

Prisoner Express News

Winter 2017

Greetings to all. Whether you are a long-time member of PE or this is your first newsletter, I welcome you to this project, and look forward to your participation, as well as your feedback on how we can improve on what we are doing. Our primary goal is to provide a public forum of opportunities for self-improvement and creative expression through the programs we facilitate. In each semi-annual newsletter, we include a listing of projects offered in the upcoming program cycle. Some projects are ongoing, while others are one-time events; and occasionally, projects reemerge after hibernating awhile. Such projects are usually revived by the energy new volunteers bring to PE, or because you, the recipients, inform us about how useful or meaningful it had been.

For those of you receiving this newsletter for the first time, let me explain a few things. If you have found us through some resource guide, it is possible that we no longer offer the services listed. As a rapidly growing program, PE is constantly evolving and changing to better fit the needs of our members. Another important thing to note for all participants is that if you wish to remain an active member, you must write us at least once since the mailing of the last newsletter. This current newsletter, what you are reading now, has been mailed to anyone who wrote us since Aug 2016, since that is when we mailed out the Summer 16 newsletter. This also means that each registration form (at the back of this newsletter) is only valid for that particular cycle. In this newsletter, we will update you on the programs from the last cycle, and list and describe the projects of this upcoming cycle. You will also find creative writing and art recently submitted by some of our active participants.

Please understand that we receive a lot of mail and that there are only a few of us here, so we can get backlogged in responding to letters and mailing out some of our programs. Many of our employees and volunteers are students who leave for breaks during the year, so that periodically slows us down. It is seldom that we are able to write individualized letters back to those who write asking for information on our project, or other special requests. It is not that we don't want to help or that we don't sympathize with your situation, but rather we just don't have the funds or people power to be able to respond to most individuals. What we *can* do is create low cost programming to provide you with stimulating and thought provoking materials

that can help you attain skills and exercise the parts of your mind that go unused in your daily routine. By sending out our newsletters and other program packets by bulk mail, we are able to save thousands of dollars. For example, this newsletter will be sent to 4000 people and will cost around 19 cents per unit, bringing the total cost to about \$800 total. If we used regular first class mail, we'd have to pay about \$1.20 per unit. The sole cost of mailing one edition of our newsletter would come out to \$4800. We'd be out of business quickly as I must raise all the money for this project. We are doing everything we can to keep this program going and growing so please understand when you do not hear back from us, even when you mark your envelope as urgent.

My name is Gary, and I began PE about 13 years ago after receiving a compelling letter from Danny in Texas, letting me know how much a good book means to someone in prison. Danny's writing inspired me to begin this project and today, much of what I read from all of you inspires me to keep it going. Just as your words have impacted me and many of the volunteers here, PE offers a venue for you to share your thoughts with other incarcerated men and women, and touch the hearts of folks in the free world.

For those of you who have been with us for a while, you may remember that in Aug 2015, I smashed and broke my hip while skateboarding. In hindsight, at the age of 63, I had no business in trying out my son's new mini skateboard. I had no idea how unstable they are. Well, just 7 weeks ago, I had a second surgery to replace my hip, so I am now getting back to work, which had been on hold for the time being. Several of you have been asking about your book orders. Processing typically takes 2 to 3 months when things are working well, but due to both my leave and student breaks, we are facing delays.

If a few months wait for your order is too much, I certainly understand and encourage you to explore other ways to get reading material. I hope that by March, we will begin to work through all the backlog. The good news is that though I am still experiencing some pain and limited mobility, I feel stronger and more agile each day since the surgery.

For those of you who are new to PE, this next section may be a little less interesting, but I would like to provide an update about the programs from the last cycle and inform participants about what we are doing with your responses to those projects.

Fall 16 Program Update

Song Writing:

I just sent a big batch of responses to Kathy Z. in Europe. She is excited to read through your submissions. I am not sure if she will respond individually or send a group mailing to all who wrote, but if you have yet to submit your lyrics or questions for Kathy, we are accepting responses until April 1st. She is a talented musician and songwriter and I am looking forward to her song creation using your submissions. Below is a note from Kathy to you as well as a song lyric she shared with me after I told her how difficult it was for me to express my thoughts to you all about the election of D. Trump as president.

Hi Everybody! Just checking in to remind you that there are still a few weeks left to send in any song lyrics. Even if they are just works in progress or you want some feedback, please feel free to send them in. Thank You to everybody who has already sent letters with song lyrics included. Gary has forwarded them to me here in the Netherlands but they have not yet arrived. I am looking forward to receiving your work and your words. For those of you who weren't able to participate or would like a few follow up challenges, we are considering a part two for the songwriting course which will be offered with the Summer 17 newsletter. I feel there are big changes sweeping the planet at the moment and the energies are chaotic, confused, like gigantic scales trying to balance but swinging heavily back and forth. Every thought, every word has power and value....use your words and practice conscious thinking! You are a valuable piece of the puzzle and you have an impact. Which way do we want these scales to swing? Take good care of yourselves in the meantime.....as well as you can with the resources that you have. All the best! Kathy Z.

Flowers, by Kathy Ziegler:

"Words, like birds, gather at the edge of things
Ready to attack or sing, open up their beautiful wings
Feathers fly, filling up my open mouth
weighting down the way to shout
I only want to get them out
What will happen when we don't speak?
What will happen when we can't write?
What will happen when we don't know that words have the
power to grow
like flowers?
Arrows fly, nestle in between the ribs
Careful what you wish for, kid

*If you said it then you already did
children holding guns in the age of the frozen up tongues
human stories must be sung, like before
the silence of a thumbing war
What will happen when we don't speak?
What will happen when we can't write?
What will happen when we don't know words have the power
to grow
like flowers?"*

[Editor's note: Kathy has emailed to say your letters have arrived and she is reading them]

Chemistry of Climate Change:

I was pleasantly surprised at how much fan mail Andrea received for her Chemistry of Climate Change. I read the packet and was impressed at how much information she shared about chemistry, and how skilled she was at making it comprehensible. She is a science writer by trade and her packet certainly showcased her skills. This packet and the science journal "Plasmodesmata" we created last cycle have shown us how much interest you all have in science education, so we have some interesting science offerings for this cycle. FYI, several of you thought page 23 was missing from your packet but there was no page 23. It ended with the periodic table. Below is Andrea's update to all of you who are participating in this lesson.

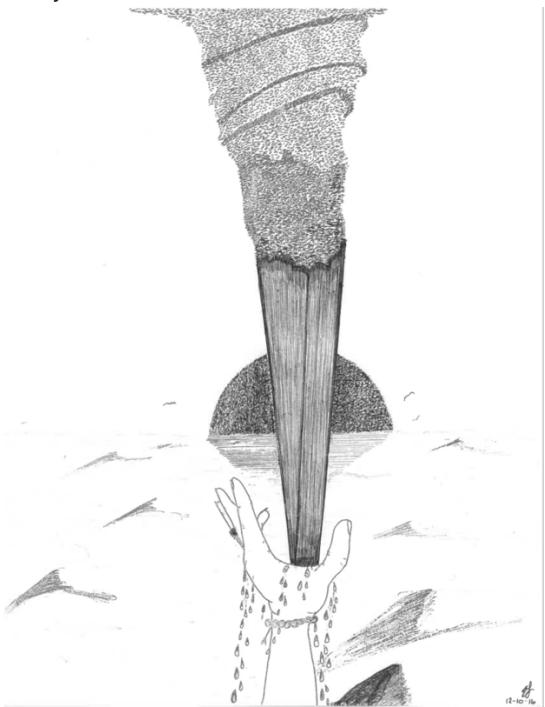
To the participants of The Chemistry of Climate Change:

I've enjoyed reading the letters and essays that have arrived so far, and in another month or so I plan to send a response. Next fall, I will be offering another science course. In the meantime, Gary tells me that you have some exciting science classes to choose from this spring.

I'll briefly describe what I've been up to the past couple of months. On January 21, I attended the Women's March in Washington, DC. It was an amazing experience. An estimated 440,000 people attended—so many that we couldn't march. Despite the crowds, it was positive and peaceful. I've heard that there wasn't a single arrest. Marchers advocated many causes, including prison reform.

For work, I am now writing interactive science lessons for grades 3-5. These are online lessons where students can drag items into a table, click on hotspots and things like that. I don't have to do the programming but I do need to think about how the interactivity will work. I've written content on all kinds of topics, including chemistry, space, geology, and weather. It is a lot of fun and I learn something new every day. My dog,

Levi, keeps me company while I work and walks with me when I need a break. The ground is covered with snow here, and it is beautiful. I know that most of you are deprived of nature in prison and I feel blessed to have the pleasure of experiencing it every day. I wish you all the best and look forward to working with you in the future.



Art by Eric Langley

Art:

Treacy and Danielle collaborated on an art program last cycle and they plan to do it again. Treacy wrote about figurative sculpture and what it means to be artistic, while Danielle focused on surrealistic art and tips for drawing. **Treacy and Danielle hope to curate a show of your art on the Cornell campus this spring. If you wish to be considered for the show, please send some art or craft work we could display. Please send any artwork for the show no later than March 21.** The show is both great for showing your creativity and skills to the folks on campus, and is also a way for PE to share information about our programs to the community. If we use your art, I will take a picture of it to send to you. This is not about us selling your artwork. We are not able to represent you or be your agents in selling your work. We do love curating shows displaying your art and helping folks in the free world see the humanity in you all as artists, rather than as statistics and faceless numbers. We do offer a few small art scholarships to help in the purchase of art supplies to some of the contributors to the art show. It's not much but it can help buy some art supplies.

Telling Your Story:

Michelle and Clara created the Grammar/Telling your story packet. This was mailed to over 900 participants. We welcome your responses. Michelle is planning to read them all and create a small booklet containing some of the autobiographical stories many of you submitted. Clara's grammar section was top notch, so I encourage everyone to read it through a few times and practice the skills she has imparted. Below is Michelle's update on the project.

Hi everyone!

Telling Your Story is a new writing program comprised of various prompts representing five life-time periods: childhood, teen years, adulthood, before incarceration, and incarceration. These periods are not clearly defined (i.e. when does your adulthood begin?), but nonetheless, I plan to produce an anthology of selected essays that highlight your various perspectives.

Clara and I sent out a packet focusing on grammar and presenting Telling Your Story prompts. Many essays have arrived, and many of you made me smile, laugh, and cry—with happiness! Prisoner Express is about building relations, and to me, a healthy relationship is one in which both people support each other's growth. I cannot thank you all enough for supporting me and making me feel useful and helpful. You all give me hope, and I hope that I, too, give you all hope. Your essays demonstrate critical self-reflection, a necessary skill for communication and personal development. Keep up the great work and remember that here at PE, you're heard and welcome.

As a note, the deadline for your responses has passed on January 20th, but if you are still interested in contributing, feel free to write to us. Staff and volunteers are still processing and reading submissions, and we plan to complete the anthology in April. As an anthology, we only select a few submissions per prompt. Making those decisions will be difficult because we read every essay, and so even if you don't see your work in the final compilation, know that your work contributed to this program. Also, writing about these prompts still offers you the opportunity to be self-critical, self-reflective, and engaged.

Stay excited about the coming publication!

Clara's note: I am still in shock by the number of you who signed up to receive Michelle's and my packet. Your vigor for knowledge has inspired me to strive for more in my own life, so I thank you all. I am still in the process of responding to some of your letters (ATTN:GRAM to reach me!), but I hope the grammar section was comprehensible and interesting!

Exploring the Ocean:

Laura created a packet about the ocean which you should have received in late January if you were on the mailing list. The ocean is such a large and fascinating subject, and Laura's packet offers an introduction to it.

Chess:

David became our new chess master last cycle and created his first packet for all of you. **What makes this so exciting is that David is the first incarcerated individual to take on a leadership role in creating distance learning material for Prisoner Express.** I don't expect him to be the last. One good idea I received was that we gather info from some of the well-educated paralegals among you to create a study guide on appeals or other legal issues that most folks on the outside know little about. Perhaps in the next newsletter we will have more to offer on that subject. It is a powerful statement when the creation of our programs originates from behind the walls. This is another way to highlight the humanity and worthiness of those of you who feel forgotten. So, if you have an idea for a project you would like to lead, let me know. We can find volunteers to help type up any content you generate. Warning, please do not send lots of your writing and call it a course and expect us to type it. All our courses are approved before they are written, so feel free to share ideas and I will get back to you regarding developing your idea.

Buddhist Meditation:

In the packet for the last cycle, Tara included a PO Box where you can write her directly with your responses to her packet. I was moved when I read her last offering and expect many of you to have also seen the beauty in what she shared. I still remember the title of the Bo Lozoff book, "We Are all Doing Time". There is a lot of meaning in that title. Whether we are incarcerated or not, daily life inevitably brings about some struggles and suffering, and it takes a practice of mindfulness to help us move through those times. Tara is offering a new study packet in this cycle and you can sign up for it and the other new projects offered this cycle

All the packets mentioned above are posted on our prisoner express website. If you didn't get them because you are new to the program or because you sent in your request for the mailing too late to be included, perhaps you can try to find someone with access to internet to go to our website, www.prisonerexpress.org, to print and mail you a copy from the "Education" page, under "Programs". We upload all the newest programs there.

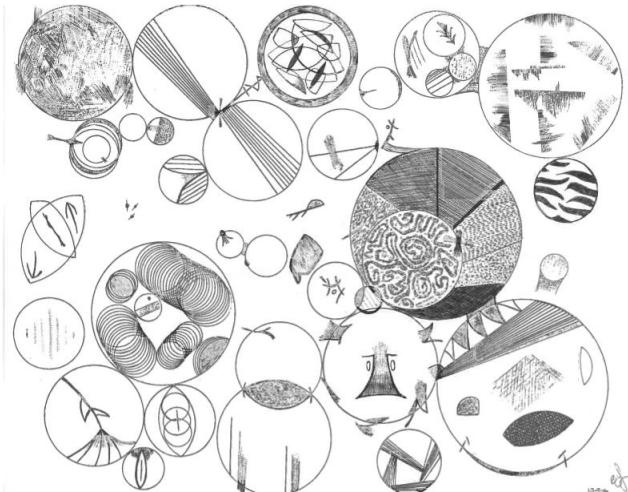
Project Offerings Spring 2017:

Expedited Books- The book mailing program is how PE began, but it has expanded into something quite different, partly due to necessity. At one point, we had about 2000 people asking for books and we realized we could not raise enough postage funds to keep up with the demand. We started the expedited book program to keep packages moving from us to you. Typically, it takes a few months before we can mail your package as we must process previous requests first. (First come, first served.) When logjams happen such as school breaks or hip breaks, things can slow down temporarily and we can get backlogged as requests keep coming. We try to send 100+ packages out each month but sometimes that becomes physically impossible. Do not sign up for this program unless you can be patient. Sometimes your books may arrive before you know it, and other times you may be left wondering why you haven't heard from us. I wish there was a simple solution, but I do not know it. On the positive side, we get some great book donations. Being on a university campus we get an incredible selection of books donated, and we certainly try to make the best match possible. That said, there are some categories that so many of you request, such as art, chess, trades laws, or dictionaries, that we cannot keep up with the demand. We make the best substitutions we can when we have trouble matching your request. Rather than just asking for 2 or 3 titles, give us multiple subjects areas you are interested in and let us know which are most desired. Of course, list the book and author you most want, but if you give us more options, there is a better chance that we will make a good match. Unfortunately, here is the catch: **this program is only available to those of you in institutions that allow you to mail stamps or send us a check for \$4.00.** Postage for a typical package is around \$6 or \$7, but your contribution helps us keep going. All our other programs are free, but the postage cost for mailing book packages is costlier than the money we can raise by our fundraising efforts. If any of your friends on the outside can help, they can contact us at our email address: prisonerexpress@gmail.com. If your prison doesn't allow you to send stamps, family members can do it for you. **Also, please check with your individual unit to find out what you are allowed to receive from us.** On the signup sheet, there is a place at where you can tell us the rules for sending you books. The more we know, the better our chances of preparing a book package that meets the rules of your institution.

I get great pleasure out of making good matches when I pack books and I so appreciate when you are clear with

giving us choices of what you might like. On the other hand, it is a bit frustrating when someone asks for some obscure book on a subject that I don't have without any secondary choices. If we cannot make a good match, we hold onto your letter for a few more weeks, hoping something good comes in, but often, it just means you wait a long time to get your books. **SO, GIVE US CHOICES!** I'm sorry we can't send everyone books, but we struggle as is to raise the funds for each cycle of programming, so the \$4 allows the program to continue.

Poetry Project- We are collecting poems for our 18th poetry anthology. All previous anthologies are posted on our website. Yvette put together Anthology Volume 16 and we mailed it out last September. She has been reading your poems since and has just about finished typing up the poems for Vol. 17. As soon as Vol.17 is mailed, Kevin, who is helping Yvette, will start reading the new poems and hopefully by summer we will begin compiling Vol.18. If you don't receive Vol.17, that will be because the poem you sent was entered into the Vol.18 folder, and we have yet to process those. **Remember that you must submit an original poem to receive that issue.** Students read through all the poems and pick the ones they want to include in the anthology. You can send as many poems as you like, but we get far too many entries to pick all of them for printing. The upside is that everyone who submits an entry gets a copy of that volume. We had more than 500 poets participate in the last edition. Every past issue of the PE poetry program is on our website, again under "Programs." You can ask anyone with access to internet to print and mail them to you if you would like copy. Here are some of the poems submitted for consideration for Vol. 17.



Art by Eric Langley

Jurassic Barnyard - Burl N. Corbett

Tiny dinosaur,
Feathered strutter in the sun,
Rooster fears nothing.
Not humans, nor their hatchets,
Not even the shadow of
A lowering hawk,
Swooping here, swooping there,
Can scare this colossal
Egotist. He lifts his head
And cackles just one...more...time

The Outside Looking In - Leon Benson

What if after death
You possessed the power,
To observe your own funeral?
Witnessing who came,
To commemorate the life you lived
By bringing you flowers,
Or by the libations
That came
In the form of tears
Of their pain,
It'll then occur to you
Who wasn't there,
Because they were the folks
Who proclaimed to loved you the most
Or so it was told,
Like the recurring cliche:
"Life ain't fous!"
Ironically it has taken
Until after your death
To know it's cold.

At the grave yard
Your casket is placed six feet deep
Into the mud and buried
Before these words:
"Ashes to ashes and dirt to dirt"
It may seem scary,
Especially when your loved ones
Are no longer around
But the flowers left
Over your grave may
Ease your hurt.

Caged Bird - Tiser Turner

I fathom why the caged bird sings.
I understand why it tweets from its beak.
I'm that caged bird and now I speak.
It is the adversity it took for me to get to this point, the pain that was inflicted throughout history, which tells the tale of my story.
It is the loneliness that compels me not to move forward.
The disappointment from mankind's bibliography.
Being suppressed emotionally and now being captured physically.
In a cage of the mind, being in a cell of the body.
To be liberated from these walls, would free me from this misery.
Maya Angelou's interpretation as to why the caged bird sings rings differently to me,
Yet it's all the same when it comes to being free from slavery.
I do know why the caged bird sings because...
I'm the caged bird without feathered wings.

Far Far Away- submitted by Essence Nobles, written by his daughter

Daddy, you're in jail so far away
You can't even be a part of my life today
And I know you care about me each and every day
Daddy you're in jail so far away
I wonder whenever you get out
Will things be the same
Will you be the dad that I know
Or will you be someone else
Because jail changed your soul

I don't understand the reason for this
But daddy your jail is so far away
Hoping everything will fall back into its place
Daddy, I know it's hard and you got a lot on your plate
But remember there's peoples willing to wait
You got parents and two kids too
That haven't give up on you
You have a second chance
To make it right
So, continue your battles and fight to make it
Back to the ones you love.

A Woman's Blues - Geneva Phillips

That woman is born in ash like a woman in the kitchen
In daydreams our ideas are winged with grave pleasure
In courtrooms we look like fear or poverty

Oh the downtrodden, we crouch against the walls
And become a sign of the institution
What prisons are the Doorways of Life?
No one comes out an embodiment of the beautiful
Years of Trouble
To come through invisibly with intricate shadows
Demarcating gradual patterns of dysfunction

Is usually sufficient to silence women who would spring up.
Against the insufficient light, the oppression
Those who partially break free
Sisters do not belong in boxes
Helpless as a woman on her back
We are trained for that, at least, in the end
To bear it. Stoically. Well used.
Words are the clarity in my own tale to the world
I, too, would stop talking and break free
Yet how can I? When I know we are all supposed to
By force or wisdom, stand in the open and open them
For each other.
My sister living for release in that slow prison
So alive. So abandoned



Art by Ellis Hyatt

God's Paint - Porfirio Mendoza

Looked out my window,
Seen the way God painted, painted the sky
Asked if he could paint a picture, paint a picture of love,
Picture of love in passion, picture of love in beauty
Picture of beauty in love, a love of no deceit
A love that knows nothing else but how to love,
But for this picture..."I"

I can only express the way she would make me feel,
The way she would feel, whatever she felt I would feel,
And I feel, if you would only paint this picture,
A picture of awe, picture of sight, a picture of calm
Picture in peace,

Whatever it takes' paint a picture for keep's,
Picture for keep's, I picture her for keeps
Looked out my window,
Seen the way God painted, painted the Sky,

Asked if he could paint a picture,
He painted some "I's", painted some "loves", painted some
"you's"
Painted some violets, painted some blue's
Said he painted the world
And for me,
He painted you.

Journal- The Journal program is an ongoing opportunity for participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and memories with us at PE. I had a student who was going to put together an updated journaling instruction packet, but it fell through. Then, I had second student lined up to do the job, but again, it didn't happen. Hopefully, I, or another student, will send a program update soon. For those of you who are new and interested, sign up for the program so that when we do send out the journal instruction packet, you are included. We have recently updated our website so we hoped to add more scanned or typed journal entries to it, but we can't keep up with all the writing that has been submitted. So, except for a few pieces, we are focusing on having students read your journals and write a letter back to connect with you. In time, we hope everyone who regularly writes for the program will hear from a student reading your work. Self-reflective writing is a great way to get a grip on all the thoughts that roll around in our head and journaling is a great tool for such introspection. **You do not have to wait for our journal packet to arrive.** If you want, write your first entry and send it to us; we will make your own journaling folder here. Most of the work on this program is done by volunteers and students who work here part-time, and there can be a lot of turnover in who staffs this project. New volunteers are often eager to read your journals. Remember to date your journal entries and write neatly. If it is too hard to read, we often give up on that piece. I have learned to read almost everyone's writing at this point, but even I get stumped at making out some words. Also, I know paper is at a premium but I have 64-year-old eyes, so if your writing is small and unspaced, I struggle to understand what you are trying to say. Please spare my vision and write big enough so I can read.

Buddhist Meditation Guide- Tara, the creator of the guide, teaches practical meditation practices to help you embody more peace, patience, acceptance, and compassion. The packet offers articles and suggestions to help with difficult emotions, like anger, and includes testimonies and insights from others in the program who share how it is affecting them. The packets often have a resource guide and inspiring quotes. We are now working on Tara's 7th packet, which continues to inspire me and the people who read them. She has also included an address at which you can write her directly.

Art Knows- We have some inspired artists working towards bringing art into your world. So many of you ask for art instruction books, so we tend to run out. Luckily, Treacy and Danielle have stepped up to create art lessons. They have written descriptions of their respective sections of this upcoming packet, "Pop Art" and "Animals I Become." Enjoy!

Pop Art: Danielle writes, *The pop art movement began in the late 1950s when artists caught the urge to reintroduce identifiable imagery after abstract impressionism. Most of the work that is defined as pop art reflects mass media and pop culture, objects and ideas that are available to people across America regardless of class. Richard Hamilton, a British pop artist intrigued with American mass production, gives a clear definition: "Pop Art is: Popular, transient, expendable, low-cost, mass-produced, young, witty, gimmicky, glamorous, and Big Business." Techniques and subjects typically involve collaging, repetition, tabular images, pulp culture illustrations and quite literally making the image itself "pop!".* This packet will introduce you to these techniques and the artists that have contributed to the variation of these techniques.

Animal I Become: Treacy writes, *In the next issue of Art Knows, I will explore historical and contemporary artists who use animal imagery in their work. I want to look at this art and how animals relate to current social issues of human inclusivity and exclusivity – who belongs and who doesn't; and what happens when we exclude groups of people or creatures from our understanding of importance.*

Human beings have been relating to animals for thousands of years. Yet, it is a unique, strange relationship that turns closeness between a person and an animal into the ownership of one over the other. I own my dogs, parrots, and cat as pets. I even own chicken in the freezer as my food. But I don't think of the spiders in my house as part of my ownership. Without ownership - albeit, the chicken in the freezer - the spiders fare less than my pets and are vulnerable

to being killed. We, as humans, have deemed that animals can exist in only two ways— either as ownership or subject to human negotiations.

Through this power, animal existence has historically been made inferior to elevate human existence. Consider the phrase, “You’re no better than an animal.” Sometimes, we expect animals to exist like us in anthropomorphizing an animal. Donald Duck is not important because he is a duck, but because he is a duck with human qualities.

Traditional thinking has given lots of reason why animals are less valuable. Animals don’t understand morality, they don’t have language, they don’t understand death, they don’t have agency. But when it is remembered that some of these same arguments have been used to establish superiority over certain minority human groups, the arguments don’t seem so reasonable. Hopefully, if society is moving towards inclusiveness, these arguments can be seen for what they are – a means to subjugate a group.

What happens when we make ourselves vulnerable to the needs of the animals; vulnerable by no longer demanding them to fit our existence and to serve us? And, instead of personifying them, we identified ourselves in them? Can artists help forge new relationships that are not a dominion over but a becoming with animals?

Plasmodesmata- We are now offering the second issue of this great science journal. Last year, when Mia, the creator, first introduced this project, I was surprised at your overwhelming positive responses and realized that science information and education was meaningful to many of you. And I saw that again with Chemistry and Climate Change. Here is Mia’s introduction:

Hello everyone! My name is Mia and I am a biology student at Cornell, interested in sharing my love of science with you. I am excited to announce that we will be offering the second issue of our science journal, *Plasmodesmata*, this spring. *Plasmodesmata* are channels between plant cells through which information can be exchanged. In this program, we bring science articles written by biology students from our cells on the outside to yours. Thank you for the many enthusiastic and encouraging responses to the first issue—I hope you will enjoy this next one just as much. In this second issue, I will report back on the most common prison environmental problems that you wrote about. This issue will also include articles on topics such as the importance of vultures, how plants fight back against those who want to eat them, and the

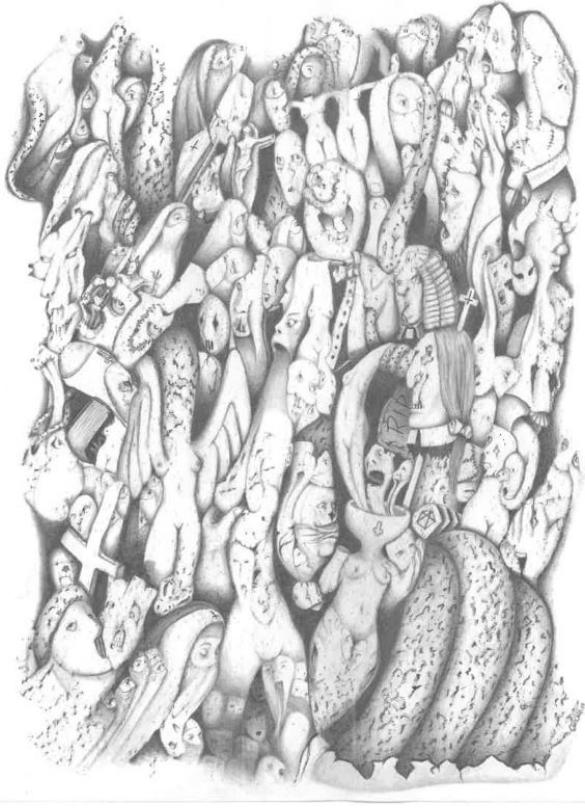
environmental impacts of golf. Since many of you asked what it takes to become a (career) scientist and what being a scientist is like, in this issue we also feature several interviews with distinguished scientists in which they discuss their research and journeys in science. We will also provide you with an opportunity to submit your own articles on your favorite science topics to be considered for publication in issue #3.

Nutrition-My good buddy Larry has been watching me create Prisoner Express since its first conception. He has always supported the program by donating many books over the years. He had been running a nutrition lab at Cornell for many years, but he recently retired. Being the caring guy he is, he has asked how he could help me with PE. After some brainstorming, he has come up with the following idea, and I so look forward to reading the packet he is creating. He will explore how we take things in our environment and make them a part of us. Below, Larry shares his thoughts. If you would like to explore how your body does what it does, sign up for this packet!

Our human bodies are amazing organisms in so many ways, constantly functioning so beautifully, with us barely aware or completely unaware of all the work that it is doing, all the time. One of the fundamental things that it is engaged in, which it shares with virtually all other life forms on the earth, is consuming parts of its environment, breaking it down, and transforming it into its own body. This process, known as nutrition, has fascinated me since I was a young man. I have studied nutrition in various ways over the years and would like to share some of what I’ve learned with you.

I’d like to take us on a journey through our digestive systems and into some of the ways we transform our food into ourselves. We will explore how we decide what to eat, how our bodies keep the nasty stuff in our environment from killing us, the processes involved in getting energy and expending energy, the bacteria in our guts that we coexist with, the ways in which the cells of our bodies maintain themselves, and much more.

Most of the human body replaces itself completely within 10 years, with some organs, like the liver, replacing itself every 300 days, and the cells lining your gut being replaced every 4 or 5 days! Food for thought.



Art by Chad Whiteford

Project Jump-Break- I don't know how Greg heard about the project, but after we shared a few phone calls and some emails, he stepped forward with the idea of a creative writing project to help those of you who feel stuck in your writing routine. I am sure it will benefit those who don't feel stuck as well. Greg is an educator, writing instructor, and life coach. He has a lot of plans to share your writing through some of his various projects and I am thrilled to welcome him to the Prisoner Express team. This is what he had to say:

Have you ever thought to yourself, "Man—how do I break the chains of writer's block? How can I jump into my imagination and expand on my ideas?"

That is precisely what Project Jump-Break is designed to do: provide you the tools to liberate your mind and jump into your most fluid and authentic creative self. The exercises from Jump-Break will enable you literally to break into words and ideas that pop in your head but too often lie dormant and undeveloped. With practice, you will find yourself breaking free from every day, mundane ways of thinking into a fresh and new way of perceiving everything around you—even yourself! As a teacher and facilitator with a background in music and original theatre as well as gifted and enrichment education, I have years of experience working with writers from a wide

range of backgrounds. I truly enjoy working with individuals who have a sincere desire to learn and grow as creative thinkers and writers. Project Word-Break will afford you the opportunity to receive feedback on your writing, either through snail mail or JPAY. By the end of our collaboration, all those who put forth the effort through practice and revision will have a publishable piece that can and will be shared with others in our writing community. I look forward to working with you!

Creative Interlude- Shawna is studying recreation therapy and will graduate in May. She has created a packet on some ways to have fun that require little to no supplies and space for mental and physical stimulation. Perfect for anyone in Seg. The typical format of the packets sections are as follows:

- * Personality
- * Paper crafts
- * Fitness

Please sign up to receive this action oriented packet.

Theme Writing Project- The theme essay program keeps our bi-annual newsletters vibrant as it provides a chance for you to get some very interesting mail. Every month, we have a picture theme and a word theme topic. For the word theme, we ask you to write a true story or essay that is conjured up by the word of the month. The picture cues are more open to interpretation so you may also send us a creative writing piece. Anyone who submits their work will receive a packet of all the writing that responds to that same topic. It is a great way to learn what other people have experienced in their lives or what they are thinking and feeling. From your many letters, I understand the isolation many of you must endure. Reading theme essays written by others also experiencing incarceration can sometimes provide you with a new sense of understanding and empowerment within your personal situation. I encourage you to take a chance and share a story on the topics below. In each newsletter, we will reprint a few stories from previous theme topics. The only way to see all of the entries for a topic is to send in your original piece. Currently, this program is coordinated by Michelle. She shares the following thoughts:

Hi Theme Writers!

Thank you to our writers, readers, and the Durland Alternatives Library, all of whom make this program possible. Each shift, I'm excited to work with these essays because together, we build—and are part of—the Prisoner Express community.

A purpose of Themes is to foster relations between incarcerated and non-incarcerated persons, and we

accomplish just that (woohoo!). Through these relationships, we remember that we're not alone. I feel like I know all my writers, especially the regular contributors. Because I read all your Themes submissions, I catch myself thinking of your stories. I deeply appreciate and am proud of all your efforts. You all offer me the opportunity to witness your writing skills develop, to laugh with you, and to reflect on your words, whether they are fiction or nonfiction.

Do you feel like you know a particular author? Do you lean toward word or picture prompts? The word theme "Facing Fear" stuck with me most, though I truly enjoy each essay.

Moving forward, please keep essay submissions to 600-800 words. If you are interested in writing poetry, sign up for PE's poetry program. To publish their annual anthology, poetry staff and volunteers read all poems, so I recommend trying it if you are interested!

Also, like you all, I consistently work to improve myself, and if you have ideas to improve Themes, please write to me! Overall, keep up the great work. You all make me proud to pursue literature.

Following are some essays from the past few months. Enjoy!



Art by Julie Spencer

Upcoming Word Theme Topics

Bargains	due 3/1/17
Gratitude	due 4/1/17
Almost	due 5/1/17
Accomplishments	due 6/1/17
The Zoo	due 7/1/17
Keeping Calm	due 8/1/17
Life's Purpose	due 9/1/17
Protected	due 10/1/17

GRANDPARENTS

by Andrew M. Van Vleet

My best role models have always been Gramps and Granny. I don't know of anybody I've met who embodies the compassion, kindness, virtues, and love of a Christian like them. I would have done well if I had not ignored the lessons they taught me. My biggest regret is letting them down.

Growing up in a broken home, I had only Gramps and Granny as my source of stability. Mom's moods and overbearing protectiveness kept me cooped up inside and I was often grounded from playing with friends or even doing Boy Scouts or youth group at church. Through the years, I could always count on going to Gramps and Granny's every Sunday. It was my escape, almost surreal in the moment I got into the car. I felt enmeshed in love, trust, and happiness. As intangible as those feelings were, I could almost grasp them as my hand closed around the car door handle.

Gramps and Granny made me want to strive to be better. The aura of positivity that surrounded them was almost entrancing compared to the dismal life at home. They made me want to help others through church and volunteer work. All the time they put into volunteering still amazes me. If anyone needed help, they were there. I learned most of my life lessons growing up at their house. Where else could I have learned table manners, discipline, responsibility? I learned to take pride in my work while doing yard chores, fixing things, or helping with dinner. I learned that I had family that cared about and loved me. And I learned that their disappointment could cut a hole through my heart like nothing else.

Today, Granny has passed on, but I thank God, that Gramps is still here. I have a chance to make things right. It's funny how even in prison, I remember being told, "If something's worth doing, it's worth doing right." I heard that countless times from Gramps and Granny. I'm doing this time in prison, and Granny would want me to do it right. So, I'll make the most of this time and learn all I can. I hope everyday she knows how sorry I am to disappoint her, and I want to do better. I hope Gramps can see the changes I've made when I get out. I just want them to be proud of me again. I am thankful every day that I have the best grandparents in the world, and even though it took a huge wake up call, I will strive to be just like my Gramps and Granny.

by Karla Norris

I think about my grandparents all the time when I am on my bunk. I think about how I would go on nature walks with

my grandma when I was little, or how my grandpa used to always tease me by saying "What Lola wants, Lola gets" because I am very spoiled and because there was a song with those words in the lyrics. When I would visit during the summer as a child, they always made sure there was pan dulce, including my favorite pumpkin empanadas. My grandparents loved each other, their family, and giving back to the church. My grandma loved to cook and grandpa would always have hot sauce on everything he ate. They were married 66 years and 2 months. In May 2014, when my grandpa got sick and passed away with grandma and family at his bedside, I sat in prison. However, God gave me my closure. It was so strange how it occurred. I got to talk to my mom who flew down to Edinburg, Texas to be with her parents. She let me know ahead of time what to expect. I even got to talk to my grandpa a few times a few days before he went to heaven. The reason I say heaven is because the day he died, I had to go to Restaurant Management Vocational. We sometimes get to cook. That day, Mrs. Maxwell, the teacher, said, "Today, we are making pumpkin empanadas." I knew that at that moment this was God's way of letting my grandpa say good-bye to me. Well sure enough, when I got back to the dorm, my mom and dad let me know Grandpa had peacefully passed away. I, of course, cried, but I knew he was with God in heaven. I didn't get a furlough. I think it was for the best because I don't think I could have handled being at my grandfather's funeral and then coming back behind the razor wire.

Now, I just have my loving grandma to whom I still write and send cards. Every now and again, I have a dream about my grandpa, and he is always telling me how much he loves my grandma and how he is watching over her and is still with her. He was an amazing, humble man who loved his family. He had a big heart for helping people, made jokes, and loved drinking coffee with his friends. He was always smiling and just thinking about him makes me smile too.

by Marvin Jones

In 1997, I was locked up in Boston, Massachusetts, doing 8 to 9 years. It was to be my last time being incarcerated, where I had a daily routine of weight room training and boxing ring sessions. I became somewhat of a legend in the penal system. I began to believe all the hype myself; I felt as if nothing could weaken me or harm me. I went from 190 pounds up to 289 pounds of solid muscle during those years. My fighting skills increased almost as much as my muscle gain. I feared no one, nothing. But I didn't know God, and that's where the chink was in my armor. He has a way of

weakening the strongest of the strong, and He got to me through my grandmother.

One day, while sitting in my cell, an officer came and told me my counselor wanted to see me. The only time they want to see you is when it's time to sign your release papers (but I had 3 or 4 more years to go) or to give you bad news, so I slowly walked to his office wondering what's going on. Did something happen to my kids or wife or mother? Once I got there, he made me sit outside his office for 20 more minutes, so I decided to leave: he can keep his bad news, I thought.

Just as I reached for the outer door to leave, he calls me into his office (crap!!). After I take a seat, he says, "Marvin, I'm sorry, but I have some bad news." (Wow, I'm so surprised!) "Your grandmother died yesterday." I thought, did he say my grandmother? The woman who loved me more than I loved myself? The woman who thought I could do no wrong in her loving eyes? The woman who devoted her life to God? That's impossible, I thought. She can't die. God wouldn't do that to me.

I don't know how or when I made it back to my cell, but for the first time in 20 years, I cried. I cried like a baby. People who heard me were scared to tease me or even come to see what was wrong. I grieved like that for 3 days. I talked to my grandmother's spirit as though she were there with me! Nothing can replace your grandparents. For those of you blessed enough to still have them in your life, cherish them and the love and knowledge they have to give.



Art by Timothy Cannon

by Shannon Guess Richardson

My grandparents were such an essential part of my life. I was abandoned by my mother when I was 2 years old, so my grandmother (my father's mother) was the closest thing I had to a mother growing up. She helped to shape me into the woman I am today.

As much as I love and adore my grandmother, I want to tell you about my grandfather. I longed to know him growing up. This was the man my father, his sister, and his brothers had written out of their lives, long before I was born.

My grandparents had 4 children. My grandfather had an unfortunate temper. From what I have been told, it didn't take much to set him off. When he was angry, he lashed out by beating both my grandmother and all their children. He preferred using his belt, but was not opposed to using his hands. Unfortunately, my father inherited both his father's temperament as well as his method of "punishment."

Eventually, my grandmother couldn't take anymore. She moved herself and her 4 children to her aunt's house while her husband was at work. Rather than taking this as a cue to clean up his act, he moved away. He left them all behind and they didn't hear from him for many years.

My grandfather eventually got himself together. He stopped drinking. He had a good respectable job that he eventually retired from. He had gotten control over himself and his temper.

By the time he made contact with his children, they wanted nothing to do with him. He tried to make up for his actions and wanted nothing more than to start over with them. They didn't feel the same way. They couldn't/wouldn't forgive him.

I knew all of this, but it didn't matter to me. I wanted to know my grandfather. My father refused. He said I could contact his "sperm donor" when I was no longer in his house.

My grandmother tried to help me in my endeavor to know my grandfather. She allowed me to stay in contact with my aunts (my grandfather's sisters), Lovella and Estelle. They visited me at her house and we wrote letters that were sent through her address. They told me stories about him and told me all about him. I was fascinated by this mystery person that was my grandfather.

When I moved out and had my own child, I immediately got my grandfather's address from my aunts and sent him a letter. I honestly didn't think he would respond. Not only did he write me back, he drove from Colorado to Georgia to meet me and his great grandson.

The person I met was not the same person that had been described to me by my father. He had such a light about him; you couldn't help but be happy when you were around him. He had the sweetest and most gentle nature. My son and I absolutely adored him.

I tried to get the rest of my family to see him, but they refused. My heart broke for him. I wanted him to know his children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and even my grandmother. I made a scrapbook and included pictures, histories, and funny stories about each person. I was told he treasured that book until he died. It was returned to me when he died-- it was well worn and used.

I am so thankful I had a chance to meet and grow close to my grandfather. Horace Rogers gives me hope for humanity. He taught me that people really can change. People can do horrible things and still have a beautiful heart. They say people don't change. My grandfather is proof to me that they are wrong.

by Christopher Simonelli

When it comes to grandparents, I can only tell you about my grandmother on my mother's side because my grandfather on my mother's side passed away in 1975, 5 years before I was born, and my father left my mother before I was born, so I never met my grandparents on his side. One of my first memories of my grandmother is from the mid 1980's. Early on Sunday mornings, the two of us would be making meatballs in the kitchen for Sunday dinner. She taught me her secret recipe from every ingredient and how much of them to use to how to roll the meatballs by hand, molding them like a ball of soft clay, dropping the finished product into the hot sauce ever so gently to avoid getting scalded and to prevent any splashing on the stove or walls. We didn't have air conditioning in our apartment back then so when my grandmother (Nina) cooked, especially during the blistering months of July, August, and September, it was like being in the engine room of the Titanic when the captain of the ship ordered full power in reverse to avoid hitting the iceberg. The aroma of the fresh oregano, parsley, garlic, basil and tomato sauce smoldered as the smell filled up every room of the three bedroom flat, including the hallway leading to the other apartments. On those hot summer weekends, among the smell of Italian bliss, it sounded like a multi-track of perfectly mixed recording of a symphony through paper thin walls of lead paint-covered plaster. The sound of the neighborhood and neighboring apartments filled the air: other kids outside playing, police cars, paramedics, and fire trucks racing towards the next incident or accident, Metro-North train

horns blowing on the way to Grand Central Station, infants crying as they are held by their mothers in one arm, wiping sweat off their forehead with the other arm as they wait for the Mister Softee ice cream truck to slowly creep up the block, couples arguing, the older generation playing classic rock, the younger generation packing double cassette boom boxes with the twelve fresh "D" batteries and break dancing to Africa Bambaataa's - Planet Rock on a broken down cardboard box discarded from a recent refrigerator purchase they found lying against a dumpster. It was like a competition for who owned the loudest radio. If Guns n Roses was playing loudly, then Eric B and Rakim turned theirs up louder and, God forbid, my uncle started to drink with the old school Puerto Rican guy upstairs on the third floor. Once they had a few drinks in them, they didn't care who was playing what on any radio. At that point it was Hector Lavoe or Tito Puente playing or no music at all. As the cold Budweiser and liquor flowed, the break dancers kept breakin', the dominos kept slamming on the table top, and the meatballs kept cooking on the stove. It's funny how many good times are remembered from the thought of helping my grandmother make homemade meatballs on Sundays.



Art by James Nicholas

BIG CITY

by Eric Whisnant

Growing up, I always thought of the big city as only New York City. I knew I had to get to the big city one day! All my life I had traveled but never understood, even if I was there,

what a big city was. So around the time I turned twenty years old I climbed onto a tractor trailer loaded with furniture headed for The Big Bad City I always craved: New York, New York!

The new job I had consisted of driving a truck out of state, getting sales permits and selling furniture from the furniture capital of the world, High Point, North Carolina. After that first trip out, I was HOOKED on traveling! We would drive to a city, set up to sell, and once the truck was empty, we went home.

This job was cool, but I was always stuck to one area, and so I was craving more travel and more excitement. After two years of this job I got involved with a different company who drove furniture out of town but delivered and set it up (being it was already sold). This was definitely a big change. No more soliciting and no more stuck in one area! My new job was it!

In-home delivery was way more exciting. It allowed me to see multiple big cities, people, places, and more areas of these big cities I craved. We would do up to fifteen stops a day all across multiple cities, states, etc. This job has allowed me to see the true meaning of a big city.

I've been to the Puerto Rican Day Parade and the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York. I've been to Boston and partied for St. Patrick's Day and Cinco De Mayo. I've walked Bourbon Street, New Orleans with fish bowls of beer strapped to my neck and hand grenade mix drinks while listening to the best music ever made and seeing some of the best sights! (Wink wink.) Every day is Mardi Gras on Bourbon Street.

I've spent cold-cold snowy days in Detroit, Michigan, a city that seems almost like a third world country. I've driven through St. Louis, beside the famous Arch. I've been in downtown Chicago in the penthouse suite of a high-rise building, setting up a bedroom set, looking out over the city, realizing how small I am to a city so big. I've toured the Underground with friends in Atlanta. I've seen how everything really is bigger in Texas from Dallas, Houston, to Fort Worth. I could go on for days about the places I've been and the things I've seen.

I love the outdoors, the country quiet places and the mountains with small towns. But there is no place in the world like the experience of a big city. The sights, smells, food, people, car horns, smog, buildings, police sirens, and the overall feel of the big city is something that draws me in and keeps me mesmerized. The big city is almost the equivalent of the best drug. Once you get a taste, it leaves you pining for more. I'm addicted to the fast hustle and bustle lifestyle of the

big city! Not everyone gets a chance to rip, run, and travel to big cities.

If you've never been far from home, I suggest everybody travel at least once to a big city. When I say big city, I don't mean a big town, I mean a Big City: New York, Atlanta, Miami, Los Angeles, Chicago or somewhere. It's its own beautiful art form. Everybody should see Boston, Massachusetts, and New York City, at least once! It's amazing! I love these big cities!

No Big City for Me by Shaun Blake

I'm from Utah, so the biggest "city" is Salt Lake City. But considering I lived the first six years of my life in towns with populations less than *three hundred*, Salt Lake is huge. Now that I'm forty-eight years old, the biggest city I've ever lived in is Boise, Idaho. At the time (1972-1973), I believe it was less than 100,000 population.

When I was fourteen years old our family took a vacation to Los Angeles. We spent time at Disneyland, Knotts Berry Farm, and Long Beach, playing in the Pacific Ocean. L.A. is gigantic! If it wasn't for being with my family and the security they provided, I don't believe I would have made it past Las Vegas. Ha, ha!

Personally, I love the quaintness of small, isolated towns where everyone knows each other and looks out for each other. I truly believe that if our family had stayed in Liberty, UT, population less than 300, where we lived when I was born--or Idaho, City, ID, population 126, where we moved to soon after my birth, I would not be incarcerated today, or would ever have been.

by Jonathan McGeoch

I'm just a good old country boy. But at the age of twenty-two, I was thrust into the big city of Seoul for two years - not knowing the language, culture, or food, and not being a city kind of guy. I hunt, fish, and camp, not shop around for fashion. But in two years, I learned a lot, had a lot of fun, and got to know the city. I have lived in much smaller cities a couple of times since, but in the end, I am a country boy.

It was in the heart of Seoul that I first learned about public transportation. Where I had previously lived, it wasn't a real thing. But I learned to read a subway map, understand the bus lines and routes, the different colors of subway lines, and just how much like sardines Koreans can become on a Friday night. Good grief. But going home on Friday night, it is advantageous to have no room to move. That way, we couldn't fall down drunk.

I also learned to eat other foods. I am not too picky, so I gladly ate dog, Kimchi, octopus, and all sorts of bugs. Hell, I even learned that liver is meant to be eaten raw. I liked it, but my wife never agreed on that one. I had the opportunity to engage in the cultural experiences that were unavailable in America. And I got to see the differences between our paradigms of life and the Eastern ways. I met some very interesting people and, in many ways, became integrated into the Korean way of life.

Though I have since lived in other countries and experienced many other things, and though I will always just be a country boy, I will always consider myself to be a Seoul man.



Art by J. Level Jr.

by Joshua S. Balistreri

The city, where millions of egos clash, and collide in a frothy soup of chaos and anxiety, thousands of interactions take place every minute. Fears realized. Dreams that are made, and those that are crushed. There is so much that is going on. So much activity that it is nearly unquantifiable.

Each individual personality here believes that the universe revolves around them alone, that they are the sole reason for the existence of life. Each so full of vanity and shallow desires that they fail to comprehend the grand scheme.

Yet, for all their shallowness, and self-indulgences, the people in the city manage to accomplish great things. Building skyscrapers, incredible totems, and monuments to their achievements, all massive structures of such complex design that it boggles the mind.

This not only applies to the concrete and steel structures of the city, but to the infrastructure of its management as well. How, in such a relatively short period, we have come from a species that once roamed the plains of the world as people of small nomadic tribes, to creating these massive metropolitan societies is absolutely amazing.

Even though there is still a great deal of life in the rural areas of the world, and for all of its problems, as well as each individual's misgivings, the big city remains mankind's greatest achievement. The triumph over tribal feudalism, and the ability to come together, and build something lasting is a great accomplishment. The city is our greatest realization.

RESCUED

by Wayne Dowdy

Sad to say but it is true: yes, I was rescued. God saved me from myself by allowing me to go to prison to serve a 35-year federal sentence for armed bank robbery and associated charges. What is best: to live in prison or to not live at all? In 1988, when I began serving this sentence, my answer was different than today. Now that I am near the end of it, I'm pleased to have survived long enough to discover my journey to recovery.

Recovery is the process of returning to the "Beginning" God created, in contrast to the one I became based on life experiences. To recover, reclaim something lost. Rescue innocence lost as a child whose path lead to crime, drugs, and incarceration.

Rescued: For me to admit that the government rescued me is growth, since my pride often denied the truth. I humble myself and am honest when I confess my imperfections because doing so tramples on the ego.

My pride and ego have been my worst enemies. The two are running partners: one does not act without the other. My first sponsor in a Twelve Step program said that his head was the type that thought it could kill the body and keep on living. Mine too.

Renewed: Living in a renewed state of mind enables me to see life as it is, even when it is not how I planned for it to be, instead of painting a distorted picture of reality inside my head to make me feel okay when I am not.

God doesn't ask my advice on how I want life to happen. As a human, if God did ask my advice, I'd mess things up by allowing my character defects of pride, lust, anger, greed, and gluttony to influence my decisions, or by letting emotions drive action instead of intellect.

Fantasy: In prison, and in life in general, a common behavior is creating fanciful scenarios of past experiences and personal histories. The reporting of a fantasy life on the outside is common inside prison. Some prisoners bum commodities and claim to have been millionaires on the streets; others claim to have been "Scarface" style drug kingpins, when in truth, they may have been a homeless street hustler, dope fiend, or prostitute.

Truth: The truths of my life contain a mixture of success and failure, a mediocre existence, nothing fancy or extravagant to report. I experienced success by working for two reputable companies in Atlanta, Georgia where I climbed the ranks and did well, until my worst enemy appeared, Mr. Ego, demanding more than life was giving.

I quit good jobs and forfeited lucrative careers because of Mr. Ego who drove pride with a distorted view of reality. The drugs I used altered my perception of truth. I told myself I deserved more money than I was earning. The companies weren't paying me what I was worth. Those thoughts justified my struggle to survive with my unhealthy habits.

The truth was that I mismanaged my earnings and made unsound business decisions. I spent more money on shooting and smoking drugs than I did on rent, car payments, insurance, utilities, and groceries, which explains why a repo man chased me for months to take my car. I shot more drugs in a day than I could work and pay for in a week. I reverted to crime to cover the cost. When I landed in jail with multiple felonies, facing the rest of my life in prison, the truth set in and I wanted to commit suicide to end the pain caused by my past. I'm glad I didn't choose to end my life.

Love and Pain: Things chance. Love and resentment kept me alive. I loved my family, and knew they loved me. I didn't want to hurt them by killing myself even though I did sometimes feel their lives would be better without the pains I caused by living a self-centered life.

The resentment originated from my interview with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. I refused to cooperate. The lead FBI agent said, "I'm going to put you in prison for the rest of your life."

"I will kill myself before I let you do that," I said.

His response: "Do it!"

That made me want to live to avoid satisfying him, and to live to see the day I could make him regret saying it. Today I am thankful for him. God used him to rescue me from an abyss filled with anger and self-hatred.

Thug Life: From a thug point of view, I lived a life filled with danger and excitement, by using guns to rob drug stores and other businesses to take what I wanted, using violence to accomplish my goals. Even inside prison, I lived the thug life by playing the drug game, running gambling operations, and making decisions that affected the lives of others through prison politics. In my youth, I did several things that gave me clout as a prisoner. For instance, I kept my mouth shut when arrested; in the Georgia prison system, I assaulted two guards and later escaped with 10 others by taking over a control room; made homemade wine and moonshine, sold drugs, and was later falsely accused of murdering another prisoner. I still held strong and did not rat on anyone. Those things happened many years ago, when I was young and dumb, a phase most people seem to go through.

Retired: Seven years into this sentence, I retired from all the above because I tired of the associated drama. I was killing myself and acting insane by staying involved in dangerous situations to stay high and in control.

If God had not saved me from myself, my life of crime would have lead me to death row or the graveyard. I'm glad I was rescued, even though I do wish the path hadn't been so rough.



Art by Rhondy Davis

by Jeremy Brown

In 2009 I had a job working at Atlanta Bread Company. On my way, I was setting up a party at my house. It was St. Patrick's Day, and parents and siblings were on vacation. Time to have some fun. I was riding my motorcycle down Bay Drive in St. Petersburg. I was in the right of way when an elderly lady came from the left of me at forty miles per hour. I was flatlined for ten minutes, declared legally dead. I only remember feeling a slight pinch when I was knocked out. My Atman or Astral body was in full consciousness from a metaphysical perspective. I was in my pure energy free form, meaning I was luminescent and able to move with ease. I did not see any other entities. I did not see a light at the end of the tunnel. I was in some sort of limbo. I was moving in the Aether, bioluminescent grayish white clouds. It looked like ectoplasm. Ectoplasm is subtle bodily energy or (Prana - Inner Energy: Skrt). I was not able to move too much. This luminous cloud was holding my free form energy down. It was so exhilarating. No fear, no anger. Just peace. Satori, Samadhi, Nirvana? Who knows.

A few hours later I was awakened in my body. Sterile scents wafted into my nostrils. A tube protruded from my lungs to drain the blood. Stiff, but grateful I was still alive. My family asked me if I was doing okay. I said "I'm alive but my phone is dead". That got me a few laughs. When everyone left, my girl shows up. I tell her the story. I spoke to the nurses and doctor that saved my life. I didn't tell them my experience though. Strange things were happening ever more frequently after that. I was rescued and awakened to my high self. It's an amazing journey; this life.

by Craig Shipley

I have heard many people say they were not arrested, but rescued. I myself would fit into that category as well.

I am 5'11" and weigh about one hundred eighty-five pounds. When I was arrested back in 2009, I may have weighed 150 pounds, if I was lucky. Meth and crack really did a number on me. What is sad is that I was only out about seventy days. I did a little over three years and stayed out seventy days, only to come back with twenty-two years, eight months at 85%. Rescued, huh?

Yes, I was rescued. Rescued from myself and the drugs that I was doing just to feel "normal".

Today I feel "normal" being sober. On 4-10-16 I had seven years clean. I've had plenty of opportunities to use in here, for free even. Sometimes I really would like to escape

this place for a while, but I turn to music or pen and paper instead of drugs.

My freedom has been somewhat rescued. Of course, I am in prison, but my freedom from active drug use has been achieved. I do not know about tomorrow, but today I am not planning to use. That is being rescued to me.

I have rescued my mama from having to worry if she will get a call saying I overdosed or got killed. I have rescued my loved ones and friends from having to tell me I cannot come to their home because they do not want me around (I may rob them blind). I have rescued some of the broken relationships I had and mended them pretty well.

Of course, I do not like being in prison, but being rescued is a whole lot better than the alternatives.

OLD DAYS

by Yankee Lawyer

In the old days, the sun never set on the British Empire. The United States of America and the United Kingdom of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales were spreading the gospel to the four corners of the earth. Gene Autry sang of love and adventure. Tarzan rescued black men from whites who sought to oppress them. Superman led the struggle for truth, justice, and the American way.

In my home town, Plymouth, the streets were quiet on Sundays. Cars would be going to and from churches, but businesses were closed. A few small restaurants were open part of the day and closed on Mondays. Drugstores coordinated with each other and the police. On any Sunday, a few would be open at least a half day, the rest would be closed. A few mom-and-pop grocery stores were open half the day. The local I.G.A. store was owned by a Jew, so it was closed on Saturday and open on Sunday, with a limited number of employees (His competitors and the police counted them).

I could go on and on about things I miss, things that went wrong in the '70s and '80s, and what a mess we're in today. Right now, as I'm writing this, though, there is one thing that weighs most heavily on my mind: the American political process.

Dwight David Eisenhower refused to run for political office. As a good soldier, though, when voters determined that he was the most popular and respected elder citizen in the United States of America, he answered their call.

Six decades later, we are in disgrace.

The Democrats have nominated a woman whose only noteworthy qualification is that she was the wife of one of the worst presidents in our country's history. As Secretary of State under Obama, she was a scandalous failure.

The Republicans have nominated a man whose only claim to fame is, in a word, money. He got where he is through shady real estate deals, aided by highly skilled bankruptcy attorneys.

So... how much is 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, Washington, D.C., worth today?

In 1956, it was priceless.

by Conscious Brother

In the old days men...women...and children

Were chained...bought...and sold,

Whipped...starved...'till they were old (They were the lucky ones),

After a time some in society felt the injustice done to these,

They suited up, went to war, and fought to

"Give...Us...Free"

Now centuries pass, but alas things remain the same, the plantations are now prisons and the night riders wear badges.

Just like "in the old days" men...women...and children are chained...bought...and sold!

NICKNAMES

by Steve Wells

For most of us, when we are born, our parents bless or curse us by the name they bestow upon us. For better or worse, that is the name we carry for the rest of our lives. However, our birth name is not the only name we will be known by. Very few people go through life without picking up at least one nickname. Most of us receive, use, and discard several over the course of our lifetimes.

Nicknames are as diverse, descriptive, complementary, and disparaging as there are human beings. Nicknames may be hung on people for any number of reasons and in many societies or organizations it is considered a rite of passage to receive one. For most of us the choice of nickname will not be left up to us, but made by others. The only way to get rid of an undesirable nickname is to acquire another one, which may not be a good thing. Ultimately it is up to us to accept, grow into, and be identified by our nickname. Not that we have any real choice in the matter.

How is it that we acquire a nickname, which the dictionary calls an informal descriptive name added to or replacing the actual name of a person, place, or thing? Your own family, the very ones to name you in the first place, are usually the first ones to have a nickname on you, calling you Mikey, Shelly, Bud, or Sis. Then you leave home and run into Pee Pants and Cry Baby, while they call you Cookie Monster. When we go to school and enter our adolescent rites of passage we are met by Butch, Spike, and that red-haired girl named Babe, while they all remember you as Geek or Psycho. It is during these formative years that we enter clubs, scouts, or sports and the nicknames fly fast and loose. Whitey, Leftie, TayTay, Hot Lips, and those girls with unfortunate names become BJ's.

Then we leave the womb of school and enter into the cold, cruel world of work, be it blue collar, white collar, or camouflage, where nicknames become more descriptive and derogatory. We've all known or heard of a Fast Frank, Slo-Moe, Betty Bonkers or a Sleazy Sal. The military if rife with job nicknames, such as Doe, Sparky, Gunner, Top, or Florence Nightingale. It is here that many lifetime nicknames are bestowed, such as General Schwartzkoff being named Bear at West Point, a nickname he wore long before he became world-renowned as Stormin' Norman. Movie stars and sports stars such as The Duke and Hammerin' Hank will live forever in our hearts.

Prison walls hold many nicknames inside. There are Paperhangers, Macks, Chesters, Firebugs, and Five-Fingered Discounters. In one twenty-four man dorm there is a Zulu, Fireball, Choppa, Doc, JoJo, BoBo, Ave, Lakewood, Jax, Chip, Domino, Florida Boy, TC, and Johnny Cochrane. You have cons, inmates, and snitches. Then there are the Screws, Turnkeys, and Cops Wearing Stripes to denote those in charge or trying to curry favor with the cops with real badges.

A person's sexual desirability or orientation brings forth a plethora of nicknames. One women was known as .44 Magnum for her magnificent bosom she wouldn't hesitate to display. Then there are the Meats, PeeWees, and Luscious Lulu's, while gay men are called Nancy's and a lesbian is known as a Dyke. As can be seen, nicknames can be funny, delightful, or cruel.

As I teen I was once called Wet Willie after I went swimming in a Minnesota lake to retrieve a duck a friend had shot down. Later in life I was dubbed Orca, because I was the biggest man on the team and carried the M-60 machine gun. Nowadays I am known variously as Truck, Poppa, Dad, Unc,

Sardo, LT, or The Candyman. My girlfriend calls me her Knight in Dented Armor.

Look around and identify everyone you see by their nickname. Isn't it amazing how many people we know only by their nickname? And what nickname is it you live up to?

by Sarah Luedecke

I've been called many things. I am these things and none of these. I've been called "Solo," "Frost," "Eden," "Sara Jane," "Halliana," "Monster," "Dangerous," "Worthless," "Embarrassing," "Lifeless". So many people assume at first glance the lack of emotion etched upon my tattooed face is the way that I am. I would say this is true. I don't go out of my way to make myself unapproachable, just I prefer not holding the normal conversation people are so very attracted to. Of course, what moves me doesn't exist in a world where lies are the foundation for life and plastic is the depth of a person.

No one knows my passion for baking, cooking, or writing. I even have a manuscript that is fantasy, unpublished. I attend college and despite my enjoyment of learning I struggle to pass. Not because I'm not intelligent. Being intelligent is by far one of the common compliments I receive, but because I have Asperger's Syndrome. Stack that on to the PTSD I developed in not only the military but before that from numerous traumatic experiences. Yet I have nothing to date that I have accomplished I would say I am proud of! Not in myself!

I have three boys, Thor, Loki, and Ryo, who are all three my greatest and best accomplishment to date. However, I'll never be able to tell them because my nicknames are who I continue to be labeled as. Maybe one day I'll have nicknames like "mother," "lover," "wife," "author," "baker," "spouse," "brilliant," "loving," "forgiven," and "understood." Until then I strive to exceed everyone's expectations and make progress each and every day.

by Diane Spencer

Chocolate! Babygirl! Noo Noo and Na Na. Even *itch! All "nicknames" I hear daily. They say it takes all kinds...and women sure do know how to put a name to them all!

But, wouldn't it be nice if we assigned nicknames based upon one another's very best qualities? My best friend would be "Generous", or maybe "Loyal". She's so much of both. My youngest brother would be "Faithful" or "Committed" instead of Buddy. And his wife? Well she would just be AMAZING instead of "Sweetie Girl".

Instead of calling all of the wild, young women running all around by their "street names", or even worse, we could just call them "Young Children of God"!

Even the officers have been assigned nicknames..."Cupcake" and "Queen B" and we even have a female "Joe Dirt"! So hard to look beyond some of the nicknames we give them. But, I'll try...Maybe "Ms. Compassionate". I know one or two of those. And I do know a "Miss Understanding". Even a "Miss Helpful". Oh wait! There are even a few "Mr. Respectful"s around here.

If we were to assign nicknames based upon our best qualities maybe we would all be better people...Maybe, it would change how we perceive ourselves and maybe even how we act. It couldn't hurt to be continually reminded of the good in ourselves. After all, we all know the damage that occurs when we're constantly reminded of the worst in ourselves. Certainly no one wants to be known as "Thief"! Or "Liar"! Or "Backstabber"! And definitely not "Snitch"! And really, who honestly likes to be called "*itch"?

If we had to be openly called the very best parts of who we are maybe we would be kinder. Honest. Respectful. Giving. Helpful. Forgiving. Loving. And oh, wouldn't it be something if we could mean it every time we call out, "Hey FRIEND!"

Nicknames. From childhood until our adulthood and even sometimes on our graves when we are gone, we wear them, own them, love them...sometimes we can't stand them! But, good or bad, liked or disliked they are the banners that we wear. We should remember that the next time we assign one to someone else.



Art by Maximilian Michaels

FACING FEAR

by Sean E. Poulton

I learned early in my prison sentence to face my fears. There was no choice. As a child, I was raised by my mother and two older sisters. I grew up very timid and soft spoken. I had only been in a couple of actual fights, and they were usually with my friends.

My life changed in an instant on December 8, 1993. My crime was not planned, and it wasn't meant to happen. It started as a "scoping out" mission to see if a home was worth burglarizing. It ended in a brutal murder of an innocent man only trying to defend himself and his home. I didn't kill the man, but he died as a direct result of my actions. I got us in the house. I realize I am just as responsible. I don't mean to minimize my part in the events of that night.

After my arrest, I was placed in a small cell block in jail. My name was all over the news, and I'm from a small town so no one really talked to me or messed with me.

I walked through the gates of Pendleton January 18, 1996. Hearing that railroad gate close behind you is nearly heartstopping.

I was placed in an 8 man dorm called A & O (Administration and Orientation). It was a cold afternoon, and my first meal was supper. The bell rang, doors came open, and people filed out in jacket and boots. Behind me was an old school dude from Michigan City Prison named Ben.

We get back to the chow hall, and guys are coming from the left and right to walk single file through the chow door. A guy on my left steps up to go in, and a guy from my right rushed past me, pulls the jack of the guy in front of me, and hits him in the ribs--hard. *Uhh*, you hear as the attacked rushes off. The victim falls in the doorway, pulls his hand away from his rib and is leaching blood. 12 inches in front of me, a man had been stabbed, two hours after walking into the prison.

I started to help him up when Ben grabbed me from behind, "Do you know him?" As I reply no, he pushes me through the door, "Then mind your business if you want to survive."

I walk through the line on the right, shaken and so scared I want to puke.

When I get to the window, I see opposite from me is another window with a black dude grabbing a tray. Behind and there out, the whole line is blacks. Behind me is all white. I go to the Kool-Aid stand and wait on Ben to decide where we should sit. We find a table on the right side of the chow hall where it's all white.

I look down at my beans and corn head and realize I can't eat. Just the Kool-Aid makes me want to vomit. "You gonna eat that?" Ben asks. I slide it over to him.

That was the beginning of my nightmare. After all these years, I've learned how to sit, never with both legs under the table, in case you need to get up quickly. And always sit

across from a friend. Lovers sit side by side; friends sit across from each other and watch out for each other.

I heard my first rape about a month into it. I laid in bed, clutching a piece of metal and crying with the knowledge that I couldn't help that kid without putting myself at risk.

It didn't matter: I was at risk anyway until I proved I was not prey. I stabbed my first man within 90 days to avoid being claimed.

Every step I took was pure fear. I was in a 48 man dorm with no police and no cameras. The police came in 6 times a day to count, locked the door, and went back downstairs. My choice was taken from me. I lived in fear, and there was no escaping it. No choice but to face it. To overcome it meant being feared. So I adapted and changed to survive.

I've lived this way for 20+ years, and I have scars from the top of my head to my knees. I've had at least 8 broken bones, and the scars people see are the least of them.

Now, I don't fear prison. This is my world. I know how to survive. Now, as the possibility of getting out approaches, I fear the real world. I am a convict now. What will I be when I get out? What will be my identity?

I have a beautiful, loving wife. Will she see things she doesn't like in me? Can I give her and be for her all that she deserves?

I want to be loved and truly respected, not feared. I only chose that path to survive. Can I survive out there? My question now is, can we ever be completely at ease with no fear?

by Corey Higgins

They say we should face our fears, though some are a little more scarier than others. Some people spend their whole life facing their fear, while others spend most of theirs running from theirs. But as for me, I'm having to face my fear whether I want to or not. Life has put me in a place where a turn of events have led up to me facing my worst fears of all.

I sit in what we call a day room, and I put in headphones in my ears with the music loud to block out the yelling and laughing all around, and the cards slamming on the table. Most long times in this dorm got their own seat where they sit all the time. So I'm sitting my everyday seat, thinking about what my sister is doing and how her kids are doing. Then it hits me that I'm pretty much alone in this world, out of sight and out of mind. My uncle would say that, and he did 21 years in Tennessee prison and always tried to get me to calm my act down. But with my Mother gone and now my wife passes as well, it's only a matter of time, if not already, that I'm "forgotten." What have I done to leave my mark on this earth?

This feeling is the one fear that I've ran from since my Mother died in my arms. Funny thing is feelings affect not just how we think but our habits too, since it feels like even if I get out, I won't have anyone or anything. So I keep busy trying not to think about it. Though I've still got family not really around,

it's started to settle in my worse fear of dying alone and not being remembered.

So in 8.5 years from now, I'm working on it, and to my shock, being alone has kind of got its positive ways to look at this. New start, a goal to make my mark here on this earth and not something that hurts others. As I write this, I hope it has helped someone. First mark is fixing my wrongs, and second mark is helping others. Then I move toward drawing so much because I want to be a great artist, a one of a kind and remembered person. I guess that the same reason I write is to be remembered, but now, no matter what happens to my goals and plans, one thing is for sure. I'll have faced my fears!

Picture Themes

Some people respond much better to picture cues than they do word cues. For that reason, we started including pictures that we hope inspire you to tell a story. In the word themes, we ask you to write true accounts when you submit an entry. For picture cues, there are no such constraints. You can write anything that comes to mind from the picture you see. I hope the picture inspires a story and prompts you to write it down and submit it to us. As with the word cues, if you send in a story, you will receive a packet with all the stories written about the same picture. Remember to write legibly. Perhaps, if you are hesitant about participating in this project, you might join Greg's program that will help end writer's block. Here are some submissions for the past deadlines:



by Shaun Blake

This picture personifies peace. It exudes peacefulness. Every time I look at this picture it makes a smile come to my lips and peace fills my heart. As does the longing to be the partaker of the love I see. This scene is never something we here inside will physically see or experience. But we find our peace in our own whimsical ways.

Peace takes many forms for many prisoners. One might find peace with music (in all its many forms), within nature (its animals, its vegetation, its geology, etc.) with meditation (yoga, breathwork, guided imagery, etc.), within religion/spirituality (all its many forms), with exercise (weight lifting, walking, running, cycling, etc.), with just enjoying the silence with his family lying in a hammock - within the noise around them, as one prisoner told me.

In prison peace is hard to find. It's hard to find someone who is trying to seek peace (guards included). But one only needs to look inside oneself to find peace. Peace is in whatever you, as an individual, can find it in, just learn to look - TO SEE! And accept the peace when it's found. Too many of us believe peace is lost to us because we're incarcerated. I did for many years. But not anymore.

One of the ways I've found peace is in accepting myself as a person of worth. Of worth only because I exist. This has also opened my eyes to the fact that I've worthy abilities. I love to put my earplugs in and immerse myself in a good book (I'm presently reading *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens) or writing poetry and other creative writings. I'm transported out of my cell into whatever existence the author has created or what I'm creating. The words aren't just a bunch of letters randomly combined, marching across a white sheet of paper. They're new worlds I travel in, new adventures taking me wherever I want to go. I'm not in prison then. I'm in my peaceful place(s).

I truly believe that I've learned to take back myself. To take my ability to choose back from the system that had stolen it. Because I peacefully travel across endless worlds, through many situations, in the guise of innumerable entities, I've reduced my incarceration to what amounts to the turning of a page or the taking up of a pen or pencil. To me this is peace.

"Lazy Days" by Joshua Balistreri

It's days like this one that we live for. Days filled with ease and relaxation. Days where the most difficult part of it is when it ends. Life is punctuated by moments like these. The sweet, blissful moments of job, and time spent with our families.

Each week we work our hands to the bone. Struggles with coworkers, battles with our bosses, and the pressure to meet deadlines. We sacrifice time at home for time at the office, or more overtime at the shop. And for what? At times, we get caught up in the rush of it, and it's easy to feel it's all for nothing. Then we finally get a chance to simply slow down and enjoy the day, and we come to the realization that this, this

moment of peace, is what we do it for. And suddenly all our strife seems worth it. In these brief instants, we see the true meaning of life.

As I lay here in this hammock, looking up at the sky, and notice my wife smiling at me, our little girl quiet and content, I know, without a doubt, that this is what it's all about. These lazy days.

by Akai McRee-Tram

Ahi puchica mi cora through all my travels I would never thought I would end up in a maca with you and our little princess. I can only scratch mi chiba and say to myself - I went to the U.S. to work but instead ended up with prison time. And when I.C.E. came to see me they only ask me "Where did I get them papers?" I could only say "ami no me pica tu english señor". So they told me that the United States of America don't deport people like me.

So now that I lay here en esta maca con vos I think of those words that I can't even call or write to you all, because I went to chase the big American dream - and I ended up with a thirty to sixty year sentence with no friends or family. Just a bunch of scars and empty promises.

And I can only recall those long lazy days lying in a maca with my dos flores,talking about if I went to the "USA", how better we would all be because of the money.

And now I wake up hoping and wishing I can be with my flores,

pero eso no es así y solo lo que tengo es un deseo de estar a su lado

Pero me piden 85% de mi tiempo para

Yo salir y estar a su lado con tazas de café y tortillas de maseca

En manos eso solo es mi sueño

And this picture brings me back to those lazy days.

But I must wake up from this daydream and go back to my day of three meals and a cot with four walls and a door that is locked. That I can only wish I could take off mi chanchas and hat to rub mi chiba, and think of you as just another lazy day.

That I come to realize I'll never see or hear of my loved ones again.

But I keep on smiling on because one day all this will be gone. As I know that they took my freedom but they can never take my pride or memories. Even though my body will get battered and bruised, I can always fall back to those lazy days in a maca con mis dos flores.

Es una esperanza hacia, pero todos tenemos la misma esperanza.



"Daddy's Little Girl" by Michael Morales

My wife Gloria called me and told me, "Babe we need to talk." At first, I was kind of nervous because I thought she found out about my drug addiction. I was at work. So, I said okay. And then she said "Come straight home." I was like "okay." So, I come home, and I'm like "What's up?" and she was like "I'm pregnant." And I was like "For real stop playing, are you serious." I had a big smile on my face. I was happy. And she was like "Yes I'm pregnant - I don't know how that happened." She was on birth control, something called I.U.D. I guess it's a plastic deal inside of her. Anyway, we went to the OBGYN - "Coochie Doctor" - and sure enough, she was pregnant.

Of course, I wanted my baby. I don't believe in abortion, and I'm glad she never mentioned it either, anyhow.

The baby started growing, and almost every day Gloria would grab my hand and put it on her stomach, and I could feel the baby moving. We found out the baby was a little girl. Gloria said I could name her. So, I named her Alexus. Because I always said, "I don't think I'll ever be able to buy a Lexus car so I'll make one, and call it Alexus!!" Then her middle name is Josephine after my grandma! We called her Alexus before she was even born. The day Gloria went into labor, I was at work, and she called me and said, "Babe your mom is coming to pick me up, I'm having the baby."

Now, I had an '86 Buick Skylark that only went forty miles an hour. That day I pushed it to the limit and went forty-five miles an hour. I was on the freeway and cars were honking their horns and passing me up. I didn't care, I just knew I had to make it to the hospital to see my baby's first breath. I finally made it, and it was for real. Gloria was in so much pain, screaming, cursing, crying, etc., etc. She even told me to beat

the damn doctor up. They were telling her to push, and she was like "What the \$@?* do you think I'm doing." I guess she got so tired, she gave up on pushing, and the doctor said we are going to have to move into another room for an emergency C-section.

I didn't know what to do, I felt helpless. The doctor took off his gloves and apron and asked, "Sir you can come with us?" So, I left the room, and when I went out, my family and her family were out there. And they were like, "Did she have the baby?" and I was like, "No, they are taking her to emergency C-section, and I can't go." We were on the eighth floor so I jumped into the elevator, went all the way down, walked outside, smoked a whole cigarette and came back inside. I went back up to go check to see what's up, and right when I walked in, all I saw and heard was, "Oh here she comes!" Alexus just slid out. I never seen nothing like that in my life. It was the grossest, nastiest, craziest, beautiful thing in the world. I didn't cut the cord because I was in shock. I walked over to Gloria and told her "It's over babe. I love you" and kissed her. She said, "Go check on the baby." So I did!

They checked her and cleaned her up then wrapped her up and handed her to me. I just looked down at her and smiled. I felt like crying in my mind. I was like, I made this, this is mine. We were connected; this was daddy's little girl. I walked over to Gloria and said, "Here babe you want to hold her." And she said "No you wanted a baby, now you got it: she's yours." Gloria is a good mother; she was just messing around. I handed her the baby, and she just held her like nothing new, that was her third child. I took the baby back and just held her until they took her away. Anyway, from that day on, we stuck together like these two girls connected at their hair. I'm serious. I lost my job, stayed home then took care of her while Gloria worked. From the day she was born, all the way until I got locked up, Alexus was right there with me. She was my road dog, my sidekick. I taught her everything: how to crawl, walk, talk, all that.

I just saw her April seventeenth and I'm in AD.SEG so it was through the glass window. And she said, "Daddy do you know what I want?" And I said, "What you want beautiful?" and she said, "I want to give you a hug and a kiss." I started crying, then she started crying too. She's only seven years old, and I'm thirty-four. I've only got one year left, God willing, until I get out. I can't wait to hold my baby girl again so we can be connected all over!

Thank you for reading this true story and remember all praise and glory goes to our Lord and God Jesus Christ! Amen!



"Heroes Vs. Hypocrites" by J.C. Young

I'm conflicted! Yes, participating in this war will afford me and my family opportunities - mind you, less opportunities than the average white American in 1963 - But also equally justified is the disdain and indignation I feel for the mistreatment and inequality I endured on a daily basis as a black American. Jim Crow is brutally degrading. Yet, here I sit, hoping to defend this country. Begging to defend it. As if my life isn't good enough to waste on a country that hates me.

"Yeah, that's an interesting dilemma," Latrel, the mulatto brother in the next seat observes. I initially met him at the recruiting office. They threw us in the same barracks during boot camp - which is hardly surprising considering the air force only has two dormitories reserved for black soldiers. We ran up hills, side by side, with eighty pound packs strapped to our back, crawled through mud; under spiky wires and sealed twenty foot walls; all in the name of a country that despise us.

"Yeah, 'interesting', that's one way to put it," Jamal, the brother next to him, contributed to the conversation.

He's a Tuskegee graduate - top of his class - wrote for the North Star and even had a brother represent this country in the Olympics. But with black skin, nobody cared. He was cursed to the same misfortune as the rest of us.

"Alright, guys," Commander Springwell ordered, "Calm it down. We got work to do!" After the noise dies down, he resumes - "They don't like us. We know that. Heck, half the country thinks we don't even belong here. The other half thinks we're not 'sophisticated enough' to fly no planes. Well, guess what? I don't care what they think. We are the Tuskegee Airmen! Not only are we flying those mini-bombers, but we're the best da-gone pilots this country has ever seen."

Frankly, after a short while, I tune him out. The commander's patriotic rhetoric usually precedes our missions:

How great this country is; how we should be proud to sacrifice our life for it and hope *they* recognize our value and afford us equal rights.

As if, unlike all other races in this country, we have to earn decent treatment. But the truth is, no race has contributed more free labor in creating this country ten us. *PERIOD*: Blood, sweat, tears, and pregnant women hanging from trees while their babies hung by their umbilical cords.

"Alright, mission starts at 0700 hours. Be ready. The United States Navy will not wait on you," With that, Commander Springwell storms out the room, leaving us to ponder another arduous mission.

"Man, I'm tired of this shit!" Larry - on the bench directly behind me - announces, like he always does, "If we were white, we would have the new planes instead of that cheap crap."

"Not today, Larry," Latrel says and gets up, "The way I see it any mission could be our last. And if I'ma die out here, 'lest I could do is get me some pussy 'fore I go!"

"You ain't think you made enough high-yellow babies out here yet. 'Finna have Germany lookin' like Harlem in no time." Big Willy said from the last seat on the second bench.

"Let's get the party started then," Larry says and gets up, bracing a hand on my shoulder as he does.

"We gotta pretty early start tomorrow," I say, always sounding like the annoying grandmother.

"We know," Jamal - the Tuskegee graduate - concedes.

"Shie, better get it out our system 'fore we go back home; that respect-for-a-blackman-shit will be over." Latrel's comment sanctions a stale silence that dominates the room. We avoid each other's eyes, suddenly finding meaningless tasks to occupy ourselves with.

The truth is, the real fight - for us, at least - is back home. Brothers like Malcolm, Luther - even the boxer, Muhammed Ali - are making headlines condemning America for doing exactly what we're doing. How are we supposed to feel? Serving as agents of an imperialistic regime looking to oppress people of color like they're doing us.

My girlfriend's stopped replying to my letters. She's joined "The Revolution". To her, I'm a hypocrite; a boot-licking "Uncle Tom"!

Somberly, one at a time, we all mope out the room, a slight slump in our shoulder.

Out the dining hall, across the compound - beneath a gloomy night - we all enter our sleeping quarters. We each go to our bunks and stew in thought. Out the window, by the field

of planes, crickets, frogs, and other critters in the night ridicule us with an ominous chorus.

"Well, I'm finna' go partying 'fore we get into this dog-fight tomorrow. Who's coming?" Latrel's words - aimed at infusing some levity back into the situation - splatter against the wall and slowly slide down onto the dirt floors.

"Man, I'm going to sleep," Jamal says and turns towards the wall.

"Shie, that's what I'm doing," Big Willy echoes.

One by one, those sentiments are repeated throughout the dorm.

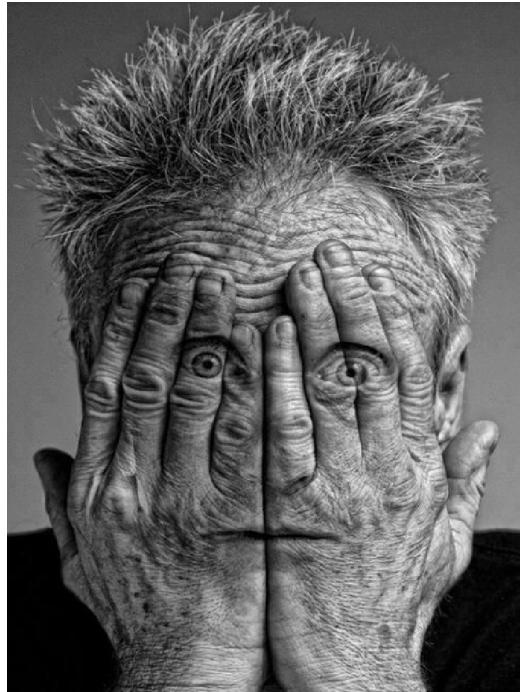
"How 'bout you, Dewayne," He finally asks me.

"Naw, bra', sleep's what I'm doing."

"Shie, why is that?"

"Because, in this situation, ain't nothing to party about."

And with that, I too, turn around, face the wall, and call it a night.



"Masks" by Charles M. Yonkings

The word "person" comes from the Latin *persona* which means "mask." Each and everyone of us have many masks that we wear, whether it's to protect ourselves and hides our vulnerabilities from those around us, or to hide emotions, or even portray qualities that we wish we had. We can use masks to fit into different groups of society.

These masks change throughout the day as we move from scene to scene in this grand production we call life. We

try to fulfill the roles that society has created. We have our professional masks for work. We have our Paternal or Maternal masks. We have our "street" masks and our "party" masks. Masks for all occasions.

As we move through the day, we hide behind these masks. They protect us from prying eyes of those around us. They create an image of strength when we feel weak. They show smiles when we are at our lowest. They may show tears when we seek sympathy.

We are all actors playing the part we think we must. In prisons, there are many masks to wear, and every role has a player. Some have many roles. The person they are, the person they wish they were, and the person they think others want them to be. There are predator masks, masks of prey, masks of loves, gangsters, and snitches, and all other characters imaginable. Both savory and unsavory, which is subjective. Right and wrong is in the eye of the beholder, especially in prison.

Though these masks we wear are used to hide ourselves from others, we also hide from ourselves. Most of us don't have the slightest clue as to who we really are, and we are scared to find out. When you put someone alone by themselves for a while, a lot of things surface. Demons from our past come rushing at us in a whirlwind of what ifs and if onlys. The average person isn't comfortable in their own skin so these masks are created to shield us from our own worst enemy: ourselves.

Nietzsche said it best: "When staring into the abyss, be careful for it may stare back into you." So the next time you look in the mirror, ask yourself who is in the glass staring back. Is it me, or who I want to be, or who I was told to be?

by Anthony Randall

Today is August 22, 2016. I just received my summer issue of the Prisoner Express newsletter. As I flipped through the pages, reading the articles, I came to the picture writing cue due September 1. I instantly thought this must be how I look when I think about a lot of things that are going on out there in society. And especially when I think about politics in this country.

If I was to describe myself, I'd say I am a good, ol' country boy at heart. I served in the United States Army and got injured during my service, receiving an honorable discharge under medical conditions. I am a patriot of our country.

But I now sit in a 6x10 solitary confinement cell because I've made some very poor choices in my life. After

receiving injuries and the discharge, I was dealing with a lot of personal issues. I was diagnosed with traumatic brain injury and post-traumatic stress disorder. Regardless of what I had been through or what I was diagnosed with, no matter what the surrounding circumstances were, I still made some poor choices. And that led to my current circumstances.

I sit in this tiny cell and watch the news and read the newspapers. When I see everything that's going on out there in society, I picture myself looking crazy like this picture (LOL). Because it is truly so sad and scary to see where our country is heading! I see the cops killing unarmed human beings. I see people killing the cops. Because of everything going on, I see black people protesting since a black person was killed by a cop. The black lives matter group.

Then we can talk about terrorism and terrorists such as ISIS, Al-Qaeda, and other Islamic extremist groups who hate Christianity and Western civilization. There is so much hatred out in the world!

Whether it's abroad or right here in the USA, have you ever wondered why there is so much hatred in the hearts of mankind? I can't give you an easy answer--it's taken years and years for everything to get so messed up! But what is amazingly astounding to me is the fact that a lot of people feel like nothing is wrong at all.

We have homeless people, unemployed people, and starving kids living in poor conditions--right here in America. And yet we want to open the borders and let hundreds of thousands, millions of immigrants come here. I understand not all of these people are bad, and many are running for their lives from even worse places in the world such as South America and the war-torn Middle East.

I just don't understand what "Washington" is thinking about or what they are doing. There are people like Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump who are running for president. Both who are terrible choices for our country, and both have billions together for campaigning, but yet kids are starving and veterans are homeless. People are unemployed.

Then I think about slavery. Slaves and slavery were abolished in America, but what do you call the American Prison system? You have hundreds of thousands of prisoners across our country, and we are forced to work in prison in many different jobs. From the license plate factory to uniforms for military and office equipment for state offices, we get paid next to nothing! \$9, \$16, \$22 a month, for as much as 16 hours a day for 7 days a week. If you refuse to perform your work duties, they write you tickets and put you on different restrictions. So ask yourself, is slavery really over? Clearly the

answer is no! For a man or woman who "broke the law" to work these hours and not receive enough money to pay for basic hygiene items is wrong. Then people say well, it offsets what you don't pay for (food, electricity). Living in prison teaches you nothing about being a successful member of society.

With everything going on around me, I want to hide my eyes so I don't see it.

by Tommy Hightower

The picture of man trying to hide his eyes from seeing reality of the world, yet the world still is there, in stark reality, no matter where you try to hide.

This is so much a symbol of much of the American society's personality disorder in the twenty-first century. We as a society at large, try to avert our eyes from the stark reality of life in America.

We hide our eyes from seeing a race problem, when we witness racism daily. We see classism too. Yet we put on blenders and rose colored glasses, then pretend that we personally do not hold such bias, nor its presence in our communities. Just look at the murdering of persons of color by law enforcement. Both white America and upper classes never see it as a national disgrace. Instead, they spout it was just criminals who deserved what they got. It took us social advocates of "all" races and classes to make it a well-known fact of murder by state actors.

Now let's look at the prime example of hiding our conscience from blatant facts concerning our presidential candidates. Both have flaws. Yet one lived under a microscope of dirt digging by her political opponents, yet so little dirt stuck. Advocates do endure mud slinging. Yet you have on the opposite side, a glaring-certified hate mongering racist with severe egomaniacal tendencies who claims purity while wearing bloodstained hooded white robes. To hear his supporters, this narcissist with a messiah complex really is the savior of the American WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant).

Yet as the eyes still can see the world despite hiding the eyes, we as a nation know we are only fooling ourselves, but reality just is too fearful to bear at this time. So we sleep in a false security that the America we know yesterday will still be the same tomorrow. Well that is a pipe dream so wake up and smell the coffee. Our nation is forever changed.

I challenge you today, to start looking around and truly seeing this world for what it truly is. Then change it for the better.



"Unchanging" by Charles Murphy

Here is a mountain. When we think of mountains, we conjure the images of a solid, massive form of earth that doesn't move or change and probably hasn't since humans first walked the earth.

However, these thoughts are misleading. Mountains do, in fact, change as well as move, except observing these things is nearly impossible. To see changes takes time.

To the outside world, I am like this mountain. To the correction department especially, I seem to be the same selfish criminal who hasn't learned a thing from being locked up, but that isn't the case.

With time, most mountains rise taller and taller, high above the rest. Mount Everest grows a few centimeters a year. This growth can't be witnessed by casual glance, but it is happening even as you read this.

I look at the mirror and see the same guy I've always been, maybe a new scar or laugh line, just like a mountain gets sculpted by erosion. Inside myself is much different from the outside, like the magma influencing the growth of this mountain. My thoughts are changing, shifting in my mind, forming new ways of thinking, and melting away the negativity of my heart. You might not see this process, but the D.O.C. might say it's made up. That doesn't matter because I am changing: I will rise and reach the fullest extent of my potential.

With time, all things are possible. Even mountains change.

"My Mountain" by Craig Shipley

When I see this photo of the mountains, it reminds me of prison life. There are always ups and downs and unexpected pitfalls, trails, and paths.

There is beauty, even behind these walls. I've learned that I am a good listener, that I really care about people, and that I like to share. Being sober and not telling lies are good feelings.

My mountains will lead to my freedom one of these days.

"Living for the Moment" by Calvin Westerfield

Nature is really beautiful. To look at places on the Earth that have not been disturbed by the destructive hands of mankind is peaceful. The damage people have done to this planet so far is already causing so many changes to the environment, yet we continue to dig and build as if the Law of Causation do not apply to us.

CNN and other news stations are always reporting on big oil spills that poison aquatic life and on nuclear explosions that release toxic radiation into the atmosphere. They also talk of the coal we burn, the trees we cut down, and the natural resources we constantly take from the Earth; nature is starting to complain.

Sport hunting is something I've never understood either. To kill an animal and not eat it just seems wrong. What's the big deal about anyway? Here in Baraga, Michigan, these people call this "God's country" which means it's prime hunting land. You should hear all the correctional officers talk of their hunting plans: go out and whack a few bucks and black bears. What bragging rights do you have for hiding in a tree, luring an animal in, and shooting it from a very safe distance, just to leave it there?

That's not being in tune with nature. Our ancestors who were very skillful hunter-gatherers did not waste like this. In this day and age, we seem to be just living for the moment.

Think how dreadful things will be for humanity in 200 years from now if we keep degrading our home. Even animals know not to shit where they sleep! I wonder how a picture of this exact mountain and its surrounds will look in the year 2216? I hope for humanity's sake that it will waken up. The universe always corrects itself.

"100 Years" by David Cooper

I grew up in the city, but my grandfather introduced me to fishing around age 6, and then one of my mother's boyfriends took us camping. I loved the outdoors early on, but as I started getting older and came into my teens, I was too busy running with friends and chasing girls for a day of fishing or camping. Around this time, I started going in and out of jail.

The last time I was home in 2011, I was wanted and went on the run. I went all the way across the country to northwestern Montana, a place I'd never been. I didn't know anyone, and I was on the U.S. Marshals' Most Wanted list. At first, I was so stressed out and fell into a deep depression due to the fact I was sure I would never see daylight again once caught.

Right outside of Glacier National Park on a campground, I was staying in a tent then a camper, a big change from my condo and expensive things I used to have.

After I was there for awhile, I began to enjoy myself and felt happy. When I would go into the remote wilderness or parks out there, I was happier than I'd ever been. These

beautiful places changed my life--may have even saved it. I see this picture and am in places that are some of the most free places on earth. I'm sitting in one of the most unfree places.

I'm thankful for men that made this possible, like President Theodore Roosevelt and John Muir, especially John Muir.

With the Park Service turning 100 this year, I hope these places are protected and around forever, so future generations can enjoy them, and so they can bring happiness into others' lives like they did me, even if it's only for a short time. And someday, I will be able to breathe in that cool mountain air, smell the trees and flowers, and be surrounded by raw beauty you can only find in these wild places.

The following photos are for the upcoming picture themes. Please send us your submission by the deadlines for each.



Due 3/17



Due 4/17



Due 5/17



Due 6/17



Due 7/17



Due 8/17



Due 9/17

Final Notes:

I so appreciate being able to write to all of you at once in these newsletters. I get so many interesting letters from you over the course of six months and I often want to write individual replies, but I just cannot find the time to do so. As the program expands, it will only get harder. So many of you tell you a little about what I am up to.

As a parent, I am particularly concerned about my children and the world they will inherit after a Trump presidency. He is a fear monger who tries to make it seem as if doom is around the corner unless we listen to him. I do see many structural problems with how our country is organized and I am particularly disappointed in the vast inequality of wealth we experience in this country. The inequality of wealth distribution in our country should be criticized rather than

celebrated. We worship the rich and criminalize the poor. For all his talk, President Trump seems concerned with making himself and his wealthy cohorts richer, and keeping the rest of us scared of terrorists. I am more afraid of handguns in the hands of mentally unstable US citizens than I am of the refugees fleeing death from countries that have been destabilized by wars the US partly started. The fact that Trump will tell lies on camera and later deny what he said indicates he is not in touch with some aspect of reality. He now has the term, "Alternate Facts." He calls everyone a liar and fake. As bad a president as I felt Nixon and Bush were, they start to look like sage statesmen compared to our current president. Please, if you can write and let me know what you think. I am not sure what sources of news you have. If you listen to right wing talk radio or watch FOX news, you probably have a different picture of what is going on than if you read the New York times or listen to NPR news. Even our USA Today newspaper, typically conservative, has been questioning all the lies Trump tells. His cabinet picks highlight incompetency, and those people he has chosen aim to bring down the agencies they are hired to lead.

I was camping in the high desert of New Mexico on election night. My wife called to let me know what was happening [amazing cell phones]. I was in disbelief that he could be elected, and I guess it shows how far removed I am from mainstream thinking. I think most of America is still in shock, and I hope that his election will unify the country in rejection of his mean-spirited policies. The thing that tips me off to his bad character is that he has no sense of humor. At best, he can sneer at something humorous.

I wonder if PE should start putting together a current events newsletter where we share political news and commentary from around the nation. Knowing me, expect it to be leftist and highly critical of the Republican Party. My concern would be raising the funds for printing and mailing.

Regarding camping in the high desert of New Mexico: I got to take my annual man-cation with my good friend, also named Gary. We have convinced our wives that absence makes the heart grow fonder, and with their slightly reluctant blessings, we take a few weeks each year to camp in wild places. This year, we drove nonstop from NY to a third friend in Manitou Springs, CO. We stayed there and got some sleep. We visited a stunning rock outcrop there called "Garden of the Gods."



Garden of the Gods, Manitou Springs CO

From there, we drove a long way south to Las Vegas, New Mexico to visit a natural hot spring. Natural hot springs don't occur in the northeast, but can be found scattered throughout the west. Hot mineral water from deep within the earth flows to the surface. Finding these places and soaking is a particularly compelling pleasure for me. We soaked away our road weariness, and camped by a lake in Santa Rosa State Park. Because it was so hot in the day and so cold at night, all the lake water in the atmosphere came down as ice in the night. Our sleeping bags were stiff as boards so it took a few hours to thaw and then dry out once the sun reappeared. It was a good lesson to learn and we were careful not to leave a lot of things out whenever we camped by water during the trip. That we were covered in ice that morning propelled us south. Out of the high desert of northern NM, we headed to White Sands National Monument. It is a unique dessert, created by eroded gypsum, the same stuff they make sheet rock out of. Most of White Sands is off limits to the public and it is used as a missile testing base by the armed forces. There is a large public area on the south west side of it, so we camped out in the middle of the dunes. There is little life there. While camping, I saw one black bug and heard two birds in the distance. We even left some food out at night to see if it would attract any wildlife, but there were no takers. The folks in the area come there with snow sleds to slide down the big dunes. It is otherworldly.



White Sands National Monument, NM

From there we went further south west to Organ Mountain national monument. It was a stunning set of jagged peaked eroded mountains. I could only hike a bit as this was all prior to my hip surgery in December, but the beauty of the place certainly inspired some walking around.



Hiking at Organ Mountains, NM

While it wasn't freezing at night that far south, we wanted to be warmer so from there we headed to our primary destination of Big Bend, TX. For those of you who don't know, this is a large state park and an even larger national park. It is located on the Rio Grande.



View from camp site Big Bend State Park TX

The river is the boundary between the US and Mexico, and through the state park, the road follows the river. The scenery

is amazing. We camped in a different place every night., sometimes in the mountains and other times next to the river. We hiked in slot canyons that were super deep and as narrow as 4 to 6 feet wide.



Entering a Slot Canyon in Big Bend,,TX

We saw all sorts of crazy rock formations. The geography of that area is stunning. The only real hot spring in Texas is located in the national park. We ended each day soaking up the warmth of the mineral rich hot water, and then cooling off in the rio Grande. The topography makes the idea of a wall being built there ridiculous. Will they build the wall so Americans can't get in the river? Will they build it on the Mexican side of the border? Logistically once you drive 100 miles following a river that goes for 1200 miles between the two countries you see the enormity and foolhardiness of a plan to build a wall. Since when has Mexico been our enemy?

With all the real issues of income inequality, climate disruption, environmental degradation, US debt etc. how has the country become fixated on this non-issue? We exacerbated Islamic terrorism by invading the middle east, and now we suddenly hate all immigrants. It is absurd and anti-American.



Deeper in the Slot Canyon. It steep and narrow a little bit further down this way.

Well, after camping for 5 days, we had to hightail it back to NY, to work and family. Driving back, we stopped at Roan Mountain, TN. It's about 6000 ft. in elevation and affords some spectacular views of TN and NC. Mostly, we sleep out at night on these trips and that is the very best part of it all. I live in a town, and am mostly indoors between work and family life. Being outside continually through the week is a good and healthy thing to do.

So now the trip is over, my hip is healing, and Trump is president. The future awaits us all. Please send ideas on how we can best serve you with stimulating programs and interesting things to do.

REGISTRATION FORM

Please Note: If you received this newsletter, you are on our mailing list through July 2017 This form or a letter should be returned in a timely manner if you want to sign up for programs.—and If you don't want to cut up your newsletter, you can write a list of programs you wish to join and send it to us . If we do not hear from you by July you will be removed from the active mailing list until we do receive a letter from you

Programs – Please check the box of each program in which you wish to participate. Carefully read the requirements of each program before signing up.

[] Expedited Book Mailings –Check with the administration of your facility to be sure you are allowed to participate. If yes, please send 8 stamps or a check for \$4.00 to cover postage. Books are free, but the mailing cost is not. We have a good selection of donated used books List types of books you want, and we will make the best match with our existing collection of books.

Please fill in this if you order expedited books _____ Number of books allowed

_____ Soft cover only

_____ Hardcover and soft covered both allowed

[] Poetry Project – Please send me the next Prisoner Express Poetry Anthology Vol. 18. I understand that to receive the anthology I am required to submit a poem for consideration in the anthology.

[] Nutrition Packet – Please send me Larry' s packet on how the body converts the food we eat into ourselves!

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

[] Project Jump-Break – Please send Greg's packet that will explore ways to circumvent writer's block and unleash our creative writing abilities

[] Chess Club – Yes, I want to receive David's mailings on how to improve my chess game.

[] Art Knows: Come explore the world of art with Treacy and Danielle. Treacy will explore art and its' connection to animals and Danielle will explore the world of Pop Art

[] Buddhist Meditation Newsletter-Come explore the practice of mindfulness through breath and contemplation as well consider the inspiring quotes and ideas shared by Tara

[] Plasmodesmata--Science Journal Group come read and celebrate Plasmodesmata, channels between cells, through which information can be exchanged. How poetic!

[] Creative Interlude- A recreation packet for the confined body with an expansive mind

You do not need to sign up for the Theme and Picture Writing programs. By submitting your writings and art, you are automatically included on all future mailings regarding those individual projects.

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I give the Alternatives Library permission to post my writings and artwork on the web

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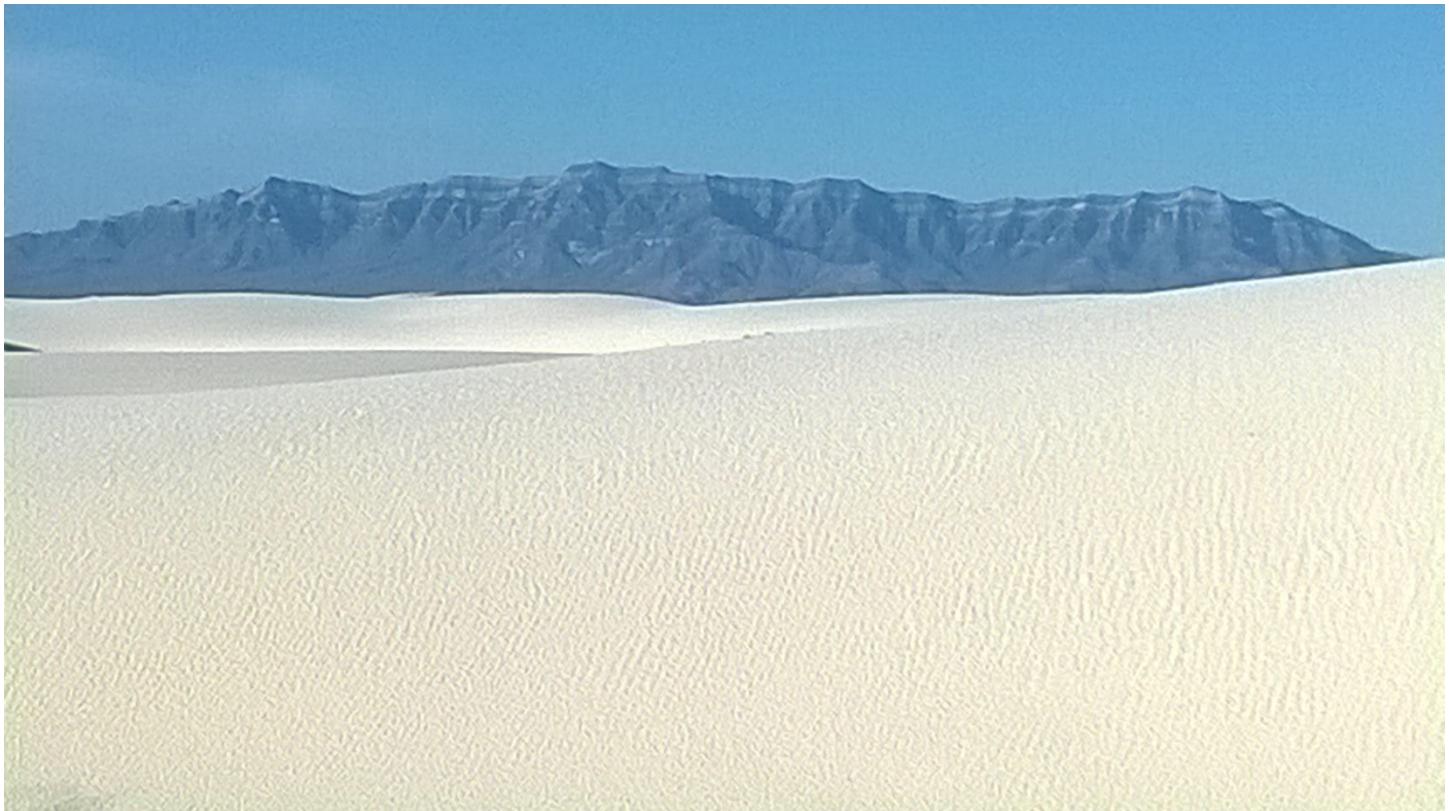
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Prisoner Express Newsletter Winter 2017

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..

The Durland Alternatives Library, which funds Prisoner Express, is 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



White Sands National Monument