. I invited myself to Canasta, Chess, and Scrabble games. I let people style my hair. I braided and twisted a few heads. No one knew I could do that. How can I be a woman of mysteries if there aren't any mysteries to discover?

Then a problem arose. Quarantine ended. Camp Prisoney Land partially opened. The Law Library called me back to active duty. Except now all these new friends were still back in Delta. Friends who thought I wanted to spend more quality time with them and who eagerly awaited my return at the end of each day.

Have you ever been in the uncomfortable position of hooking up then having that person follow you around for weeks expecting attention? Honey, it was good for a while but not a long while. I feel dirty! Almost like a man!

Then something unexpected happened. I got moved on New Year's Day to Charlie Dorm. The Short Timers compound. What? Who thought this was a good idea? It's true, I've been declassified from a 4/4 (the highest custody allowed at Camp Prisoney Land) to 4/1 (the lowest custody level I can achieve). This is my just desserts. I'm chaotic good. I'd like to be chaotic neutral but I can't sustain the necessary sociopathic behavior. I always end up with giggle fits and can't keep a mean face.

Don't these people know I'm a dangerous criminal? Actually, I'm a bit frightened by these wild and free Short Timer neighbors. They might do something bad to me. On the other hand, they don't care about the TV before 7 p.m. I've been able to watch Nightly News every day. No one saves seats in the day room. I have no roommate.

Maybe I've been freed from Delta Dorm and all those crusty Long Timers. I guess Jean Paul Sartre was right, Hell is other people.

by Anthony S. Romero

However, negative the experience of doing time can be, it can also be a good and probably one of the best experiences you can have. With neighbors, this can have its effect and it can be annoying and comical at times. A lot of times, I don't listen to the

radio and listen to all my neighbors from next door to one row, two row, and three row. You'll be amazed by the things you hear. From info, that is useful to B.S., the latest gossip/rumors to the facts, from helpful uplifting conversations to the most retarded ideas and concepts that one can imagine. Some people just want to be heard and recognized, but don't know how to convey it properly, so they rant for hours and possibly start problems with others for no reason. Only to come back later and send a written note apologizing for their actions or claim to just be playing and nothing that was said was to be taken seriously. Another way to want and get attention is to rudely butt into others' conversations and put in your own two cents. This is constantly done until that person is included, or the people decide to talk later because of the interruptions. Even though I don't agree with it, I do understand the factors that are involved and why this motivates one to jump out there and grab attention. First, we're in and we're cut off from human contact for the most part, then if you don't get any type of friends, mixed with no movement and being stuck in the cell all day. Yeah, this place can get pretty lonely pretty quickly. I guess that is the reason why I sit back and just listen to my neighbors most of the time. It's like I'm included in the conversation, since they scream and holler for everyone to hear all their business, so automatically, we hear the whole conversation. In a way, it's like listening to a sitcom or a talk show, depending on what's being discussed. Just imagine a TV without being able to watch it and yet, you got some characters in this place. Don't get me wrong, I do talk to my neighbors at certain times, but I'd rather listen and let them talk to others. Some people help one another out, others well, they can be a challenge to avoid. When you got the right ones next to you, yeah, your time will fly by fast, especially if y'all into the somethings and look out for one another. It could be like having a friend that you knew all your life like you partied with and went to school together. Eventually, you'll get separated from one another and you'll be pretty upset about it and complain for a bit but get to it because that's prison for you. Always making things unpleasant for you. You'll never get comfortable in here. For me, I've gotten a long way by showing common courtesy to all my neighbors, and if I can't get along with or if we can't click, then I just limit all actions with that person. It saves both of us a headache. Truth be told, I feel neighbors are needed in this place 'cause we live in such an inhumane world, so I can honestly say I'm grateful for my neighbors, whether they speak truth or make a bunch of unnecessary noise for no reason.

by Jacob Keiter

Getting indicted by the federal government was by far one of the scariest moments of my life. As I feared for what the future may hold, my now wife scanned around, determined to find a way to get me out on bail for a little while. She even resorted to a final option in which she was trying to avoid, returning to her childhood home.

My wife grew up in the same home her entire life. It's a duplex house, where she, her brothers, and father occupied one side, while the other side was rented by various people. At the time of my arrest, her father was living there alone, with the other half of the home still vacant. After some persuasion, she convinced her

father that I'd be coming there for the time being. The only thing is, I had yet to meet him.

Entering this home was awkward to say the least, but I was grateful for this opportunity. As far as first impressions go, those were out of the window. I mean he's already fully aware that I'm on federal pretrial bail with pending drug charges. There's absolutely no way he'd want this for his little girl. Instead of wondering if he was going to like me, I pondered on the thought of how much he is going to dislike me rather.

Somehow, we completely avoided each other's presence for the first two months I was there. Not quite sure how that was possible with only a thin piece of drywall separating us. Nonetheless, I still desired to meet him; I mean he created the love of my life. I had to think of a plan to meet him in an appropriate manner.

With this being his home, I knew he'd want to do any repairs or installations. I had a rather fancy chandelier I wanted installed in the dining room, so I approached him with the idea. The ice was finally broken. Our first encounter with each other wasn't nearly as intimidating as I thought it would be but went rather smoothly. He treated me like a human, rather than a felon or drug dealer.

Since, we have grown to have a rather good relationship with one another, and he's always taken a liking to me even when the rest of my wife's family rejected me. He attended my wedding within the prison and gave me his blessing on marrying his daughter. We have truly accepted one another as family.

Today, I am counting down the days until I return home to my wife, and I'm able to visit my friend, my father-in-law, my neighbor, and thank him for being there for me from the beginning.

Picture Theme Writing- This project is a cousin to the word theme writing. Related but different. You know that a picture is worth 1000 words. Instead of giving you a word cue like "Friendship" this project will supply a picture cue and you are asked to write a story. **Unlike the word theme this does not have to be based on a true story.** Your imagination is the only thing you need for this project. That and the ability to write sentences. Writing is a way to develop your brain and your thinking process. I know there is not as much intellectual stimulation in prison as many of you would like. Boredom can lead to fatigue and depression. Writing is a useful tool to stimulate your mind and body. Having led this project for close to 20 years I have seen how many of you have become excellent writers through participation in this program [Plus you get a copy of everyone else's submission in a packet sent after all the writing is typed. Like the word cues the limit for each essay is 800 words. If you go a few words over don't worry, but please don't send in massive writings expecting us to type and print it all. By setting the limits we can conserve time and funds and have more to offer the entire group.

I believe the writings shared in the word and picture cue portion of the newsletter have profound effects on the other readers. It helps people realize they are not alone, and that they are not

going crazy and in fact other people are responding to the prison environment in a way that is similar to them. Also, people see the commonality of their experience transcends race, religion ethnicity, and in fact your common humanity is in the spotlight. Please keep writing if you already are, and if you haven't tried your hand at this, now is the time to begin. Many people take great pleasure at seeing their writing in print and shared with others. Don't deprive yourself of this experience, write on a picture or word cue and share it with us. Be sure your name and number are on your submissions so we can give you credit for it in our newsletter



A Warm Embrace by Juan Delgado

That smile you shared
 The fresh smell of your hair
 At home is the best place
 Nothing better than a mom's warm embrace
 The tender loving care
 The knowledge that you will always be there
 You're my light to my darkness
 The clarity to my judgment's
 The beat of your heart will
 Always be embedded in my DNA
 And as time fades away, I will
 Always remember my mother's
 Warm embrace

Reunited by Austin Herald

This one day back in my 20s I thought wouldn't it be cool to find my birth-mom since I had been adopted at such a young age. I joined this website looking at all the adoptions where I'm from and noticed a date at the same hospital I was born in, except the request was for a girl, not a boy. I did research and found out she had no clue if she had a boy or girl. I contacted her by the website and waited for a response which took a while. She sent pictures of what I assumed was my biological brother whom I looked just like, except he had dark hair. I was blown away; could this be true? Really true? I didn't want to get my hopes up until all the information was given out and put together. I knew my lawyer that did my adoption (friend of the family) so he could answer questions I needed. I contacted him and asked if he had my information about the name of my birthmother. We came up with the same name linked together. Now she knows she had a boy

and I know she's a nice lady that gave me life. How the world turns and seems to always come full circle. The picture shows 1 million words said through life.

by Joseph Lightsey

What a nice picture of a mother and child embraced in a hug, a very obvious deep bond forged through lots of love and trust. I think a typical person who was raised in a good home and good parents would see this as a very normal picture. Unfortunately, most inmates look at this picture with confusion - trying to affirm that this is how a mother is supposed to treat their son. You see, most of us inmates did not have a loving and trusting relationship with our mother. What we got was a mentally unstable mother who was unfit to be a parent. Instead of stability, they were violent and abusive in nature. Yelling, screaming is what we saw. My mother used to lock me outside the house for hours at a time, in a very rough neighborhood - I was only 5 years old! Once when doing this, I encountered a 13-year-old bully who - for no reason - punched me in my nose 3 times while declaring "I have three things to teach you today!" I ran home hoping to get assistance from mom - only to sit on the porch for an hour before she came out rushing past me. She said she didn't have time to deal with me because she had a date. I watched her leave feeling there was no way I could ever trust this person. This one example is just the tip of the iceberg of the shit I went through - although from hearing the stories from other inmates; my bringing up seems to have not been so bad.



Snapshots by Larry Harwell

In my mother's obituary were two pictures of her. One, a 16-year-old tall redhead East Texas beauty. The second, a 92-year-old well lived visage. Two pictures we are presented with, and had I not known her, I would be left to judge her by those two pictures, and they do not tell her story. If her life was a motion picture, lasting about 92 years old and I watched the whole thing, I may have some understanding, but still limited for I may not know her heart.

Last night, a friend and I were enjoying a meal together and he was complaining about so and so, and what an ego trip they were on. I mentioned that I myself have a difficult time with my own ego and concerning myself with someone else's ego is beyond my capabilities. There was silence at our table for a while.

So, it spurred me to think about the snapshots we take of people and then judge them on the picture we see, however incomplete. Is that honest? Aren't we leaving out the entire movie that has thus far played in their life? We may not be interested in their movie, but does it serve us or them to pass judgement on the small scene we see, which by the way may be clouded by our own bias and limited knowledge?

A Drive Through Dreams and Nightmares by Rafael Quintanilla

The complex way our brains simultaneously process all of our senses into a shared reality with humanity is amazing. Everyday, each of our consciences connect through countless social interactions in this world's grand movie of life. But that's only the surface.

Underneath, there's a world where rules, laws, and logic do not apply. A world that has influenced the direction of many historical events and is constantly affecting the outcome of future ones. Each world is a reflection of the individual experiencing it.

Take these three college teens for example. They live a life of pressure, anxiety and chaos, but at the moment, the outer world is peaceful. Their closeness is obvious yet in their sleeping state, they're lightyears apart.

Each of their minds are drifting through psychedelic murals of their own personality's projections. Each subconscious taking the wheel and driving through a disorder of memories, desires, visions, and ideas, flowing together like dense liquid easing through a cluster of spiral meshed funnels. They're destroying oceans with fire, fantasizing about the unspeakable, morphing into monstrous creatures, splashing through the nuclear core of the blazing sun, zooming at lightspeed through unexplored galaxies, communicating with supernatural beings, and solving the problems of the universe. Nothing making sense yet everything is making perfect sense at the same time. Multiple colors and shapes are irrationally merging and dividing into a superb blend of non-replicable art as their synapses and neurons electrify into an overdrive of rapid eye movement. They flip, spin, and whirl through an eternal span of possibilities as they lose their sense of direction in another dimension of beautiful chaos. They see glowing angels clashing with raging demons, godly heroes at war with deceptive villains, storms of fire battling blizzards of ice, mountains erupting into colossal dragons of lava, planets colliding, hurricanes of stars exploding across the cosmos, universes upon universes rapidly intertwining into a tornado of distorted stars crashing into an web of lightning, illuminating every atom in existence into one blinding light.

It ends with darkness, fading amnesia, and blinking blurred vision as their subconscious hands over the keys along with seeds of life altering ideas.

Convict Chronicles by Leo Cardez

I miss having real friends. Friendships in prison are complicated not only by the physical limitations -- any of us could be moved to

another cell, building, or facility at a moment's notice which can mean never seeing or hearing from someone again. But also, by the lack of trust this place imbues in the soul. God forbid you decide to look up someone's crime -- sometimes the horrible details are difficult to align with the person you know.

Shankster (real prison nickname, but not the real nickname of the person to whom I am referring) and I were cellies for years and had developed a good, healthy friendship. He was funny and generous and eventually I came to trust him explicitly. But when I had my sister deposit some money into his account as repayment for a painting, she chose to look up his conviction details. It was a heinous story which ended with two grisly deaths including a beheaded child. I could never look at him the same. And yet, I'm sure he would feel the same if he chose to look up my crimes.

Prison has helped me learn the difference between lifelong friendships and "situationships." There is something about being put into an extreme or new circumstance e.g., prison, military service, college where we are hurled together with others that can feel like they've become our chosen family and sometimes they do, but more likely they are just our friends during this important phase of our life. It's unfortunate but sometimes as we grow, we outgrow or grow apart from even our bestest friends. It has torn my heart out as I've mourned the death of so many friendships, both from the world and this human warehouse, then I care to remember. My only solace: I always keep the memories.

3 Friends Tie One On by Thomas A. Hightower

As a teen of the 70's, my friends and I tied one on every weekend. It was just part of the times we grew up in.

There were several of us who grew up together in "old Broderick" (a suburb of West Sacramento). We were all part of the working poor; a couple of the fellas were from the middle class section of W. Sacramento. I called them privileged. That is because most of us grew up in the dirt-poor section of town. My home was built in sections added onto a 1930's 1-room cabin, made 100% of used lumber and recycled nails (pulled out of boards and pounded straight again).

For us, a weekend binge drinking was our only escape from our poverty. We were poor, yet we were rich because we had each other. No one judged in my group of friends. It was the peak years of the 1960's love generation. The 60's were only the beginning. It was the 70's that really rocked the world with sex, drugs and Rock & Roll.

We were also blessed with color blindness, and full acceptance of freaks, geeks, and LGBT. It was your bond as friendship that counted.

We watched the race riots of the times side by side with people of color, never understanding why people of color were so marginalized. So we walked shoulder to shoulder with African Americans, a march for equality.

We heard Martin Luther King speak, Caesar Chavez spoke many times locally. All of us worked the tomato machines each harvest season. To me, I was blessed to be raised blind to prejudice by my paternal grandmother. She came off the Oklahoma reservations during the "Great Migration West" of the Dust Bowl 30's. We are light skinned American Indians: ½ of my family is super dark, reddish brown, the rest were tanned white skinned.

The 70's matured the 60's into a permanent part of history. 70's was the glue that put back together a new America from the broken pieces of the 60's riots.

I could write a book on this subject. But the short story is, we cared deeply for our friends. I think more so than the world is today. We are too quick today, in changing friends, on growing indifferent in this "me first" mentality of the 2000-2020.

Treat your friends like family. Treat your family like the gold they are. Grow closer to each other before life imbrutes you.

God bless the 60's and 70's. They are what brought America out of the indifference to the plight of others. God bless our nation, but don't forget your friends of your childhood.



Anthony Romero

Some people wonder and think about the dark world of prison. Really, I see it as the same thing in the free world. I feel sorry for people who aren't in prison but yet live in a mental prison. To me that's scary. I've even known some people who wish that they came to prison. I rather run towards my problems than run away from them. I really believe we all are living the same conditions, those of us who are experiencing a negative world in your current moment. Those are the ones that I'm talking about, those who live in a dark moment at this moment. They're times that this lasts for a few days, for others it could be years or even decades. It can feel like the walls are closing in on you and like there's no light to see which way you're going, like every path you choose is the wrong one. A lot of people just choose a direction and run full throttle only to crash into an immovable wall. Others can't

mentally take it and flip out or break down cause they can't see what's ahead of them. So, they dissolve and collapse where they stood and scream only for their words to echo and fall on deaf ears. You got some who tread slowly and wish for the best, some make it, others lose patience. You could put in much work in the dark only to realize that you're making no advancements or that you're just going in one big circle over and over and over and over again. Things might appear in front of you that aren't even there. Probably out of desperation you imagined it or probably fell on false hope, but just because it looked so good even if you lied to yourself. Other times the darkness will whisper comments and or advice, or at least we feel like we heard this. Sometimes it's not the darkness in front of us, sometimes it's the darkness that's locked in our mind that's playing these tricks on us, just cause we feel we're too weak to control it. Whatever it is, we've all been in that dark caveat at one point or another, and it'll probably happen again because guess what it's something called *life*. Life is full of ups and downs, but if you stop and think of it all, ups and downs are challenges that will strengthen us in the end if you take the time to solve and learn from each one you encounter. Some may advance further, others you overcome. We really got the answers to our own problems, but a lot of us like to be in denial so we'll ask for others' advice about a current predicament. Even if they give us the wrong answers to every question we get, a lot of us accept it as truth. How is it we fail to trust ourselves when no one will look out for you like you will. There are many reasons why we would rather stay in our dark cave. The mind feels the right answers come too easily and it doesn't get any satisfaction, nor any sense of accomplishment to be proud of. So, we go through a long process of trials and errors until we arrive at the obvious answers and feel proud that we made it this far. For others, their friends really hold control over them and their decisions. Only thing I can tell you is that the person you see in the mirror is your greatest ally in life or your worst and deadliest enemy ever known. You possess the strength to win your battles and to eventually win the war within. Whether you complete this quickly or in the long run I can't say because everyone is different and not all situations are the same. Just push steadily and pay attention to how situations change and have patience and hope because you will get to the end of your tunnel one way or another. The sense of that fresh air that you'll feel graze your skin will be the most welcome and that scent will let you know that you're on the right track. Then you're almost there, soon you'll hear things from the outside then you'll see the light. At first it will be real dim, but it'll get brighter. The day I stand at the mouth of my cave, then I'll know that I made it out of this prison.

By Vicki Hicks

The majestic beauty of the forest. There is nothing like the Freedom you feel when you are with the forest. The many animals that have free roam under the cover of the forest canopy. As you hike up, up, and up a little farther you are able to enjoy untouched beauty. A place that man has yet to destroy to build condos or malls. Such a peaceful dwelling. There you will find trees as old as the earth itself they reach their hands to the Heavens as if praising the day. The Sun rises high up in the sky to spill its warmth on the treetops. The forest floor is slick with the mist of the humidity. Now close your eyes and picture yourself

right there. That is where I escape when life gets too hectic around here. Next time I close my eyes and escape to my special quiet place, I hope to see you there. Happy travels!

The World Awaits by Scott Madoulet

I pause at the threshold, looking out into the world. Why do I hesitate? Why am I so afraid? The skull carved into the rock to my left is a warning to all those who would leave this darkness. The rock and the dark make this place confining, but it's comfortable too. It's safe in here with no temptations, no distractions, no one else to complicate things. I've learned to like the dark and the quiet, the hard floor, the hard walls, the hard bunk. Just me and my thoughts, alone with all the others here; we are all alone.

It feels like I'm gazing up at the world from the bottom of a grave. Because here, in the dark, I'm dead to the world. And sadly, I'm okay with it. We are the true walking dead. Forgotten, or seldom remembered, we trudge through our isolated lives in the dark and the rock. An occasional stray beam of light may deliver a letter or a package, momentarily remembered, but soon the soothing darkness settles in, comforts again.

The owners of the rock which cradles me, they have told me it's time to leave. But, I don't want to go! I'm afraid of going into the world. It was so, so hard to get adjusted to the dark and to the rock - the first time - if I fuck up, if I make a mistake ... I don't think I could face it again.

So I pause, one foot on the threshold looking into myself, checking to see if I've earned it, if I'm ready, if I'm worthy to try LIFE again.

By Brandi Belton

Deep in a cave and seeing a man at the entrance would be such a great feeling. I feel trapped in a cave now as we are locked down in our cells not even allowed to take a shower. I'm from a town that has Turner Falls in it and it has caves and what I would not give to have a nice God-fearing man. One that wanted to be a gentleman, that shows respect and kindness to someone with a past so rough as mine. One that overlooks the mistakes to see the person, also the person I want to become. One that takes on someone with kids, that stands by them no matter what. Someone that makes my life better just having around. Someone who's a provider like my dad has been.

Having hope like this seems like such a farfetched dream since my life has turned out like this. I still cannot give up that idea that all girls I hope still have. It will be far too long before I get to see any of the caves and trees and family and friends, I've had my whole life. I just pray that they are having a good time in everything they do. That all their families have all they need and want. I'll be here wishing I was there and would have been more grateful and taken care of everything better.

When Rabbits had No Enemies by Larry Harwell

I love to shit in the woods. There is something wonderful about joining all the beasts and birds of the field in doing something they give little thought to, but I take deep joy in.

There are a few different techniques, and I submit them for your consideration. There is the squat method. Dig a small hole, drop trowel and squat. Squatting is the most natural method practiced for eons by our ancestors and much of the world still today. It can be a tad uncomfortable as you try to maintain your balance. I prefer, if time permits, to find a log or sometimes a rock. Not too large or small. Enough to allow your derriere to hang over the side and deposit right into a hole. This method allows you to relax and tune into your surroundings. Notice the wind traveling through the leaves and the limbs. I have had a chipmunk scold me, birds serenade, and a fox stare in disbelief at my affront. If the weather permits, I like to be totally naked. I have never felt freer than at that moment.

Perhaps it is like a deposit in this boneyard called Earth, a subtle reminder that eventually, I will join my deposits. Oh yes, I love to shit in the woods. -The Traveler

The Man-Made Cave by Jackie E. Moorehead

My friend James and I walked up to the man-made cave, AKA an entrance to an abandoned coal mine, that was gouged into the side of a mountain, in southern West Virginia. The coal mine had been abandoned for over 30 years, but there was cool air flowing out of its interior. The mine was a drift mouth coal seam mine.

James and I both had heavy duty flashlights as we entered the mine, and descended down the slight grade passageway, next to the rusty framework of the old conveyor-belt line, into the bowels of the Earth. We walked for about an eighth of a mile and entered a large room that contained a tippie (an apparatus of emptying nine's coal cars into a large steel hopper that slowly fed the coal onto the conveyor belt line below). The v-shaped hopper was about fifteen feet high, by ten feet wide and thirty feet across the top. On each end there were mine tunnels. The one tunnel had light blue alkaline mine water across it, twelve foot wide abreast, that gradually ascended up the sides of its tunnel, as it went further back into the mountain. But the other tunnel, on the opposite end of the hopper was dry, and the cool flowing air flowed out of it.

There was a steel ladder welded on both ends of the hopper. So we climbed up the ladder, and entered the dry floored tunnel. As we progressed further into the tunnel, we saw pure white mushrooms, attached to some of the wooden support posts, and wooden cross beams that supported the tunnel's ribs and ceiling.

Some sections of the tunnel we were walking in had water dripping from the ceiling and trickling down its ribs, which created a small steam of water that flowed down the center of the tunnel's floor, in the direction we were walking. There were tunnels that branched off the tunnel we were in that had the light blue alkaline

water across their twelve feet wide that also gradually ascended up their ribs as they went further back into the mountain.

The light blue alkaline water is poisonous and kills the fish and their habitats of the streams and rivers it seeps into. When we stopped to rest and fell silent, the only sounds we could hear was our own breathing, and our hearts beating in our ears, and the soft to loud ker-plunk of pieces of sandstone, or slate dropping into the water in the branch tunnels or the thump as the pieces of slate or sandstone fell on the dry floor of the tunnels.

We could also hear the faint groans of the mountain as it shifted under the enormous weight of billions of stone and earth bearing down on the honeycomb coal beneath, and the even fainter echoing, through the stone of the mountain, as charges of high explosive exploded in the far off strip mines or deep mine when we turned our flashlights off and the darkness encompassed us, we could briefly see the faint outline of each other's aura, and then we were in a complete and total darkness.

James and I had walked for what seemed to be two miles and we could see the sunlight at the end of the tunnel's other exit.

About six months later we approached the same coalmine with the purpose of re-exploring it. But when we arrived at its adit, we discovered the adit [*a horizontal passage leading into a mine for the purposes of access or drainage*] was blocked by a solid wall of sandstone, the mine had caved in. To this day, (57 years later) I firmly believe that our guardian angels walked through that coal mine with us.

My friend James was killed serving in the United States Marine Corps, in North Vietnam in 1972, nine years after we had explored the above abandoned coal mine.

Getting Back to our Roots by Shawn Miller

It's very important to understand ourselves and our ancestors. Not just looking within but connecting with our ancestors. By doing what they did to understand life. One day I'll be able to do this again when I go home. What better way to get connected with nature and our past ancestors. By doing, like I said, to experience what they did, to experience them and the divine. So, let's get out and enjoy nature, our past, ancestors and the Divine. Let's get back to our roots.



by Tamilyn Robertson

Looks as if she has just got off of work and is ready to relax, but first she must endure the dreaded train ride to get to her destination. The way she stands and the flats on her feet makes it look as though a massage is in order. As she leans against the wall, she is so deep in thought that the fact that the train is approaching is not of any importance. From her attire, I would think that she is probably a waitress. And then, her hand in her pocket indicates that there is a chill in the air, but she can only warm one hand since she must secure her purse in the other. It is dark out and she doesn't want to look like a target. The expression on her face is of exhaustion from a stressful day. And she is posed on the wall to ensure no one will sneak up on her.

When I observe the picture, I think of when I used to take the train downtown and how I would be on the train platform right now.

by Carita Corpuz

If you told me last year, last month, or even yesterday that I would be in the dilemma I am in now, I would have laughed in your face. Not twenty-four hours later and my entire life as I knew it changed. I no longer have a job or a home to make me feel safe and secure. There is not one person whom I can trust or turn to.

It's like Deja vu. Seems I'm forever running from him. When he walked into the restaurant where I wait tables the breath left my body and I stood trembling. I had to get away before he spotted me. Please, I silently prayed, make me invisible. Fortunately, my self-preservation kicked me out of my fearful stupor. I was able to escape undetected.

For years I allowed myself to stay in that awful relationship. The physical abuse was bad enough, but the mental and emotional abuse kept me broken. I had to get away. How I would do that was anybody's guess. I had no friends, no family, no outside support. He would not allow it. He said he loved me. That his love alone was enough for me. Did love equal the bruises that covered my legs, arm, and chest? Or the scars which permeated my heart and very soul? Oh, he never hit where the public eye could verify his malicious acts, his insanity, no! But beat me he did.

My friends, the few I had before I hooked up with the abuser, tried to warn me away from him. However, the appeal of someone finally loving me overrode all else. When he told me he loved me, it was like warm honey soothing my empty soul. Oh, how long I longed to be loved and to love in return, and he assured me he loved me. I grew to associate the beatings as measuring the intensity of his love for me. The more he beat me, the greater the love. I had to be hospitalized after being found unconscious with barely a heartbeat. He almost loved me to death.

When I woke up in the hospital, I hardly recognized myself. I knew I had to make a choice... a lifesaving decision. Either save myself or yield to death. As I healed physically, my resolve to make the great escape grew stronger. By the end of my twenty-one day stay at Harborview Medical Center, I knew I wouldn't

return home. On a wing and many prayers, I disappeared yet again, leaving behind the distant and troubled memories.

Hundreds of miles away, living in shelters and reacquainting myself with the less fortunate surrounding me, I realized this new life was much preferable to the one I escaped. Formerly, I was fortunate to have a job and roof over my head. However, I was constantly embarrassed by the physical scars I bore, tired of the regular visits to the emergency room where the staff and I knew each other by name and feeling utterly alone and disconnected from the rest of the world. That could not be counted as living... just surviving. Did I really want to survive?

I escaped. I was able to remove myself from the abusive situation I found myself in. I found gainful employment at a local diner. My bruises faded, my physical wounds healed, but my spirit was broken. I was disengaged from reality, every move was robotic, unemotional, like I was standing outside of myself watching, waiting. Gradually, I grew into myself and began to feel a semblance of peace. It felt strange to wake up without the pain and anguish I once experienced. Yet fear hovered and certainly was constant.

He had to come... he had to find me. Why, I asked the universe? Why? Had I not suffered enough? What did I do to deserve to be treated as less than human?

Now what? Where do I go from here? I find myself utterly alone hiding behind the wall at the train station contemplating my life and where I should go from here. Under the train or on the train?

Making It Right by Jay B. Van Story

Amber was forty-one years old, with weary hazel eyes. Her straight black hair cascaded down past her shoulders. As she stood on the well-lit subway platform, the harsh light was interrupted only by intermittent flashes from the malfunctioning fluorescent tube above her.

She leaned up against one of the thick, tiled pillars, taking comfort in its semi-permanence and ability to hide her from anyone approaching from the other side. Alone with her thoughts on the deserted platform, she contemplated her serious dilemma.

Earlier that day, she received a call from the director of an innocence project. Out of fear, she hung up as soon as she realized what the call was about.

More than three decades prior, Amber had testified in court, at age ten, that an older male cousin had sexually assaulted her. Trouble is, it never happened, and an innocent man was wrongly convicted as a result. She had been coached and coerced by overzealous officials into falsely accusing him.

Amber felt terrible about it. For decades, she had been deeply burdened by intense guilt and shame. She had always wanted to help correct this injustice, but she was deathly afraid of what might happen to her if she came forward with the truth. And then there was the prospect of being thoroughly embarrassed and

humiliated. She thought it might be easier to try and forget about it and move on.

But she couldn't forget it. She hadn't been able to sleep at night, knowing that an innocent man- her own cousin- was in prison for something he didn't do.

She knew she had a very important, hugely consequential decision to make. Standing on that platform, she finally realized she wasn't going to be able to get on with her life until she made things right. Shaking and in tears, she lifted her iPhone from her purse and called the innocence project. The subway ride home would have to wait a little longer.

The Train Station of Life by Ethan Macks

She's waiting. Standing on the train platform in the dark. Emotions swirl through her mind. Anxiety out of control. Her heart is pounding in her chest. She can feel the beating, bumping right into her ribcage. Dizziness begins to overtake her. A warmth starting at her lower back creeps up into her neck and her head tingles as her adrenaline surges. Every hair on her head tingles. She still shivers even though it is not cold outside. Why does she fear the coming train?

The train represents her future, and her future is full of worry. She can't stop the train from arriving, just like she can't stop tomorrow from coming. The trip she is about to take is just the beginning of her journey. Is she really running from the past or just sprinting toward the future?

A new start in life. Everybody deserves a second chance. Even though you cannot change the past, you can still change the outlook. What is a bad experience if not an opportunity to learn? The woman in the picture is by herself because we are all independently learning at our own pace. We are all running our own race. It's not about who finishes first but is really about how you get there. See, this girl you see in the picture is me. It's all of us. It's time to embrace the journey. Do not hide from the train. Welcome the train. Welcome your future.



The Journey By Vinicio Garcia

One of my electives in college at St. Edwards University in Austin, Texas was hiking. It was a one-hour credit (I believe) in the fall of 1972. We would walk between 12-15 miles through Austin. It was beautiful back then. For a city of 235,000 it was countrified. Even in the middle of the city, spring fields of bluebonnets sprung up everywhere, beautiful large oak trees everywhere.

On this particular occasion we were driving to a location several miles from Austin, and we were to walk to Lake Bastrop from the drop off point where we would subsequently be picked up. The walk was nothing out of the ordinary. It was fall and we had gone out very early. The sun was just clearing the tree line when the sign said, "Lake Bastrop One Mile." It was still cool. As we made the right-hand turn beginning about 100 yards from the sign, the ground was an unusual orange color. It is like that all the way to the lakeshore. To the left and right, it was a carpet of orange. I did not recognize the foliage; the color was unusual. It was Saturday morning and there was no wind. But I seem to notice motion in this mass of orange ground cover. From the distance it looks as if gusts of wind are moving the mass in an undulating manner. This was my freshman year. When we get close enough to discern, I see it is a monarch butterfly, a mile of butterflies. The sun was hitting the butterflies to the right of the small two-lane road. They were awake and they were just starting to move their wings. It was an undulating wave broken up by groups beating their wings more energetically. I will never forget the scene: the left edge of the tree line being penetrated by the sun's rays through that light haze, the wings beating, the journey through the field of life.

By Jacob Keiter

I enter this forest in the early morning to meditate. The canopy protects me from any unwelcome visitors. The rhythmic croaks of my amphibian friends are hoarse yet soothing. The sharp chirps of the crickets slowly fade as the moon begins to escape the sky. The log I sit on every morning is deteriorating but still able to support my body comfortably. The illusion of time ticks on as the sun captures the sky.

With the sun lingering overhead, the breeze transitions from chilly to delightful. The rabbits hop out of their dens to scavenge for their next meal. The beautiful creation that mother nature has manifested is finally visible and magnificent. I look above me and the beams of sunlight pierce through the heavy trees and I realize something.

No matter how deep in the woods you travel, how many wrong turns you take, or the series of unfortunate events that are currently taking place in your life, there's always a glimmer of hope. Each ray of sunlight displays a new path to happiness and success. Each ray of sunlight shows that your darkest place always has a brighter side. The sun always rises.

I enter this forest in the early morning to meditate. To remember there's always a bright future ahead of me.

"Ghost of the Woods" by Jackie E. Moorehead

The common gray squirrel of the eastern United States is also regionally known as the ghost of the woods, and/or a shadow tail, because of its natural ability of being heard barking with a loud chattering sound, that is very similar to an over excited Donald Duck. It is mostly unseen by predators except for a slight twitching of its bushy tail, while lying flat on a high tree branch or against a tree's trunk.

There are a variety of squirrels, such as: red squirrels, or ground squirrels, or chipmunks; fox squirrels and flying squirrels.

Squirrels are skittish, nimble critters, that jump and scamper from limb to limb and branch to branch in the nut bearing treetops foraging for: acorns, beechnuts, buckeyes, hazelnuts, or hickory nuts, and other nuts, and berries to eat, and store in cache for later consumption.

One late Indian summer evening I was sitting on a large thick pile of autumn leaves, with my back resting against the trunk of a large red oak tree. With my shotgun's butt end lying in my lap, and the end of its barrel lying in the vee of my boots. I was watching my potential gray squirrel supper gnawing on some hickory nut to get at the sweet nut meat enclosed in its hard outer shell, about thirty yards down the mountain.

One of the squirrels suddenly came running down the side of the scaly bark hickory tree, to its lower trunk. It jumped down on the leaf covered forest floor and ran straight up the mountain side toward me. It stopped at the toe of my boots and sniffed the end of my gun barrel. It jumped upon the toe of my boots, ran up my legs, climbed up the front of my heavy red wool hunting coat, up over my head, up the side of the large red oak tree, and disappeared into bright fall foliage, far above my head.

I stood up, removed the shell from the breech of my shotgun, put the shell in my hunting coat pocket and started for home. I have not had the urge to hunt any kind of wildlife since, and especially not the ghost of the woods. It has been more than fifty years since the common gray squirrel taught me a lesson I'll never forget!



Growing up as the middle child, I always had someone to annoy. My older sister was more like a mother and my younger sister was like a baby doll to me. When my mom was not around, I always had my sister to look after me. She was not only my sister and mother figure, but my friend. I could ask her anything and she would answer. I could tell her anything and she would listen and give me good advice. I looked up to my sister. I covered up for my sister and her friends when they snuck out. They took care of me always. I was never truly close to my baby sister because she is so much younger. One day my sister got married and I felt like I lost my friend. When we moved to Florida, I visited my sister and her husband for the summer, and it was just not the same. She divorced husband number one and moved to Florida only to meet husband number two, whom I dated briefly prior to my own marriage. She divorced him after having an affair with husband number three. After being with him for about eleven years, she got bored and found a guy half her age— then came the third divorce. Through all of the turmoil, my sister and I remained very close. I got arrested and my sister was right there to support me both physically and emotionally. I trusted my sister to take care of my family until I got home. Somewhere along the way I guess my husband needed taking care of as well because they now live together as partners, and I am facing a divorce after 28 years of marriage. All I can do now is forgive them both and move on. It makes it very difficult to trust anyone when you cannot trust either of your closest friends.

Moral of the story is to beg your parents for an older brother instead of a sister. At least then my husband would not have destroyed both my families.

The Meeting by D.J. Forbes

"Hey, Mom," I said, answering the front door. "How was your trip?"

I stepped forward, gave her a quick hug and kiss, then took her suitcase and escorted her into my apartment. I eyed her conservative outfit, a gray pantsuit with matching shoes that I knew matched her conservative outlook on life. I, on the other hand, had on dark jacket and matching slacks, not because it matched my outlook on life, but for a more practical reason: to hide the sweat stains my nerves were producing.

"Oh, the drive down was nice," she told me as I led her down the hallway and into the living room. "There wasn't much traffic at all. Of course, it wouldn't have mattered if there was. I'm just so excited to finally meet this Jack of yours."

Movement from the couch drew my mom's attention. "Oh, you have company," she said, noticing Jaclyn sitting there.

Jaclyn in her pressed white button-down blouse, stood and approached my mom, hand extended in greeting. "Pleased to meet you, Mrs. Thompson. Sue has told me so much about you."

My mom's impeccable manners kicked in, though not quick enough for me to miss the momentary quizzical look that passed over her face. "She has?" Mom said, taking Jaclyn's hand and shaking it. "Well then you have me at a disadvantage. All Susan ever talks to me about is her boyfriend Jack and how great he is. It's impossible to get her to talk about much of anything else."

Jaclyn graced me with a knowing look, a sly twinkle in her eye.

I set the suitcase down and walked over to where they stood. "Won't you have a seat, Mom," I said, gesturing to the chair kitty-corner to the couch. Jaclyn sat back down on the couch.

Sitting in the chair, Mom asked, "So when is Jack getting here?"

The moment of truth had finally arrived. "Jac is already here, Mom." I walked over and sat down, right next to Jaclyn, placing my left arm around her.

My heart was beating so fast I was afraid it was about to burst out of my chest as I watched my mom's expressions. First there was confusion. Confusion turned into realization, which then morphed into understanding. Her features went neutral as I held my breath. My heart dropped as I watched her stand up and straighten her clothes like she does when she is about to leave.

She looked at Jaclyn, and then to me as if she was trying to figure out what to say. I was on the verge of tears when my Mom finally moved. She stepped forward and extended her hand to Jaclyn. "Let's try this again," she said. "It is nice to finally meet the... person who makes my daughter so happy."

Jaclyn stood, but instead of shaking the extended hand, pulled my mom into a hug. "She makes me just as happy," Jaclyn told her. "Let me get my jacket and we'll go to dinner."

After Jaclyn left the room, my mom turned to me and said, "There's one thing I really don't get, Susan."

"What? Why was I scared to tell you?"

"No, I get that. I just don't get how the sex works."

Light travels faster than sound. This is why some people appear bright until you hear them speak. --Alan Dundes

Remember, today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday.-Dale Carnegie

The surest sign that intelligent life exists elsewhere in the universe is that it has never tried to contact us.-Bill Waterson

People who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do.-Isaac Asimov

The road to success is always under construction.-Lily Tomlin

What the world needs is more geniuses with humility; there are so few of us left.-Oscar Levant

Upcoming Picture Themes



Due 10/1/21



Due 11/1/21



Due 12/1/21



Due 1/1/22



Due 2/1/22



Due 3/1/22

“In the middle of a difficulty lies opportunity.”
– Albert Einstein

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”
– Confucius



Due 4/1/22

Final Notes-So much to say and so little space to do it in. It does seem crazy in this electronic world that we are not able to send you this newsletter to a tablet. Then we could include so much more and there would be no printing and postage costs and it could have color! It seems inevitable that this is the next big step needed by prison officials. If you have expertise in using the prison mail electronic system, send us suggestions. Please know there are many different for profit entities, and different correctional facilities use different companies. I need a universal policy to make this work.

CORONA virus seems to be back among the unvaccinated and spreading to the vaccinated. It is hard to predict what the next year will look like at the Alternatives Library. Just a few weeks ago I thought the library would reopen and volunteers would once again be plentiful. In my mind I saw them all coming back to the library ready to read and respond to your art, poetry, and journals. I still hope for that outcome, but if things go differently, we will be prepared to display more of your work online and we will recruit volunteers to write to you through these internet postings. The pandemic has changed much of the way people interact and do business. It will be interesting to see all the changes to daily life. I already know many people who are not planning to go back to their office and will instead work from home. Working at a library does not give me that option. While I do like the lifestyle working from home provides, I value the library and the services it provides. There are very few free public spaces in the modern world. Mostly you can go to stores but without money they turn into giant displays of what you can't have. I remember one time standing in front of the Whole Foods supermarket located in the Bowery in NYC. The Bowery was a transition neighborhood. I had lived there in the 70's and it was full of drunks and drug users everywhere. People were at their lowest, laying about drunk or staggering around on drugs. A few years later the neighborhood started gentrifying but there were still many of the old-time drunks stumbling around, dirt poor. They opened this fancy food supermarket, and the windows were full of the most delicious, cooked foods you could imagine. Super fancy, super high class, and I could see the disconnect that scene created in the staggering hungry poor people wandering the streets. Much of modern life can be like that. We wander through TV shows and internet postings seeing luxury and ease as we navigate the twists and turns of our own lives. It creates a false narrative of what life should look like. I like that the library is open to all no

matter their situation and the services we provide don't change according to one's financial situation. Libraries are an accomplishment that I am proud humans created. Many folks ask about copyrighting their work. We do not do anything like that. Our service is to help you express yourself creatively. We do not try to profit from your work. We don't have the time or resources to do that. Occasionally someone might offer to buy a piece of artwork and we tell them if they make a donation to PE they can choose a piece of art. I have not done much fundraising during the pandemic and our financial reserves at PE are running down. We do need to figure out ways to gather funds. In the past I have been able to produce and mail this newsletter for as little as 50 cents per newsletter, and I can see this issue is going to cost over \$1.00 per issue. It still seems like a deal except when I multiply by 3500 copies. Since the pandemic prices for goods and services has been climbing. I have the funds for the next 6 months of programming and will keep you informed of our financial status. If you are in a position to send funds to keep this project going, make checks out to CTA/PE. I know the majority of you struggle just to have hygiene products, so I don't want you to feel additional pressure, but I figure you want to know what's happening as this project is for you.

We are a small organization, and while we do a lot, we are still very limited. If you read the newsletter, you will see what we have to offer. It is okay to ask for something other than what we say we can do, but I would not hold high expectations of it being done. While I certainly would like to offer more services, it is not practical. Being a volunteer-based organization, please know that volunteers come and go. Mostly they do extraordinary work serving your needs, but they can also disappear, and I can lose track of them. When you send materials to us, I advise you send a copy of work without the expectation that it will be returned. I have had artwork and writings I tried to return mail to prisoners rejected, and I have also had volunteers misplace writings. I don't want you to suffer more than you already do, so be careful with any original work that you cannot afford to lose. These programs are geared to giving you an outlet to explore and develop your innate creativity. We do not have the resources to get you published or sell your art and writing. But we do celebrate your



Art by Jesse Osmun

being a member of PE, and we look forward to reading and viewing all the art and writing you share with us. We in turn share it with the free world community. It is hard to know how all this will effect change, but I am confident it will help improve the quality of all our lives.

Write on, Gary

Registration Sheet – Please check the box of each program in which you wish to participate. Carefully read the requirements of each program before signing up. Send back this sheet or write out the programs you want in a letter and send it back to us. We hope to hear from you by mid-October as that is when we will begin printing and mailing these programs

☐ **Expedited Book Mailings** – Check with the administration of your facility to be sure you are allowed to participate. If yes, please send a check for \$4.00 or some other means that is allowed at your prison to cover postage. Books are free, but the mailing cost is not. List types of books you want, and we will make the best match with our existing collection of books. Make sure you know the rules of your institution, and that you are allowed to receive books from our library-based program, Please fill in this if you order expedited books

_____ Number of books allowed
_____ Soft cover only
_____ Hardcover and soft covered both allowed

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

☐ **Poetry Project** – Please send me the next Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology Vol. 25. I understand that to receive the anthology I am required to submit a poem for consideration in the anthology. Once we finish collecting for Vol 25 all entries automatically are entered for Vol 26

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

☐ **Chess Club** – Yes, I want to receive a packet on how to improve my chess game.

☐ **Meditation Project**- Yes, I want to join Tara for meditation practices and spiritual musings

☐ **Travel and Leisure**- come take a trip around the US without leaving home. Check out some of America's finest destinations and begin making plans for all you will go see when you can finally move about without constraint

☐ **Astronomy**-we are stardust. Come join Kate as we explore the mysteries of the universe. It doesn't get bigger than this

☐ **Health and Fitness** – Here's some tips on how to take care of your body. A sound mind can lead to a sound body. Come back to balance as you learn to stretch your body and mind!

☐ **Role Playing Games [RPG]**- round 2 of our RPG experiment is available to anyone who cares to join. There are worlds out there to create, and you are invited to join Jameson in exploring the internal worlds that RPG lovers inhabit. Come

along for the adventure and enjoy all the characters you meet along the way.

☐ **Design and Creativity**- Anna is offering a principles of design packet that will help you develop your creative side. This is an ambitious project, but after seeing the comprehensive packet Anna designed for learning the fundamentals of computer science, I am confident that she will deliver a packet equal to her intent. If you feel stuck by your current circumstances perhaps this lesson will help.

☐ **Play Writing**- Learn a new way to tell stories as you learn the steps to writing a one act play. This will be an excellent chance to practice writing dialogue, which is a skill that can carry over into any future writing projects you embark on.

You do not need to sign up for the Theme and Picture Writing programs. Just send in your submission. By simply sending us any mail we automatically sign you up for our next newsletter, in Winter 22.

Prisoner Express Permissions Form

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

☐ that I have sent to Prisoner Express in the past

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

Signature: _____

ADDRESS and ID #

"When I was 5 years old, my mother always told me that happiness was the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down 'happy'. They told me I didn't understand the assignment, and I told them they didn't understand life."

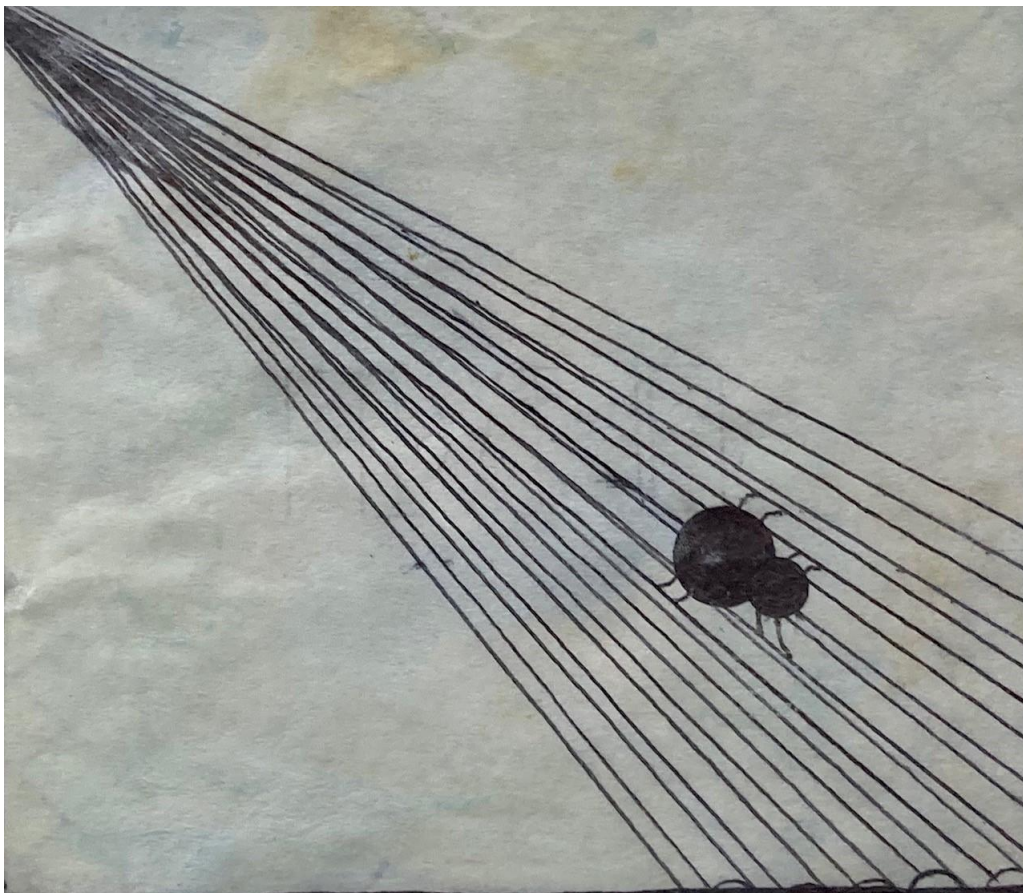
– John Lennon

Prisoner Express Newsletter Summer 2021

Prisoner Express promotes rehabilitation by providing information, education, and opportunities for creative self-expression to incarcerated individuals throughout the United States.

Subscriptions are free to prisoners.

Prisoner Express is funded by the Durland Alternatives Library, a project partner of the Center for Transformative Action. Additional support comes from the Cornell Public Service Center and the Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives at Cornell University



Art by Leroy Sodorff

