

Tomasio '05

Winter 2006

Prisoner Express

Free to Prisoners

A program of the Durland Alternatives Library
A project of CRESP
Co-sponsored by the Cornell Public Service Center

With great pleasure, I send you this next edition of the Prisoner Express News. We receive so many letters, and finally I have the chance to answer them and share with you updates about the various programs we are sponsoring, as well as reflect back to you some of the thought provoking writing that individually you share with us. As always this newsletter is organized so that if you are new to the program you can get a sense of what is going on. Many of you have been receiving this for awhile, and I trust you can understand why I might repeat some information in each issue of this newsletter. For those of you receiving this for the first time, my name is Gary and I coordinate the activities of Prisoner Express. When you contact Prisoner Express to participate in one or more of our projects we automatically send you a copy of our next newsletter. For some of you this could be the first you've heard from us since you sent your letter of inquiry. Our mission is to provide education, information and opportunities for creative self expression to the participants of the program. I understand from your letters that for many of you prison is an isolating and alienating environment, even though it is teeming with humanity. What a contradiction! Prisoner Express seeks to nourish your intellect and spirit, by providing resources from the outside as well as putting you in touch with the writings and thoughts of others going through similar experiences as you.

Prisoner Express programs are designed to provide incarcerated men and woman with opportunities for creative self expression as well as educational opportunities. It is my intention to focus on what can be done to improve the quality of life of those who participate. In circulating your writings through the newsletter I hope it helps you all realize you are not alone in your struggle, and that there are like minded individuals working to stay whole and balanced as they also do their time. I hear from so many of you that it is hard to have friendships in prison as people's allegiances change, and you never know exactly who you can trust. Prisoner Express projects are a place to share positive energy, even if it is by writing about suffering in prison. Just having an opportunity to bring thoughts to light and have them read and considered by others is a great way to work through personal issues. We often cannot send out individual responses to each letter received. It is both a question of money and time. As far as money goes it is much more cost effective for us to rely on bulk mail for much of our correspondence. It cuts costs considerably. Also this is a volunteer organization and there is not the people power to individually answer the letters. Your writings are all read, often more than once. We place many of your writings on the website www.prisonerexpress.org where they can be read by many more people. I will explain more about that later in this newsletter. I would like to update you on some of the

programs we run, and in doing so hopefully answer some of the questions that have been in your letters regarding our ongoing programs.

Book Mailings

As some of you know sending books in to prisoners is how this program started. We send approx. 150 packages a month. With over 1000 of you requesting books you can see that it is possible to have a number of months pass before you get your package. If you think we've forgotten you it is okay to drop a line to us letting us know your concern. It might not speed up when you are due to get books, but it ensures that we know you are waiting. We are generally good about keeping a cue on who should get the next package of books. Please when you request books let us know in broad terms what you'd like. If your request is too narrow, say a particular author or book, and we don't have it, then sometimes it can be hard to find a suitable substitute. Letting us know the subjects you are interested in gives you a better chance of getting the types of books you want. Please let us know if there are limitations on the number of books you can receive at once. If you are from Texas we know the rules, so you don't need to explain them. We have sent out lots of books this last year, and I like to think of them each as seeds. The seeds are planted when you read the book, and the beauty of books is that when you pass them on to another to read, the seed gets replanted. It varies on how long it takes to receive books from us. Right now it takes us about 3 to 4 months for a request to be answered. Sometimes we are much faster in sending you books, but because of the high demand compared to our resources that is what you can expect. Finances for our projects are particularly tight right now, and postage for book mailings is our greatest ongoing expense. We may have to slow down our mailing schedule to accommodate our financial situation. We are planning a music and dance benefit for 2/18/06. Let's hope we raise lots of money.

The Durland Alternatives library is located in a building next door to the Cornell University Law School. The law students had a small used bookstore they utilized to sell their old books. With the coming of book selling on the internet, the collection of used books were not used. It was decided to give the books away to deserving organization. I was able to go thru the room and pull out 15 boxes of books that the lawyers helping me said would be good for prisoners. Please let me know in your book requests if you want law books in your next shipment. The ones I have mostly deal with Civil Procedure, Sentencing Guidelines, Constitutional Law and a few on legal research. There are others. I still have to unpack and shelve all the books. Let me know what types you want. This is a limited offer and the books will only be available till they are all mailed. Please share them with one another. The law books are limited. If we run out before we get your letter your request for law books will be treated as a regular book

request, so let us know what types of books we should substitute to fill your request.

Journal Project

There were about 50 of you who started keeping a journal in early 2005. In late 2005 we extended another invitation to begin for those of you who enrolled later in the year. I am so pleased by the writings you have been sending in. It is very rich to read about many of your thoughts and experiences. We keep a file for each of you who are participating. Each entry you send is added to your file. We depend on volunteers and student workers to type your entries into the computer, and from there we can put them on the website. There are so many styles of writing, and the volume of writing individuals submit varies greatly. What seems to be emerging from it all is a sense of the humanity and diversity of the people who are participating. I really appreciate the skill and courage it takes to examine personal feelings through your journals. This project fulfills our program expectations in 2 big ways. One it provides the writers with a creative outlet for their thoughts and feelings, and two it provides us on the outside with a glimpse of lives we'd never know about. Hopefully the connections that are established by people reading your journals will lead to more understanding and better circumstances for those who are incarcerated. I do not feel confident that I can get everyone's journal typed and on line. There are so many being submitted. Stephanie and I and other readers will pick journals to be typed. If for some reason we cannot get yours [lack of typists] typed, we will still keep your journal filed and at the end of the year we will photocopy a complete set of your writings for you. The only limitation to that would be if we don't have the funds to pay for photocopying. I am putting out a call for volunteer typists, and with luck each of the journalers will have 1 person assigned to type in their writing. Please keep sending in your work. I know some of you need paper, and hopefully not too much later from when you read this some paper or pads will be sent by us to you.

Comic Project

We sent paper and ideas for this project to about 290 of you. I feel pictures and words are the best way to tell a story, and I hope a number of you get as excited by the possibility of this project as I am. We received funding from the Cornell Public Service Center which will cover the cost of paper, photocopying and postage. Anyone who wants to get involved in the comic project, please send us some drawings that show characters or scenes you'd like to portray. Even if you don't draw you can send us stories that you think would make a good comic. We will hook up the stories with artists who like to draw, but don't have a great story to tell. I have been a big fan of comic art, and am interested to see if we can do anything to advance the awareness of Americans about the prison system through your work. Ileana, a junior at Cornell is coordinating this project. Send her your drawings and stories. A Community

Service Partnership grant thru the Cornell University Public Service Center has funded this Comic Project as well as our History

Project. Your art and stories will be on display at a Cornell University awards ceremony sponsored by the Public Service Center. Seeing your work can help us gain support from other better funded organizations on campus. It will be an opportunity to display this program to a wider audience, and possibly help us in our efforts to secure funds.

Origami

I list this in every newsletter, but except for a few designs in a previous newsletter this project has not been launched. It seems like every so often it is going to happen and someone agrees to coordinate the project, and then for a variety of reasons there is no follow through. I have found a number of books that offer good instruction, and I still have great hopes for introducing you all to some serious paper folding art. I have all of you who have signed up for this registered in the database [presently there are 471 of you registered for this program] we maintain and as soon as funding and people show up we will begin. Please know we are not ignoring you, but rather that this has been a harder project to start than I anticipated.

History Project

This is another project that I've wanted to see rolled out for quite awhile, and now for the first time I can say it is on the way. There are over 600 of you signed up for this project. The problem is how to supply you all with the materials we are gathering. I'll break this one down a bit so you can see what we are up against with each project. A graduate student Diana and longtime volunteer Dave are working on creating a unit of study for you. We will copy different documents to help give you information on a topic. The first unit will be on "The Vikings" the second unit will be on "Ancient Egypt". When we start figuring out how many pages comprises each unit we quickly come up against the cost. Do the math and see if you can figure out the photocopying cost of a 50 page packet going to 600 prisoners. Add in the postage, and it leaves us all scratching our heads. I've thought about limiting the size of the packet or the amount of people who can participate in the project. I don't like either of those paths. There is so much interesting info on the Vikings that even 50 pages seems too small. We had hoped to create at least 3 units with the money we have, but if we send it out to all 600 it might be we spend all the money on 1 unit. Either way we will begin creating the Ancient Egypt unit next. There may have to be a wait before we send it out. To get a second unit you will have to complete questions and/or a project that will be sent with the first unit. That is one way we can trim expenses. This project will all be explained in the first unit which I **hope** we can mail out in early March.

NEW!! Math Project

A group of teachers from Ithaca College and other volunteers are putting together a packet of interesting math problems. We will be creating a number of packets. Some will be geared to those hoping to improve basic math skills while other packets will be aimed at students who are already confident in their basic math skills. I'm also hoping the packets will include some interesting math puzzles that will test your thinking skills. Below I will include an introduction to the project by Dani who is leading this project.

*Hello, My name is Dani, and I teach Mathematics at Ithaca College. We are a group of teachers from Ithaca College who are interested in starting a program through Prisoner Express so we can communicate with you mathematically. The purpose of these Math lessons is to help you learn Math, improve your logical skills and develop self confidence in your thinking abilities and also have fun. The people that are preparing these exercises would like to hear from you and to help you find a way to become productive and happy members of our society. The circumstances that brought you to the situation that you are in are in the past. What we do have is the **now** so why not say yes to Life and go for it. We would love to hear from you. Learning Mathematics can become a great tool for a future job and a new way of thinking. Numbers and shapes can also become your friends, and doing mental Math can become an experience for your mind that will take you away from the difficult situation that you may be facing. In particular doing mental Math can become a useful tool to take your mind away to a place where there is no hatred or abuse.*

These exercises are only the starting point. Once we will start knowing you and your needs we will tailor specific Mathematical exercises and sheets to fulfill your needs. Any comments that you send with your answers will be helpful for us in creating a relationship with you. We are looking forward to share and learn with you, and we believe that by doing so everyone will benefit. Another thing you may want to consider if the circumstances allow is to teach other people some of the concepts that you are learning or that you knew from before. The best way to learn and grow is to teach someone else. This could be of great benefit for everyone.

Here are some ideas of what we hope to accomplish. We will send you math lessons on various levels which will teach you Math concepts and improve your Math skills. We also hope hope to communicate with you on the relationship between Mathematics and spirituality and healing (the nature of Pure Mathematics is such that it corresponds to deep levels of our mind and can help us see reality clearly and surmount inner obstacles. If you are interested in participating, please let me know what needs do you have, and what level of lessons would best help you?

--Dani

I am excited about the possibilities of this offer to create math lessons. I have seen the introductory packet for basic math and it is good. Math can open up your thought processes and help bring order to what appears chaotic. In this modern world that can be a help for anyone. If you'd like to get a copy, please request it in your next letter or fill out the registration form on page 2. Please let us know if you'd like a basic or intermediate level packet. If you'd like to communicate with Dani please put his name on the envelope you send to us, or include your letter to him in other correspondence you send to us. At the end of this newsletter I will include a page of sudoku puzzles for those of you looking to play at some math logic games.

Art Projects

We recently sent out paper to 300 of you who expressed interest in our art program. We are both looking for art work to use to create a line of prisoner designed greeting cards, as well as art work we can display at an art show of prison artists. We also display your work at our Prisoner Express benefits and local art galleries. We hope to eventually have funds to create a traveling art show of your work. Please submit any art you would like to share. We make an effort to send drawing paper to those of you who send in art work. Please do not send in images of copyrighted characters ex. Mickey Mouse, as we can not use them. If you send art work for display include a short bio about yourself that we can post next to your artwork. Displaying your artwork is a great way to reach out to the general public whose support I need to continue this program. Anyone can join this program by sending artwork, and by enrolling on the form at the end of the newsletter.

Profiles and Pen Pal project

For many years now we have been accepting your self profiles that we then share by showing them to library patrons or by putting them on our website. We are very behind in posting your profiles on line. I want to start over again as many of the profiles we have are outdated, and addresses of folks posted have changed. I also want to be realistic about how many profiles we want to maintain. Everyone is welcome to send a profile, but I will give priority to posting those profiles of you who are engaged in other PE projects. That way if you are keeping a journal, submitting poetry, or sending in theme essay submissions, the person reading your profile will be able to click on your writings to go to your personal information, and vice versa they can go from your personal profile to the writings you have submitted. While I want to support all of you in your desire for pen pals, I want to prioritize those of you who are sending in poetry, drawings, and other writings. It makes way more sense than just having someone read a short profile with no other info. If we do get ahead of our typing needs we will put everyone's profile on line, but please note we will be prioritizing those of you who participate in our ongoing programs. Please also take note that sending us a profile does not in any way guarantee that you will find a

pen pal. For some of you this program has generated letters, and I understand for many of you it has not.

New Profile Format

Please include answers to the following questions.

1. What are your interests or hobbies?
2. What book or author has had the greatest impact on you in the past 12 months?
3. What do you consider your greatest personal achievement in the past 12 months?
4. What qualities are you looking for in a pen pal?
5. Write a short personal statement that tells something about your background, and explains the kind of person you are.

To have your profile listed on our website please participate in one or more of our writing or drawing programs and submit a profile following this format.

Theme Writing

Theme writing is an important component of our program. Every month there is a different theme to write on. We type up every theme we receive on a topic. After they are gathered we post each monthly theme on the website. We are currently behind in getting the past number of month's themes on the website, but they will be up soon. It is another way for your words and feelings to be expressed outside of the walls. Submitting an essay on the monthly theme will allow folks who are looking online at your profile to learn more about you when they are deciding who to write to. As I mentioned before I will put a priority on getting the profiles placed on the web from those of you who are submitting writings for one of the programs. Writing a theme also gets you more mail. I mail everyone who submits a theme a copy of what everyone else wrote on the topic. In this newsletter I will include a just a few themes submitted on a number of topics. We receive many excellent submissions and I can only print a few selections in this newsletter. I encourage all of you who want more mail and connection to take the time to write on the theme topics. I am always looking for suggestions on what themes to suggest. Please let me know if you have an idea on what would make a good topic. As those of you know who participate, I often fall behind but eventually do get all the themes typed up and mailed out. If you have written a theme on that was due more than 4 months ago and have not gotten the theme packet back please let me know. Sometimes themes get separated from the name of those who write it. Also mail has been known to get lost.

Love

Love is a very powerful and dangerous emotion. I can't even begin to fathom the numerous lives that have been destroyed—directly and/or indirectly—in the name of love. And yet there are still these individuals who try to impress upon us their insane ideological belief that we should employ a 'love thy neighbor as you love yourself' philosophy in our lives.

An article that I read in The Echo (Texas prison newspaper) last October comes to mind. In this particular article the writer naively opines that to 'love thy neighbor as you love yourself is the best rule to live by.'

I am sure that his intentions were for the best, but this environment (prison) is not some make-believe land of milk and honey. If anyone is serious and I mean serious enough to actually believe that a 'love thy neighbor as you love yourself' philosophy is in fact the best rule to live by in this predatorily dog-eat-dog world that is our reality—then I can only conclude that one's romantic optimism is exceeded only by one's inability to see either the ridiculousness, or the actual danger (that is imminent) in such a fanciful belief.

Should anyone really subscribe to such nonsense and risk placing themselves at the mercy of a neighbor (potential enemy) by exercising an indiscriminant effort to love them as you love yourself? After all, how many times have you 'shown love' to a homeboy (girl), neighbor, friend, or even a family member, only to have the proverbial knife thrust deep into your defenseless back?

Surely, every man and woman residing in prison now, and in times past, are well-aware (or should be) of the scandalous, devious machinations (referred to as 'game') that every, psychic vampire--masquerading as a friend and/or neighbor—will attempt to impose upon those that open wide the door of gullibility. And what better way to open that door than to remove it completely from its hinges by adopting some pious philosophy of 'love-all' that is better suited for a romance novel.

Besides, love is an emotion that should not be distributed freely like so much state-soap and toothpowder. It is a deep, intimate, heartfelt feeling that should be reserved for the dearest people in our respective lives. And sadly, even then it's not always reciprocated. This gives even more validity to the logical reasoning behind the words of Anton Szandor Savey that go: "if anything is used too freely it loses its true meaning. Therefore, you should love strongly and completely those who deserve your love"

Although I would venture to say that even more deaths have been caused in the name of love than hate, I do not deny that love can also produce never-ending happiness, comfort, and tranquility. That is a unique 'unconditional' love, a TRUE love.

I have been fortunate in having experienced that divine love via the love bestowed upon me by my children and my mother. Why they continue to shower me with such unreserved love I do not know. What I do know is that although my actions (i.e. being in and out of jail) speak differently, my love for them is equally unconditional. A fact that they are aware of.

The love provided by my mother and children is more than enough to sustain me and keep me from succumbing to the weight of my sentence. However, I've been single for a long time, and I readily and shamelessly admit that I yearn for a 'special someone' that can fill that particular void in my life. Someone that I can love, and who will reciprocate that love. I am certain that most of us—if not all—do.

But I don't let that desire blind me. I am a man that does, can, has, and will love unconditionally. Yet I guard my love, and I will only grant my love on an individual basis. Not on some exotic 'love all' philosophy that, in reality, isn't love at all. What is so unique about indiscriminate love? Randomly forced love will only serve to lessen one's true feelings. And frankly, show me a person who professes to love one and all, as totally and completely as he loves himself, and I'll show you hypocrisy at its finest.

Being sympathetic to another is not love. Kindness is not love. Courtesy is not love. And charity is certainly not love. None of those are even acts of love, if you ask me. Better put: they DO NOT define love. Maybe that's where the misconception lies.

We can be—and should be—all of the above. At least to those deserving of it (lets face it, not everyone is appreciative. There are many snakes lying, in wait to strike). But let's not confuse any of the above with 'love.' Because when it comes to love—TRUE LOVE—there is no comparison.

--Gilbert M. Davila

Love... a small word for such a complex emotion. There is no single explanation for it, because love is made up of many things. It cannot be measured, because it is a feeling. All the money in the world cannot buy love; it has to be earned. It does not happen by wishing; it must come about mutually. Love is not an instantaneous emotion, but something that grows slowly between two people, maturing with time. Once love has reached maturity, there is no stronger bond between two people. But when the two people are separated like a lot of us in prison are from a loved one, this love sometimes becomes weak. And those of us in prison struggle to strengthen this love once again.

To love someone means being comfortable and at ease with them, sharing confidence knowing that they will be understood and held in trust. It means respecting each other's dignity and never being demanding, but rather being willing to give, and accepting that which is given, graciously and with love.

To love someone means having a genuine concern for them, being able to sense that something is wrong without being told. It is understanding the other person's problems, moods, and 'hang-ups,' and accepting all of them even if you don't quite understand. It is excusing their faults, because you know that their good points far outweigh the bad. A lot of us in prison don't seem to realize this until we are locked up and then sometimes it is too late.

Love is always being there for each other with a shoulder to cry on, to give support when confidence levels are low, to give helpful advice when it is asked for, to know when to be silent and just listen, or to have cheerful words of encouragement given. There are a lot of us in prison, especially Ad. Seg., who ask this of our loved ones.

Love is sharing the good and the bad, the hopes and the dreams, the amusing times and the serious

times. It is doing things together, yet leaving room for each to grow as an individual.

How do I know these things about love? Because this is the kind of love I had once given to me and didn't realize the love at that time, instead I abused it. Now after nearly 10 years of prison in Texas I've had nothing to do except think about what love is all about. So this is my conclusion I've come too, especially after three marriages that I destroyed due to the lack of love from me. So now if any of my ex-wives read this, and for my family, this is the kind of love I feel for you.

I'm blessed with your love, and I will never take it for granted ever again. I will strive to become an even better person and to always be deserving of your love as I once was, because I truly love you as I have never loved before.

For those of us in prison who feel this way,
We love you Baby!
--Lewis Martin.

Man, what can I tell anybody about love? Not very much... as love has not been very good to me. Then too, maybe it's me that has not been good to love.

Even family-love is an effort. You have to put something in to receive. But my real point is that everybody on some level wants to be loved. It may not last forever as we would like it to, as I have loved many people and animals as well as objects. People have left me behind, dogs have died, and cars have broken down. So always start with the one you see in the mirror.

--Calvin Carter

Love is an extraordinary force in human affairs. It can drive one to despair. In here (prison) love can offer that most sought—after commodity, hope. And as so many concepts in here, sadly, the concept of love can become distorted. So great is the need for love that the human condition deteriorate without it. It would seem that when man was created the need for love was made an integral part of his being. The love for life, the love for woman, and the love for the unknown. Love has driven man to create art. The loss of love has driven man to destroy himself. As long as man exists, love and the need for love will be a part of his existence.

--William Davis

God and love are synonymous. To be in love is to be in God. To know love is to know the very existence of god. For God there is no other proof needed except your love. Man is born with the potential of love, but it is only a potential, it has to be made actual. Only when love becomes actual is it wellborn, otherwise it remains a seed, and the seed is not going to grow.

Love knows no death, love conquers death, and love conquers time. But it is not of the mind; it is not a question of thinking. One has to live love. Love is the greatest magic. It transforms the mundane into the sacred, it transforms prose into poetry.

Ordinary people live their lives like prisoners, dragging their feelings around, afraid to let them loose as if life is a sentence to be suffered. But love should transform it into an island of bliss and make it a song to be sung. We are born to love, nurtured in love by our mother, but we grow up to suppress it as if we were ashamed of it. As if we were looked upon as weak. To the opposite sex we show it as a means of sexual gratification as if we were bestowing a gift upon them. But true, spontaneous love should flow freely towards everyone. The mind is full of doubt and doubt is very cowardly; and the mind that is not in love is bound to be in doubt. It is only through love that doubts disappear.

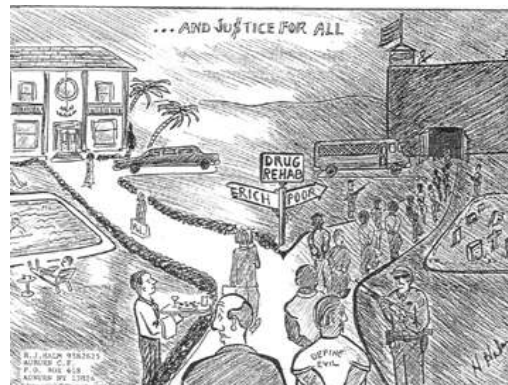
Love always comes from beyond. It is not something that we can make; it cannot be manufactured by us. At the most we can receive love or reject it. One has to go through many pains and many pleasures, many dark nights, many sunlit days, and the many agonies and many ecstasies that love brings. It is only between these extremes, as if one is walking on a tight rope, balancing constantly, that one grows, that one matures. Never avoid love—love is the greatest courage one can experience in life.

To live without love is to live a life of defeat, of frustration, of despair, of anguish. To live in love is to live victoriously. People have tried all other kinds of ways to be victorious—through money or power—but everything else fails except love. That is why God gave his only begotten son. It says that God so loved the world that he gave his only son—that is love

--Donald R. Dickson

What are you but a very crazy impulsion? Luring me into investing all my precious devotion. Leading me into emotions I never thought I had, at night making me feel like I've gone mad. Always tricking me into believing all your lies, then promising me your truth never ever dies. Why would I give in to you one more time, when I know you could end at a drop of a dime? Still, without you I feel so blue, I fight myself but I give in to you. If only I could change you for what is best, you're very tricky, you're like a test. My desire.

--Jose Flores



--H.J. Halm

Parole

Parole is something that every convict dreams about, but no one knows how to readily achieve...At least in this state, it is a gift given to the very few. Doesn't matter that your case is decades old, or that you abide by the rules to avoid all write ups for whatever period of time, nor does your age weight a factor... So then, tell me; what can parole be but a gift given to the few? Better yet, describe to me the basis for an F-I or any number...Myself, it's been over 18 years and still don't know what it takes to make parole...For sure it's about more than just staying out of trouble. And the rehabilitation thing, well that's for the media to holla about around election time... I have rehabilitated myself for myself, and yet I have no way of proving this to anyone...so those that decide my fate, only see on paper the 23 year-old kid that thought he was a Gangsta and not the man I am now. So how should I see parole? How should I think about parole?? As it truly is...A gift, given to the very few!!! Now it's a given that everybody doesn't deserve parole... Now or at any other time. But every person locked away feels that they are ready and justly deserve to be paroled.

So how do THEY decide who to award the precious gift to? A point system, based on what? Past and present? The past cannot always foretell the future...

--Calvin Carter

I have read in several newspapers that many States abolished their parole programs as an act of getting 'tough on crime' towards career criminals. I guess a sort of political belief was developed that states if parole is taken away prison sentences become lengthier; and more prisons are built, then you now have a definite way of locking these criminals up and keeping them locked up for the rest of their lives. That way, the public doesn't have to worry about Joe the Robber or Jane the Murderer coming back on the streets after serving only a portion of their prison sentence. If it is certain beyond doubt that Joe and Jane have no intentions of ending these careers of crime, then perhaps this is what they deserve.

But there is nothing 'career' about a person who gets involved with a crime for the very first time. All humans make mistakes; some more severe than others. But the role of government is to issue punishment in the name of justice and fairness. Not to play the role as psychics and say: "They did it once and in the future they'll do it again." This is not fair towards the 1st time offender.

And the hypocrisy of charging offenders who committed their crimes while under the age of 21, as adults, reaches the level of insanity. In America, you must be 21 years old to purchase alcoholic beverages, and to own a handgun. If a person is not mature enough to legally purchase a pistol or get drunk, how can they be mature enough to fully understand their crimes while using these same objects? Yet several thousand sit in prisons with lengthy sentences and no possibility of a parole or early release.

Mandatory minimums and structured sentencing should be abolished and replaced with mandatory education and structured imprisonment. The majority of prisoners I have met regret and are ashamed by their crime. They come from environments where proper social ethics are not taught, nor practiced. Once a person sincerely understands their wrong of committing crime, and are instructed on the proper ways of civility and self-improvement, chances are they'll become productive members of society. Why should not Parole be available for such a person?

Anyone determined to live a life of crime should not receive an early release. To deny a rehabilitated prisoner the possibility of parole is ridiculous
--Uri Small

The hour glass mocks me with every grain of sand; I can't believe my life is in their wicked hand. At times I sit and think; could this really be me? If I had done it different, right now where would I be? Still the grains fall one after another, having no compassion, not even for one's mother. And even though your youth it seems that you prolong, your soul inside grows old knowing there's something wrong.
Not True

--Jose Flores

I think about this all the time. I am quite sure that no day goes by that I don't think about living life on parole. I have yet to ever be granted parole but the day is arriving in just a couple of years. Since I have been incarcerated for all this time I do know that living life out there on life's terms in the 'Free world' will definitely be a rather daunting phase in life. I will be on parole or probation for the better part of ten years when I do get out of prison, so this will not be a temporary one or two year stint, this will have to become a way of life for me.

I just recently went for an annual review and, due to many budget restrictions; the reclassification system has changed a small bit. The D.O.C.s decided that I am still a high risk offender and will keep my security level at four (behind the walls), yet decided to take the last twelve months of my incarceration and send me to work release so as to start phasing me back into society. This is extremely fine with me, yet I was a little taken aback at the real possibility of being out of prison one year early, even if only to work. Do the fact that I have mandatory work release when I get done with my initial prison incarceration; this is like receiving an instant and unexpected one-year time cut. This new policy takes the two and a half years I have left to do and knocks it down to eighteen months; add to that that I am on target to receive a six month substance abuse time cut in about two months, and now suddenly I'm out in less than a year, and wow, when it first dawned on me my heart started beating a million beats a minute.

Everything I've thought constantly of over the last nine years and now it's in my face and I can't wait, and yet I have many fears. Now people that wouldn't even take the time to write a few lines on a sheet of paper and send a

letter are now popping out of the wood work trying to be last minute saviors. It's definitely a nerve-racking situation in whole. I mean I know I'll get a job, and do this and do that, and be ok but so many unanswered questions and things that you're not looking forward to. Like the first time you're offered a drink or to stop at the local watering hole and knock a couple back with the guys. Or the family, how the children will react, and the ex-wife scenario, it's all so real, so fast, and it's do or die time. All the talking in the world that we all have done its now time to put up or shut up. I know that I can do it; I just hope that I do.

During the course of my incarceration I've had opportunity to see many guys come back on parole violations. Some, you just knew would be back, others you really thought had what it takes to make it, surprised you when they walked back through that door. All in all who's to say who's going to make it? I know that I am starting to send out letters and get my affairs in order and that alone is a task. Who knew that today it would be so hard to get Social Security cards and Birth Certificates and other various legal and government documents? Rent for two bedroom apartments has doubled out there. Today it's next to impossible to get a drivers license because of identity theft. Am I ready for all of this? Is society ready for me? I am not sure of any of these things, I am sure that I plan to do every thing in my power to stay out and stay free. I know that I will do everything in my power to mend my relationship with my daughter. I know that I will try to be the best father I can be. I know that I will try to be the best person I can to the women I meet and date and fall in love with. Bottom line, I'm scared, I think that it is only natural to fear the unknown. Is my fear going to prevent me from moving forward? No, it never has before. I will get out there and do every thing I can to be the man I always knew I could be!

--Jeffrey Jinks

In 32 years as an innocent man, I've never had a parole; never even seen a parole board member. From my point of view, parole is just a scam to rush the young, unscrupulous punks out so they can quickly return with 'enhanced' sentences, third strikes, life, life-without-parole or a death penalty.

The simple fact is that the cops and lawyers make too much taxpayer profit off us to do anything but snare more people into their bottomless pit. The juveniles are handed break after break and keep coming back for more (see *Earth Calling All Adults*, www.jamesbauhaus.org) They become short-timers in prison and are given probation, suspended and deferred sentences, 'boot camp' (aw, pul-lease!), pre-parole and parole after parole until finally they get a virtual life sentence (45 years or more) and suddenly, the process stops. No more freebies, largesse or more chances. You became a cash cow for the cop and lawyer's system. You support dozens of cops, guards, lawyers, judges, politicians, media-clucks, and other assorted parasites. You robbed a few vending machines, sold enough dope to stay in a stupor most of

your life and now, instead of being a parasite yourself, you have become food for even bigger parasites. You're not making any more paroles, kids. The best thing you can do now is to try and develop a social consciousness. While all the other prisoners are phenning for the trash dope in here, or for another shot of coffee, a cigarette, dip or some candy. I find it quite satisfying to lash out from my ivory tower. You can too. Just grow a brain, learn to write and spell, then think. Just like Ross Perot, the best potential president we ever got cheated out of said, 'there are plenty of good plans lying around everywhere; the trick is to get them implemented!'

Now that you're screwed forever, you can be the one who thinks up these great plans and tries to get them implemented. Think of it as contrition for your crimes. Leave the world a better place than you found it. Or you can go screw yourself: some more! At least this time it will be intentional.

--James Bauhaus

Child-Hood

Now that I've lived past my 40th year I spend a lot of time day dreaming of my idle childhood days. For the most part, my younger days were not all that hard or bad. In fact, there were many good days.

The two strongest people in my life were my Mom and Grandmother. They pretty much taught me everything about life: how to cook, wash clothes, pay bills, treat women, love and be loved. I was 11 years old when I got my first bike. It was a Schwinn 10 speed. Momma didn't like the idea of me riding other people's bikes, so she took me to a pawn shop and bought me a bike. The killer part was that it would not fit in the car...and she didn't want me to ride it home because it was about 8 maybe 10 miles from the house, plus I'd have to cross some 3 major intersections in a row. Would you believe that she actually told me to walk the bike home? I had to explain to her that the bike was meant to be ridden, and that I would be riding the bike all over the city...eventually. Well, what happened is that I got to ride my new bike home. After that, Momma grounded my bike for a week because she's my mom and had to check my attitude, after that I could only ride my bike with her permission, and each time I rode it out of her set boundaries, I was seriously punished. For about six months that bike spent more time chained up in my room than anywhere. And I never had more fun with any vehicle since.

--Calvin S. Carter

Violent Montage

Childhood is a montage made from snippets of memory surrounded by nothing. It seems strange the memories that became seared in my brain cells. There's joy and pain, embarrassments and fears, but mostly there is violence.

My first and oldest memory is of my Uncle Joe taking me swimming. He held me high and dipped me in and out of the water as I laughed and squealed and his dog,

Missy, swam worried circles around us. If only all my memories brought such joy.

When I was a preschooler and old hunting dog took to living under our house. She was more than half wild and had a belly full of pups. My dad asked if I could catch her because I had a way with animals and of course I said yes. Dad gave me a noose of rope, he held the loose end, and I crawled beneath the house with some bread. She was eating out of my hand when I put the rope around her neck. Dad pulled her out, but didn't take her to the pen where he kept his other hunting dogs. Instead he tied her to the willow tree in the back yard. Then he got his shotgun off the rack and went out and killed her. Dad was proud of me for catching her, but I wished I hadn't.

Mom was mad and fixing to whip me, I ran out the door and circled the house. Afraid I'd lap her and get caught I bent over to look for her feet to see where she was. Couldn't figure out why there were no feet in sight. Then she grabbed my arm and tanned my tail. After that incident I'd climb an oak and sit swaying in the breeze until she cooled off her temper yelling and threatening me. Once she sent my brother, Jody, up to get me, but he was nine years older and too heavy for the end branches where I sat chattering like a squirrel. Jody had always hated me and tried to hurt me at every opportunity. Mom sent him to get a switch to use on me and he brought back a whole tree. It was so big Mom just gave up and didn't whip me.

Sundays Mom would send me to church with my sisters. More often than not I'd refuse to go. I might have gone if Mom was taking us all, but if she didn't have to go it didn't seem fair if I had to. That got me a weekly beating most of one summer until Mom wore down and gave up. After every beating she'd come back in the bedroom and cry about how she hated to have to whip me. She couldn't have hated it more than I did. It's no wonder I'm so anti-religion as an adult.

Jody was hogging the Sunday paper as he always did. Instead of fighting or arguing I sat on the floor and read the back of the comic as he held them out reading the other side. He slapped me in the face and I backed crying to the closet to reach the baseball bat without his noticing. He came charging me and I knocked his legs out from under him and ran screaming for help to Mama Claudie's trailer, my maternal grandmother, with Jody in hot pursuit. He'd have caught me if I hadn't hurt his leg and slowed him down. Dad beat Jody with his belt buckle for that one so badly I felt sorry for him.

When I was thirteen they hospitalized me with a kidney infection. The doctor had trouble understanding until I told him about my twenty-two year old brother kidney punching me on his weekly visits. Yeah, Mom and Dad knew he hit me. Mom had seen me lying on the ground hurt so bad I couldn't get up and cussing him every time I could catch my breath while Jody stood over me laughing. They didn't want to hurt his feelings. Guess my body being hurt didn't matter much. After the expense of the hospital stay the kidney punching stopped, but he didn't stop hurting me until I was fifteen. That was when I got fed up

and took him outside, not wanting Mom to fuss all week about fighting in the house, and broke a few ribs for him. Why I never took a gun down and shot him I don't know. He deserved it.

There are good memories, too; going with dad to work in the garden on Saturdays and busting a big watermelon to eat for breakfast; riding horses with my mom; watching my oldest sister, Claudia, challenge Dad to a race with his having to take us swimming if she won, she never did, but he'd take us anyway; fishing trips with Mom and dad; hunting with Dad; staying weekends with Dorothy, my youngest sister, after she got married, yet the violence and pain seem more vivid and I'm sure was more of an influence on the man I became.

Why should my family be surprised when I hit people who made me angry? It's what they taught me when they hit me. That was when I was too small to fight back. All I could do was swallow the pain until I was big enough to give it back to others.

Knowing where my violence comes from isn't an excuse. It isn't a cure either, but it helps. It's up to me to break the cycle of violence. This is not about blame because playing the blame game changes nothing. What I have to do is dig up what was planted in my childhood and plant a more pleasant swelling flower in its place, PEACE.

--Daniel H. Harris

The spark was as bright as a million suns. Microbes started to grow and divide and multiply twenty-six times. Then the whole process started again. The organism called a baby was due any day on this cold September.

Winter had blown in from Canada. The Great Lakes were frozen over. The wind howled outside, and whistled as it passed through the cracks on the walls. Old newspapers had been yellowed by time, fluttered as their folded edges wedged in the cracks of the old wooden house could not completely stop the raging winter storm.

The woman cried out for her husband. He was busy feeding firewood to the metal stove. "Basilio." The man closed the side latch, and turned to attend his pregnant wife. She held her stomach and cried again, "Basilio, the baby is coming." The man had blankets ready. He wrapped her up, and picked her up. As he walked towards the front door, he called out instructions to his oldest son. "Manuel, take care of the house, do not let the fire go out, lock the door, nobody goes in or out until I get back. I'm taking your mother to the hospital." Manuel understood he was in charge.

The wind and snow blasted the man and the woman as they faced the elements. Quickly the woman was laced in the passenger side of the man's 49 Chevy. The drive to Detroit would be treacherous in the bad weather conditions. But Don Basilio was a good driver. Many roads were closed. Some completely covered in 8 feet of snow, impassable. Don Basilio turned around and headed to Saginaw. Finally, they reached St. Mary's Catholic Hospital.

Soon as the car stopped outside, the nuns came out to greet the arrivals. The head nun saw the lady getting stronger birth pangs and quickly rolled a wheel chair and pushed it to the maternity ward, where the delivery room was adjacent. Don Basilio didn't have to wait long. He stood at a heater warming his hands, when he heard foot steps behind him. Instinctively, Don Basilio turned just as the moment the nun was reaching out to tap his shoulder. Startled at his abrupt turn, she apologized.

Mr. Govea, you have a healthy wife and a son. Your wife is calling for you. It was like a dream, the day was September 21, 1953. Don Basilio thought as he was escorted to the recovery room. At the entrance way he stopped. There was his beautiful wife, but she was arguing, it seemed with the nuns. Don Basilio quickly stepped forward. "Concha, is everything alright? Where is the baby?"

The boy was born sick. He could not digest milk. Without nourishment he would die. The argument continued. It concerned the nuns' choice for a name, "Jesse Mathew" and the parents' choice, "Jesus Mateo." Finally a middle ground was met. His name would be Jesse Mateo Govea.

Life silently accumulates, like grains of sand and the little spark grew. The little body was metabolizing everything it could see, hear, smell, and touch. The input was transforming the little body into the shape and form of a bright young child.

The child survived, and grew and understood, but could not speak, or maybe he did not want to speak. Nobody knew. At two years old he could walk and run around with two farm dogs that favored his company over the rest of the kids. Tipe, the black mixed Labrador, and Spot, the mixed St. Bernard, were farm dogs, guard dogs, family pets. Jesse would wander off into the woods near Fairgrove, Michigan and the dogs would walk on each side of him. They made eye contact from time to time. Something in those woods attracted Jesse. He kept returning deeper and deeper venturing into the unknown.

His parents were immigrant field workers. One day the sun was beaming through the car window. It was a shiny 49 Chevy. By standing on the car seat, at a distance, Jesse could see the dark shapes of his parents, brother, and sisters knee deep in the sugar beet fields. The door handle was hard, but Jesse pulled with both hands until the door clicked open. He climbed down the car seat, to the floor board, and dangled his bare feet from the side board where he sat.

Jesse heard a little voice instruct him to go ahead and jump. Somehow little Jesse knew it would be ok. He let himself go. The loose dirt below his feet cushioned his landing. Jesse smiled to himself. Once again he looked towards the beet fields, but he sugar beet leaves were eye level. He could not see his parents but knew they were straight from the car window and the sun was hot beaming down.

The little voice spoke again. Jesse walked to the back of the car. The trunk looked like a big mouth without

teeth, like when grandma yawned. A little smile at the thought. Looking over the edge of the trunk he spotted the glass gallon jug full of water. He could touch the ring on the jug, where his dad would stick his index finger and lift it up to drink and quench his thirst. Jesse had observed that ritual many times.

Jesse tugged on the bottle ring with all his might bringing the jug balanced on the rim of the car trunk. With one more pull brought the jug crashing to the soft dirt. Water started to spill as the jug fell to its side, just as the little voice said, half the gallon spilled, the dirt drank it quickly. Only a black spot remained. Jesse lifted the jug, it was lighter now. Once more looking up at the sun the little voice spoke again. Take them water to drink. Jesse walked to the row in front of the car door and started to walk. The sugar beet leaved slapped his face as he walked between two rows. I was along walk. Somewhere along the way Jesse dropped the jug. He could not hold it or cradle it in his arms anymore.

He rested a bit, but the little voice ordered him to get on his knees and grab hold of the ring over his shoulders and stand up and "keep walking." It felt lighter and I could walk better. I could hear voices now, my Dad giving orders, I speeded up my pace, until I could hear the hoe's chopping weeds and the swish of the loose dirt as my Dad, Mom, brother, and sisters worked in unison. I could not see him, but my Dad spotted me. He must have been looking back making sure no weeds were left uncut. I heard him, "Ah miren" (Ah, look), "Mijo nos traje agua." (My son brought us water.)

In life we always have choices to make some good and some bad. Whatever decision we make, we must learn to live with the rest of our life. I was three years old when I made that choice to take water to my loved ones. I remember it was Dad, Mom, Irene, Gloria, Manuel, Alice, and Margie. Now only Mom, Irene, Gloria, and Margie remain.

I didn't have a childhood like regular kids. Animals were my friends. I never had toys, I made my own sling shot. I searched the woods until I saw a tree with a good section forming a "Y." I stood in front of the tree. A breeze indicated "No" not to cut it, "Go Away!" So I kept on, until I found on the floor of the forest, a dried perfect branch formed in a "Y" for my sling shot. I used it to knock down apples or pears high up on tree limbs that I could not reach. If my family wanted pheasants, I would bring some home. Sometimes the dogs knew what I wanted, and they would catch some rabbits or pheasants alive and bring them to me. I would give them to my grandma, who would quickly kill, clean, and cook them. I would not eat any animals I brought home!

Childhood for me is a blur, short lived. I was forced into field labor as soon as I could swing a hoe in the fields. I was disguised with a tall hat, and thick heeled boots to make me look as tall as a short bent over adult, swinging the hoe chopping weeds from sunup to sunset. The time off at home was spent chopping firewood and stacking

it in a wood shed in our basement/storm shelter under our wooden house, for the cold Michigan winters.

At 11 years old, I started to attend school, the 1964 civil rights act, would not allow my parents to keep me from school. It got me out of the field labor force. I started to learn English, I understood it before I could speak it. I learned to pronounce words, to communicate, with the help of a caring little girl's teachings. Her name was Diana, we attended Fairgrove Elementary. She started to bring sandwiches and ate and exchanged some for tacos of refried beans. I would refuse to eat in the cafeteria. I ate outside on a tree stump. Diana started to follow me and she didn't bring a sack lunch like me. I gave her one of my tacos. I felt obligated to give her half of my lunch. I could not sit and leave her watching. I was always starving when I got home. I finally had to ask my mom to put 6 tacos in my bag instead of 3. Diana and I did not speak; she made me understand her by signs and the tone of her voice. She meant well so I accepted her company and shared my tree stump with her.

Finally I became a problem, got into fights with all the little white guys at school. I was a loner and a darker shade than white. Diana was the only friend and communicated by signs, nods and her leadership. My father pulled me out of school and moved all our family to San Antonio, Texas.

Again it turns out that the choices we make play a big part in our future. I was an A and B student and even skipped from first to second to fourth grade. But in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades I made bad choices. In 1968 I was kicked out, expelled, banned from all the tough schools on the west side of town, from the Edgewood district.

Ten years later I was sent to prison for murder and 27 years later after much hardship and pain, I sit in a prison cell at the Wynne Unit with a busted right wrist and broken thumb, penciling this story with my left hand (I'm right handed.) Childhood to some never existed, never experienced the things that some children now a days take for granted. Still, some old men never grow up. They act like little spoiled children. To define childhood, one must evaluate the full spectrum, from silly to serious, rich, poor, or as some say "filthy rich" or "dirt poor."

The unfortunate, the still born, never experience the choices of good or evil afforded to every child. Good or bad decisions, our choices form a path we will follow until we come to realization that failures and success in life derive from childhood, choices and decisions acted out in adulthood. A child is born every second, that child's choices and decisions may some day affect all our futures. Until the spark goes out, I continue to remember my childhood past.

--Jesse M. Govea

Middle of the Night

When the cell is quiet and I can hear my own heartbeat, as I lay motionless, thanking him for seeing another day. Going over my past, facing my present and

hoping for a brighter and better future. Thinking over and over, will I be able to function, mentally and physically, when I get out. Hoping that I'll find that someone to make my life complete, with a woman I hope to love and that she will be faithful and loyal, while blessing me with more kids, to make me happy. As I think about that one, the other or both, of the females that I gave my heart to, images of our bodies in action, makes my body tingle and itch, for what was once passion, love and excitement. But as I fight for control over my body, I switch the image to my two kids and niece. As I think about all the birthdays, holidays, PTA's and open houses that I have missed and going to miss, I feel hot tears rolling down my face. And I beg and pray silently, that I get a chance to be with them again. Because I'm afraid that they will forget and hate me since I'm not there in their lives, to protect and be with them, like I said I always would. As the pain starts to subside and my tears come to an end, I breathe slow and deep to bring myself back in control of my emotions. As a voice tells me, "Men aren't supposed to cry. It's assign of weakness." So I get up, wash my face and rinse my mouth out. I remind myself that men who don't cry after leaving something behind, that he misses and loves, is not a man. And with that, I lay back down with a smile on my face, going back over the past, present and forming a future. Middle of the night you ask: it's my crystal ball that shows me my past, present and hopeful future.

--Tim Hampton

In the middle of the night when it's most quiet and I awaken from a dream, sometimes I hear men scream. It makes me wonder what would cause a man to do such a thing. Then again there are times when the screams are my own. I have found that when it's most quiet and I feel alone, it's a rare moment that gives me the chance to see who I really am that day, at that moment.

I've been in segregation for sixty seven months now (ad-seg and shu) and sometimes I lose touch with how much time has passed me by. Reality seems so distant, the world outside a whole other planet. It's like I'm caught in a vortex of time-space dimension, watching everything whirl around totally out of my grasp, totally out of my control.

In the middle of the night I often ask myself, "Am I alive, is this just another dream?" Then I realize that I'm still entombed, that we all have our stigma and this is the one I must now bear. After all who would dream a dream like this one and want it to be true?

An amazing thing is that in the middle of the night sometimes I feel most free, because where my mind takes me is beyond these walls to places I've never seen or been, to places that I want to be. That is freedom; to be where I am not.

--Bruce Large

Isolation

I've read that isolation builds character. I'm alone in this concrete box 23 hours a day; with myself, by myself. So I'll assume being confined to Ad Seg is the ultimate test.

Never before have I experienced such an intimate companionship than I've established here, in isolation, in the middle of the night.

Deep within myself there is a teacher that I never knew existed. Questions are asked that none can answer but me. The test is difficult because again I only have myself. I look within, listen, I learn. So it's here, in isolation, as I build my character that I enjoy this rigorous yet intimate companionship in the middle of the night.

--Vonderic Barlow

It's after rack time. Many nights I've spent, wasted here. On my bunk I lay, staring at the ceiling, trying to see my thoughts as clear as possible. A futile attempt because my inner vision is as dark as the sliver of sky in the small rectangular window to my right.

Now I understand why despair is symbolized as darkness: it dims all it surrounds. Every thought, feeling, visualization must always arise in its shadow. All else is secondary to the omnipotence of despair—the 5-star general to other emotions, outranking them in all circumstances.

--Delvin Diles

Night Comfort

In the night, as a child, primordial beasts chased me through the darkness of my dreams. It was a struggle, to fight free of their grasping claws as I tried to scream and had my voice stifled by my fear. Once awake my terror would bind me to the bed as every creak sent shivers down my spine. I was alone and every shadow had fangs and claws.

There was only one safe harbor and to get there I had to get out of my room, down the hall, pass the dark bathroom where anything might be lurking and into my big sister's bed. I would lie trembling until the fear became more than I could bear. Then I would climb out of my bed and creep down the cold, dark hallway to Claudia's door.

Both my sisters, Claudia and Dorothy, slept in one double bed. Claudia was six years older than me and Dorothy was four years older than I was. Either one could give me comfort in the night, but Dorothy slept too hard to wake easily. That was why it was always Claudia I went to for protection when the devil was walking in my dreams. With a touch on her arm Claudia's eyes would open. When she would see me no words were needed. She'd just pull me under the covers and cuddle me close. There wouldn't be much room, Dorothy was a bed hog, and I'd be lying on the edge with Claudia's arms to gold me and make sure I didn't fall off.

Those were the most restful hours of the night for me. Nothing could threaten me when my sister held me tight. Best of all, Claudia was an early riser and would get me back in my bed before anyone knew that I had been afraid of the dark.

In years later I'd come to believe there was nothing in the night more dangerous than me. Darkness was a veil of invisibility to hide behind as crime became my life. In

the middle of the night I'd move through shadows to steal and rob the unsuspecting. It was the time to do drugs and I did my share as I became one with the night and night became one with me.

Now I've come full circle. My nights are never dark because I live in prison where light is a constant. Still, within me, there is night. Though I am no longer prone to night fears I have found there is one beast more dangerous than I that walks the night. There are times when I awake and wish for protection from the loneliness. No longer is it possible to creep down the hall to my sisters loving arms and be snuggled close beneath the covers. Instead, I lie alone, locked in a tiny cell, with only my memories to hold me.

--Daniel Harris

It may not be correct to divert from the topic "The Middle of the Night," but I will end with it. I think there must be a definitive explanation of the darkness and there is one.

There is a very old esoteric school about which you may not have heard of. This school was known as the school of Essenes. Now before I go any further I want to say something about darkness or the absence of light. When we were children we were told by friends and family about the boogie man and other evil things lurking in the dark to snatch us if we were not good. So we grew up passing the same lies onto our children. But the night is so beautiful and helpful. Because if you can learn to love to love darkness you will become unafraid of death. If you can enter into darkness—and you can enter only when there is no fear—you will achieve total relaxation. Man, through ignorance, heredity, and beliefs handed down through the ages, has completely closed himself off from the darkness. There were reasons, historical reasons because the night was very dangerous, and man was living in caves or in the jungle. In the day he was more secure: he could see all around, and no wild animals could attack him; or, he could make some arrangements, some defense—at least he could escape. But in the night everywhere was darkness and he was helpless, so he became afraid—and that fear had gone into the unconscious; still we are afraid.

We are not living in caves now and we are not at the mercy of wild animals, no one is going to attack us—but the fear is still there buried in our conscious and passed on through our heredity. Because in this fear man discovered fire and turned it into a god. Not because fire is a god, but because of fear of the darkness. In the night the fire became the friend, the protector, the divine security. That fear is still there. You may not be aware of it because no situations are there in which you can become aware of it, but one day put off the light in the middle of the night and sit—and the primitive fear will come to you. Some noise will come and you will become afraid of wild animals—some danger is around. That danger is not around; that is your unconscious.

All forms arise out of the darkness, and they fall back into darkness. Darkness is the womb, the cosmic womb. The undisturbed, the absolute stillness is there.

There are many madmen in our mad asylums who are suffering not from anything else but just from the primitive fears inside them which have erupted. The fears are there; the madmen are afraid scared every moment of their lives. And we don't yet know how to allow these primitive fears to evaporate. If madmen can be helped to mediate on darkness, madness will disappear. But only in Japan do they work towards this. If someone goes mad, psychotic or neurotic, the Japanese method is to allow him to live in isolation for three weeks or for six weeks, as the case may be. They just allow him to live in isolation. No doctor, no psychoanalyst goes to him. Food is supplied, these needs are taken care of, and he is left alone.

The Sufis have a method of dealing with darkness, a particular sect of Sufis, and those Sufis are known as drunken Sufis. They are drunk with the darkness. They make holes in the ground, and they lie down in the holes every night, and they meditating down in their holes, meditating on darkness, becoming one with it. They are known as drunken Sufis—and they are drunk with the darkness.

Our gods are created out of fear. We give them shape and form. That shape and form is given by us—it shows something about us, not about our gods. We are the ones that labeled God as Light. Why has God been symbolized everywhere as light? Not because God is light, but because man is afraid of darkness.

Now, let me go back to the start and the school of Essenes, the only group in the entire world who think of God as absolute darkness. The Koran says God is light; the Bible says God is light. The Essenes, the ones that taught Jesus, is the only tradition in the world which says God is absolute darkness, absolute blackness, just an infinite black night. Darkness is eternal, light comes and goes and darkness remains. In the morning the sun will rise and there will be light, in the evening the sun will set and there will be darkness. For darkness nothing will rise—it is always there—nothing will rise—it is always there—it never rises and never sets. Light comes and goes; darkness remains. Light always has some source, darkness is without source. That which has some source cannot be infinite; only that which is sourceless can be infinite and eternal. Light has a certain disturbance that's why you cannot sleep in light. It creates a tension. Darkness is relaxation total relaxation. So why are we afraid? Because light appears to us as life—it is; life comes through light, and when you die it appears you have fallen into eternal darkness. That's why we paint death as black, and black has become a color for morning. God is light, and death is black. That's the way we perceive it. But darkness is the womb out of which everything arises and into which everything falls. Essenes took this standpoint. It is very helpful also, because if you can love darkness you will become unafraid of death. Life will seem so much more fulfilling. If you can enter into darkness—and you can enter only when there is no fear—you will achieve total relaxation. It's working for me. That's why I take the time at night when it is dark whether it's the middle of the night or not to meditate on darkness.

--Donald R. Dickson

Darkest of Night

My personal "middle of the night" is not twelve AM. That's too close to normal waking hours; when life is still a fresh memory that provides security and assurance that I have lived and loved.

No, my middle of the night is closer to the three o'clock hour. The darkest part of the night when enough time has passed by those memories of the previous day aren't as crisp and clear. A time where I begin to question the factualness of those memories. The time when morning is still so far off that it can seem not so much of a surety, but only a slight possibility. That time of deepest darkness that fills me with hopelessness and I despair a return to life.

There are times when that "middle of the night" time lasts for days and weeks at a stretch. When the struggle to continue this existence seems nothing more than an exercise in futility.

These are times when I consider, seriously consider, the prospect of releasing myself into that darkness, whatever it may hold in store for me. It may even be the uncertainty of it that draws me closer. My fear, though, is that I'll only meet more of the same "nothingness" my life is already composed of. That I'd be giving up one meaningless existence for another.

So, I let those hours until dawn pass while I contemplate my options and the prospects each holds for a better, more fulfilling existence or life. When the morning does appear, as I knew it must, the bleakness of those dark hours becomes less real and not so frightening. The sun rises in the east, and with it my hopes for something more meaningful, something more.

So far my "middle of the nights" haven't lasted so long that I wasn't able to endure. As their frequency and duration continue to increase I'm left to wonder how much longer I can resist the pull of those dark possibilities.

--Kenneth J. French

I awake to silence. It's calm, comforting and creepy. I lay awake in my concrete catacomb and listen to my cellie softly breathe. Staring at the ceiling they start to come. Slowly they worm their way out of the recesses of my mind and play their part in the lonely theater of my memories. It's an all-star cast. Method actors one and all. Marching through my past like an army of torment. Oh, they're all here now. Mom, sisters, wife, kids/ Not a lot of men though. It's a bit old. Maybe it's Freudian. Who the hell knows? As the wee hours pass the march goes on. The memories morph into a deluge of images. Eyes open, eyes closed. It doesn't matter. I'm sure you know what it's like. Can't sleep, mind's racing; heart's beating, time's wasting. The world is asleep and it doesn't seem right as you lie awake in the middle of the night. -Patrick Brady

Taking a Stand

Stand Gone Way

History is replete with illustrious characters that have taken a stand by correcting flaws in politics, business, academics, etc. There are always costs and consequences to effect a change. Large or small, taking stands of varying dimensions, will undoubtedly drain your energies to the max. When I took a stand for the first time in my life, it wasn't for civil rights, or to protest an unrighteous war, it was to oust bullies, from my life. Accumulation of anger and time caused me to revolt successfully against harassing bullies. In so doing, my revolting momentum became my undoing. The power of courage that had saved me would destroy me. In destroying the bullies, I became an antinomian myself. In short, I had changed into a monster. In my lifetime, people had accosted and assaulted me and shown no mercy, Soon, I would be committing the acts, I once deplored against others. This process happened in my juvenile years, and followed me into adulthood. I no longer knew who I was. The laws of city jungles had shaped me. I was left for police stations, court rooms and prison. As a youth, no one was a mentor or guardian to me, I was left to my own devices. Society had stuck its blows against me in myriad forms and ways. I became misanthropic and xenophobic, in response to society's oppression. Now, being more gentle and genteel I wished I had taken a stand for the weak and meek. My stand had gone awry in the past, taking me into a backward direction. My advice to others; take a stand for justice and righteousness.

--Keith Reese

There are many ways to take a stand. There is an equal amount of permutations in what people should take a stand on. We have all taken a stand on something; from what we want to be called to what our political beliefs are, i.e. voting or protesting.

In prison, one becomes circumspect about what "stands" they take for obvious reasons. A few years ago, January 2002, I was faced with a chance to take a stand. The prison was a wreck and there were several problems that needed to be fixed. Both internal and external means were employed to get something done and there appeared to be utter indifference. Expected, I guess, we are death row, and who really cares about us? A very small minority! What were we to do? We needed to prove to the right people that we were serious, that we needed help and our complaints were legitimate. A protest was proposed: a hunger strike.

There seemed much enthusiasm from the row with a fair bit of grumblings and nay sayings. As the discussions progressed I saw a problem that needed to be remedied. We had tons of suggestions that needed to be conveyed in the form of a petition that explained our dilemma to the "right" people, but no criteria of what should be included. I proposed a constitutional/privilege approach.

Constitutional would be all issues that we could arguably show were rights in court. Privileges would be those things that were able to be taken away and no legal

recourse available to return them. Once we got a general idea of who would participate on a hunger strike we delegated duties to those that would not. For example, they would write letters make phone calls and pressure the prison in whatever non-violent manner they could bring to bear.

When the final amount of days was proposed to strike I was not at all sure I was ready for it. Thirty days without eating seemed like a long time. I expressed my concern as I had never gone more than a day without food in my whole life. This would be a test I had never faced. I stated that I would surely participate and that if 30 days was not attainable I would shoot for the closest number.

What we ended up agreeing on were ten things that needed attention. One, the toilets were hooked together pipe wise so that the guy in the adjacent cell could flush his feces and it would come into your toilet. It acquired the name ping-pong toilet. Two, we wanted brighter lights in out cells, a 65 watt bulb made the cell look yellow, hurt eyes and caused headaches. Three, something needed to be done about the bug infestation from mosquitoes, spiders, beetles and the occasional rat, snake, or turtle. Four, psyche patients needed to be separate from the bulk of death row. Five, the whole building needed a paint job as the paint was peeling and worn away in large swathes. Six, we wanted our shoes back. All we were permitted were flip-flops. This meant whatever the weather we had no cover for our feet but socks and flip-flops. Seven, a laundry that worked. Frequently the clothes came back worse than they went or mildewed. Eight, we wanted the roof fixed so that when it rained we didn't get flooded in our cells. This contributed to the peeling paint problem. Nine, we wanted a medical, dental and psyche department that was more than a name. Ten, we wanted better ventilation, that helped us deal with the sweltering heat of summer and the stagnant air of so many enclosed men. The bugs kept windows closed that otherwise could have helped with the ventilation.

We started on a Monday and quickly saw that the number of participants would not be as many as expected. About 75 on death row and only 10 of us were committed to a hunger strike. Many did contribute with letters, phone calls and trying to persuade outside help to come to our aid. That first morning we told the officer that we did not want our tray; that we were on a hunger strike. He upped the ante by saying if we did that that we also had to refuse liquids too—coffee and milk. To each a man we followed suit. Next came the Rule Violation Reports for refusing to eat. Nonsensical, to say the least, but we dutifully signed our names to them. On the third day of our strike the prison moved us from around the other death row prisoners. Each of us then had to go through a shakedown of our property and we were limited to the basics, toilet paper, toothpaste, etc. We were then told to send all other property home before February 2 or the property would be destroyed. Once completed we were put on a separate zone and tier from death row; segregated.

The next day I had a lawyer visit and gave her all my property to give to my mom. The guys didn't much agree with my decision, but I looked at two things; one, the officers wanted to use the property as a ploy to stop the strike. "We'll give you your stuff back if you come off." Two, I knew I could easily replace any of the items by buying more or getting my mom to send it back by mail.

As a group we did well until the night of the sixth day. One of the guys got sick and started dry heaving. Once he had been taken to the hospital a debate about coming off started. Several didn't want to go through what the sick one did. I was for staying on along with two others.

That night five started eating again. Four of us continued into the seventh day. I was demoralized because the guys seemed so dedicated at first, but the first sign of real trouble brought a halt to a cause I felt warranted a stiff resolve from all of us. I refused breakfast and lunch that seventh day and then gave up myself. Any momentum was lost, and the cause seemed equally so. I missed a total of 20 meals. Far, far from the proposed 30 day goal, but I did have a small measure of pride in that I had contributed in some way with something I genuinely believed in. Being on death row you lose so much autonomy and this protest had given me a bit of it back.

The morning of the 8th day the three hold outs were taken to a clinic to be examined. It was the first time anyone had actively sought out our medical condition. Sadly, it was only because of the standard procedure to examine a person only after 7 days committed to a hunger strike and not to some altruistic tendencies. When they came back two began eating again to leave one still standing.

Two more days of segregation and we were moved back to our original cells. The one hold out had been in a segregation cell on death row so was never moved. He lasted until the eleventh or twelfth day and came off as well. Property was returned as the guys had pointed out to me would occur when I sent mine home. There was still no complaint from me as I felt comfortable with my decision.

Disciplinary proceedings began soon afterwards. For each meal we missed we were given one R.V.R. Each R.V.R. had to be heard before a board that would impose a sentence of 5 to 30 days loss of privileges; canteen, phone calls and loss of one or two visits. Depending on the hearing officer you could quickly rack up a lot of time. I ended up with two-thirds of a year loss of privileges and a slew of visits. No complaints here either. I knew that taking my stand would result in certain consequences.

During the strike we attracted the attention of the A.C.L.U. in Jackson and in Washington DC. We could describe as much as we wanted, but the attorney's needed to see for themselves if things were as we claimed. They told us to implement internal emergency Administrative Remedy Procedures because they had to be done before a lawsuit could be filed. Simultaneously they got federal authorization to tour death row. Ironically, they were

pleased to see our living conditions were fairly bad and that our descriptions were exact.

By the time the first tour came the prison had started painting a tier. It was only half done and actually heightened our cause because an immediate before/after scenario was there for the attorneys to see.

More tours, motions, conferences, and briefings ensued. No headway was made on voluntarily fixing the problems so the A.C.L.U went to court for us.

After a trial with a myriad of experts we secured a wonderful ruling from the court. You can review it at *Russell v. Epps*, 2003 WL 22208029. We got pretty much what we wanted, but we didn't get shoes. On appeal we lost on the laundry but the court 5th circuit, upheld the district court's ruling on all other particulars.

As I write this in 2005 I can state a lot has been done to improve our living conditions. The plumbing has been fixed so that the feces aren't pushed back and forth. Bright fluorescent lights have been installed. Screens have been placed on all windows to prevent bugs coming in. A spraying system has been installed over each entrance to kill bugs. The building is painted and for the most part clean. To help combat heat we get showers everyday from May 1st until September 30th. Each of those days we get ice three times: morning, noon and evening. Fans were given to each man for his own use. Psyche patients are housed separately from us. The roof has been resurfaced. Ventilation has been improved slightly. Medical issues are better and actually addressed fairly quickly.

The ruling ended up only applying to a certain class, death row, so state prisoners, those not in the row, have filed suit. The A.C.L.U has led in that one, too, they are asking for the same changes for them. They are also challenging the medical issue in a different light as it appears some of the personnel are not qualified to practice medicine.

Taking a stand can be a wonderful rewarding experience. It can lead to great results and actually improve living standards. Where you are shouldn't stop you, I'm on death row, but you should choose your causes wisely. You should also be as dedicated as possible. Sometimes you won't have people to stand with you—that should not be a deterrent. Ultimately it is you that must decide and you that must take a stand. No matter what, this country allows you that right, exercise it, but treat it as if it will go away if you don't.

--Larry Matthew Puckett

Upcoming theme topics and due dates

Psychic Abilities due 2/15/06

Coming Back due 3/15/06

Neighbors due 4/15/06

Personal Boundaries due 5/15/06

Gambling due 6/15/06

Compassion due 7/15/06

Food due 8/15/06

Please remember that this newsletter you are reading contains only selections from the themes that were

submitted. If you would like a complete copy of the writings you must submit a writing of your own on the topic. Do not worry about it being good enough, or long enough just keep it real. I can be easy about the due date as well. I'm often a couple of months behind so don't let a missed due date stop you.

Conversation with an Author

Many of you have discovered the pleasures of reading and writing since you've been locked up. Reading is a great way to gather information, expand your horizons, and learn what other people are thinking as well as lose yourself in a great story. Everything you read has to be written. I hear from so many of you how helpful writing is to you. For some of you, the creative rush of putting your thoughts on paper carries you through difficult times. I feel the passion in your writing. Many of you dream of having your works published. This program wants to help you develop your writing and story telling skills. As a **new feature** of the newsletter we've asked local published authors to share some of what they know about writing and publishing. Below is the answers to some questions posed to E.B. EB has been writing professionally for twenty-five years and is the author of over thirty-five books

On Writing

by E.B.

What advice would you give to an aspiring writer?

Read as much as you can. Read whatever holds your attention and draws you in. Read until the words and stories are part of you, until all those voices merge inside you and become your own. It's very hard to write if you don't read (although some people do it). Reading widely can show you what's possible in your own writing.

If you are serious about writing, the best advice I can give is to treat it as a discipline. Set up a writing time for yourself and write regularly on most days of the week. It doesn't matter if it's fifteen minutes, half an hour, or two hours. Treat your time with respect and treat yourself as a serious writer. Once you have the habit of daily writing, you can expand it.

Do you have a mentor? How did you learn to write?

I've never really had a mentor, but for most of my life, I've devoured books. Reading doesn't guarantee that you can write, but it gives you a very solid basis of knowledge. Many people take creative writing classes today; but it's not strictly necessary. In my opinion, it's impossible to teach creativity - but a good teacher will wake you up to your own possibilities. Learning to write is really learning who you are. For some people, that comes more easily than others. Writing is very hard work - I call it mental rock breaking. The rocks you're breaking up are in your own

mind; very often they're fears or set ways of looking at things that interfere with creativity. You're trying to free a channel for your thoughts, feelings and experiences to come through. The way you express those thoughts, feelings and experiences will be unique to who you are. There are no right and wrong ways to write, but there are more and less effective ways to write. Writing is about communication. You want to communicate in the most powerful way possible. You want to be true to yourself and to what you know. Good writing also equals clear thinking. For me, the power of fiction is that it takes you into the heart of another person's experience. It will open up worlds. Good non-fiction will do the same.

What is it like to write professionally?

The bad news is that most writers don't make enough to live on without another source of income. A few are lucky and not only survive, but thrive. The "lucky" ones usually devote years to building a career. Writers have few guarantees. They work on a book for years, not knowing if it'll even be published. This is a labor of love. Free-lance writers don't get paid vacations, medical insurance, holidays, or pensions. It takes tremendous discipline to sit down every day in a room and face a blank screen or piece of paper. Writers work alone. Solitude is an occupational hazard.

The good news is that if you succeed, you have extraordinary freedom and independence. No office politics or boss; you determine the schedule; you set the goals; you chart the course. You can work at any time of the day or night. You can live anywhere. You don't even have to have a college degree. There's no limit on your income. You need outstanding writing skills, persistence, an ability to deal with rejection, and belief in what you're doing.

There are many ways to write, many genres and forms of writing, and many places to publish. Start with what you love or what interests you. Again, do as much reading as you possibly can. Experiment. Find what suits you best.

What about rejection? How do you deal with it?

Every writer has a drawer full of rejection slips. It's important to have a plan to deal with rejection and criticism, because there's no way to avoid it. For writers, it's a fact of life.

I have a few rules. If I'm rejected over and over for a similar reason (example: "your story is weakly plotted"), then probably the editors are onto something. If I'm rejected for many different reasons, then either the editors just didn't like what I sent them - or maybe that piece of writing has a lot of problems! Try not to take rejection too personally. Always have something new to work on, so that all of your hopes aren't pinned to one book or article. Keep on going. Some successful writers get dozens or even hundreds of rejections before selling their books.

About criticism: every editor will offer you

suggestions to make your book or story stronger. They're trying to improve your work - which can only make you look better. The editor isn't the enemy. On the other hand, they're human and sometimes they make mistakes. If I don't agree with an editor's criticism, I look to see what needs changing in my story. Maybe they're onto something, but they don't know what it is. Even if I don't do exactly what they suggest, they're usually happy with my changes.

What's most important as a professional writer?

If you don't have self-discipline, you're lost. You have to be able to work on a regular basis. You can have all the talent in the world, but if you don't write regularly, you lose it. (It's like being an athlete who doesn't train.) The most important thing to do as an aspiring writer is to sit and write every day. Start with a short period of time (1/2 hour to an hour) and build it up over time. Soon you'll be able to work for several hours. If you don't love it, you'll have learned something. If you love it, keep going. The next most important thing is persistence. It takes years. It's not easy to break into publishing, but it is possible. If you get any kind of encouragement, such as a personal note from an editor, or encouragement from a writer or teacher, take that as a good sign. I remember taking hope from "friendly" rejection letters. Sure enough, after years of work, I finally got published.

A lot of people drop out along the way. If you are one of the ones who has a burning desire to do this, and the grit to keep going, you may very well find yourself published someday.

Where do you get your ideas?

Ideas are everywhere, but you have to be listening for them. When I'm working on something, it makes my senses more alert. Answers come out of nowhere. It's a heightened state of awareness. I don't see as much when I'm not writing. Ideas can be stumbled upon accidentally or take hold of your brain and stay there for years. Writing is the hard work of translation from brain to paper. It transforms the original vision into reality.

How do you deal with writer's block?

Sometimes, I just force myself through it. I give myself permission to write anything, without judging it. I may write nonsense or garbage, but I'm writing. Sometimes that nonsense/garbage writing will shift to something deeper. I also find that mechanical shifts help me. If I'm stuck typing, I write by hand. If I'm writing third person, I write in second or first person to see if anything new emerges. I've never tried this, but you could dictate into a tape recorder or to a friend. Anything to shake up your usual habits.

Sometimes I need to walk away and give myself a

break.. If I'm really frustrated, I leave my work for a bit. Writing comes out of the unconscious mind and sometimes it needs to simmer. If you've been working very hard for a long time, remember to give yourself a break.

There are good days and bad days. Sometimes you think your writing is stuck, but it really isn't. Sometimes you think you're inspired, but you're not. Sometimes you really ARE inspired. But don't stop, no matter what. Just keep going, every day, as if you're digging yourself out of a hole. Little by little, you get where you want to go.

Sierra Story Book Club

20 or so of you are working with author Henry Stark after reading his "Sierra Story" book. Henry has been enjoying his conversation with those of you who have enrolled in this program. He is willing to send his book to another group of you. His book is a first person account of a camping trip Henry experienced in the Sierra Mountain wilderness, where things did not go as expected. For those of you who asked to join this program after it started, I have kept track of your request and you will be sent a book when we start the new group, most likely sometime this spring. His book is a good read. Along with the book are a number of thought provoking questions. If you are interested in receiving Henry's book, answering the questions and entering into correspondence with him regarding your non fiction writing projects please let me know.

Poetry

Dave is coordinating our poetry program. He helps me with so many aspects of Prisoner Express Program, and is really devoted to keeping P.E. going and growing. He inspires me with his can do attitude. What follows is his contribution to this issue of Prisoner Express News. Keep sending us your poems and prose. We will be selecting them to be put on our web site. I hope to partner with students at a local high school to read your poems and post them on the internet. We will be reading a selection of your works including the poems that follow at our upcoming benefit on Feb.18th. Below Dave shares the results of our last Poetry Contest:

In this issue of the newsletter, you'll find the six finalists for the Prisoner Express Poetry Contest. I hope you enjoy them and recognize the level of achievement in these poems, tackling, as they do, a variety of difficult subjects with honesty and remarkable precision of language. Our judges, mostly working poets from the Cornell and Ithaca communities, found it difficult to narrow the field down to six from the nearly 100 poems submitted. Everyone who entered the contest deserves a lot of credit. The simple reason for my saying this is that is that I have come to understand that it can't be easy to create beauty from the kind of environment you guys spend your 24/7.

For the last six months I've been going out to Auburn Correctional Facility every Tuesday with a bunch of teachers and undergraduates from Cornell University to teach English composition and creative writing. Auburn

is one of the oldest prisons in the United States built in the 1820's. Let me tell you that it doesn't wear its age well. America has done a mediocre job in preserving its past but, of all the structures that have survived the bulldozer, our prisons are the edifices we can take the least pride in. Auburn on a good day is a relentlessly ugly place.

Every Tuesday night, from 7-9 pm, I get a brief reminder of what kind of places prisons really are. What makes the 70 mile round trip particularly worthwhile for me is that I get to spend two hours in a classroom with a dozen or more incredible human beings. Our students raise unbelievably thought provoking questions, rip the heart out of any claim the instructors throw out, dissect a text with surgical precision, and, not least of all, they treat each and everyone of us from the outside, as friends and welcome guests.

So, over a period of weeks and months, I came away from Auburn with the answer to the question I posed earlier. How can so many fine poems, essays, plays, novels come out of prison? People don't change that much when they're stuck behind four walls. They struggle to hold on to what's most important to them and, in some instances, have not only the time but find the resources, as well, to allow themselves to grow spiritually, artistically and emotionally. That's not, I realized, a reflection on their environments. Obviously prisons are not yet or have ever been, designed to nourish the person.

*I always find myself coming back, whenever I wonder about the possibility of poetry in prisons, to the work of a truly remarkable prison poet, a guy named Spoon Jackson who is serving a life sentence in California. Spoon wrote a series of poems that confronts this issue. In *Beauty in cell bars*, he writes:*

*By seeking the beauty on the outside
That is surely within
For prisons are created internally
And are found everywhere:*

And, the last stanza:

*The world may not bend to
Your every whim
But, it will flow wherever you
Want it to go,
Where it's supposed to go
There's beauty in cellbars.*

Whitman once wrote, and I paraphrase, I am huge, I contain contradictions. Spoon mirrors his own contradictions when he writes in a second poem:

Restless, unable to sleep,

*Keys, bars, the guns being racked
Year after year
Endless echoes of steel kissing steel*

*Noise
Constant yelling
Nothing said
Vegetating faces, lost faces
Dusted faces*

He finishes the second poem with the title line:

There's no beauty in cellbars.

So, in closing, thanks to every one of you who submitted a poem for the contest. Every poem you write exposes the lie, rips the veil off, and destroys society's complacency that guys in prison deserve to be treated simply as numbers, statistical abstractions. By writing, even if you are not published, you are, in one sense, saying, I am a human being capable of expressing the whole range of human emotions and reflecting the entire spectrum of human potential – I will not allow myself to be beaten down and broken by the system of dehumanization. That's quite an achievement.

--Dave

First Prize

The thirteenth Amendment, Amended

*A coffle of state slaves shuffles
Slowly into the radiant rays
Of dawn's early light,
Spartacus nowhere in sight.
Fight scarred all, and bone
Weary from strife and stress,
Destined to toil under the sun till
Twilight's last gleaming brings rest.*

*The tools are issued:
One hoe per man, each
Dull the blade, each
Seven pounds of sweat-stained misery.
Each, in proper hands,
Seven pounds of peril.*

*Let there be no peril today, we pray;
No quick and vicious fights where, sweat stinging,
Fists flying, we cull living from dying;
No riots fought for fast forgot reasons—
Swinging steel scintillating in sunlight,
Blood gouting from the too slow heads—
Brown, black, white—
Our blood ruby red and thick with life,
No respecter of color or creed.*

Let there be no peril today, we pray;

No dry crackling reports of leaden soldiers,
Chasing wisps of smoke from forge fashioned barrels,
Speaking the ancient tongue of Authority;
Guns guardgripped fast by bossfists,
In confederate gray cloths,
Their fire felling friends, freeing foes.

Let there be no peril today, we pray:
Today only—hard work, for no pay.

“Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, ~~except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted~~, shall exist within the United States or any place subject to their jurisdiction.”

So let it be re-written.
So let it, at last be done.
--K.L., Huntsville, Texas

2ND Prize

The Dwellers

For the days bright as the stark pain caused by ruffian
children slain for material gain:
For the money—hungry kids who life off pain.

Ain't that sweet? Same hot buttered propped-corned feet.
Now, I'm hyped; down for pain and “Whatever,
Sister. Let's do this like Brutus. Hear me?”

Day creeps like a thief in the night to steal
Sleep from them all who pipe-dream Black Power...
Black...pride will always live a loveless...Death
Wrongs all right to the motherf'n bone-weary...

Residents...sleep heavy on spine-backed beds
Fighting the cold with wallpaper blankets.
Day gets up to rouse them from their weeping;
To get up and stand still to chill with pelts

Of mink on corners knuckleheads wear out.
In the darkness with the heat of armed knights,
Sunlight lances the flesh and soul shouts...

“Black!” ..boxes, uncurtained, stare like blank eyes..
Inside..of these stoned tenement tombs bake
Ancient newborns..awake with fear to cry..
“Mother!” miraculously has fed eight..

Brothers ..in two rooms fight and dress..Fly
..high as 'sons psyched with starched psychedelics.
Mother has 4 spouses who don't have wives.
Fathers limp out of closets dressed to get..Down

is up! In the clubs, feet boogie and get..
Down!! Go! Up the alley, over the fence,

across the yard, and into the cellar.
Quick! Quick!
Split the lot.
Stash the Eagle.
And one got killed
by a pig's bullet in the leg.

of Ham ..in the bible sold on Sunday..
Mourning ..in the merchant's house, “Bingo!” plays.
Hymns. ..resurrect gold form shallow pockets;
Nuggets lint lent them when they gravely begged

All through the night after the long workday..
Before. ..they stayed

Out all night: Fucked all day. Scored mad shine
to lynch themselves with shiny ropes. They think:
Drugs. Sex. And money. Then ole HIV
“Fuck the TV! That's me.”
Cooped up and coached, many just watch TV
But then jump up: “Fuck the TV. That's me!”

On these Somedays sermons poured and.. Spilled.
..beer flows at the picnics like piss on mattresses.

There's “Thank you, please's” for chickenheads
and cornbread and
phat backs
and potato salad and
macaroni and cheese.
And gizzards and the castrated.

Couples kiss, lounging under shady clouds..
Above. ..on roofs of storied roach
motels are Scarab.. of beetles lay there
on the tarred beach of grains of goey
sand. dwellers puff Hyd ro and
zone out the hazy, sea side ho-
rizon that dawns with the shimmering heat
of Kn ight, spill ing its blood
'round the ole wide world- that
grind wheel that sharpens the lances of
light every one, every where feels..

Blessed are the roaches who die like flies-
Nawh! Hell, nawh! Nigga, we multiply!
--Victorious Belot

3rd Prize

Death of a Dog

I never cared for dogs
especially little ones
like the one
who pranced inside
the door left open

*not to welcome strays
 but to catch a breeze
 on a hot summer day.
 A silly little mutt
 pushing its nose against
 my hand it licked
 wagging its tail while
 looking into my eyes
 before flashing out
 the still open door
 while I, compelled
 for some undefinable reason
 followed this dumb little dog
 who ran into the street
 got hit by a car
 then waited to die
 till I held it in my hands
 it licked me
 and wagged its tail
 one last time.
 And, though decades have passed
 Since the death of this dog
 whose body I threw into
 a dumpster of garbage and trash
 I, who never cared for dogs
 Especially little dead ones
 Cannot forget this mutt
 Who came into my life
 For five minutes, no more.
 --Derrick Corley*

The following 3 poems received Honorable Mention Award:
Flow

...Hunger, lust, greed, desperation, alcoholic blur, drug haze, insanity, incident, allege victim, police, arrest, mug shot, finger prints, jail, arraignment, bond, Grand Jury, indictment, defense attorney, DA, postponement, defense strategy, witnesses, bystanders, experts, liars, jury, trial, handcuffs, holding cell, strip, jumpsuit, Blue Bird, transfer facility, classification, chain, ID-unit, security guards, sergeants, lieutenants, major, assistant warden, warden, superiors, overloads, bosses, third world rejects, cripples, dropouts, retarded egos, retirees, bored, unemployable, unambitious, self-righteous, cell, cellie, Hispanic, ese, Afro-American, nigger, white, peckerwood, motherfuckers, criminals, rapists, murders, thieves, child ,molesters, druggies, dealers, players, masturbators, homosexuals, punks, singers, fighters, gang members, Mexican Mafia, La Familia, Crips, Blood, Aryan Brotherhood, independents, work assignment, filed, aggie, sun, blisters, dirt, sweat, strip search, hands up, mouth open, hands through hair, lift nut sack, turn around, bend over, spread cheeks, lift feet, showers, necessities, recreation, Scrabble, checkers, chess, dominos, weights, basketball,TV,sports,news,movies,soaps, laughter, shouting, noise, rack time, lights out, count-time, violence, fights, shanks, stabbings, rapes, riots, gas,

lockdown, breakfast in bed, silence, vacation, shakedown, contraband, paper clip, rubber band, magazines, cheese, disciplinary court, 30-30-30, major case, loss of good time, reclassification, time, days, weeks, months, years, loneliness, heartbreak, eligibility date, set-off, disappointment, frustration, anger, acceptance, church, chaplain, Bible studies, Voyager, Kairos, Jesus, Allah, Sabbath savants, choir, band, personal conflicts, hypocrites, heretics, ITP, school, GED, college, OJT, Project Rio, SATP, CIP, parole packet, parole attorney, support letters, review, positive votes, Huntsville, golden gates, release, parole officer, restrictions, good behavior, zero tolerance, ex-convict, no voice, no vote, no hope, no dreams, hunger...
--John E. Christ

Obsidian Black

*now comes one blameless
 giver in the morning
 giver of mourning
 adorned in granite
 Obsidian Black
 comes as the last
 beginning of life
 a true transition at last
 fear it, ponder about it
 wonder about it
 it comes to pass
 and after is then
 so now savor laughter
 and wind
 and light
 and rain
 P.D.A's, L.E.Ds, R&Rs, streets and cars, drinks and bars,
 skies and stars,
 loves and wars, hugs and scars
 all that is
 all you are
 it takes then, so how
 could you not,
 in its shadow
 live right now?
 --Delvin Diles*

Void
*My body and I are locked in a cage;
 I can feel my sanity slip, slip, slipping
 Away, devoured by a dark cloud of solitude.
 There's a never-ending pain in my head,
 Like so many demons chewing on my brain.
 There's voices laughing, screaming, whispering:
 Insane! Insane! Insane!
 But I'm saying! I'm saying! I'm saying
 That I. Must. Surface.
 I must surface for a breath, of reality.
 But the weight on mind is holding me down.
 I can't seem to find a shoulder to lean on—*

*Presently, no one's around.
I swear that I can hear the distinct sound
The pieces of my fractured sanity make
As the hit the floor of my mind and break
Into even smaller pieces.
I find myself on my knees, crying:
Tears streaming down my face, blinding
Me as I desperately try to gather
The pieces of my fragmented life.
I wipe the tears from my eyes,
Wondering how I can feel so cold and dead inside.
And how long can I survive as
The resounding tick-tock of the clock
Of confusion determines my time?
And how much more must I endure before
The wave of madness—that is sure to follow—
Comes crashing down upon me, flooding
The hollowness of my very existence?
Then, I ask myself: Does it matter? Because
What is means to me will ultimately be a memory.
And even memories, like the paint on and old car
That's being exposed to the sun's rays year after year,
Will start to slowly fade away.
So here I sit—cage—exposed to the rays
Of insanity, year after year after year.
Just me, my fading memories and broken dreams,
Staring at the blank, white wall that seems
To perfectly represent the emptiness that is—
My life.*

--Gilbert M. Davila

Censorship?? What do you think?

In the past I've asked you as a group whether I should censor any of the writings I receive for the theme project. I disagreed with the position someone took in a theme, and thought it was offensive. I asked a number of you what you thought of my censoring articles, and I heard overwhelmingly that I should not censor the writings. The general position was that you all have so much control over you, that I should let you have your say in PE programs. In a previous theme writing mailing [that is when I send everyone who submits a theme a copy of what all other theme writers wrote on the specific topic.. For the most part I believe reading each others writings can be inspiring] I included all of the themes sent to me. One of them promoted violence. That theme prompted one of you, Danny Harris to write and change his opinion on whether to censor any of your writings. I ask you to read it and let me know whether you as a member of Prisoner Express agree or disagree with what Danny is stating.

I do think of Prisoner Express as an organization that you all belong to, rather than some group that just sends you a newsletter. The newsletter is by, for and about you and I value your opinions in to how it gets created. I am not reprinting the essay Danny is commenting on as what I'm interested in is your opinion on what Danny is saying.

Standing Positive

On reading the collected Taking a Stand theme writing essays I have noticed that one writer is promoting gang membership and violent actions. It is a continuation and escalation of this writer's misuse of the Prisoner Express venue to voice support for conduct detrimental to the welfare of prisoners. For this reason, in rebuttal of all he stands for, I've decided I must be the voice of truth.

Prisoners that mutilate themselves, by cutting or other means, are in need of psychological therapy. Members of Prisoner Express should take a stand in defense of these people and do what we can to help them to not hurt themselves. It is unacceptable for a theme writer to advocate using their sickness as a weapon. When a prisoner cuts himself only he and the people that love him are harmed.

The writer in question was not man enough to say what he really meant when he wrote, "...people who throw liquids and other things, being their job." He meant they should throw piss, shit and blood. For over a year I lived in a cell around such individuals. It was the staff's way to retaliate against me for kicking the major in the head before I wrote myself sane. They used that cell assignment to punish me beyond what was allowed. The smell was horrendous, even when they weren't actively chunking, due to the lack of cleaning. My personal experience assures me that such conduct more damages the prisoners who have to live in the stink and face the health risk involved than it does anyone else. It gives the administration another weapon to use against prisoners while it destroys any hope of building a friendly rapport with guards that are being chunked on.

Burning your own property and state supplied necessities is worst of all because prisoners often die from smoke inhalation and toxic fumes. Most staff could care less if prisoners are harmed as long as they are not blamed and if anyone is harmed it is sure to be the prisoners. When you add to that his suggestion about breaking the fire prevention system, it is sure to give the administration an excuse if the fire kills prisoners because they are inoperable due to prisoner conduct. This is the most insane of his advocated protest.

My advice was asked about Prisoner Express setting limits on what voices would be printed and shared as part of the theme writing project. Being a believer of the First Amendment rights to free speech, and thinking that prisoners deserved an uncensored venue, I made a mistake in judgment and gave bad advice. I wanted to give this writer the benefit of doubt and hoped participation would make a difference in his life. I didn't know what his organization (Gang I now call it) espoused, but certainly had suspicions. I gave my backing to making Prisoner Express and open venue with no limitations on content for the theme writing exercises. Though I did advise that only essays that didn't contradict the Prisoner Express view point be published in the newsletter, it was my mistake to believe all prisoners would value this outlet and treat it with respect. I'm proud that only one writer has decided to

take advantage of this project and attempt to use his access to it to foment violence. Violence is anathema to the goals of Prisoner Express and cannot continue to be allowed.

Prisoner Express' reputation is much more important than any one person's right to rant. All members of Prisoner Express are affected if that reputation becomes tainted. I'm asking that such writings are no longer printed and distributed. Prisoner Express depends on the goodwill of mail rooms for continued access to prisoner's writing. Such writings are in violation of most DOC's correspondence rules, and they should be. Providing the administration an excuse to deny that access needs to be addressed. My personal opinion is that I don't want to read or receive anymore such materials. Such people are the problem in prison and I want to associate with people that want to be a part of the solution. If any theme writers wish to air their thoughts, whether in support of me or not, I hope they will do so. It is time for us as a group to decide what limits we wish to have on the content of Prisoner Express themes.

From reading the excellent essays being written by the majority I know none of them who have read this screed are motivated to take part in such ignorant conduct. The goal of Prisoner Express is to teach that violence is always the last option and only then in the case of self-defense. We should teach our fellow prisoners that there are positive alternatives by our words and actions.

He has continuously championed the negative way that requires prisoners to live down to the stereotypical expectations about prisoners. The Prisoner Express way is to rise about expectations and try to take a fellow prisoner with you. By doing so we can disprove the tough on crime legislators' opinions, and win support from guards and free world people to our cause.

He even has the nerve to quote Sun Tzu's Art of War, and proves he hadn't grasped the concepts. Sun Tzu would never have initiated a war he could avoid on a battlefield his enemy had prearranged for their advantage and agreed to their rules of engagement.

A prisoner's most potent weapons are peace and courtesy. With those we disarm the powers that be and hold them powerless. Then they must explain why such peaceful men are still in prison and housed in ad-seg conditions. Peace is our battlefield and peace brings us allies. Violence and all other negative forms of expression give them the weapons they need to lobby for evermore restrictive conditions, to deny us parole, and to extend our sentences. Only prisoners can take away their excuses and force them to reevaluate their position. We, as members of Prisoner Express, are obligated to be the seeds of positive change in the prisons where we live. It all starts with you when you choose peace.

--Daniel H. Harris

Well that was quite a piece of writing. I really welcome your opinions, and while I support much of what Danny says my mind is not made up as to the correct course of action. Please continue to give me feedback on what is

important to you. I encourage your comments on the writing you read in PEN. It is intended to be a forum for creativity and expression.

Send correspondence to us regarding any of our programs to
Prisoner Express
127 Anabel Taylor Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853

Final Notes

Well this about raps up another issue of PEN. I hope it inspires some of you to practice your own writing skills, whether as part of our program or in another venue. I usually share a bit about what is going on in my life. It is my way of answering all of you about what's up with me and my family. Depending on the day it is a different story. Today my 3 year old boy Tony is having an asthma attack that won't stop. It immediately changes my priorities and what I think is important. Hopefully it will pass. My wife will probably bring him to the doctor this afternoon as a precaution. Seeing my children suffer is nerve wracking. We are in the midst of winter. Luckily it has been mild by Central New York standards. My 18 year old daughter has finished going to High School even though she won't officially graduate to June. I am beginning to nag her to get up and find something to do. She has a million plans, but has yet to take certain action beyond sleeping till noon. My 6 year old lost her first tooth, and through my studies I see that it corresponds with a new phase in childhood development. She is a handful.

We have real TV reception for the first time in 20 years at my house. My wife really wants to watch the Winter Olympics. Because of where we live we had to get a satellite dish connection. We now have 150+ channels. It is insane. I don't think it will last the year. It is too easy to sit in front of it and space out. I can't stop myself. Even when the sports are over I'm still surfing. This is the first time I've controlled a remote for 20 years. Actually I kept TV out of the house cause I have kids. If you don't watch it for awhile, and then you do see it, you quickly realize that it is full of unnecessary violent images. It is always selling popular culture convincing many of us to rely on the media to tell us who we are and what we should think, rather than figuring things out for ourselves. I am watching lots of college basketball. I really enjoy the game and the intensity. I can see that TV is definitely dumbing down our nation, and years of watching have led to such calamities as George Bush's presidency.

I keep waiting for the people of this nation to wake up [including myself] and vote this administration out. Bush and his Cabinet lie with impunity, and all of the scandals that are uncovered are ignored by a Republican controlled Congress. Let me list a few of the lies and cover ups. Reasons for the Iraq war/ Weapons of mass Destruction/ a Iraq aiding Al Qaeda. Proven Lies. The White house Staff denying being involved in the outing of the CIA agent. Lie. Denials of organizing domestic spying

on US citizens. LIE! The lobbyist scandal. Bush will not release pictures of himself shaking hand with the chief cheat Jack Abramhoff. The administration refuses to comment on the connection between the White House Energy Task Force and Enron criminal Ken Lay. It goes on and on. I haven't even talked about the Katrina mismanagement and the lies that surround it. Did you know \$9Billion is missing from the Iraq appropriations funding and no one knows where it went, and Congress is not investigating. Can anyone really believe G. Bush will lead the country through a time of crisis. His policies are magnifying crisis. It is unreal to watch the nation slip and slide toward fascism. My understanding of fascism is it exists when the ruling moneyed classes have undue influence on the policies of the government, and the government suppresses civil liberties to accomplish those policies. It seems to me that is what is going on today, as the Bush regime wages a war that their cronies profit by. In past years, war profiteering would be shunned, but with our current president it is held up as an example of freedom.... the freedom to make money by killing others.

In Ithaca the hot topic of debate is whether to create a special tax to support our public library. It seems like the regular tax system will no longer suffice. In the newspaper the other day there were 2 front page stories. One was about the library needing \$545,000 to continue all services, and the other was the Bush administration request for 70 BILLION additional dollars for the Iraq war. Where does that money really end up? Can you imagine investing the money spent in Iraq in relieving suffering in the USA? The advisors for this president want to destroy the social safety net, while beefing up an armed forces loyal to them. It becomes easy to understand the historical expression of "Nero fiddled while Rome burned".

The Prisoner Express Project is growing faster than my ability to find funding for the project. As soon as I get this newsletter in the mail, my focus will turn to finding the funds necessary to continue operations. With over 1500 of you receiving this newsletter just the postage and copying costs are staggering. I would love to make this newsletter larger as well as more frequent, but until the funds are here, just getting it out 2X a year is a piece of work. I am not discouraged and am open to suggestions about where to secure funds. I am committed to keeping the program growing and thriving, so just know, until you hear from me again, I'm at work furthering the aims of this program. Please remember to send in the enrollment sheet if you want to register for any programs. Let me know if you want join this new math project.

Before I disappear off this page, I want to reward all of you, who've read this far; **a chance to contemplate the study of knowledge and the meaning of things.** A local scholar has stepped forth and said he would like to create a philosophy study group. He will accept 20 students. To be accepted into his program he asks that you submit an essay entitled "What is philosophy?" If you send the essay to us

at Prisoner Express, we will pass it on to the instructor. Onward and upward, Over and Out.

Thank you for being part of Prisoner Express
Best wishes, Gary



Jeremy Towner

**Prisoner Express
Durland Alternatives Library
127 Anabel Taylor Hall
Ithaca, New York 14853**

Registration form

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, artwork, and my other writings
- 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
- E. _____ 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** affect 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]
- 6. _____ **Math Project!! Enter (B) for beginner packet and (I) for intermediate. My advice is to start with the beginners packet and develop your skills before requesting intermediate. If you are comfortable with quadratic equations then the intermediate packet is for you.**

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. _____ 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. Next group start date will be June 2006]

9. _____ I'm interested in studying world history, and would like Prisoner Express to develop the course work.

DURLAND ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY
127 Anabel Taylor Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853