

We're locked behind a gate in our work area with nothing to do, which gives him time to talk. His usual gruff voice turns tender when he speaks of his girlfriend at home.

"She used to weigh one hundred and fifteen pounds back when we first met. I could pick her up and carry her over my shoulder." He smiles and strokes his gray beard, which is longer than she likes, and he's sure it's the first thing she'll scold him for when they finally see each other again.

"We've been together twenty-nine years. Never married. Who needs a piece of paper? At her appointments, the doctors say we're as good as married." As he speaks, the crows' feet around his eyes squeeze and squeeze. Voices beyond the blue metal gate laugh and argue playfully. "I've changed her bandages, given her meds, cooked and cleaned for her. I've taken care of her through thick and thin." He stares at the gray cinder block around him while he remembers.

"Once, I called her from work, and she didn't answer. So, I left to go check on her. The boss stormed after me, yelling that I'd be fired if I left. I turned around and told him, 'I guess I'm fired then.'" He laughs, and it sounds like water gurgling around his heart. "She was okay. She had fallen asleep with the phone off."

He calls her several times a day on the black prison phones, checks that she's taken her meds or seen her doctors.

He touches his calloused thumb to his rough fingertips, counting. "It's been three and a half years now. Unless parole gives me another hit, then it'll be more." He shrugs, as if to say, What can you do? After all, his girl isn't on the parole board's checklist.

"Once, someone tried to get us a home nurse. They say I don't look like the type of guy who would do all I do for her, whatever that means." He glances at the workers roughhousing outside the gate. "She says she has more wrinkles now, but I won't know until I see her." He strokes his beard again, his own wrinkles etching character into his face.

"Yep," he says, "I used to carry her over my shoulder." Then, he sits silently in his memories.

Beyond, the keys jangle, and the blue gate is unlocked and opened. But, he stays in his seat, just waiting.

DEVOTION by Keith D. Pertusio

GRATER FRIENDS

**2022 LITERARY EDITION:
INSIGHTS FROM THE INSIDE**

A Publication of the Pennsylvania Prison Society

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Dear Friends,

In spirit of my previous letters, I want to begin with a reflection on this year's submission pool.

The work we publish often mirrors the world in which we live. In years past, we have showcased writing that highlighted the ever present inequalities within our criminal justice system, as well as the ongoing isolation brought on by the pandemic. While these issues, of course, still impact our lives today, they have been overshadowed by a running theme of hope. As I have looked over your work, I have noticed hope's dominating presence. Even in moments of loneliness and frustration, hope peeks its head out, speckled in your submissions. And I want to commend you, our dear friends, in submitting pieces of kindness and positivity amidst the circumstances. We are eternally grateful for your writing.

This year, we had a handful of returning poets – namely, David Meade, Keith Lamont Burley, Richard Gross, and Joseph Mander – who always submit beautiful poems. We also received short story and memoir pieces, a big change from last year, that added diversity in this year's submission pool. A special shoutout is needed for Kenneth Baker, who submitted a large number of this type of work – each piece was moving.

The literary issue is a huge passion of mine and Kailyn's – we have always joked that we wish Graterfriends was our full-time job because of how touched we are by your work. Back in 2019, an intern and I found the old Insights from the Inside, sparking my interest in creating a literary edition. Kailyn, with a degree in English, brings expertise to our approach in these issues – it is because of her that our design and content has matured and grown over these last two years.

That being said, we are aiming to have two literary issues in 2023. Our goal is to have one in June, and one in December. Bear with us as we work to make this happen. Training and recruiting volunteers, dedicating time, reading over your pieces – this is all the behind-the-scenes work that makes Graterfriends what it is. However, this also means that some pieces you submitted may have been considered for our June 2023 issue, so you will

see them published in the future. Nonetheless, we are eager to receive more content from you all and create a larger, more substantial issue.

Alongside your writing, we encourage you to continue to send us your feedback. I want to personally thank Vaughn Wright, who took the time to send us a detailed letter of feedback after last year's creative issue. We shared his praises and considered his critiques. We not only love to receive your thoughts, but we value them.

And, with that, please enjoy this year's issue in time for the holiday season. It is full of tender-hearted work, invoking each emotion as you read through. It has been a joy editing these throughout the years. Thank you to all of our Graterfriends' editors, authors, and readers. We could not do it without you.

Regards,
Noelle Gambale

GRATERFRIENDS

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I NEED YOU TO KNOW

Robert McCracken

I need you to know
that I can't see past tomorrow,
that I've been surviving these long years
on nothing but blood and tears,
that I'm withering under the weight
of me.

I need you to know
that the more I fight my yoke
the more it chokes me,
the more of my burden I share
the harder it becomes to bear,
my pen rebels–

Stop!

I need you to know
that I'm dying,
that this is the midnight hour
of a squandered life
and I'm struggling for recognition
of my struggle.

That these crudely woven words
are my last desperate attempt
at preserving a tiny piece
of what could have been.

I need you to know
that I'm sorry.

The path of the lone wolf is virtuous ... and bleak

Well, yes. But even a lone wolf must bare his teeth and raise a few hackles when backed into a corner. NOT even confinement can fully erase the years of instinct and willpower that thrives inside the beast. Nor me, for that matter.

It's not that I mind berating our institutions in print, or publicly denouncing our broken system for the persistent and daily accounts of mistreatment we're experiencing - but it is not my Life Mission. On some days, I feel like a doomed Kamikaze pilot, hellbent on duty and righteousness, hoping beyond hope that my one last sacrifice will mean something in the bigger picture.

To my knowledge, no lone wolf has ever charged into certain death for the sheer shake of patriotism. Nature has installed a little safeguard called self-preservation within their DNA. Mankind seems to be the only deficient species that ignores this vital mechanism.

And it is when I look around to see that I am fighting alone, without support of the pack, that I fully realize just how hopelessly deserted I truly am. These days, it is every man for himself, apparently. Nevermind the greater good.

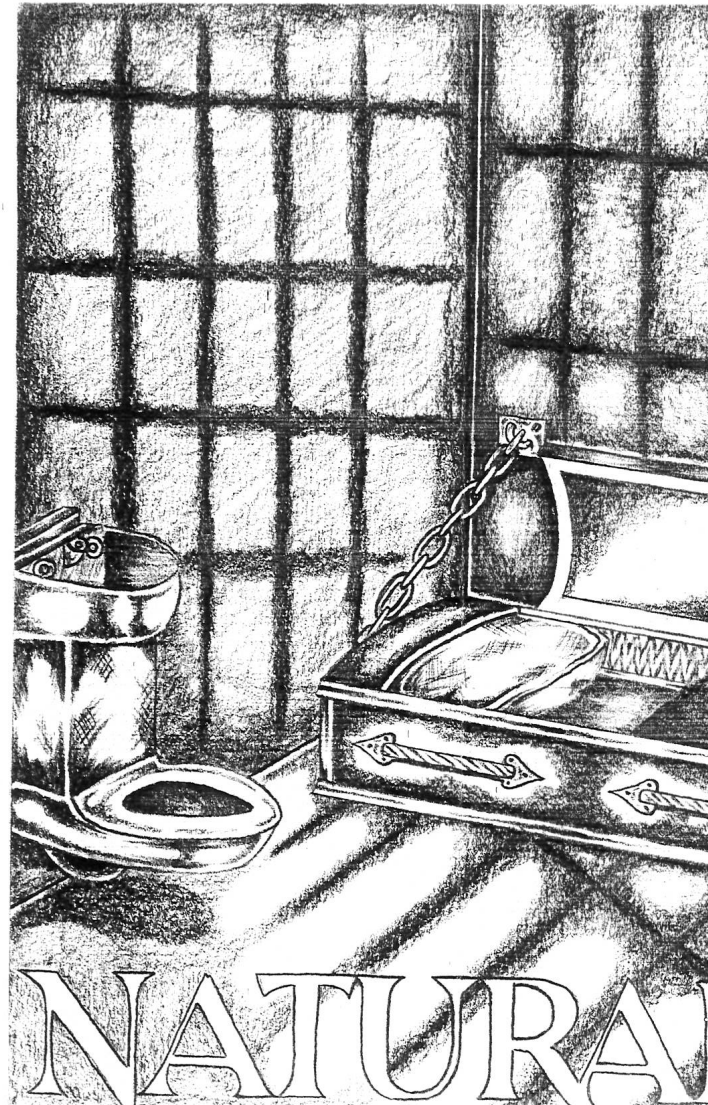
Which is why the system is winning, if you ask me. When left to their own devices, their own unchallenged authority, of course they're going to overstep their bounds. It is the nature of power to seek more power. And when it comes time to take that bull by the horns, sadly enough, not many cowhands show up for the job.

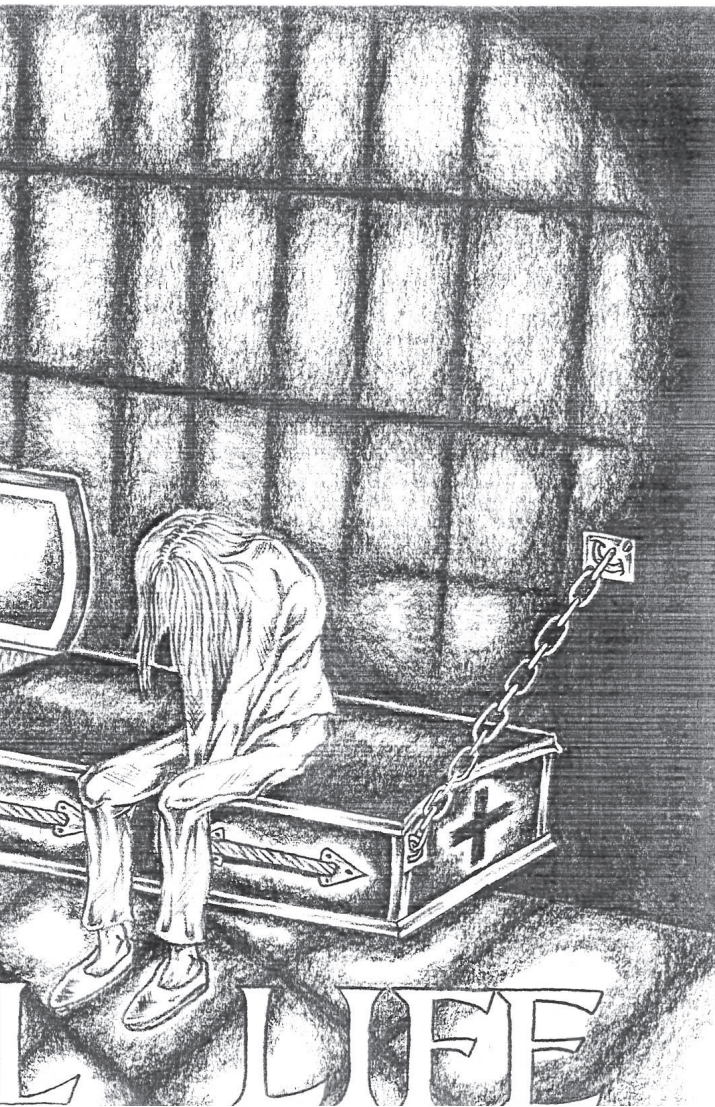
I've spent countless hours waging war with myself, The Establishment, and tyrants of every description, voicing my contempt at every conceivable turn. But I had looked over one simple, fundamental truth: People don't care. You are easier ignored than you are addressed. Your fight is just that - Your Fight. It is no surprise at all, at least to me, that the appellate courts are swamped in backlog, and this country is embroiled in discontent. The splitting of hairs is a tedious endeavor, a bane for convicts everywhere. But split them we do. In the courthouse and the correctional system. As the years wind on, however, it seems less and less fashionable to advocate on behalf of the oppressed. A losing battle, some people say. Better to just avoid the swarm altogether than to kick the hornet's nest.

Which is neither here nor there at the end of the day. All I wanted to do at the beginning of this rambling screen was convey how desperate and dangerous it is to contend with The System in today's climate. Like the ill-fated soldier, you are expected to put your neck out, Knowing the axe will fall any day, but still forgiving headfirst into the melee because - in your heart - you believe that one more contribution to The Cause will mean something to someone ... someday.

I've heard that even the most trivial task is meaningful, when done in the right spirit. But, these days, it is hard not to question that logic.

Just ask the lone wolf.





Artist unknown

PAROLE AGENT OF TOMORROW

Shawn Younker

If you are addicted,
we will give you a cell

If you are sick,
we will put you in cuffs

If you need help,
we will take your freedom

If you are struggling,
we will lock you up

If you are suffering,
we will put you in prison

If you have problems,
we will take you to jail

If you have any issue of any kind,
we have the answer.

One size fits all.

***RIPPLES ON THE POND* by “Spin”**

The other day I saw an up close photo of the moment immediately following an object being thrown into a perfectly still body of water. The impact was so strong that it actually shot a drop back up and held it suspended about an inch above the surface. Below it, a large ring, a ripple in the water, had formed and was starting on its journey to unknown shores. I love this photo because it captures beautifully an axiom I have heard all my life: Be mindful of your words and actions for they can have long lasting effects.

In my mind I am standing next to a large pond that winds and stretches to places I cannot see. It is a glorious summer day; still and silent, the water is a pane of glass. I throw a rock in the middle of it, and as the ripples begin to expand outward, the results of my action start to unfold. It's not a grand gesture. Something as simple as a compliment on a drawing an inmate is working on in the Dayroom, asking someone you don't know very well to sit and join you for a spread, providing a sympathetic ear to someone you can tell really needs someone to talk to, or giving a neighbor a .15 cent bar of soap because you know he just used his last, and is too proud to ask for one. Any of these can start a ripple.

Your wave of positive energy is immediately apparent as it passes under and lifts up the boats (people) who observe it. Maybe the action is to pick up a piece of trash or straighten up your seat and the seats around you as you leave the library. It could be holding a door open for someone, offering some tissue to the guy sitting at your table at lunch so he can wipe off his hands, or even just saying “good morning” as you pass an inmate on the walkway. In our pond analogy, these actions are reflected in the leaves and other objects floating on the surface that are instantly raised to a more enjoyable level. As your ripples spread, more and more areas of the pond are touched by your words and actions.

Take care, however, before casting that stone. As our photo so wonderfully captures, there is a negative part to the wave. The valleys in front and behind it can have just as much, if not more, of an impact as the positive aspect can. Unfortunately it's the negative comments and memories that tend to stay with us far longer and more intensely than any others. A snide or sarcastic remark made to a

child or significant other on the phone or in a letter, not following through on something you promised to do like waking up a friend for Rec., or simply no longer continuing to talk to another inmate without explanation can be enough to turn your little ripple into a tsunami of negativity, having lasting detrimental effects on your relationships.

But it's the ripples on the pond that land on shores we may never see that have the most impact of all. These are the stories passed on from one person to another, and live on in the memories of the people we interact with. I see it all the time in the people I talk to as I recall stories my parents and grandparents told, in the wisdom my pastor shared, and in the lessons my favorite teachers taught. These waves are STILL finding shores and making an impact decades after they were launched.

A Note on 2023

Thank you to everyone who submitted for this year's creative issue of *Graterfriends*. We review every submission and are thankful for all your work. If you do not see one of your piece's in this issue, it is likely that we are holding it for next year.

Next year, we are hoping to publish two creative issues: June 2023 and December 2023. Thank you for your understanding.



EVANESCENE by “Spin”

Isolation. Desolation. Abandonment. Ostracism. Left to die on the vine. These are just some of the feelings prison evokes. It's a dark and depressing place, with plenty of reasons to retreat to the solitude of our cells and to walk around like zombies with our heads hung low in silent resignation. But it doesn't have to be like this. And sometimes beauty pierces the shadowy veil. You just need to know where to look for it.

I spent two years at a unit located in the Permian Basin, an area of Texas that millions of years ago sat at the bottom of a shallow ocean. The water that once was is now a sea of sand - a desert punctuated by tumbleweeds, the occasional cactus, and a handful of grand mesas. Our recreation yard was located at the end of the unit and provided us with a 180 degree view of this barren spectacle. Obstructed only by the chain link fence and razor wire that encapsulated us.

One day I was standing next to the volleyball court, assembling my team and awaiting our turn to play the winner of the current game. Behind me the sun was just starting to breach the horizon on its inevitable plunge into darkness. To my front, the warm unrelenting West Texas wind was filling my nose with the smell of sagebrush and rain, as it pushed a thunderstorm across the near distant mesas on a beeline straight for us. My vision was saturated with dark ferocious clouds and lightning dancing like Russian ballerinas across their desert stage.

As the storm approached and the luminous dance intensified, rain began to fall - lightly, like angel kisses upon our cheeks - while desert lions roared with thunderous applause. And just when I thought my senses had reached saturation, a rainbow appeared to the Northeast. Full and vibrant and brilliant, its ends framed the pathway straight back to my home. To family, friends, and all things good and right in the world. As if to say, "Here we are, waiting patiently for your return."

In the movie Shawshank Redemption, a prisoner named Andy is called to the Warden's office to receive a shipment of donated books for the prison library he started. He discovers a record of an Italian opera. In a moment of mischief, he locks himself in the office and plays it over the PA system for all to enjoy. Everything came to a stop. Work, Rec, Chow - it all fell silent as the inmates enjoyed a brief moment of freedom. That rainbow was our Shawshank moment. The volleyball and basketball games, the guys working out and the yard-walkers, all of them froze in their tracks, and stood in silent worship of the glory and grandeur of God's work. And for a brief moment, we too were free.

"Hey man, serve the damn ball! We only have 20 minutes left." And just like that, our succinct yet splendorous moment passed. The games and walkers resumed, our heavenly vision vanished as quickly as it appeared, and life returned to its wonted pace.

"It's a dark and depressing place, with plenty of reasons to retreat to the solitude of our cells and to walk around like zombies with our heads hung low in silent resignation. But it doesn't have to be like this."

An illustration of two hands, one brown and one light blue, forming a heart shape. The hands are positioned with fingers pointing towards the center, creating a white heart outline. The background is a light blue oval with a soft gradient.

THE FIVE STAGES OF WHY YOU CAN'T

Richard Sean Gross

- I. ...you're too little
- II. ...big boys don't cry
- III. ...wait 'till you're older.
- IV. ...listen to your elders.
- V. ...you're too old.

“H e’s got that shit!” someone yelled from across the prison chow hall.

Panic shot through the room like a sonic boom. In an instant, a couple hundred of us had turned our attention from our breakfast trays to the ruckus on the far end of the chow hall. Across the sea of prisoners, I saw that a mob of guys had leapt to their feet and were backing away from one of the tables. Still sitting at the table was Wally Westrick, an older, stoop-shouldered white guy who had over 30 years on a life bid.

And there was Kenyatta, one of those militant anti-establishment brothers, pointing and still yelling, “He’s got it man! He’s got that shit!”

Any con who didn’t have a lot of time-in wouldn’t have known who Wally was because he was a quiet guy who kept to himself. But everybody knew what “that shit” was: eye worms.

Correction officers near the chow hall exits started moving in, and then the frantic jingling of keys marked the coming of more COs from other parts of the prison, all of them keeping their distance as they snapped on the blue latex gloves they each kept in pouches on their utility belts.

Ugly shouts and plastic cups were derisively hurled in Wally’s direction. The old man threw his arms up to protect his head, before a dozen or so gray guard uniforms closed ranks around Wally and hustled him out of there.

Word around the joint said Wally was taken to Medical, then directly to an outside facility. It was the last time anyone ever saw him. That was how it started for us in the prison.

Out in the world, however, the eye-worm madness had been going on for two months by then. The media’s best “informed” sources hypothesized climate disruption had released the parasites from an Arctic tomb, seeing how they showed up at the same time at different places around the Pacific Rim--Indonesia, Japan, Alaska, and California. True or not, that claim seemed more sensible than those who said it was the wrath of God, or an alien invasion, or terrorists, or, like Kenyatta, blamed it on the government.

What’s known for certain, however, is that worm eggs can lay dormant almost anywhere for years, until they make it to the warm moistness of

the eye, usually after being deposited there during one of the hundreds of times a day a person typically touches a hand to their face. Almost immediately, the larvae hatch and begin burrowing their way into the eyeball to get to the vitreous humor, the transparent jelly that fills the eyeball. Once there, and looking more like hairy-legged centipedes than actual worms, they set up shop like it’s SeaWorld, swimming and feeding and breeding. To their hosts, they seem like floaters at first -- dead cells or other debris either in the fluid of the eye or on the lens -- until they grow large enough to actually start obscuring the vision.

Adult worms are the ones that do the real damage. Their suckerlike mouths secrete a paralytic enzyme that keeps the host from feeling them eating at the inner structures of the eye. Complete blindness occurs in four days. By the fifth, they’re gnawing their way back out, riding a tide of vitreous humor and blood, each gory drop full of eggs. Some will find a home in another unsuspecting victim, to start the cycle all over again.

From the prison we’ve anxiously followed the progress of the pandemic on CNN and NPR as each new outbreak hopscotched its way across the country. We’ve done so with the dread assurance that if eye worms ever made it here, Inside, it would be the COs or one of the staffers who brought them in. The only point of contention was whether it would be done accidentally or on purpose. Believe me when I tell you all the hate within these walls isn’t locked in a cell at night.

The day after the Wally Westrick incident, two more cases popped up on E-Block, so that block was put on quarantine. After inmates on A, B, and F got infected, the entire prison was put on lockdown. We’ve all been confined to our cells 24/7 ever since, though the staff still gets to leave at the end of their shifts. Each day, fewer and fewer of them have been coming back. Each day, meals and mail have been arriving with greater irregularity. Howie, my cellmate, and I have been making more speculation than day traders about how long it’ll be until it’s just us and the rats and roaches left.

No matter what phobias the 1,500 or so of us may have had when we first came here, I’m sure the fear of being trapped in a concrete cage with eye-

ball-eating parasites is trumping them all. There is nowhere we can run, there is nowhere we can hide. There is no escape. A lot of guys have been doing things like Howie, sleeping as much of the days away as possible so they don't have to think about it.

Our only saving grace is that the worms aren't fatal, though the way folks on the Outside have been reacting has made their coming seem no less apocalyptic. I mean, people are seriously freaking out, clawing their eyes out or killing themselves just because they're infected or suspect that they are.

Personally, I can't quite reconcile wanting to end my life over losing my eyesight. There are a lot of things you think you can't do without, until you come to a place like this and discover that you can. At least, that's what I'm reminding myself of when I hear a rat scratching over by my cell gate. Usually

that's no cause for alarm. They're pretty tame from guys feeding them all the time. Sometimes they're used to pass messages or cigarettes down the tiers during lock-ins. But this little guy gets my heart pounding like John Henry late for a date when I see what he's carrying.

"Howie!" I say. "Howie, look! There's a rat, man!"

"Seriously?" he sleepily groans from up in his bunk. "You woke me up for that? Kick it out," he says and rolls over.

"Look at its eyes, man -- it's got that shit!"

That got his attention. He snatches the blanket from over his head, sits up, and nervously asks me, "Where? Turn on the light so I can see."

The light is already on, but I can see why he wouldn't think so.

NO MORE LABELS, PLEASE by Jeffery Shockley

Hello, world. Some of us sit here serving time for crimes committed, never denying we did it. It is asked: How much time must pass before, at last, we may be accepted differently, if ever again at all? Or could we be called more than just the mistakes we made before we had the chance to grow and mature into responsible adults. We wish you could and would see us today.

We are more than just human beings you see as less than currently in prison for decisions which can never be taken back. Intact at the time the mind was not; abuses from our own lived trauma, physical drama beyond anyone's control.

Our past that robbed the soul of life itself, our punishment we've accepted, but still. Why must we be forever rejected when placed within the confines designed to change and rehabilitate? Does it not matter how hard we collectively, and especially individually, strive while inside to be better today than the yesterdays we continue to apologize for? What more must we do to be beyond the times you will not let us forget? Yet you encourage us to move on? "Stay strong," is said but each day is another form of rejection and pain from the same lingering perceptions of us.

Just another dirty, stinking inmate!

Yet we rise above such names, for we remember our own. Even through decades of being identified at all times by a number, like inventory in a warehouse filled with hopelessness.

Knowing, without a doubt, we are more than our past and longing for the tomorrows we may not get to see. Joy in the day, for we are somebody, and today we live.

My name is Jeffery - what is yours?

SOLITUDE TEARS

Yassin Mohamad

Tears of Solitude invisibly spill
Non-stop drying the skin. Hardening the face.
Be strong, keep ya head up. Echo! ...
I hear the scratching sound of crickets.
This is not my place.

No more tears.

Long forgotten in no-man's land, a living
Hell clinched tight in society's
We don't love him or hers hold
My thanks have been stolen. There's none for
Giving. It's the last Thursday in November.
I'm hungry and cold.

No more tears.

Shatter dreams revisited. Emotions
Embraced with closed fist beating
tunes of solitudes forgotten.
Heart-break against a locked cell door.

No more tears.

A DELICATE BALANCE

Alexis Rodriguez

Lord forgive my doubting,
I am of little faith.
This storm has caused a shrouding,
A veil upon my face.

I kneel before you,
A dead man except for your grace.
Will it be said, "He well ran,
The course, his life, the race"?

Lord, what must I learn today
That I did not know before?
Please teach me how to pray
and patiently endure.

As trials come every way
I've learned to say; "No more!"
Yielding tears convey
what's left here on the floor.

Lord, what can I teach another
from trials that assail me?
I've been life's steady student
living vicariously

Yet life has her own partner
and death comes certainly,
they dance so well together
as far as I can see.



CAGED CONSCIENCE

Miguel Arellano

You believe you know
Why the caged bird sings;
Yet you feign compassion
For its unstretched wings.

I know the truth;
I've always known;
The caged bird sings
For its all alone.

Locked away,
In its insidious cage,
Built so it may sing,
For the rest of its days.

One day soon,
One day you'll see,
The caged birds singing,
Will cease to be.

Truth come to light,
Reality revealed,
You'll realize its singing
Was pain concealed.

Prison World

Larry Stromberg

Trapped in the bars of my mind,
Addiction has feasted on my soul,
Obsession controlling my thoughts,
A dark cloud hovers over me;
Almost demonic,
Held captive as a child by the sickness of abuse,
The past suffocates me,
Tormenting my inner being.
My thoughts wrapped around the razor wire
It cuts my spirit:
Prison world.

I gotta break free,
Plan my escape,
Release myself from the bondage,
Riot my emotions,
Sound the alarm!

Next stop:
Death row,
If I don't break the chains of oppression, addiction and
depression in my mind.

I'll never forget the caged beatings,
Psychological isolation,
Abandoned by society, they keep on depriving
and eyeing me?

My remorseful existence,
Accept rehabilitation and embrace my recovery,
Learn to forgive all, including myself,
How can I find my redemption?

It's a lifelong spiritual journey,
A tall task to endure,
Getting an education has given me a purpose;
Accountability and responsibility is my motto of truth,
A heart of remorse,
Therapy days,
Atonement lays at my feet,
Honestly standing now,
Freedom calls my name.



CREATE M

Dustin



FREEDOM

Ware

From the Cell Door

Don Johnson

From the cell next door,
I've heard hushed cries of loneliness,
pounding in the nightly cold, long mournful echoing sounds of
weeping,
and boo-hoos.

From the cell next door,
I've heard prayers ricocheting in the
condemned rhythms of night,
while dancing heartbeats whisper in the dark,
after a violent rainfall.

From the cell next door,
Life's secrets can no longer be hidden
behind innocent raindrops,
where life has no life in the darkness of true reality,
oh my!

From the cell next door,
I felt the moisture of falling tears soaking into my skin,
coldly, while feelings of loneliness silently awakened
my sleeping compassion.

From the cell next door,
I've discovered a one-time frown surrounded by aged wrinkles,
shyly bald thin misplaced hair of slow moving brilliance.

From the cell next door,
I've experienced an unbelievable pain crying inside of me,
in the dark of it's own existence,
stabbing deep into my heart, showing the reason,
why I too cry in the blackest of black-black.

Me and the empty cell next door.

The Evolution of Intelligence: Defining Your Manhood by Darrell Sharpe

“When did You become a Man?” When a male child is born into this world, his life is a question mark and his purpose, a mystery. As he encounters different people, places and things, his observations and experiences will allow him to become more consciously aware of his purpose and destiny. Each stage of your life will prepare you for the next until you reach the true realization of your assigned destination in life that has been divinely decreed for you. It is during these travels through the different stages of your life that you will be forced with challenges, which will determine the quality of your growth process and ultimately provide you with the answer to the question of: “What defines your existence as a man?”

Recently, I took a survey asking my fellow comrades to explain to me, when was the exact moment that they came to the realization that they became men? Some of the feedback that I received was truly unbelievable. Yet, overall, I learned that many of us have the tendency to confuse “Childhood and Adulthood” with “Boyhood and Manhood.” So ask yourself, “When did you become a man? Was it when you reached the age of 18 or 21 ? or was it when you had children and subsequently took upon the responsibility to provide for them? Well neither age nor responsibility is what defines your manhood or determines the metamorphosis you make from being a boy to becoming a man. Before we can truly understand this transition, we must examine and define “Man” and “Manhood” and its distinction when compared with male adulthood.

There are 3 major phases that we experience during our growth process leading into adulthood: Childhood, Adolescence, and actual Adulthood. First, we are born as male children, which says maleness is determined by the physical reproductive organs of our anatomies. As children, we are still in the physical and mental development stage wherein our growth can be determined by internal and external stimuli. From the infancy stage, we travel until we reach adolescence, at this point we become subjected to puberty, during which we become functionally capable of reproduction. We bask in the ambience of our adolescence until the period of full adult development. Adulthood is the stage of complete physical maturity.

Nevertheless, it must be realized that to be a male adult is not to be a man. As many adult males lay claim to manhood, most have yet to make the transformation from boys to men. This boyhood stage is defined by social and psychological immaturity wherein a person’s actions and reactions are done without regards for consequences or repercussions. A boy is one who lives his life according to his whims. He is most in tune with the lower-self. Foolishly, he is enticed by his physical and material desires. He is content to reside in a mental, spiritual, and emotional childlike state. In order to undergo the transmutation to manhood, the boy must begin to come to terms with who he is and what his purpose is. He must realize his weakness and identify and understand his strengths. He must adapt and apply those characteristics of manhood to his persona. By accepting responsibility for his actions and applying the knowledge he gains to his everyday living, he becomes a living by-product of his intelligence. This will allow his actions to define his intentions. Also, as a man, he will not allow his emotions to supersede his abilities to make rational and informed choices and decisions. These aforementioned characteristics are qualities possessed by a man, yet they do not define a man in his totality.

Manhood is further defined by the execution of a man’s expressed goals and his recognition of the constant progression towards the elevated state of being, the very pinnacle of God’s creation. Our biological structures and reproductive development determines our existence as males, but our psychological development, strength of character and maximized utilization of our intellectual capabilities will help our progression into manhood. As a man allows his intelligence to evolve, he realizes his purpose and begins to fulfill his destiny. He does not fall victim to such as gotism and chooses social responsibility over financial overindulgence; Spiritual happiness over economical success. A boy lives in an illusional world and fantasizes about the impossible. A man will dream and visualize his success then wake up from that dream and take the initial steps in making that vision into reality.

With all of this being said today I’d like to reiterate once again, “When did you become a man?”

LOVE ME

Juicy Queen Bee

Love me in a special way,
Love me as I am:
A real woman,
What God made me to be.

Love me now,
Like the woman
You want me to be.
Real all day long,
Love me as your friend,
Love me as your wife,
Love me as your queen
Til you die.

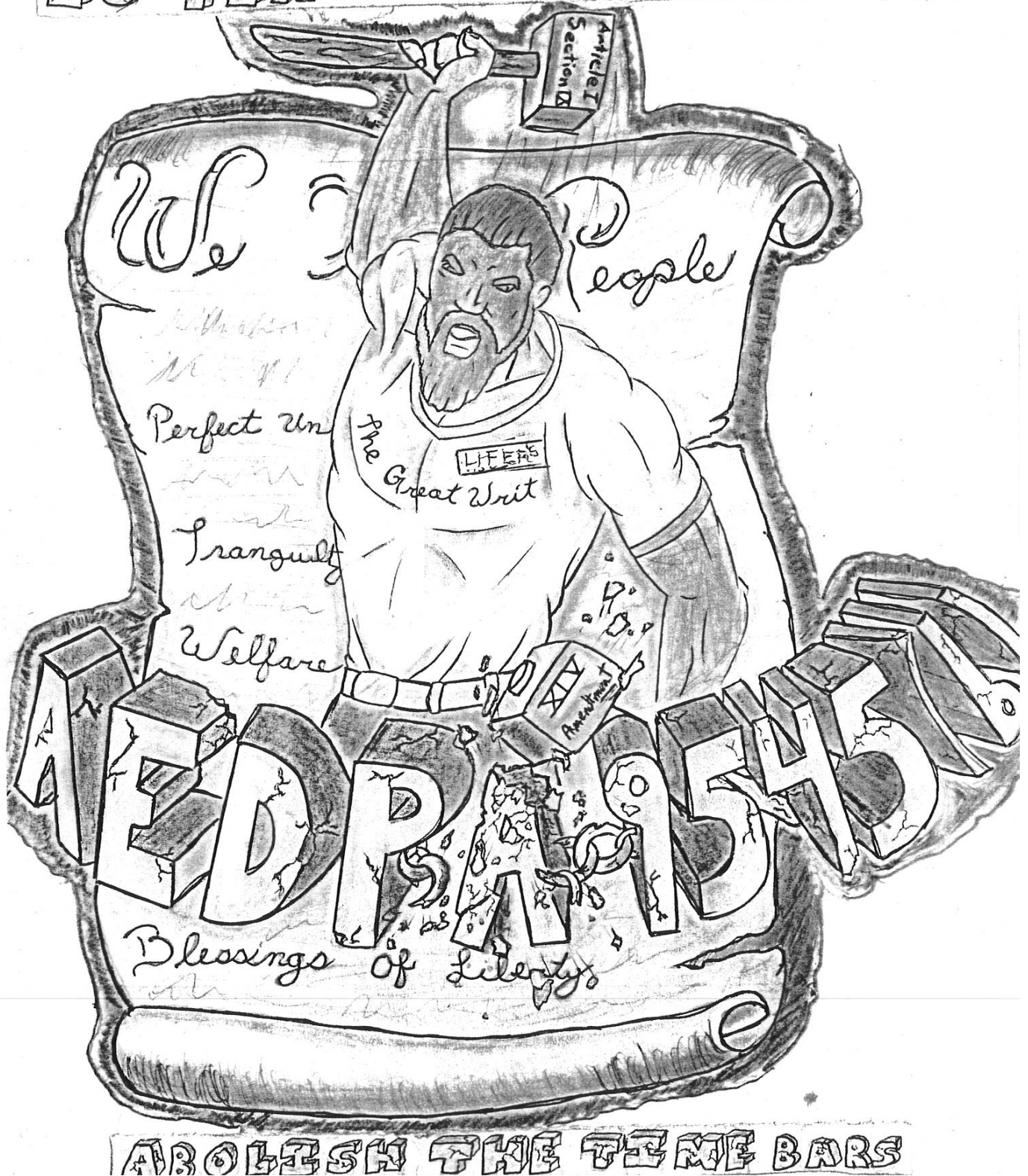
INCARCERATION

David Meade

I have watched spring turn into summer and summer turn into winter,
I have seen stress turn inmates' faces black as they become thinner and thinner,
I have walked the track with old timers that have 40 years in,
I have seen inmates wipe feces on their body as they become traumatized
while doing years in the hole,
Could you imagine a man whose daughter was one at the time of incarceration
who is now 30 years old?
I done seen inmates that smuggle drugs in visits through their daughter's pampers,
I done seen gang leader's tell on their whole operation & on other low level potential
gang members.
As the years progress. I watched CO's turn into Seargeants and Seargeants turn into
Lieutenants,
I done watch inmates mix strips with heroin and die within minutes,
I done watched inmates lose their mind every single day,
I done seen juveniles who was 16 when coming to jail and now their
entire hair and beard is fully gray.
I done seen guys hang it up by using their shoe laces, sheets, and even
their extension cords,
I would like to say R.I.P to Micheal Keaton who was murdered at SCI Graterford.
I know many inmates who work very hard for €18 a hour inside of these
modern day plantations,
So if you are free, Do not commit that homicide for it will lead to a
lifetime of incarceration.

Congratulations to David Meade on his recent release!

25 YEARS OF INJUSTICE



James Everett

Straw Man: A third party used in some transactions as a temporary transferee to allow the principal parties to accomplish something that is otherwise impermissible.

Black's Law Dictionary

When he set forth facts and presented non-frivolous claims, they called him frivolous
And took aim at the straw man- an up against the law man.

When he said that his claims are the functional equivalent of a Monell claim,
And quoted the Supreme Court's repeated holding on real party interest being the entity
represented and not the individual office holder,
They called him 'malicious' and targeted the Strawman,
The back against the wall man.

When he said the prosecutor turned persecutor and sought justice outside the bounds
of the law, They wanted the judge to sanction the pro se, in forma pauperis, general prior
pilgrim, and tax the Strawman,
The win, lose, or draw man.

The rabbit hole sunk deep, and they tried to keep sleep,
The public perception,
Set flames to the Strawman,
The one who had to crawl man.

When he demonstrated claims cognizable in habeas, they gave alias to their Strawman,
Whose words would reach the city hall man.
The pilgrim prodigal,
A paranormal paralegal,
Let reason envelop the case,
Whose face was pimpled with prejudice,
So they sought to kill their Strawman,
The one that said no one is above the law man.

Worse than removed from morals,
From the square and replaced it with vice a black hole,
Whose commercial and economic pull,
So strong the values would not escape a parallel prosecution they began to plot against
the Strawman,

THE STRAWMAN

ment abuse and overreach

nt Burley Jr.

The one who had to dig more deep with a claw man.

He found a needle in the haystack,
Then thread,
Then a sewing machine whom some then held in awe man,
And watched as he morphed into the stitch together the law man!

Drug task force agents,
Pa Parole Board,
State Troopers held captive the I-79 man,
The Greene County,
Mean county,
The 24 hour lockdown artificial light man,
For doing what is right man.

So when he beamed the first amendment, they lean to the fifth and now respect their
Strawman,
Whom at 5 foot 6,
They cannot help but see as tall man.
Then they say he's a rebel for saying the DOC grievance system is a flaw man.

They swung with the fictitious at the Strawman,
He who subjected his statements to the penalty of perjury 28 USC SS 1746,
And declared that the DOC is now an ideology of eccentric misinterpretations of the
constitution.

They call it rehabilitation,
But they only wanted to brainwash the Strawman,
The one who says since they did that to you,
They would do it to us all man.

They shackled the Strawman,
Poisoned the Strawman,
Falsely Accused the Strawman,
Beat him with the bureaucratic bilous,
And awoke surprised,
To find that he was still a standing tall man.

The Forgotten Principle of Men & Women: Integrity

Wayne Prater

The word is so pure that when it's spoken, it makes you look deep within yourself to see if it has eluded you.

Integrity - is something so taboo, that when it's displayed by a person it's so unusual but so divine.

Integrity - for most it is never honored or regarded as if it's an ordinary thing within a person.

Integrity - is being able to maintain your principles through the transgressions of the odious and repugnant individuals short comings.

Integrity - is being able to stand alone never compromising regardless of the consequences received. integrity - is given as a child then evolves at different stages in your life.

Integrity - is that gut feeling that most people ignore, knowing what's being done is immoral and wrong.

Integrity - is something most people know about, but will never attain because it requires a sacrifice that they're too selfish to give.

Integrity - is the virtue that builds the foundation of one's character.

Integrity - is that friendship that is forged and never broken.

Integrity - is accepting a person's shortcomings and not ostracizing them for these flaws and imperfections.

Integrity - requires you to look inside yourself and make sure you uphold this: invaluable principle.

*"For the people in my life:
Thank you for maintaining such an invaluable virtue."*

The Fool

Vernon Walker

Proverbs 10:8 & 26:7

A fool lacks discernment,
Leaning on his own understanding,
Common sense eluded fragmented comprehension.

He'll compromise morals,
Despising reprimand,
The folly of his foolishness,
Fated circumstance.

His eyes can not see,
Nor can he hear,
Deaf, dumb, and blind
Spiritually impaired.

A fool seeks acceptance,
By a fool of his identity,
A mirror reflected image,
Wisdom of stupidity.

A fool hates correction,
He'll justify his wrong,
A hardened heart rebels,
To reap what it has sown.

The feet of a fool wanders,
Nomadicly chasing the wind,
Double minded and unstable,
His fate is yoked to him.

Characteristics of an animal,
Stubborn as a mule,
The arrogance of a simpleton,
Grandeur of a fool.

Once a Legend

Joseph Mander

The world has forgot about me.
Once a legend, now I'm lost.
A story once told, but now forgotten.
Once a ripe fruit, but now I'm rotten.
A cell, a cage, a coffin, a grave.
A soul once free is now a slave.
A man with no family. A man with no friends.
A man with no job. A man with no ends.
Once the sun, now dead as the moon.
Once a king, now back to being a coon.
Once a smile, but now a frown.
Once respected, now a clown.

*Check out the following works written by so
Please note, the Prison Society does not e
We cannot guarantee all books*

Most of these works are available on

Daniel Cummings

A Cry for Justice

"The story of Daniel Cummings was highlighted and given national exposure 20 years ago on the Geraldo Rivera Show entitled "Spouses of Rape Victims..." When the heinous crime of rape has been perpetrated upon a man's wife, and the culprit has been identified by the victim, and that identity made known to the agents of law enforcement, it is reasonably expected that justice will occur. When the culprit has been positively identified as the rapist of the victim; and those agencies empowered with the authority to arrest the culprit and thereby mete out justice, consciously refuse to perform the duties they have been sworn to uphold, cite their own lack of confidence in the process of the justice system, as the reason they will not perform their sworn-duty; they have by their own inaction, aligned themselves with the rapist and closed the doors to even a resemblance of justice. What does one do, when coming home from a hard day's work, and finding that your wife has been brutally raped by someone you know? What would you do?"

Derrick Gibson

Before Orange was the New Black: The Camp Hill Story

"He describes a prison riot in central Pennsylvania in 1989 that was so devastating that it caused millions of dollars in damages to the prison complex. It was humiliating and embarrassing for prison officials. The officials went out of their way to keep this incident out of the mainstream news; most inmates in the same county prison system had/have not heard about the 1989 riot. To this day, talking about this riot is taboo in prison. The author's writing skills and storytelling skills are sure to impress. This book will peak your interest, captivate, humor and even anger you."

Gregory Whiteside

3P's - Please, Pain and Passion

"...includes 185 poems that cover everything from love, to heartbreak, from joy to sorrow, from the spiritual to wordly subjects, too."

Jamal Stevens

House of Brittle Bones

"House of Brittle Bones is a collection of stories which all have an unexpected twist at the end of each. If you like shows like Twilight Zone, you will love these beautifully crafted tales. The house is the book, and the bones (stories) are my very DNA. The stories are brittle because nothing is ever as you expect it to be or turn out. A story will crumble before your very eyes, thus revealing an entirely different dimension."

James Hairston

Federal Nightmare: An Urban Crime Story

"...is an urban crime drama that will take you deep into the world of South Florida's drug trade; a world not described in any of the tourist brochures; a world of cunning betrayals where enemies are abundant and friends are few and far between. To survive in such a world, one must be ruthless while holding on to their sense of humanity; if such a feat can be achieved."

INCARCERATED AUTHORS

Some of our fellow Graterfriends contributors!
endorse any of the opinions in these books.
s will be approved by the DOC.

n Amazon if not otherwise specified.

Jerome Williams

Poverty Poetry

“Poverty Poetry is a poetry book filled with numerous varieties of poems that express every element of people’s lives from happy to sad, and the ups and downs they experience. Survival of real-life events, of experiences based on Romey Romello’s life and that of his family and friends’ lives, everyone living from urban to suburban communities can relate to different experiences of poverty.”

John Griffin

Sequence of Protocol

“Mr. Griffin has been incarcerated for 40 years and has college degrees in both Human Services and Marketing. In 2002 he self published an autobiography entitled, A Letter To My Father, a revealing account of a son’s personal memories to his deceased father about the love and strength of their family. He shares his experiences of growing up in Philadelphia surrounded by racial images while trying to find his place. His search leads him to the Black Nationalist ideology of the Nation of Islam, community activism and crime.”

First Shot Fired

Sulee Niger is twenty-two years old and has just returned to Philadelphia from New York, after being away for seven years. Little does he know the entanglements in a drug operation and the murder of others he would face. Sulee decides to investigate and solve the murders. As he works on the case, he finds himself in the middle of a drug war that has broken out between all those involved. He has a decision to make and he has to do so wisely.

A Letter to My Father

This is an extraordinary autobiography of a young black man growing up in a loving and supportive close-knit family, who finds himself struggling through what he sees as the minefields established by the racial and oppressive nature of White America. As the title denotes, “A Letter To My Father” is a revealing conversation of a son to his father.

Joseph Mander

Soundcloud Music Account

Username: SSJoeyBishop

Keeshawn Crawford

Traits and Emotions of a Salvageable Soul

“All people have their own remarkable intrinsic value, and it’s time we recognize it in ourselves and share it with the people in our lives. From the wisdom of elders comes Traits and Emotions of a Salvageable Soul: A Conversation with a Touch of Class, a guide to growing and healing ourselves so that we can live the quality of life we were always meant to live. From life’s hard lessons, Crawford offers the reader encouragement and truth, a path for using life’s challenges to overcome and even thrive. Don’t give up, he reminds us. Every one of us has great potential and purpose. We just need to have faith in ourselves and courage.”

Kenneth Cannon

Dear Mama, Closer to the Truth...

"A novel written by Kenneth Cannon, HH-4008, SCI Frackville, which shines light on poverty, drug abuse, parenting, and the life inside incarceration."

Kerry Max Cook

Chasing Justice: My Story of Freeing Myself After Two Decades on Death Row for a Crime I Didn't Commit

"In 1977, at age 19, Kerry Max Cook was arrested and wrongly convicted of the capital murder of a young woman in Tyler, Texas. On death row, when Cook wasn't struggling to survive amid vicious inmates and inhumane conditions, he was fighting a justice system determined to muzzle him and loath to admit their horrendous mistake. Through his perseverance and the hard work of a team of crusading lawyers, his death sentence was reversed-11 days before his planned execution in late 1996. Here is Cook's story, in his own heartbreaking and moving words."

Malcolm Rowe

Ghetto Prophecy 7th Street, The Untold Story

"Urban street culture has since changed with the passing of the times. There is no such thing as respect, honesty, trustworthiness, or loyalty anymore. Most of these young street guys who are now running around controlling the hustle game have all but lost their moral integrity. Brothers are crossing their own brother while sisters are crossing damn near everyone, solely on the strength of their commitment to their baby daddies...With this novel, I will be making a desperate attempt to bring the dysfunctional plight of a race of colored people who had so much hope and promise to the worlds stage. The sheer brilliance of the average street hustler is so amazing that the talent can only be compared to major business CEOs...This is a powerful Philadelphia story, so Philly readers definitely should not be left out of the loop."

Marvin "Running River" Banks

Our Ancestors are Proud

"My wishes are that the readers research the vast history of this land and understand that, if they were born here, you too are indigenous to this land, and this land had a name, a culture, and an identity way before it was labeled America. And it still does."

Mumia Abu-Jamal

Jailhouse Lawyers: Prisoners Defending Prisoners v. the U.S.A.

"...presents the stories and reflections of fellow prisoners-turned-advocates who have learned to use the court system to represent other prisoners—many uneducated or illiterate—and, in some cases, to win their freedom."

Reginald Lewis

Leaving Death Row

"A book of poetry, Leaving Death Row is Lewis's 'florid, ever-unfurling dream, my winged chariot of imagination and memories escaping this low-slung mass of steel and stone and bullet-proof glass that seeks to imprison their flight.'"

Inside My Head

"In this book of 69 poems, divided into four chapters, I wanted to burrow deep into my soul, through a process of the self-examination of my masculine psyche, my political consciousness and world views??shaped and mortised by my almost two decades long confinement on Pennsylvania's Death Row."

Richardo Noble*Betrayal of a Child*

"It details what really happened in my controversial 1991 homicide, conspiracy to robbery case at age 15, how I was unjustly convicted, and the error and injustice of sentencing, placing, and defining children (juveniles) as adults."

Robert Vaughn*Appearances Can Be Deceiving*

"If you like to read murder mysteries that have a lot of twists and turns, then you will love my recently published novel, *Appearances Can Be Deceiving*. In my book, there is a serial killer who is going around Philly, just killing one victim after another. One victim is a highly decorated Philadelphia police officer, and so now the DA's office will do anything to get a conviction. When the main suspect is released from the Philadelphia County Prison, on a two million dollar cash bond, the murders start back up again. Like the title suggests, the end of the story will shock you."

Samuel Barlow*Life without Murder: The Autobiography of Sam Barlow*

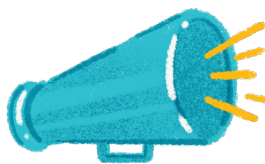
"Although incarcerated for 50 years, he never lost faith that he would be free. While in prison, he found a way to mentor those inside and outside. His autobiography *Life Without Murder* was published in March 2018. Prof. Carl Milofsky, a sociology professor at Bucknell University, calls him a "complex visionary." Karen Lee, a Prison Society Official Visitor, describes him as 'one of the most humble and intelligent people I've ever had the pleasure of meeting.'"

IN MEMORY OF...**Omar Askia Ali***Truth and Nothing But the Truth*

Askia Ali gives you just that: the "TRUTH" from every direction-he even talks about a boxing club in prison. During the 60's & 70's Omar Askia Ali, a.k.a., Edward Sistrunk was active in the Nation of Islam; he and others endeavored to curb the drug trade in Philadelphia. Omar maintains his innocence and gives it all, from his work with the N.O.I., corrupt police, all white jury, and FBI cover up."

DO YOU HAVE PUBLISHED WORK?

Feel free to send us a list and brief description of any of your work, and we will advertise it in an upcoming creative issue of Graterfriends.



Art- making communion with oneself.
Art gave an awakening to the modern man's soul.
From the furnace of the sun I was baked into being.
People with uncommon backgrounds,
Bring about uncommon art.

Eyes: nature's way of seeing what she is made of,
Often she is held in awe of her own reflections.
Without the air- how could I breathe?
Without the sun- how could I see?
Without the dirt - how could I be?

Forget not the RHIU - that too is a part of me,
When matter reaches the state of INDIVISIBILITY.
Behold the inner sanctum of GOD.

Kindness: more than the measure of one's compassion,
Also a good indicator of one's awareness.

I have now acquired enough pebbles of sand to
Walk upon a beach, that touches the shore, of an
Island, existing in the unknown.

Prison barb-wire: twisted skeleton of razor
Sharp metal spiraling across the sculptured
Landscape of agony.

Ironically, a clarity of mind has percolated
Itself from the ashes of my ignorance.

He who is well read, well fed- enough said.
I think and write in short bursts.

My hope,
One day to become a long distance runner.

I sometimes think rather be a rocking chair
On someone's porch than an inmate sitting in a
Prison cell.

How miraculous, man being born from the Earth,
Now the consciousness of it.

Art: a luxury of mind and spirit that
Is ill afforded to the many.

Reading enriches the library of the imagination.
What color is the sky without the eyes?
What color is life without the hope?

Art is the finger-print of man.
Book stores are chapels of the mind.
Crying rinses away the agony in my heart.
Trapped in the catacomb of prison I cannot
Escape the stench of despair.

Creative Writing is an act of prayer.
A blade of grass, a reminder of how
Inconsequential and lonely my life is.
An artist without a canvas
Like a drunk without a drink.

Writing is perfecting an imperfect thought.
Why do I still like acquiring knowledge?
Gives me greater appreciation of life - in turn -
Lessons the agony of my imprisonment
Most mysterious thing in the universe,
Being aware I exist in it.

Museums: grave-yards of our imaginations.
The art of drawing and painting;
A silent prayer of attention.

Jane Goodall - She is the Mother Teresa of the Forest
Whatever - whoever is responsible.
Thank you for allowing me to see beauty.

REQUESTS FOR RESOURCES

In lieu of a list, please request resources directly with this form. Please allow one month for a response.
Complete and mail to the Pennsylvania Prison Society:

Pennsylvania Prison Society
ATTN: Resources
230 South Broad Street, Suite 605
Philadelphia, PA, 19102

Name, ID Number, Facility
If Applicable: Returning County for Re-entry Resources

Resource Description
Note: The Prison Society does not offer financial assistance

READER SURVEY

We welcome comments and suggestions from all readers. Please complete this form and mail it to the Pennsylvania Prison Society.

Pennsylvania Prison Society
ATTN: Graterfriends
230 South Broad Street, Suite 605
Philadelphia, PA, 19102

Name, ID Number, Facility

Comments and Suggestions

First Class postage is required to re-mail
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Philadelphia, PA 19102

LITERARY ISSUE

2022

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