

Winter 2005

A program of the Durland Alternatives Library, a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics & Social Policy (CRESP); with support from the Cornell University Public Service Center

Prisoner Express News

Hello to you all,

I send you season's greetings and best wishes. As the year 2005 opens I have a lot to be thankful for, and my correspondence with you is a part of that. I cannot answer your letters individually as there are too many and I don't have the time or resources to do it. I am glad that I can write to you as a group to share the latest Prisoner Express project updates, to catch you up on how I am doing, and to share with you some of the writings that you have sent to me.

I am using this letter to write to the 1400 or so of you who are participating in this program.

I am including another registration form in this newsletter. If you have already filled one out then you can ignore it. If you have not filled one out yet, please do so. **If you do not register this will be your last newsletter.**

I want to be sure the newsletter is reaching the people I'm sending it to, and I want to be sure you want to receive it. I will put a label on the registration page that will let you know your status in the program. That way it will be easy for you to tell whether you are registered in the program. Some of you who have been participating in our program for 2 years have not sent in the registration form. Please do it now so we can continue to send you mailings.

If you do not register with the program I will drop your name from the mailing list. I want to send this to everyone who wants it, but I have to know you are receiving it.

First I shall update you on the various programs offered by Prisoner Express. There are quite a number of you getting this newsletter for the first time. As many of you know we are a small organization with little funding. We are making the best of what we have, and are continuing to seek out funds and volunteers so we might better fulfill our mission of promoting rehabilitation by providing information, education, and opportunities for creative self-expression to incarcerated individuals throughout the United States.

Please understand that I coordinate this program while at work at the Alternatives Library. There is no direct funding for the project other than what I hunt up. I protect the funding I can secure by being careful how I spend the funds. If I respond

individual to the 1400 people who have written asking for books, I'd run out of funds quickly. We do the best we can with the resources available. I know many of you are benefiting from the resources we have been able to share.

BOOK MAILINGS

We continue to send books to prisoners. We match your request with the stock of donated books that we have. We have so many requests that for many of you the wait for your package seems too long. I'm sorry for that but we are doing the best we can. Last year we sent out about 970 packages of books. Given that we have more than 1200 requests you can see how long your wait can be. I'm working on how to speed book mailings up. It involves 3 things. I have to find a bigger space to pack books. I have to find money to pay the postage costs, and I have to find more volunteers to pack books. I know many of you have gotten books, and I hope we can send out at least 1000 packages this year. I know it is a drop in the bucket, but it's the best we can do right now. We keep track of your requests and every month print out labels for the next group of folks to get books. Your turn will come around. I get so many letters from people wondering, "where are my books". Some of you are very nice about it and others of you are a bit belligerent. Either way I do feel bad that the wait can be so long.

Book Resources

More Resource Information

Free Book Resources

• Books for Prisoners

c/o Groundwork Books, 0323 Student Center, La Jolla CA 92037 / Tel: (858) 452-9625 /

E-mail: groundwork@libertad.ucsd.edu

Groundwork Books offers up to two books per person, free of charge. Send your request, specifying your interests, and we will send you a detailed booklet for that area of interest. Subjects: politics, spirituality, feminism, dictionaries, culture, social criticism, and select novels. Stamp donations are appreciated but not required.

• Books Through Bars

4722 Baltimore Ave, Philadelphia PA 19143 / Tel: (215) 727-8170 / E-mail:

info@BooksThroughBars.org /

Website: www.BooksThroughBars.org

We offer a wide range of reading materials free of charge to inmates. Request books by topic and specific subject areas (for example: novels, self-help, American

history, etc.). If you wish, you may request specific titles or authors, however, we may not be able to provide these. No legal books. Donations, including stamps, are greatly appreciated. Please send information regarding prison regulations for reading material being sent in. Allow 3 to 4 months for delivery.

• **The Granite Publishing Group**

PO Box 1429, Columbus NC 28722 / Tel: (828)

894-8444 / E-mail: brian@5thworld.com /

Website: <http://5thworld.com>

Inmates may write to receive free books on subjects that support the cultivation of planetary consciousness. The metaphysical/transformational subjects of our books range from Native American spirituality to the extraterrestrial presence. Please send postage if possible.

• **The Inside Books Project**

c/o 12th Street Books, 827 West 12th St, Austin TX 78701 / Tel: (512) 647-4803 /

E-mail: insidebooksproject@yahoo.com

We send books free of charge to Texas inmates only. Please expect a three to six month wait. We also offer a resource list and a free newsletter. Donations and/or stamps are appreciated if possible.

• **Prison Book Program**

c/o Lucy Parson's Bookstore, 110 Arlington St,

Boston MA 02116 / Tel: (617) 423-3298 /

E-mail: info@prisonbookprogram.org / Website:

www.prisonbookprogram.org

The Prison Book Program has been supplying individuals and groups of prisoners with free, quality reading material since 1972. We believe that literacy and access to reading materials are crucial for the personal, spiritual, and political development of all people. We offer a free **National Prisoner Resource List** to all prisoners. We do not offer a catalog of books, so please request books by topics. When requesting books, please send us your prison's restrictions on reading material. Donations, including stamps, are always welcome. Be patient, we have over a 3 month backlog of requests.

ART CARDS

We have started an art card project. We sent some copy paper to about 300 of you last fall. Some of you received it while others had it refused. It was good that it was inexpensive copy paper, as I didn't mind the loss. It provided me with information about where we could send paper. Since it's initial denial I have contacted the Texas mail coordinator and gotten permission to send paper into Texas jails. I am working my way down through other states where the paper was rejected to get permission. It is always hit or miss. Many prison administrations won't give me

the time of day, but others are agreeable about helping us further our mission. We will take some of the drawings you submit and create art cards by scanning them into the computer. Anyone can send in drawings, but I'm trying to support the 300 or so folks who signed up for the program by sending them paper. I will try to improve the quality of the paper in the next mailing. I must hear from those of you registered in the program before I send you more paper. I hope to be able to sell cards and use profits to pay for mailing books to you. If you do send a drawing send a few words about yourself to be put on the back of the card.

JOURNAL PROJECT

We have just started this project. We have sent letters to 272 of you who want to participate. If you have signed up for the journal project and have not heard from us then you probably registered after we began the program. We will start another group on journals in the summer so let me know if you want to be included in the next group. We will be sending legal pads to those of you in this project. Of course some of you won't be able to receive them depending on the rules of your facility. I will send you a letter a few weeks before we mail them out so you can be looking out for them. Kate a senior here is managing the journal project at Cornell University. Our hope with this project is to create online journals for those of you who write. We will scan the writings into the computer and then post them on the website. It's a big task, but I believe it is doable.

WEB SITE

This is one area that really needs improvement. I believe it is a key component to this program. With it we can let more people know about our work, and more importantly hook them up with you and your writings. Besides the Journals, I want to place your poetry, theme writings, other essays, and personal profiles on the web site. We have a volunteer from another local college (Ithaca College) who has agreed to manage the website. We are meeting later this week to further this plan. I hope he can help me realize my dream of a web site that will convey all of the information I just listed. Many of you have sent profiles already. Most of them are typed into the computer, but they are not on the website. I have circulated the list of profiles to many different folks to see if I can find you pen pals.

PEN PALS

This subject deserves it's own paragraph. We don't have a distinct pen pal program, yet we try to find people to write you. We don't have lots of folks looking for pen pals. The way the world is these days, most people don't write letters. Many people email frequently, and the personal letter written on paper is quickly becoming a thing of the past. I hope the website will help you find people to write to you. We have recruited students to write, but students are a very transient group. They move a lot and leave town when school is not in session. I have a dead letter file of letters written by prisoners that students fail to pick

up. There is not much I can do about that. Please know these students are under a lot of academic pressure, so while they may have good intentions they can get overwhelmed with their commitments. On the plus side I do know that I have hooked up quite a number of you with pen pals who do write. I know how important mail can be and I will continue to try to find people to write, but with so many of you wanting letters there will always be many who are not getting letters.

As far as your personal profiles, please try to let people know about yourself. Let them know what is important to you. Many of the profiles seem to be looking for that special someone with the implications that romance could follow. I know that the students I work with will not respond to personals like that. You are welcome to write what you want, but the heavy flirt type profile will not get many responses. It's tough cause I imagine that dreams of love can keep you going during periods of solitude. I certainly understand the desire. It's just that I don't think you will get many replies from the folks I work with. Maybe it will be different when your profiles are on the website.

PEN PAL RESOURCES

- **CellPals!**

PO Box 1594, Montgomery TX 77356 / E-mail: support@cellpals.com / Website: www.cellpals.com

CellPals! is a prison pen pal organization on the internet that seeks to aid inmates in finding positive influences during a given term of incarceration. We try to make our site accessible to everyone regardless of financial status.

- **Christian Pen Pals**

PO Box 2112, Statesville NC 28687 / Website: www.christian-penpals.com

We share the love of Jesus by providing a Christian pen pal for friendship and spiritual help to those who ask, and by networking with other sources of help for other needs common to prisoners.

- **The Conversations With God Foundation / God's Pen Pals**

PMB#1150, 1257 Siskiyou Blvd, Ashland OR 97520 / Tel: (541) 482-8806 / E-mail: prisonoutreach@cwg.info / Website: www.cwg.org

Our foundation is based upon the work of Neale Donald Walsch and his books **Conversations With God**. Through our program, God's Pen Pals, we will connect you with other people who are interested in these teachings. In addition, you may write to request a scholarship subscription to our newsletter, **Conversations**, and through our Books for Friends program, you may request any of the **Conversations with God** books free of charge.

- **Death Row Support Project**

PO Box 600 Dept P, Liberty Mills IN 46946

We offer pen pal services to death row inmates.

- **Hongaku Jodo of America**

3908 Harlem Rd #287, Amherst NY 14226 / E-mail: reverendkoshu@aol.com

We provide dharma books in English, Vietnamese, and Spanish, and offer a pen pal service for those who are sincere about learning the dharma.

- **Hoshia Inmate Ministry (Messianic Jews)**

PO Box 599, Vidor TX 77650 / Website: www.baruchhashem.com

Support and pen pal program for Messianic Jews.

- **Inmate-Connection.com**

PO Box 83897, Los Angeles CA 90083 / E-mail: info@inmate-connection.com / Website: inmate-connection.com

"Though they may incarcerate the flesh, they can't incarcerate the mind." This website is dedicated to connecting inmates with the outside world. You may write to request an application form that will give you a full web page on our site. The cost is \$20.00 for an entire year. Inmate-connection.com is an excellent place to advertise on the net and get pen pal connections.

- **The Insight Prison Project**

PO Box 169, Woodacre CA 94973

IPP is based out of the Spirit Rock Meditation Center and its volunteers are happy to correspond with prisoners and discuss Buddhist issues through a pen pal situation.

- **Jewish Prisoner Services International**

PO Box 85840, Seattle WA 98145-1840 / Tel: (206) 985-0577 / Emergency Collect: (206) 528-0363

Offers support, referrals, guidance, educational and religious programs, pen pal service.

- **Joy Writers' Ministry / Cartersville Church of God**

PO Box 668, Cartersville GA 30120-0668 / Tel: (770) 382-9489 / E-mail: jjcoker_2000@att.net
Christian pen pals.

- **Liberation Prison Project**

PO Box 31527, San Francisco CA 94131 / Tel: (415) 701-8500 / E-mail:

info@liberationprisonproject.org / Website: www.liberationprisonproject.org

We provide many services and materials for prisoners interested in Buddhism. We also offer dharma pen pals, as well as correspondence with a qualified teacher (monks and nuns) if you have any questions about your practice.

• **Mindful Buddha Outreach Project**
3512 Myers Ct. #2, Cheyenne WY 82001 / E-mail:
mindfulbuddha@hotmail.com

Through developing our wisdom and compassion, we can improve our quality of life and the lives of those around us. Whether a prisoner of the mind, or of the body, freedom is within ourselves.

• **PrisonerLife.com**
PO Box 1664, Voorhees NJ 08043 / Website:
www.prisonerlife.com

The PrisonerLife.com website is dedicated to providing all prisoners incarcerated in the U.S. opportunities to communicate with the world and expand their networks of support. Prisoner's can become a part of the PrisonerLife.com family by simply entering their information into our member directory. You may ask anyone with internet access to load information about you into our database. There is no charge for this service.

• **Prison Fellowship Ministries**
PO Box 17500, Washington DC 20041 / Tel: (703)
478-0100 / E-mail: correspondence@pfm.org /
Website: www.pfm.org

Prison Fellowship's Pen Pal Program matches prisoners with Christian volunteers whose letters bring hope, compassion, and the Gospel.

• **Prison Pen Pals**
PO Box 235, East Berlin PA 17316-0235 / E-mail:
info@prisonpenpals.com / Website:
www.prisonpenpals.com

The largest prison pen pal site on the internet since 1996. Thousands of inmates' personal, legal, and specialty ads are listed on this site, providing prisoners with correspondence opportunities. Write for a brochure.

• **WriteAPrisoner.com**
PO Box 10, Edgewater FL 32132 / E-mail:
General-Information@writeaprisoner.com
WriteAPrisoner.com is a website helping prisoners find pen pals. Write to receive a brochure.

I am not familiar with any of these penpal listings so let me know which ones bear fruit.

THEME WRITING

This is one of my favorite parts of the program. Every month I suggest a theme for you to write on. If you do I will send you a copy of what everyone else writes on that theme. Writing a theme is one way to get more mail from Prisoner Express. I

have been behind on my sending out themes, and realize that that if I send out packets containing 2 themes every other month that I will have an easier time staying up with the task. I find many of your writings compelling and hope more of you will take part in this program. I print samples of theme writing in the newsletter, but if you want to see them all you have to write on the subject. If you submit a theme please write your name on it as they sometimes become separated from your letter. When it comes time to print them I'm not sure who to mail them to. I also encourage you to suggest theme topics for the future. You all know best what subjects are most compelling.

Upcoming theme topic and the deadlines
are:

RELIGION	due March 15
SELF-CONTROL	due April 15
LOVE	due May 15
PAROLE	due June 15 th
TAKING A STAND	due July 15
CHILDHOOD	due Aug 15

Please consider writing on a theme. They will be placed on the web site, and some of them will be included in the newsletter. Many of you have written in to tell me how much you have enjoyed reading what others of you have written. I usually don't edit your themes for content. I wonder how I should handle theme opinions that I find either racist or hateful in some other manner. Should I publish them anyway? Please let me know your opinion on this.

As some of you know we are always collecting essays on two topics, "What makes a good corrections officer", and "Advice I would give to a young person". Originally we collected the "Good Corrections Officer Essays to have published in a national magazine. We sent them in, and then the project seemed to die. The person we spoke to was enthusiastic about the essays and kept asking for more. She left her job, and the woman who replaced her was too busy to even talk with me. I called her a number of times and she kept putting me off and never returned my calls. So goes the world of publishing. They are good essays, but I don't have many connections in the publishing world. I will keep trying, but I can't promise I will have success. I've sent the essays to a few other magazines and radio news show "Democracy Now", but no one has replied. If you want to submit essays on these topics we will put them on the website as well.

I have turned a first collection of prison guard essays into a booklet. I had thought to include it in the newsletter until I found out it would cost over \$1000 to get enough copies printed for all of you. Instead I will send a copy to each of you who have had a submission selected for publication. I would like to create another booklet on the topic so please write if you have something to say on "What Makes a Good Prison Guard". I will send a copy of the

booklet to those of you who request one. (As long as I have the money to keep copying it.) I am planning to send a copy to all 50 state commissioners of corrections, and other assorted influential people in the corrections field. Maybe we can open up some eyes.

ASSORTED SELECTED THEMES

“PrisonSlang”

Most prisoners would agree that the prison experience brings them in touch with feelings they never knew they had. Such feelings require descriptive words that few prisoners can articulate. The resulting verbal expressions they produce are referred to as “slang” and by their nature, designed to be obscene or comical.

The obscene slang is designed to show our anger, our pain and our frustration. It’s no wonder that this variety is heard the most often.

The comical slang is designed to show our very humanity. A prisoner can easily lose his identity among the masses, and by comedy, he draws attention to himself. Few people understand that his “act” or “words” are merely his courageous to simply say, “I’m still alive”.

Our words express our innermost feelings and if such “slang” words are hard to understand, then perhaps they reflect the difficulty we have in understanding ourselves.

As men, we are taught by society not to show our emotions. But, while under such formidable pressures, the pain grows within us. Or emotional outbursts are not in tears, for tears are not acceptable in prison. Our outbursts are in words, words that far too few others wish to hear.

So, in effort to be heard, we have created a language that others will listen to. It may offend you or it may make you laugh, but please notice... You’re finally listening.

Perhaps if you listen carefully, you will hear a message beyond our tormented words that simply says, “We need you. Please need us”.

Dave Gordon

Five or six years ago, I was a skinner laying up in the County Hoosgow, and was receiving the normal amount of Hoo-rawing and bull-dogging from men who had already been in the joint and were in on new charges, awaiting trial. One ‘Ol boy wrote down about twenty words and phrases and told me and another soon-to-be Prisoner that we’d damn sure better memorize his list of “must know” words in order to be able to “conversate” normally - so as not to

get beat down for being a stupid skinner of lop. So, I wrote down the good Samaritan’s words, memorized the lingo and continued to add to them. I thought (jokingly), “Now one day I’m going to publish an ‘English -to -Prison, Prison-to-English Dictionary’”. And I may still do so if they ever open up that front gate for me. That’s not very likely though, because I’m doing 2 C.S. LWOP sentences plus ten. But who knows? I’ve compiled over 1500 words and phrases so far, and I have a strong appeal before the courts.

One day, you may walk into a seedy looking “Adult XXX Rated” bookstore, or maybe you’ll just look up on the back of a honky-tonk in Mudville Oklahoma, and there on the rack, in between the copies of “Road Kill Recipe” books and the Kilgore trout novels, will be a fly specked copy of my “Prisoner’s Dictionary”. What a claim to fame!

I will dedicate it to all my fellow Slick-mouthed Prisoner Brothers. Don’t give up on your appeals, fellas. We will beat this system one day.

Peace, love and happiness

--Mike Abernathy

Slinging Slang

It is rare to converse with someone prison whose language is not peppered with vulgarities, salted with slang and coated in stale clichés. The environment seems to lower the verbal IQ of all who enter, even the guards.

Slang terminology, in limited use, can be interesting and even seem cute. When you take a moment to more closely examine the effects this has on a section of society unable to articulate their opinions and points of view, slang becomes a corruption of the mind.

One very apt term that I have heard, when trying to have an intellectual conversation, is “That’s the Webster’s dictionary shit.” This is usually used in defense of the insupportable position that “pitchers,” the prison term for the masculine portion of a homosexual relationship, are heterosexuals. “Catchers,” are, of course, homosexuals. In my years doing time I’ve met many catchers who only catch against their will. Pitchers all pitch because they enjoy it. No force needed.

You need little imagination to envision these young people, unable to articulate their thoughts in a civilized manner, going to a job interview. Most prisoners will go free, though few will remain free without having a job. What hope have they of being hired, even for those with vocational training, unless they learn how to speak coherently?

For the most part I refuse to use slang or “you know” cliché phrases. In recent months I did make an exception. During the bombing of Baghdad a euphemism arose among the war mongering patriots for taking a dump: “Bombing Saddam.” This aggravated my anti-war sentiments to no end. In retaliation I formulated my own; “Taking a Bush,” my personal favorite, and “Knocking the dome off the Whitehouse” as a variation. These were frowned upon by the numerous conservatives who surround me.

In the way of regional dialects and accents, the use of slang is virtually unavoidable. As an antidote, it is in the best interest of prisoners, as well as others in slang filled environments, to develop a vocabulary suitable for civil conversation. This is not an easy task, when more often than not, a prisoner has no one to practice speaking intelligent with. You may find yourself in a conversation where you look up and find the person you are speaking with in a daze of enchanted incomprehension. The condition is not fatal. You can bring them back to their senseless senses with a staccato burst of vulgar slang terminology.

Many of my peers are unable to understand the English language at its best and fullness of meaning. If you are one of these it would certainly be in your best interest to acquire a dictionary and read more Hemingway and Dickens than psycho killer novels.

Spending your time in a productive, positive manner is an excellent way to make it pass less painfully. Building an impressive vocabulary will free your mind, give you the tools you need to express yourself, and allow you to speak with confidence. As in all things, the choice is yours. Maybe you like being in prison. If so, don't change a thing.

Daniel H. Harris

Letters

In this day and age of technology, faster is better, and most people are in such a rush that writing letters has become a lost art due to the instantaneous receiving of e-mails, faxes, and two-way pagers; not to mention the cell phone. There is something gratifying about being presented a handwritten letter, a sense of knowing that someone actually took the time out of their frenetic life to transcribe their thoughts, in order for you to “get a piece of their mind”.

The written word is a powerful thing, and when it is personalized into letter format, it transforms into unspoken dialogue, a conversation seen, but not heard. To those whom have nothing, little things mean a lot. Things most people take for granted, are exactly

the same things that are cherished by the ones who don't have the luxury of being able to take for granted. For a lot of people a letter is a waste of time, but when it's you're only way to stay connected to the world at large, and people in general, a letter received is equivalent to a life jacket in an ocean, as people start to feel the loneliness that separation, combined with loss of contact causes, often drown in misery. While those who have ties to a realm where time is actually devoted solely for them, float with their heads above water. Even though the times have gotten more hectic, there are still 24 hours in a day. It doesn't seem like a person's worth could be measured in time, but when you tell someone you don't have time for them, it's saying a lot. Just as taking the time to write a letter says a lot.

Decide if you have the time to write someone a letter, and you'll know the value to you of that person. Twenty-four hours in a day, who's worth the time a letter takes?

Derric Burbie

“My request for correspondence is the cry of a drowning man reaching for a little assistance—before the final descent into madness”

Maury Logue, in We're All Doing Time, by Bo Lozoff

Sometimes, more often than not, I find myself feeling exactly like Maury did. My name is Bulldozer. I've been in this hell-hole for nearly 7 years now, with the last 4 being caged in a box 24 hours a day. It's been one hell of a struggle fighting that..”final descent into madness”.

Nearly 7 years I've been trapped in a violent system that rewards inertia rather than innovation, and submissiveness instead of rehabilitation. Surrounded by hopelessness and a lack of positive outlook for the future.

For nearly 7 years I've been trapped in a world full of complexes, ignorance, fear, suffering and rage; world where gang rapes and senseless stabbings are regular occurrences. Kindness is considered weak, and you talk about anything except what's inside you; a world where self-honesty, responsibility, and understanding are non-existent and the only friend you have is yourself. Here, you're nobody and nothing but a number. Feeling alone and isolated, you either struggle with bitterness, or you ignore it and live an empty life. Either way, something is definitely missing.

What's missing is love and compassion. However strange or weak or sensitive it may seem, it is the truth. This is why we cherish letters. This is we (at least some of us) are constantly seeking a pen pal. What we're

seeking is something very personal. We want someone we can trust. Someone we can open up our honest feelings to and trust with our secrets. We're still human beings. We still want to feel connected and loved. We can still be warm, loving and giving. We still laugh and cry and hurt and dream. We still like to talk, learn and grow. Yeah, we can be intelligent, literate, friendly, and charming. All we want is someone who can understand and appreciate that.

In short, we're just looking for a little kindness, a friend, someone to help ease the pain, and fill the void deep within.

Don't get me wrong; I do not pretend to make this case for ALL of us. Indeed, I am well aware that too many cons dedicate themselves to self-destruction and only seek to USE everyone/thing they can. They just want you to hurt like they do. However, there are some of us who have used what we've gone through, what we've suffered, and the suffering we've caused others as stepping stones to a new and better life. We've taken full responsibility for who we are and what we've done. It's not sympathy we're after, it's encouragement.

Yes, I find myself feeling much like Maury...Here I sit in a 6x8 cell 24 hours a day. When I leave my cell, I'm escorted by 2 officers carrying shields and batons, only to go to another cage, whether it's the shower, the day-room (that only contains a gym mat and a pull-up bar), outside recreation (where there is a pull-up bar and basketball goal, though no basketball!!!!), or visitation (where I sit in a cage and have to look at my visitors through a plexi-glass window. No matter where I go, it's to another cage. I don't get to go to work, school, religious services, or even watch TV. And despite what many may think, I am not in administrative segregation because of my violating any rules, whether a violent act or a non-violent one, but because of what I might have done. Yes, in Texas we get punished before we actually do anything wrong. They call it a security measure, I call it bullshit. At any rate...

This is my life. For the past 4 years I've been confined to this box and I will remain so until I go home next year. So I reach out...in an attempt to preserve my sanity and fight against that "final descent into madness", of which I've seen many fall victim. I reach out for self-honest, courageous and kind individuals who have a sense of humor and a sense of wonder for intelligent, encouraging letters; to engage in insightful and thought provoking conversations, sharing wisdom and perspectives.

I hope that this will provide you all with a different view of what your letters might mean to

some of us. Because for many, like myself, whose family and so-called "friends" cut them off, your kind words and understanding just may be his/her strength to get him/her through the fire!

Good fortune be with you all,
Chad Strawn

A letter a day makes all things okay.

Once you're confined, you miss family and friends. Most of your outside contact is letters. It doesn't take long for them to become very, very important for emotional - mental well being.

At one time I used to save old letters and re-read them again and again.

A letter becomes your informant [sic] to the world. Just knowing that somebody out there is thinking about you is what makes a letter so special, and all that.

Calvin S. Carter

For me, being in prison in N.C. means I'm a long ways from almost all of my family and friends. Getting a letter from them now and then allows me to remain a part of their lives. It's really tough to describe the joy I feel during mail-call, when I receive a letter or two. It's like a warm glow in the center of my chest that spreads through my entire body as I sit and read my mail.

Oh, I understand that people out on the street are very busy and don't have a lot of time to sit down and write lengthy letters like we do in here. But even a short letter, a small note, just "I love you!" written on a sheet of paper, any word from home and loved ones means so much to us in here. It lets us know we're thought of and that you are, at least, alive and well enough to put pen to paper.

Sure, we'd like to hear about everything going on out there in your lives. But most of us know that the pace of life out there doesn't leave much time for writing letters.

On the other hand, there are times we lose sight of that fact and we can't figure out why we don't hear from you. Are you all right? Sick? Injured? Mad? Stopped loving or caring about us? For sure we sometimes let our emotions run wild to come up with reasons for the lack of mail, when mostly, it's just because you've been too busy. But we worry, a lot! We even get mad and sometimes act childish or write and say things we don't really mean. Not being able to pick up a phone and call, or jump in the car to stop by to see you leaves us pretty frustrated and worried when we don't get a letter for a while.

For us, a letter is more than a means of conveying words and thoughts. Your letter is a hug, a handshake, a kiss, a smile, a tear, a bit of love in the form of ink and paper. It's all of that and more than you can imagine in a hate filled world where that letter is a reminder that the sun still shines, people live real lives, love each other, and us.

So if you haven't written that friend or loved one in a while, please do so. Let him or her know they are still important to you and that you care. And if it's you out there who hasn't heard from someone in here for a while, don't be afraid to let them know how much their letters mean to you also.

Kenneth J. French

Coming Clean

It is easy to point out the mistakes of others, while it is hard to admit one's own. But to come clean we must voice our mistakes, admit we were wrong, apologize for what we did, own up to our failures - a difficult task to accomplish.

Coming clean entails exposing our lack of mental or moral strength to others. Something (pride, vanity, and perhaps a fear of punishment) does not want to let us do this.

However the act of coming clean allows a person to voice their mistakes, admit to their wrongs, apologize for what they did wrong, own up to my/your own failures. This act allows the better qualities of mankind to shine - something we all share - "of only being human".

I'm not a religious person, but did not Jesus say "He who is without sin, cast the first stone"? Who among us has not done something that they do not need to come clean for?

Coming clean can lift a burden of guilt and shame off a poor tortured soul, and make the person hearing it become the poor tortured soul. Coming clean has become a two-edged sword able to cause or relieve pain, guilt and shame. How is this possible? I thought it was one of the better qualities of mankind? Alas, the price of "only being human" means we must accept the good with the bad.

Ricky Williamson

Coming Clean and What it Means to Me

Coming clean with myself has been a hard and difficult process. In some ways I am still struggling with doing just that. After ten years of incarceration a fantasy world is sometimes preferred to the reality of present situations and past memories. As time passes I

tend to remember things as I would have liked them, instead of how they really were.

When I used to walk the streets I thought I was a real up front person. But as I see myself now, I was always living on the edge. Trying to hide the sins that I enjoyed so much from the people in my life that cared for me, and did not like watching me destroy myself.

Over the years of being incarcerated I have learned to forgive myself for my past sins. This has helped me be able to come clean with my family, and admit to the wrongs that I committed against them over the years.

Now after ten years of incarceration, I have finally come to a new understanding of myself, and what my family expects of me.

I still committed sins against myself, which in turn have consequences for my children and my family. But I have learned to own up to my own sins. I take full responsibility for my actions. In this way I have learned to live in the present. I do not have to worry about being caught in a lie, or my family not understanding why I tend to do the things I do. My family knows that I have unresolved issues from my past, and that every day in here I struggle to keep my addictions in place. Most days I win against them. But when I do not, I have learned to come clean with my family about my falling! In turn, I have found that they are there to try and give me the support I need to get back up and continue to live the best life one can live under my circumstances.

By coming clean I have been able to grow closer to the family that I have left, instead of the walls that surround me being able to destroy and take away the family I cherish. This is what coming clean means to me, at this point in my life

-

-Matt Green

Add this to the list that starts with traffic, taxes and in-laws: the need to wear masks - it's gone when you are sent to die in prison. Here, you are free to be yourself, with yourself, and with others. When you live in a cage, when your inner darkness is a matter of public record, when your letters bear a large red "STATE PRISON" stamp and your phone calls are interrupted at regular intervals by a stern announcement that you are a bad man whose conversations are being recorded - well, pretending to be someone other than your true self sort of loses the point, doesn't it? A wolf in a zoo cage would have a bit of a hard time convincing anyone he is the fluffy poodle type.

Liberating and therapeutic. Not that I would recommend it to a civilian tired of making his shrink's Mercedes payments, but still.

We all have demons nesting under the manholes of our inner cities. In civilian life, it is important - culturally and socially - to keep those slimy creatures hidden, to present a healthy and reliable façade, dazzling the world with that meaninglessly, polite, all-American smile and a decent suit of clothes. You create the image when you are young, then go about marketing it, daily, at work and at home. Some succeed; others feed mental health professionals and German automotive engineers. But some. . .

When the manholes explode and the darkness comes pouring out, what do you do? You bring it into the light and dance with it. You get to know it and make it your friend. You respect it and teach it to respect you, and before too long what used to looking like a demon turns out to be nothing more (or less) than a part of your infrastructure, a necessary component of your internal balance. A part of who you are.

And then there are the outsiders. You come with a warning label: this is a very bad man trying to talk to you, folks. Why pretend you aren't? Many try: prisons are full of sob stories about unjust convictions, excusable errors, and innocent victims of unfortunate circumstance. It works, too; "catching" women with carefully composed stories is an art form in prisons, and the artists are rewarded with money and packages. I personally like that freedom that comes with the label. Being myself is one of the few freedoms left for me. I'm not sure whether it's punk rock or enlightenment; I simply don't miss the labor of polishing my masks. If someone out there is not willing to look past the label, then I probably wouldn't find communication with that person interesting anyway, and one of my few luxuries is that I don't need people as much as one living in the civilian society does. I have learned to live with what I have in my cage; anything extra is very pleasant but not vitally necessary.

There is a sign by my cage that says, "Wolf, man-killer, keep hands away from bars." A sheep suit would look silly on me, don't you think?

Andrew Belei

You would think coming clean, or some would say, being honest with oneself, admitting who you are, should actually be an easy task. For some this may be true. But until August, 2002, the year I lost my beloved sister to an act of violence, I had never really looked at the cruel, wicked person I HAD TURNED INTO MYSELF.

I've been incarcerated in the United States Penal System since the year 1980. Oklahoma, Louisiana, and here, Texas prisons. Living around violence on a daily bases was just another act of survival to me. "The Number One Prison Rule. . . The Strong Survives Off the Weak." I'm, 5'7", 202 lbs. of solid muscle ripping throughout my body. Even at my present age of 43, I'm in better shape than your average 20 year old. A seasoned warrior in all aspects; trained boxer by L.S.P. (Angola) Mr. Mop Top himself. I'm one to never cross, for surely blood will flow on these prison floors. Yes, I've caused my share of terror over the years. But on the night I opened a letter from my uncle, who I had not hear from in over 15 years, telling me how very sorry he was to tell me that my sister was no longer with us, that she was murdered by her boyfriend, shot 17 times, even to this day I cannot explain the pain that I've struggled through. And still yet, I miss my sister more dearly than I could put into mere words. The only comfort I found at that time was in the letters she had previously written over the years, always expressing her love and assuring me that God loved me too. That God's love is by far greater than any I'll find in anyone else. Always on my back about asking God for forgiveness and accepting Him into my life.

Until that time, I never really looked at the way I was living such a sinful life. At that very moment, I actually stopped lying to myself and admitted (Came Clean) that I was taking all my pain and suffering out on others around me. But from that point on, I've mended my evil ways and lived my life in the ways of our Heavenly Father.

Now, I'm no longer looked at by others with fear or hatred. I'm looked upon with Respect . . . Respect only because I'm just and fair with everyone. For those who have heard the stories about me and my past, they'll usually ask me, "Man, how'd you change?" I'm quick to say, "Only through the love of God and admitting that the life I was living wasn't the life I wanted to live." I guess you could say . . . I CAME CLEAN with myself.

James D. Ross

Aging

Aging is a process that all of us must go through. A process that comes with much learning and patience through this life's journey.

There is no fountain of youth provided. There is no escape. All we can do is use it to our advantage. Aging is not bad, it's not our enemy, it's part of growing up.

Because of aging, many have become a great part, and of good use to the world that we live on. Many have become great leaders that guide armies to victory. While others raise beautiful families that flourish like daisies in a field.

Aging is not failure, but victory, for you and those around you. Through aging we learn to be wise.

Jesus Sanchez

Aging Perspective

Children rush to grow up, wanting to be of an age to sample adult amusements. Time seems to creep, except when it rushes us through moments of joy. How slowly did those boring hours in algebra class pass? All of us must have felt the bell ringer toyed with us and stretched those interminable periods to make up for the minutes shaved from lunch, recess and gym class.

Do you remember the invincibility of being a budding adult? Who could tell a young person how precious are those days of immortality. A job, a car, choices, freedom. No one to tell you to go to bed. Can you remember when you knew everything? The next year would come, usually on your birthday, and you'd think how stupid you were to believe you knew it all last year when you were only a child. Of course this new knowledge renewed your assurance of knowing it all this year, till the next would come. Finally, hopefully not too far in the future, you came to realize that not only did you not know it all, no one does. All knowledge is beyond any person's comprehension. Who could comprehend the incomprehensible? Not even Mom and Dad. Don't tell Mom, she'll never believe it.

Time will continue, as it always has, and a day will come when you climb out of bed slower, go to bed earlier on your own, and find your old joints can predict the weather. All the injuries you shook off in invincible youth return with a vengeance, collecting interest for having to wait to be paid in pain. Hair goes gray, skin goes slack and muscles sag. Still life is beautiful, though it becomes a trial. Old age, at its worst, beats the only other alternative all to hell. You might not rule as you once hoped, but you find a multitude of pleasures at your slower pace. Many are those you missed in your haste to grow up.

Speaking with a young fellow in 1987, I asked him his age. He was a proud 18-year-old. Laughing, I told him he was just a baby, still wet behind the ears. He asked my age, which I stated with equal pride, "26 years old and old

beyond my years". "Your not old yet, you have 4 more good years left", he told me with verve. I was tempted to spank him. That was nearly 20 years ago and I am still here. My hair is sprinkled with gray, and lines crinkle my eyes. Maybe I'll be old at 60. Probably not. At least my mind will be young, or think it is.

Youth is often synonymous with arrogance. What can we learn from some old fart who's made a mess of his own life? Do we ever think to learn from the wisdom earned from trial and error, often at great cost?

Though I have a tendency to creak like an un-oiled hinge when I first arise each morning, and I have made a royal mess of my life, there is still much advise awaiting a patient youth willing to take time to listen. I search for a creature rarer than a unicorn. When you see a smug grin on an ancient face, it may not be the result of passing gas in there Depends. They may have an idea of your future and have given up on trying to warn you. You never listen anyway.

Time is a matter of perspective. To some it is kinder than others. There is a common factor. No matter your age there is only one way out of getting older. As for me, I'm not ready to go yet. There are books to read and smiles to share. The day will come, as it must for all of us, when there is no choice left except to cross the Styx and explore another realm of existence. This shall be embraced, as all adventures must be, for there are numerous theories of what lies beyond deaths revolving door, and I will glory in proving most, if not all, of them wrong; if I don't prove they are all right.

Gilbert Davilla

I remember my first gray hair - at 27 no less! It was my panic-stricken cellmate of two years who brought it to my attention. "Dawg! You got a gray hair under your chin!" We were doing push-ups, 10 sets of 50.

He was younger than me by four years, and I guess the prospect of starting to turn gray at such an early age shook the younger homie up. "Stop playin' Blood, it's your set!" Young D., although playful, was nevertheless a soldier who, like myself, lived by all the codes of the jungle, and like Tony Montana, our adopted brother and hero from the movie "Scarface", all we had in this world was our word and our balls.

I looked in the mirror and sure enough, there it was, a gray ass hair directly under my chin, slightly to the left. Was it there this morning? Did I miss it while washing my face, camouflaged in soap? Or does gray hair just

pop up unannounced and unwelcomed like a loud and greedy uncle with chronic bad breath?!

I guess I too panicked, because I immediately tried to snatch this intruder from my face. It was the enemy and it had to go. Young D. had to grab my hand to stop me, "Nah, don't snatch it out, more will come in its place!" But I wasn't having it. I guess we both looked real crazy with him latching on to my wrist while I'm struggling to eliminate this sole gray hair.

I've since had to accept the fact that from the very time we are conceived, the clock then starts ticking. That proverbial hourglass turns over and with every grain of sand that falls, so does a piece of our existence.

Aging is supposed to be a blessing. The bible even says in Proverbs that a gray head is a crown of glory. But to a prisoner doing life of a long sentence, witnessing in that 8x12 mirror age lines cut into his face while his hair turns the same color as the walls that contain him, it's more a nightmare than a glory.

But then I look at myself, 12 years after that first "gray hair scare". Many more have since taken up residence. I even have a couple on my chest. Maybe the stress of my trial, combined with the trials and tribulations of doing time; of surviving in a "zoo" where all the "animals" are allowed to congregate in the yard, contributed to this early gray. But I see now, with crystal clear clarity, that getting older is indeed a blessing. There are many youngstas in the grave who I'm sure wish they weren't.

And at 39, I'm in tip-top condition! I actually feel 19. I can easily knock out 1000 push-ups in under an hour. I can run circles around the average youngsta coming in. And even the alleged "conditioned" young bucks who try to hang with me on my bar work and calisthenics routines often complain that I'm "trying to kill them" -- more like heal them.

So to that extent, I will venture to say that doing long stretches in prison can have its blessings (and no doubt its curses) physically. I am very blessed. But I'd love to be out there on the beach somewhere, in my Bermuda shorts, showing off a little. Those jet skies out there look like a lot of fun. Can't forget about those lovely creatures in bikinis. Hence, that "curse".

But not to be outdone, my mental and spiritual development actually rivals my physicality. I have a degree in Economics and Theology. I type extremely with little or no typos. And more than anything, I have a passionate love affair with writing. All this acquired while "aging" behind the walls.

In 1996 at the California Men's Colony, I co-wrote a play "Change Gon' Come", to be

performed by some enthusiastic prison actors. I had a ball doing the casting, rehearsing and directing. I wasn't there to see it performed on stage as I was relocated to another prison before the show. But I heard it got a standing ovation!

I now write poetry, stories, songs, personal proverbs and screenplays. However most of my energy of late has been focused on my legal pursuits. I am actively seeking my liberation. Funny thing about "liberty" and all the cynicism that may come with it; it's like a tolerant lover whom you often take for granted - until you lose her, only to realize, now wrapped in a blanket of sadness, that you love and miss her so much.

So as I continue to do the time, and not let it do me, I cling to the understanding that we all are doing time...it just depends on where and how...age well

Aaron DeShawn McCoy

Aging to me is a privilege, not a right. Cause I have seen some die at a young age, which to me was a blessing. They didn't have to go through this old world of trial and tribulation. I know everyone want to age with their kids, but the Supreme Being had another mission for them. {"May peace and blessing be among them all"}

Aging is not all bad; there are some beautiful aspects of aging. Like growing up from a boy to a man, or a girl to a woman. The older you get the wiser you get. Then you can sit back and reminisce on all the stupid things you did when you were young, and that's something to put a smile on your face bigger than the United States. If you give a good life, you'll live a good life; that's just my conception. I have encountered death a few times myself. But on the same token, I've saved a few lives also, so I guess the Supreme Being gives back to the giving.

I am of no religion, but my belief is in a supreme being. I'm a very devout person, and I believe that if you follow the common sense that God gave you, you'll continue to age a long time. You can't be taught common sense, you're born with common sense; it's the sense to know right from wrong.

All this is in aging. I've made some bad decisions myself, but you learn from your mistakes. Experience is the best teacher in aging.

Henry Stephens

Aging is actually the irreversible biological changes within living forms on earth that eventually results in death. Although the exact

cause of aging remains unknown, I'm gonna give all the credit to God. All humans and living forms were created for the birth to death cycle, which is uncontrollably unchangeable. Aging is a direct symptom of progressive illustration of life, and the assembly of the womb to the tomb concept. Truly aging to me is sometimes so hard to bear, because of all the people around the globe passing away, or just changing right in front of my eyes.

I tend to be skeptical about becoming older, or wanting to experience the aging process. Too many good people are here one day and gone the next. As a result of aging, people learn and adapt to the cycle of progression, because people actually have no choice in the depiction of life. As much as people would love not to age or change their features, it's part of the living boundaries that we cannot cross over. Eventually life becomes clear enough to see that what's done is done, and aging is just often thought of as a bad thing. So truly, sometimes aging is not all that bad, but is the most simplest thing that could actually happen to humans. Plus the verdict of aging will always override any causes to stop that process.

So we are born, we live and age a bit; we grow and age, then die. Some things are not given for us to figure out, but aging might be what everybody actually needs.

David Fomenko

The body is an unusual thing that is not immortal to the passage of time. To watch as the years pass, a person begins to wear and tear, kinda like a Goodyear tire. Humanity struggles to retain youth, even laughing amongst themselves of the possibility of a fountain of youth! Vitamins, healthy food and nutrition bars make up the majority of a lot of people's daily lives.

To consider aging, one must first grow from childhood to adulthood. It is here that one takes into consideration of aging by reflecting on the youth that they once were. Wrinkles, gray hair, decaying teeth, and failing organs are a strong reminder of the aging process. I look back at myself as a child. I can remember standing next to my childhood friends arguing over who was taller than the other. What seemed like a very small scratch at one point and time, hurt worse than anything in the world! Now I don't even realize I have a scratch until I accidentally brush the blood up against something. Last time I went swimming, I felt like I had been through the mill! I can remember going to the swimming pool and staying all day

long, and I would only require a nap to be rejuvenated!

I remember my Dad saying, "Son, you're growing like a weed." I know aging is a necessary thing in growing up. I wish that I could stop or at least slow this aging process down so that I could retain my youth. I know the need for vitamins, and I try to learn all that I can about the vitamins that are best for me. I would happily down as many vitamins as necessary if I knew that I could slow my aging down that way.

I look upon aging as I do upon snow that comes with winter, rain that comes with the spring storms and the hot humidity that comes with the summer. To me all of these things are necessary that we may be able to grow to be the healthy wholesome person that we were created to be.

I believe the thing that most reminds us of the aging process is the failure of our organs as they no longer work the way they are supposed to. Our blood pressure goes up, our vision requires us to wear glasses that we never needed in the past! Even our muscles and bones may hurt in some places, to the extent that we require pain medication to relive it.

Overall, my personal opinion of our aging is it is a maturing process, one that we all must go through, and like anything that is taken through a refinery; we are changed from our normal state. Some of us are changing for the good and some for the worse. I believe it is a good and worthwhile thing to age! One thing one can rest assured, after our aging brings our fragile bodies to their end, there is something we attained and shared that will bring good to someone in the end!

Randall Howell

What is getting old? How do we look at aging??? In truth there's several answers that could be stated. Attitude, fear, and acceptance all play a part within our conscious minds when we try to answer those questions. Each factors in upon our feelings to getting old. But we all must understand that aging is reality.

And with reality there's change. Physically, mentally, and the appearance of ourselves as we age. Gray hair, wrinkled skin, even slouching of your back if you're not careful. None of that matters much these days. In today's society already "old" is no longer old in the ways it used to mean. When old was relaxing on the porch drinking sun tea or going to the grocery store only to dodge carts being raced by the younger generation. It's common to see the elders of today enjoying the ways of our society. People act youthful according to their own

expectations, and age has lost its meaning as a predictor of stamina. Look at the medicine available today to enhance our stamina...

On another note, today we are used to seeing 28year old mayors, 50year old retirees, and 65year old students. What could be depressing about that? Obviously these people have an attitude that "time happens" and to enjoy age no matter what the year is. With this type of attitude comes the mentality of acceptance and the reality that if you allow aging to become depressing, then anxiety, and the fearful prospect of being alone and powerless sets in. That's a battle no one wants to tackle. Mid-life crisis is a saying that was used as an excuse to let age take over a period in life where depression and fear of growing old has caused you to look for a way out.

It's never anyone else's fault what life has dealt you. The choice has always been there. What we make out of the hand dealt to us. Enjoy life in every aspect while you can, and when you feel too old to compete or participate, reach through that miracle breakthrough in medicine. I hear Viagra can make a 70year old feel 20 years old again. Don't waste precious time on the past. Live for today the NOW!!

Ricky Gibson

There were so many excellent themes submitted that I always have to make the hard choice of what to print in the newsletter. Remember you can get a complete copy of all submission by writing something on the topic. It doesn't have to be long or perfect. It just has to be your opinion on the topic. I hope more of you chose to participate in this program.

RESOURCE INFORMATION Spiritual Teachings and Practice

• Asian Classics Institute

Correspondence Course, PO Box 20373, New York NY 10009 / Tel: (212) 475-7752 /

E-mail: aci@world-view.org / Website:

www.world-view.org

The Asian Classics Institute is dedicated to the serious study and personal practice of the original teachings of the Buddha. Our purpose is to provide a thorough, accurate Tibetan Buddhist education to anyone interested. We offer 15 formal study courses which parallel the same basic core of information that a Geshe (Doctor of Theology) learns at a Tibetan Buddhist monastery. This course is provided free of charge to prisoners who are unable to pay.

Buddhist Inmate Sangha

PO Box 16, Culp Creek OR 97427-0016

Spiritual support group for dedicated

Buddhist inmates. We also donate Buddhist books and other resources.

The Heart Mountain Project

c/o Doug Booth, 1223 South St. Francis Drive Suite C, Santa Fe NM 87505

We offer a 17 page meditation manual free of charge to prisoners. Choose from several styles of meditation practice to attain deep relaxation, clear thinking, and peace of mind—a place you can go at any time to find renewed strength to deal with life's challenges. A Spanish translation is available. May you be at peace.

National Buddhist Prison Sangha / Zen Mountain Monastery

PO Box 197, South Plank Road, Mt. Tremper NY 12457

The National Buddhist Prison Sangha is a nationwide support network offering personal guidance, support, and instruction for prisoners interested in Zen Buddhist practice through correspondence, books, audio tapes, and a series of training manuals specially designed for prison practitioners.

Tricycle Magazine: The Buddhist Review

92 Vandam St 3rd Floor, New York NY 10013 /

Subscription Services: (800) 873-9871

Tricycle Magazine is published quarterly.

Inmates may write to request used or damaged issues.

Heart of America Prison Ministry Inc.

PO Box 1685, Independence MO 64055 / Tel:

(816) 257-1822 / E-mail: tommhair@comcast.net

/

Website: www.heartmin.org

Heart of America Prison Ministry is dedicated to helping inmates come closer to God. If you write a short testimony, we will put you on a waiting list to receive a beautiful leather-bound study Bible. You will also be placed on the mailing list for our monthly newsletter.

Loved Ones of Prisoners (LOOPS)

PO Box 14953, Odessa TX 79768 / Tel: (915)

580-5667 / E-mail: info@loopsministries.com /

Website: www.Loopsministries.com

Loved Ones Of PrisonerS, Inc. is a nondenominational, nonprofit, religious organization dedicated to the support and restoration of prisoners and their families through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Inmates may write to LOOPS and request their newsletter, Reflections. The newsletter lists the Bible correspondence courses which are offered. Certificate of completion.

The Messianic Times

PO Box 2190, Niagara Falls NY 14302 / The

Messianic Times is a leading international Messianic Jewish newspaper. We seek to

provide accurate, authoritative, and current information to unite the international Messianic Jewish community, teach Christians the Jewish roots of their faith, and proclaim that Yeshua is the Jewish Messiah. Write for a free subscription.

Prison Resources

Maury Maurer, 59 Industrial Rd, PO Box 649, Addison IL 60101 / Tel: (630) 543-1441 / E-mail: friendmaury@cs.com / Website: www.prisonresources.com

We provide Christian literature, both for evangelization and for feeding souls, to inmates or chaplains upon request. You can write to receive free Bibles, calendars, and Christian literature (nonfiction

Siddha Yoga Meditation Prison Project / SYDA Foundation

Prison Project, PO Box 99140, Emeryville CA 94662 / Tel: (510) 428-1836 /

The Prison Project is dedicated to supporting the spiritual development of incarcerated students of Siddha Yoga meditation. Swami Muktananda, who founded this Project in 1979, wrote a message to prisoners in which he said, "If you want to respect yourself, if you want to improve yourself, if you want to experience the joy of your own inner Self, you can do that anywhere, even in prison." The Prison Project provides a free 12-year Siddha Yoga correspondence study course, called In Search of the Self, free of charge to any prisoner who requests it. Lessons are received monthly and are available in Spanish translation. The Prison Project also includes over 200 trained volunteer teachers who visit prisons and provide programs and courses designed to deepen the student's understanding of Siddha Yoga. The goal of the efforts of over 200 teachers is to enable sincere seekers to devote their prison time to the discovery of the divinity that exists within us all.

• Sivananda Yoga Prison Project

Prisoner Outreach, PO Box 195, Budd Road, Woodbourne NY 12788 / Tel: (845) 434-9242 /

E-mail: YogaRanch@sivananda.org / Website: www.sivananda.org

Serves all prisoners requesting help and guidance in their spiritual life. Letters are received almost daily and every one is individually responded to. A free copy of Swami Vishnu-devananda's The Complete Illustrated Book of Yoga is sent to inmates upon request.

The TriYoga Prison Project

Kali Ray TriYoga, PO Box 6367, Malibu CA 90264 / Tel: (310) 589-0600 / E-mail: info@triyoga.com /

The TriYoga Prison Project offers classes, workshops, and teacher trainings in correctional institutions. We correspond with inmates, and upon request will provide TriYoga products such as instructional videos, meditation music, and teacher manuals free of charge.

The Heart Mountain Project

c/o Doug Booth, 1223 South St. Francis Drive Suite C, Santa Fe NM 87505

We offer a 17-page meditation manual free of charge to prisoners. Choose from several styles of meditation practice to attain deep relaxation, clear thinking, and peace of mind—a place you can go at any time to find renewed strength to deal with life's challenges. A Spanish translation is available. May you be at peace.

Lionheart Foundation

PO Box 194, Back Bay, Boston MA 02117 / Tel: (781) 444-6667 / E-mail: questions@lionheart.org /

The Lionheart Foundation is committed to playing an integral part in redefining our nation's prisons as places for healing and rehabilitation. Through its National Emotional Literacy Project for Prisoners, Lionheart provides effective resources for breaking the cycles of addiction and violence that permeate the lives of the majority of prisoners. At the core of the project is the free distribution of the book Houses of Healing: A Prisoner's Guide to Inner Power and Freedom to prison libraries and prison programs nationwide. Houses of Healing combines essential tools for change with a deep awareness of the emotional challenges facing incarcerated men and women. It is a rehabilitative tool that many prisoners are embracing with overwhelming enthusiasm.

Mettanokit

187 Merriam Hill Road, Greenville NH

03048 / Tel: (603) 878-3201 / E-mail: mettanokit@yahoo.com /

Mettanokit is a nonprofit learning center and service organization working for a more humane society based on the old values of cooperation and equality and the closeness and caring found in our elder tribal societies. Programs and services respectfully incorporate the ancestral wisdom of Native Americans and others who honor harmonious living with Mother Earth and spiritual connections with Creation. We provide information on how to start a Native American circle, and we offer counseling services through correspondence. Please write to receive a catalog of our books and tapes.

Native Scents

NDCBU Box 5639, Taos NM 87571 / E-mail: nativescents@starband.net /

Native Scents is a network of Native American wildcrafters from Canada to South America who collect plants in an ecological and respectful way. We offer inmates supplies for Native American rituals/tools for personal transformation. We also offer the book *Plants of Power* free of charge.

FINAL NOTES

Prisoner Express sponsored a poetry reading where volunteers read some of the poetry you all have sent to us. It was very moving. Poems were read by students and volunteers with this program. We also had a display of your art work set up near the podium. Please keep sending in your poetry as we have a class of high school students reading it and trying to put together a booklet of the poems they find most moving.

I'm still trying to figure out how to create an affordable, effective distance learning history class. That is one of my big projects for 2005. In general I believe creating a series of distance learning classes would be of great service to you, but it is a difficult task. We also hope to develop other distance learning classes. What subjects would you like to see offered? If any of you feel you have a skill you would like to share with other prisoners perhaps we can work with you to develop a course.

I am also still excited about the comic book project. I hope to have a first mailing to all who have signed up for it soon. As I've been busy I've pushed it to a back burner. It's not because I've lost interest, but rather it is hard to know how to get started. I've got a few

ideas figured out, and hope to get rolling this spring. If you are interested in being part of the group working on this please sign up.

I'm still looking for an origami instructor to help get the paper-folding project going. I have a prisoner, Tim who has sent me his paper foldings, and he is very skilled. I will ask him for some instructions I can pass on to you in the next newsletter. I'm also trying to find a volunteer to coordinate this project.

Some of you have heard about this project from a radio show in Texas where a number of essays from the collection "What makes a good prison guard" were read. Welcome! I hope you participate in the theme writing and other projects. Please be patient regarding your book shipment. There are so people many lined up ahead of you.

For all of you who have gotten pen pal letters from a person with the last name Devic, please understand that they were students who were writing as an assignment for their developmental psychology class. They did it voluntarily. They could have chosen other assignments, but they wanted to know more about prisoners and life in prison. They were only committing to write for a few months. I know some of you have found some new pen pals from this project. I figure something is better than nothing, and that you never know what could come from even a short correspondence. What is your opinion? Is it okay for me to try to get students to write even if their commitment is short term. The students who pass thru the colleges are always moving on to new projects and places to live. Any of you who have been working with this program for awhile know the student help keeps changing. Sometimes they do not even return to pick up their letters. There is not much I can do about that. If you have suggestions let me know.

Many of you ask, "Who is Anne Carry Durland". She was a student who died an untimely death. (Is it ever timely?) Her family donated money to set up this library in her memory. She was dedicated to promoting an activist social agenda, and the library is charged with carrying on this mission

Others ask what is the "Alternatives Library" Our collection is centered around issues concerning human rights, racism, sexuality, spirituality, alternative technology, politics, the environment, health, global perspectives, education and a variety of other topics. We have a great video and music collection as well. We are located in a building on the Cornell University Campus. We are open to all. Anyone can get a card and be a patron. There are only 2 regular employees. Lynn is the director, and I am the Assistant Director. Lynn is kind enough to let me use my work time for a lot of Prisoner Express activities, but I also have a list of responsibilities I must fulfill in the library. Needless to say I am stretched thin in both venues. I don't mind, except for

how it can appear that I'm ignoring your letters and requests.

Many of you ask why I do Prisoner Express. The answer is so simple it seems silly. "Because I can". I got a letter 3 years ago from Danny asking for books. I realized as a library we could send books into prisons. As an individual I couldn't, but as library we can. Thus a program was born. As a child I was locked away by demented parents. For those years nothing was more valuable to me than a smuggled in book. I'm simply giving what in my past I most wanted. From sending in books to Danny this whole program evolved. If I have any misgivings about what has happened it's that I don't manage to maintain personal contact with those of you like Danny and Perry whose words have touched me deeply. It's all I can do to keep managing this program.

The library does not supply funding for this program. I am constantly hunting up money. The library does pay my salary, and I have access to computers, printers and other library resources to make this happen. If anyone has ideas on how to secure funding let me know.

What is CRESP is also asked? CRESP stands for the Center for Religion Ethics and Social Policy. The Alternatives Library is a project of CRESP. CRESP is like an umbrella that supports a number of projects that promote social justice. In the future I will try to get the director of CRESP to write a bit on what CRESP does. I'm in my own little world and don't know enough about their mission to accurately describe it. I do know that as an organization they do good work.

Some of you have wanted to send us manuscripts of books you have written. Please know that I'm not an experienced editor, and I do not have the time to read and correct your manuscripts. I am interested in what you write, and I'll be happy to accept either summaries of what your writing project is about or completed first chapters. This way if I make a connection with a publisher I can pass on your efforts. I will not edit these works. You need to make your best effort at sending me no more than 25 pages of your work.

I have also been asked about selling artwork for prisoners. At this point I have thought through a way to do that. As we further develop existing programs, and I have more time to create new projects I will examine how we might sell your art work for you. If you are interested in this service let me know. If this is a strong interest for a number of you it will motivate me to figure out how to do it.

Today it is sunny and the temperature is over 40. For much of January the temp was about 5 below 0. This feels like summertime compared to that. I thought I had wood enough to keep the house warm through the winter, but I've gone through it way fast. I'll have to start burning the furniture soon. Not really, there are lots of dead trees in the woods. Bringing in the

wood is quite difficult when there is lots of snow on the ground.

We are a few weeks away from completing most of the work on an addition to our home. The outdoor work that is left will have to wait until spring. It's too cold and snowy to be digging holes or working on the roof. We have added 1200 sq. feet of living space so it is a large addition.

The little kids are moving out of my room and the 2 little ones now have their own bedrooms. My 2 year old son is so proud to have a big boy bed so it works for him. My 5 year old daughter is thrilled to have her own room cause she can sit on her bed and order her younger brother out of HER room. It's funny to see the personalities of children develop.

I see with my eldest daughter {17} that much of her personality structure is the same as it was when she was 5. I think we all come into this world wired in some way that is almost secondary to our upbringing and genetics. We all have lessons to learn in this world, and at least in the case of my children they have their own unique temperaments, and different lessons to learn.

I hope to take a few weeks off at the end of February. If you don't hear from the program for a while that is why. I'd like to go somewhere warm and dry, but there is very little within driving distance that fulfills those wishes. It can get so expensive to fly a family of 5 somewhere and then have to rent rooms and a car. I will call a few friends I have in Florida to see if they have any ideas. I know we could visit with them, but it can be so hard to keep the kids under control in someone else's house that it is not a relaxing experience. Often we come home from trips with the kids needing a vacation. In my fantasies I purchase a small RV and drive across the country with the family, camping in National Forests and other beautiful locations.

Please let me know what kind of information you would like to see in this newsletter. It is the hope of this program to help you expand your horizons while locked up. I certainly can understand how there is a need for prisons as some people's behavior warrants them being isolated from the general population. [I myself cannot imagine why society would lock people up for victimless crimes.]

Once in prison your time should be spent learning how to take responsibility for your actions, gaining information and education, and

practicing decision-making. Our common good is best served when people in prison are successfully taught new ways to succeed. So much of what you write tells me this is not what is happening for you in prison. It is the intention of Prisoner Express to support you in gaining skills, and to get more of your stories out to the free world. As people learn more about how prisons fail to rehabilitate, they will advocate for programs that succeed.

Thank you for being part of this effort.

Please sign up for the programs you think helpful to you, and send us any suggestions on how we might improve what we are doing. **Remember if you have not registered yet it is important to do so if you want to keep receiving the newsletter.**

I hope to get this newsletter out 4x a year but need to secure funding to make that possible. Till next time blessings on you all,
Gary

Please check one choice and then print your name and sign in the spaces provided.

I give the Alternatives Library permission to post my personal profile, writings and artwork on the web using the following guidelines:

- A. _____ Use my name on my personal profile, writings, and artwork,
- B. _____ Use my name on my personal profile and artwork, but not on my other writings
- C. _____ Use my name on my personal profile, but not on my artwork and other writings
- D. _____ Do not use my name on my writings or artwork, but you may use any of my work and post it as anonymous

_____ Do not use my name or any of my writings in your program.

You must choose A or B or C, for your personal profile to be posted.

Even if you check A, B or C, you can still ask that a particular piece of writing be posted as anonymous or never posted at all. We will respect your wishes.

NAME: PLEASE PRINT _____

ADDRESS: _____

SIGNATURE _____

Your choices on this form will never effect your receipt of books or participation in the pen pal program.

PRISON REGULATIONS: If you wish to receive books, you must let us know the requirements of the prison unless you are a prisoner in Texas since we already know the regulations there. We need to know:

- 1. What is the limit of books you can receive?
- 2. Can you receive hardcover books? Paperbacks? Used books--most of our books are used? (circle all that apply)
- 3. What documentation, if any, do we need to include with the books so that they are accepted?
- 4. Can you receive magazines mixed in with your box of books?
If your institution will not allow us to send you books, please provide me with information for sending books directly to the library.
- 5. What kinds of library materials and services are available to you at your prison?

6. How often are you allowed access to library materials?

List the types of books you are interested in receiving and we'll do our best to fill your requests:

Please check the programs you wish to participate in. When necessary we will send more information about the program.

- 1. ___ Please keep sending me the newsletter
- 2. ___ I wish to receive books through Prisoner Express.
- 3. ___ I'd like to take part in the card making project. Please send me some card stock paper, and I'll send Prisoner's Express some cards.
- 4. ___ I'd like to take part in creating comic books. Circle all that apply. I can:
 - write a story
 - illustrate a story
 - ink in the words of the story.

Some of you can do all three, while others can do one of the tasks. I'll coordinate sending stories to illustrators and inkers. I can make copies and forward them to you. I am very excited about the possibilities of comic books, and hope some of you are as well. It is a great way to tell stories to people of all ages and backgrounds. Remember I'm looking for both adult stories and some suited for children.

- 5. _____ Please send me more information about origami [Japanese paper folding]
- 7. _____ I want to learn to juggle. Send me basic instructions. [Once you master the basic 3-ball method you can request additional instruction]
- 8. CLOSED TILL Summer 2005 Please send me more information on the Journal Project. [This involves a commitment to keep a journal about your life and experiences for 1 year, and sharing that journal with Prisoner Express for publication with other journals.
- 9. _____ I'm interested in studying world history, and would like Prisoner Express to develop the course work.

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