

MARC MCMURRAIN

WINTER 2024:  
A DAY IN YOUR LIFE

### Welcome to issue 25 of *The Word is Out!*

Wow, look at the time! This year has been an absolute whirlwind for our little collective of volunteers. We’ve been busy hosting workshops, conducting outreach and keeping up with the day-to-day operations of PCP.

Our office space at QPIRG Concordia has seen quite a lot of action since our last newsletter. In addition to our weekly volunteer drop-in/boxchecking evening, we’ve held resource request blitzes one Saturday a month in order to keep up with the high volume of requests we receive. We also developed a new format for onboarding new outside pen pals in a hands-on workshop called “Seeking Queer Penpals,” which we’ve run as part of several festivals/workshop series over the course of the past few months as a new way to introduce curious minds to our project.

This year we collaborated with community organizations of all shapes and sizes: we participated in the Anarchist Bookfair, the Defund the Police festival, Montreal Pride, and a strategizing meeting with queer anticapitalist collective P!nk Bloc and Escaping Tomorrow’s Cages, an Ontario-based initiative opposed to the expansion of prisons.

Some of the biggest challenges we’ve faced this past year have been in navigating the expanding digitization of mailrooms. Many of our inside members no longer receive physical mail, making it harder for us to share bulky resources and zines in the same way that we used to. As an organization

built on snail mail, we obviously believe strongly in the value of holding a letter or picture in hand! Fortunately, we are nothing if not stubborn—your mail will be getting to you one way or another!

Speaking of digitization, our website has received a long-awaited overhaul! Nothing like a good makeover to make an old org feel young again. We even have new stickers and posters for sale, with lots more merch forthcoming (PCP cosmetics line, anyone?).

Shout out to the contributors of #25: Amber Fayefox Kim, Anthony Wheeler, Ariana Bushie, Ashley Delrio, Astro, Cody Herrel, D4B, David Boone Terre, Evelyne Ryder, G. Nerd, Happy Stomping Bear, Horace Thomas, Jack Morgan, Jamie McCallum, Jane Doe, Jason Morris, Kwaneta Harris, Marc McMurrain, Mocha K. Scroggin, Richard Risher, Robert Poizner, Spark Dalmatian, T. Randall, Yvette, Zhi Kai H. Vanderford! And for everyone whose contribution we couldn’t fit, thank you so much for sharing and please continue to send us your work!

Well that’s all for now! Don’t be a stranger, ya hear?

xoxo,  
Prisoner Correspondence Project

## TO PRISON MAIL ROOMS:

If you are refusing this newsletter for any reason, please send a digital copy of the rejection notice to [info@prisoner Correspondence Project.com](mailto:info@prisoner Correspondence Project.com) so that it is received within the appeal period.

*The books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame.*

– Oscar Wilde

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## NEW RESOURCES

*Here are the new resources that we've added since the previous issue of The Word is Out. You can still request the free LGBTQ publications from our last resource list. Send us a letter if you want to receive an updated list of our entire resource library!*

**Soaring Beyond the Walls:** From Boston ABC. Practical tools for grounding and other mental wellness exercises for prisoners.

**Queer Fire: The George Jackson Brigade, Men Against Sexism, and Gay Struggle:** A collection of histories, speeches and interviews with members of the George Jackson Brigade and Men Against Sexism. Stories of queer anti-prison struggle on the inside and outside.

**Under New Management: Resistance to Prisons in Ontario & Quebec:** A history of the establishment of the Canadian prison system, and of prisoner resistance in Ontario and Quebec.

**Against Innocence: Race, Gender, & the Politics of Safety:** By Jackie Wang. An essay arguing that society's obsession with the "innocence" of victims of police and state violence makes revolutionary and insurgent politics unimaginable.

**Pretty Third-Party Surprise:** Mia, a pre-op trans girl is expecting to spend the night pleasing her boyfriend and her dominating mistress. Then an unexpected third party joins in on the fun. Featuring 3 versions of the story based on submissions from PCP members! (words only)

**Female Keep Separate: Prisons, Gender and the Violence of Inclusion:** A critique of Canada's "trans-inclusive" prison policies, and an exploration of how gender is both experienced and enforced in prison. Written by a trans anarchist and former prisoner.

**Fire Ant: Anarchist Prisoner Solidarity #17:** A quarterly publication focused on amplifying the voices of anarchist prisoners and generating mutual aid solidarity for imprisoned comrades. A collaboration between anarchist prisoners and anarchists in Maine.

## ORGANIZING VICTORIES

Before coming to prison I read lots of negative things that I should prepare to experience being an openly gay man who couldn't even pretend to pass as straight (thanks vocal cords), so I tried my best to be ready for the worst. Once arriving to Bowden though, I've come to be surprised in positive ways more often than not in how I get treated by the other inmates.

Sure, coming to prison in rural Alberta feels like I've jumped into a time machine that has taken me back to a time



where being racist, sexist, and homophobic are commonplace, but I realized that the population as a whole does not share similar views and those who do are actually the exceptions, not the rule.

It's easy to get bogged down with the negativity since it's generally louder and in your face, but there is far more positivity that I've seen when I step back and see things as a whole. I find that many of the men who express these negative ideals are simply unaware, rather than being genuinely hateful. I know that not all institutions are like this one that I'm so lucky to be in, especially compared to the United States, but please know you're not alone and hopefully wherever you are, there are more allies than you're aware of.

I don't know why I ever thought that I'd be one of the only LGBTQ people here in prison because I've honestly met so many different people who fall outside the cisgender heterosexual standards since being here and that number seems to grow with each passing month (I guess us gays aren't all angels that are adored by everyone else's parents, ahaha [not that the two are mutually exclusive]). As happy as I am to not be alone, part of me is like "damn, I don't want any LGBTQ people to be in jail!"

When I discovered there was no LGBTQ group here and that several people had tried and been unsuccessful to form one in the past, I knew I had to do something about it because that's the kind of person I am. I've been very fortunate to have the support of our library and the mental health staff, so when our group became official in the late spring of 2022 I had already obtained a decent collection of informational resources and a list of LGBTQ literature to distribute!

Attendance has fluctuated from week to week, but I hope that as time goes on the group will be a valuable safe space to those who need it as well as an educational tool for those who want it.

I've reached out to a couple other LGBTQ groups in institutions across Canada with aspirations to work with them to create a cross-country network of support and resource sharing, so if anyone reading this wants to reach out they're more than welcome to mail our LGBTQ group here at Bowden. We're eager to show our support!

*Cody Herrel*

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Shalom PCP,

I was just reading the latest issue of "The Word is Out" & the story of Wayne Walker on page 14 crushed me! I relate so very much with the being used aspect of it and the "Big Dick Clique" within the gay community.

I've had a rough time (both in and out of prison). I cried at Wayne's loss 'cause it's my loss as well. To Wayne I'd like to say it will pass, but that's a lie. I've lost a lover when free and one in prison. I was twenty three for the first, and twenty nine for the second. I've been jaded by it of course; but Wayne - you'll honor "Tristan" with your life. You can make him a part of your happiness and his spirit will strengthen you.

The entire section on relationships was outstanding! I've always had a few "friends" in various groups, so I've seen a lot of different views of gay guys. For me it becomes a problem when I'm cast as weak 'cause someone I trusted puts my business out in the open. Yes, I LOVE being fucked, so what? Then, when the punching starts I get jumped after kicking some ass (nothing pisses off straights like getting beat up by a "punk").

[FYI: Punk is originally a term for young hoodlum or thug (ie, Punk Rock is a reflection of street thugs' wild nature. "Thug Rock"!!!). I love being Fag Punk]

Richard Risher

I just finished reading my first issue of *The Word is Out!* (issue 24) and I have to say thank you for all that you all are. I recently came out to my friends and family (with mixed reactions to say the least) and now I finally feel free! *The Word is Out!* is the community I've been searching for for a long time. I hope to become an active member in my new family. I am a revolutionary to the bone and I will fight for the liberation of all of my brothers and sisters. Thank you so much. Sending revolutionary love to all that are reading these words and to all of the oppressed!

G. Nerd

Prisoner Correspondence Project,

I read the article in the PCP newsletter from my trans rainbow family members. I saw the request for art and articles. I hope this will help on all fronts.

I am a transmale, legal gender-male and legal name-Zhi Kai H. Vanderford. I have been incarcerated since 1987, totaling 36 years on a Minnesota '25 to life' sentence. I was housed in California [14 years], Oklahoma [12 years] and Minnesota the remainder.

My first thought is that romantic relationships are generally difficult for all people. Then there are those of us that are a bit more unique and of course, it narrows the field of dating and acceptance. I've been on testosterone a few years. I'm a friendly guy, perhaps even popular due to my

My life is still in the toilet here in Iowa DOC, USA. But it is slowly getting easier and somewhat normal. My cousin just came out and is transitioning and we both support each other within DOC.

I've been in contact with my family, who at first rejected my decision to transition to a woman. And I am also connected to my real father's family who live in Montreal QC Canada and in Scotland UK. My youngest child is also transitioning from MTF and lives with her aunts in Montreal. So as for now, the Gods and Goddesses are with me always and with my kin and kinfolk.

On a more uplifting note and a "VICTORIOUS CHEER FOR THE IOWA STATE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY," it was won in the Iowa Supreme Court that equal rights and rights to our medical care through state funded "Medicaid" must pay for Gender Reaffirming Surgeries of all likes. It took awhile but a win for us all in Iowa. Yeh!!! <3<3<3

Evelyne Ryder

Everything is up and running in full swing here at Valley State Prison...and there have been no positive Covid cases here in the past 2 months!! Groups have begun here too! There is a newer Mental Health Group here at this facility run by a clinician who is a huge LGBTQ supporter. It is well attended but still in the development phase!

It's not dealing with any LGBTQ issues as of yet, but it feels like doorways are being opened in this direction on the horizon.

Robert Poizner

*Do you have success stories from organizing inside your prison? Were you able to advocate for better conditions or run an LGBTQ group? What challenges did you overcome and what lessons did you learn? We want to share your victories in our newsletter! Please use the header "Organizing Victories" and keep your submission under 500 words.*



T. RANDALL

setting. Still, loneliness is a more constant companion than not, because I want to be loved for me, not as a replacement for a shortage of cis males.

I have not had a significant other relationship for six years. I have not given up on love, just found love of trans family and many projects that fill the void. One project is self discovery, self love, and worth. You cannot contribute what you do not have. Forgiveness, mercy, love and kindness begin after realizing how you came to be incarcerated and knowing you will not repeat those mistakes. I don't believe you owe an explanation to the world. You may not even be able to articulate your remorse to others. But you need to work on your own dysfunction, heal, and know yourself. People in prison are incarcerated because of mistakes; some mistakes more permanent than others.

No matter how fortunate and gifted in some area of life, it seems we can be lacking in romantic love, respect as an individual while incarcerated or a place to fit in. But truly no matter how alone you feel, we are alone, together. Alone, but alike in different spaces. The struggle is real but together we have a voice. We are the elements that erode stone. Stay strong, encouraged, and busy ... this too shall pass.

Zhi Kai H. Vanderford

*Do you have some feelings about this issue of The Word is Out? Let us know what you think! Please use the header "Letter to the Editor" and keep your submission under 100 words.*



## ADVICE COLUMN

Ms. Amber FayeFox Kim,

I know that you're fabulous so there's no need to ask. Who me? Dirt bad. Physically: passable, mentally tormented, spiritually elated because God is good.

I'm writing for several reasons. I have limited space so I must be brief. I've been incarcerated for eighteen years and have placed my name and info on every site known to man in search of a cool somebody to share my coolness with. I received one hit who expected me to pay them to write me. Out of all the singles in the world, why can't I connect with one? Am I really so unlovable as my mom suggested when I was a kid? Should I give up? (P.S. I think you're sooo great! Thank you.)

*Tired of Being Alone*

Dear Tired of Being Alone,

I absolutely hear you. Playing the getting to know you game can be rough, and it's the worst when you have no one to play it with. I went through a five-year period with absolutely no one on my team in or out of prison. That long stretch is some of the hardest time I've ever done. The first thing I want to tell you is that you're not doing anything wrong, though I would invite you to consider your approach.

When looking for a pen pal I've found the biggest hurdle is finding someone I can vibe with, especially since I'm a little strange. Now, there's nothing wrong with being a little strange. I'm just being honest about who and how I am while recognizing that for me to vibe with someone that means they will most likely be a little strange too. I wasn't able to get any pen pals until after I figured out how to let my true self shine in the words of my profile page. Which of course meant I had to dig deep and get to know myself really well.

I suspect you need to do the same. What kind of vibration are you sending out in your profile? Are you looking for "Sexy-Times-R-Us"? Or are you looking for a meeting of the minds? Do you want someone to collaborate with? Or someone with decidedly different opinions to argue with? Do you want Mx. Right, Mx. RightNow, or just a dependable friend who cares? What do you truly need in your life?

Choosing what to put in your profile is much like choosing what to wear before going to a singles bar. Sensible shoes, bootcut jeans and a plaid buttonup sends one message. Stilettos, mini skirt, and babydoll tee sends another.

What vibration is true to you and matches what you're looking for? When those things align, the people who do write you should be more along the lines of what you're looking for.

*Amber FayeFox Kim*

Dear Amber,

I am a man who feels misunderstood by many because I do not really belong to the "in-crowds" of any known groups. I do not claim a sexual identity anymore, for I have moved beyond the need to label myself. The way I am and carry myself makes me different from the LGBTQ family and I see it.

I am also a Christian, yet it is not easy to get affirming support in here, let alone Christian and affirming support. The Christians respect me because I carry myself in a way that does seem to fit their ideals, although I know that if I were to express myself in a different way, they would not approve. I find that I am in need of a mentor that is Christian and affirming but I cannot seem to find any in here. I know they are out there and I am seeking them, you know where to look?

I just want to be truly seen, heard, respected, and loved 100% for me mentally, emotionally, and spiritually in my journey because it is rough always being strong. I can take care of my physical needs; I'm not looking for a relationship right now. But a good mentor or a true spiritually-minded and affirming friend would be nice. Do you know where I could look to find one? I have a small support system on the outside and I am trying to rebuild my life by creating a new family of positive people to replace the blood relatives that have abandoned me. I hope you can help me with some resources or anything useful to guide me in my journey.

*Hopeful Seeker*

Dear Hopeful Seeker,

Being in a community, but not entirely of that community is hard, but being able to recognize both sides of yourself can, in the long run, be intensely rewarding. This applies to your LGBTQ fam, your church congregation, as well as any other parts of your identity which can pull you in various directions. I wish I could just give you one address to write that would solve your problem, but it's a little more complicated than that. Mostly because, like you, I don't have access to google. Instead, I recommend you broaden your search. Try asking your pastor, people in your congregation, Bible study group, and outside support if they know of any prisoner resource lists. Then do the same with folks in your LGBTQ community. Be prepared to write a lot of letters. Ask those places the same question. Do you have a list of resources for prisoners?

Do you know of any places that help LGBTQ people or Christians? The one address I can recommend is  
PARC PO Box 70447 Oakland, CA 94612  
[www.PrisonActivist.org](http://www.PrisonActivist.org)

They have a 24 page resource list, and is the place where I originally discovered PCP in the first place. I commend you on creating and walking your own path and I'm sorry I cannot be of more help.

*Amber Fayefox Kim*

Dear Amber FayeFox Kim,

I am a trans woman male to female on HRT meds and interested in other trans people and the rare intersex/hermaphrodite person. I have a boyfriend but I feel like he isn't enough for me. I do love him but I don't think he loves me like I love him. He is more focused on devices that keep his attention than he is on me. I also hate to pardon sexual desires otherwise I would act on them. ...see I am a Scorpio in the horoscope. If you have any ideas of what I should be I would love to hear them.

*Confused & Caring*

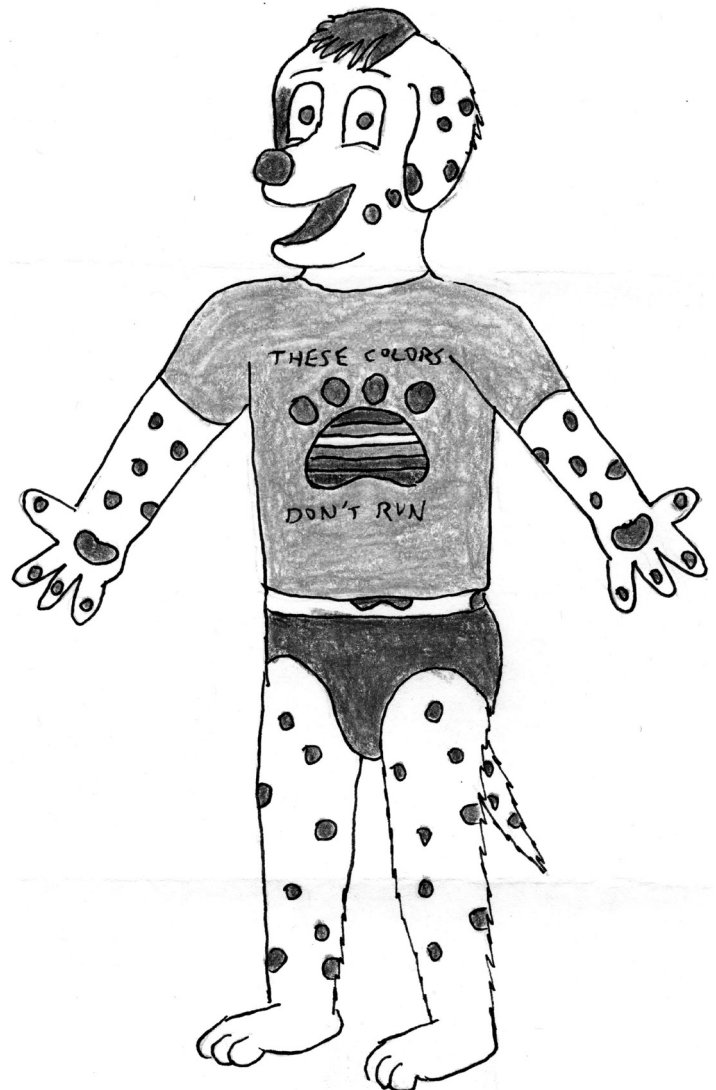
Dear Confused and Caring,

Who should you be? You should be you of course! A Scorpio like you has so much awesome mystery to offer, so don't sell yourself short. As for your fears that you love your boyfriend more than he loves you, hate to break it to you, but that's often how life works.

The good news is this in itself is not necessarily a deal breaker for most couples, but it is something which has to be navigated to make sure both people in the relationship feel loved, cared for, and seen. However, if he doesn't make you feel important, if he doesn't treat you as special enough for him to put down his tablet or turn off the TV, if he won't give you the time, attention, and care you need, well, you can always dump him and pour all that loving energy you've been giving him into making yourself feel good.

*Amber Fayefox Kim*

*Got a question for Inside Collective member Amber Fayefox Kim? Send us your questions for Amber (100-200 words) and we'll pass it along. We'll publish a few questions and answers each issue.*



# NEWS UPDATES

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## MORE PRISONERS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE COLLEGE WITH PELL GRANT EXPANSION

Pell Grant eligibility is set to be extended to people in prison on July 1, ending a ban that prevented most incarcerated individuals from getting federal aid for school.

The change has been in the making since 2020 when lawmakers voted to expand Pell Grant access to prisoners after such help was banned in 1994.

An education department spokesperson said around 760,000 prisoners will be eligible for the Pell Grant, which is also increasing at the beginning of July to \$7,395.

The expanded eligibility means about 30,000 additional prisoners will be getting \$130 million worth of aid per year to get their education while they are serving their sentences, the spokesperson said.

“The expansion of the Second Chance Pell Experiment will allow for opportunities to study the best practices for implementing the reinstatement of Pell Grant eligibility for incarcerated students, and will expand the geographic range of the programs,” the Department of Education said in April 2022.

Prison education programs have long been promoted as ways to help incarcerated individuals get the education they need to hold a job once their sentence is over and brings down reincarceration rates.

However, the idea does face some pushback and is only accessible to prisoners who are held at facilities that are able to invest the time and space into a college program.

*Adapted from “Around 760,000 people in prison will be eligible for free college with Pell Grant expansion” by Lexi Lonas (29 June 2023), The Hill.*

## LEGAL VICTORY FOR TRANSGENDER PRISONERS

Amid a backdrop of recent anti-transgender laws in the U.S., the settlement of Makyyla Holland’s case in Broome County, New York marks a significant legal victory for transgender prisoners’ rights. Holland, a trans woman, alleged in her lawsuit that during her six-week incarceration in 2021, she was denied access to hormone therapy, beaten by correctional officers after refusing to take off her clothes in front of male guards, and forced to share living spaces and showers with male inmates.

The settlement, announced on Thursday, introduces a countywide policy mandating the housing of inmates based on their gender identity and ensuring access to gender-affirming care. The lawsuit, filed with support from the New York Civil Liberties Union and the Transgender Legal Defense & Education Fund, highlighted the pervasive discrimination against transgender inmates within Broome County Jail.

Holland’s experience mirrors the challenges faced by many transgender prisoners in the U.S., who are at increased risk of assault and discrimination. Alongside a similar agreement in Steuben County, New York, Holland’s case’s settlement represents a positive shift in policies. These incremental victories should be seen as steps toward needed changes at a broader scale, including rewriting state laws to codify protections for transgender inmates. Despite the trauma experienced during her incarceration, Holland remains committed to advocating for the trans community, and she emphasizes the importance of treating all individuals, incarcerated or not, with dignity and respect.

*Adapted from “New York lawsuit triggers big policy changes for transgender inmates” by Jaclyn Diaz (24 August, 2023), NPR*

## RECORD RELEASE FROM PRISON BAND THAT OPENED FOR STEVIE WONDER

Ron Aikens, a former janitor at Philadelphia City Hall, has a remarkable past. While incarcerated in the 1970s, he was the lead singer of The Power of Attorney, an all-prisoner soul and funk band. The band regularly left prison under armed guard to perform hundreds of gigs, collaborated with music legends like Stevie Wonder, James Brown and Alice Cooper, and recorded in major studios. In recent years, Aikens, now 74, has embarked on a musical comeback with a new group, Ron & The Hip Tones.

Aikens recalls that, in contrast to contemporary prisons’ inhospitable environment towards the arts, during the 1970s incarcerated individuals were recognized for and given more space to develop their talents. Aikens emphasizes the rehabilitative opportunities he experienced while playing with The Power of Attorney. Despite current challenges, inmates continue to create art and music, and prisoner bands do still exist. One exciting example is the upcoming release of the Lifers Groove’s album from Die Jim Crow Records.

Ron Aikens and his producer Max Ochester are currently seeking funding to release Ron & The Hip Tones’ debut album, showcasing Aikens’ resilience and musical journey, encapsulated in the poignant lyrics of the forthcoming song, “Criminal.”

*Adapted from “How a Prison Band Opened for Stevie Wonder and Released a Record” by Maurice Chammah (04 November 2023), The Marshall Project*

## I RAN FOR OFFICE WHILE INCARCERATED. I HOPE OTHERS WILL DO THE SAME

I was in my cell when I heard the news of my win—5 A.M., barely awake, teeth unbrushed. The unit’s correctional officer said the lieutenant wanted to talk to me. I was now a high profile detainee, warranting new protocols and more security, namely because, as the first incarcerated person to win public office in the nation’s capital, the media blitz had already begun. I had to get myself together, so I called my mom who had heard the story on the radio.

“You won, son,” she said. That’s when I knew it had really happened. I had just become a D.C. Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner.

I was granted parole and realized my freedom on November 22, 2021. But before that, inside the D.C. Jail, I assumed the role of unofficial spokesperson long before my win as Commissioner. Part of that came from Young Men Emerging (YME), the program I co-founded with my best friend and freedom fighter Michael Woody wherein a group of us who had served some serious time became mentors to newly incarcerated men between 18 and 25. We transformed a punitive environment into one that centered counseling, education, and financial literacy while activating a community—including administration, officers, and those on the outside.

With time, our mentees advocated for themselves and thought like citizens; a collective mindset that combated a criminal legal system designed to strip us of our personhood and snuff out our hope for justice. And when D.C. restored our ability to vote in time for the 2020 election, we ignited that citizenship.

Mobilizing incarcerated people to vote tells the outside world they can’t do whatever they want with us, that we get our voice on the record. So when it came time to cast my ballot in 2020, I wore that sticker every chance I got. “I Voted” lasted nearly 30 days until the adhesion wore off. I even co-hosted a podcast with a fellow mentor so we could circulate information on our newly restored rights. Like YME, the podcast brought in experts from the outside to discuss issues of democratic participation. And that’s when I learned about the seat for Commissioner.

The day we interviewed D.C. Council Member Charles Allen, he started talking about the Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC): the group of representatives unique to D.C., adopted in 1974 as “an experiment in governance at the grassroots,” according to policy expert David F. Garrison. Like a council member, each of the eight wards in D.C. has Commissioners to voice the needs of their constituents. In fact, Mayor Muriel Bowser began her political trajectory as a Commissioner. So when I heard that Ward 7F—the Park Kennedy luxury apartments on C street, the Harriet Tubman Women’s Shelter, and the D.C. Jail where I was currently incarcerated—had a vacant seat for the taking, my antenna went up.

Between YME and the restoration to vote, I had a taste for civic engagement that freed me. It wasn’t a question of why I should do this, but why shouldn’t I? I was sentenced to die in prison; but now, away from the places that held me captive

in South Carolina, Georgia, Virginia, Ohio, Oklahoma, West Virginia, New York, Kentucky—now, I’m back home, in our nation’s capital, and had a chance to advocate for my brothers and sisters inside. I had a chance to debunk the myths and the grossly misconceptualized definitions of what it means to be “an inmate,” “a prisoner,” “a criminal.” This seat was for someone like me. Once in office, I became a direct line to the D.C. Jail that hadn’t existed before.

No one had ever heard of ANC in the jail, and no one had elected to run elsewhere in Ward 7F. So, in the Spring of 2021, when I submitted my petition to run, Joel Castón was the only name on the ballot. The news of my win came a month later, but it was retracted soon thereafter based on a technicality. The Board of Elections proposed a special election and, by then, word had gotten out within the jail about my running and what exactly ANC was. Now, there was a new spotlight on the race, and I could feel this awakened conscience of my fellow incarcerated people who realized they could also be a part of the democratic process. So when four guys stepped up to run against me, I no longer cared if I won. This was a movement. We all needed to run.

When it comes to reform or alternatives to incarceration, we’ve made little progress by leaving the conversation to politicians who have not been directly impacted by the system; who have not themselves been called a number, or faced a judge delivering a decades-long sentence. As we call for more representation in politics, we’ve left out the key demographic of individuals impacted by incarceration. After all, who better to fight for record expungement, banning the box on job and college applications, minimum wage inside prisons and jails, or creating universal access to life insurance than those who have experienced these legal blindspots? As Keeda Haynes put it when discussing her 2020 loss in Tennessee to then Congressman Jim Cooper: “They want to pick our brains or put us on panels, but what about when it comes to picking someone to lead?”

As Commissioner, I led the Redistricting Task Force—the ANC’s Super Bowl—to make the D.C. Jail a single-member district, ensuring those incarcerated would have their own, singular representative. I served as treasurer, approving budgets and allocating funds to local community organizations. And when the Director of our facility received a ruling by the Federal Bureau of Prisons to depopulate—meaning transfer people, some of whom had open cases, without warning to facilities across the U.S.—as a direct result of January 6, 2021, I stepped in.

Those convicted in the insurrection became my cellmates and constituents, which meant I was giving representatives like Marjorie Taylor Greene tours of the facility. At the time, I didn’t know who she was, nor did I know many felt she was there to advance the needs of the January sixers. I did know that what Representative Greene said about the jail was accurate: it was “like a prisoner of war” camp; we were “in torturous lockdown.” It always had been, we always had been. But trouble isn’t trouble until it’s yours. Soon after, the call for depopulating the Jail came out of an inspection by the U.S. Marshals Service, citing “systemic failure” like unsanitary conditions, mistreatment by guards, and poor quality food, all of which had been recently “raised by various members of the judiciary.”



HORACE THOMAS

We had a new, unprecedented microscope on us. Consequently, FBOP issued a ruling to transfer 400 individuals from the jail. The 40 incarcerated after January 6 were not on this list, but I was. When my name was added, my heart dropped. To be taken out of the jail meant I'd lose my title and my access to constituents. At this point in my carceral journey, I had been granted parole and was actively engaged in my transition: securing my apartment, opening a bank account, identifying employment opportunities. And still. Still it could hang over my head that, at any given moment, I could be handcuffed, wrapped in belly chains with a black box on my hands, stored like a package in a plane or van for 6 to 12 hours, all to head to a facility where I'd have to adapt to new prison politics.

To combat the transfers, including my own, Councilmember Allen held a special hearing where I was given the chance to speak. As a Commissioner on the inside, I knew the terrain, knew the stakes, knew what it felt like when we all watched the insurrectionists on the community room's TV, knowing had they looked like us they would have been killed on site. I testified that the facility's poor, unsanitary, and hostile conditions existed long before the incarceration of these people—they just came to the forefront because a group of mostly white folks were raising hell. I shared that FBOP's "solution" would only exacerbate the situation. Those individuals would be taken farther away from their communities and family visitors, with limited access to their legal representation which, for those with open cases, was paramount. What's more, none of these people had complained about their conditions; they didn't want to leave. Eventually, I was taken off the list, but 400 other men just like

me were not. And on July 19 of this year, it was announced that Commissioner Bishop, to whom I passed the baton, was also ripped from his post by the FBOP.

When I ran for my seat in 2021, I was the only incarcerated person to run in the first round. In the last election when I passed the baton, there were 20 candidates. Our movement is growing, and my win coincided with other elected officials impacted by incarceration, like Washington Representative Tarra Simmons, who is fighting to increase wages for those inside; Rhode Island Representative Cherie Cruz, who is tackling parole recalculation and record expungement; New York Assembly member Eddie Gibbs, who launched a democratic club for people with conviction histories; and, just last month, Yusef Salaam, one of the Exonerated Five, who was elected as Council member in Harlem. Together, we're demonstrating that our people have a voice. Together, we're redefining what the blueprint for political leadership looks like.

*By Joel Castón, as told to Abigail Glasgow (10 August 2023), Time*

## SEND US YOUR ART!

Please send us your art for the next issues of *The Word is Out*, including your renditions of our header—see Marc McMurray's beautiful drawing on page 1 for inspiration!





# THE WISDOM OF BIRDS

*A reflective and prospective column primarily featuring the natural world, providing birds as the vehicle, to give the reader a chance to ponder and observe one's own surroundings. I am an avid birder, including here at Lompoc, and a student of Buddhism and Taoism. The column will provide knowledge, and wisdom, by weaving themes of the natural world, primarily birds, into the teachings of the Buddha and Lao-tzu.*

In its fledgling state this column was to be titled “The Wisdom of Crows.” Crows have made an appearance in a previous essay, yet were they a source of wisdom?

Changing the title to “The Wisdom of Birds” was an act of full inclusion—wisdom to be discovered by observing all birds, regardless of identity.

On both sides of the fence identity has become politicized. It is yet another tool of separation. The term “politics” means different things depending on what side of the fence one resides on. For those on the inside, politics means something quite different than it does on the outside. Does it, really?

Amongst birds, it is the owl that is most identified with wisdom. Who comes to mind in your life as being as wise as an owl? In describing that person's wisdom, what adjectives paint the picture of that being? My well-worn dictionary defines wisdom with words such as “knowledge,” “insight,” and “judgment in terms of good sense.” Does identity—whether or not it is self-assigned, assigned at birth, or assigned by others—impart knowledge, insight, and good sense?

Conformity is not a synonym for wisdom. Does identity and the politics that are attached to it demand some form of correctness? Ironically, my dictionary defines “political correctness” as conforming. Is wisdom truly “knowledge,” “insight,” and “good sense” sans identity? Free of correctness?

The wisdom of crows: David Allen Sibley writes in his wonderful book *What It's Like To Be A Bird* that crows “understand the concept of trading, and have a sense of fair trade. Some humans were “fair” and traded items of equal value, while others were “unfair,” giving a lower-quality item in exchange. The birds learned the tendency of each individual human and preferred to trade with the fair ones.”

Sibley also notes that crows are able to recognize a person by looking at their face, going as far as to associate each person with good or bad experiences. Sibley explains that crows communicate this information to other crows. Is this intelligence or wisdom? Both? How different, or similar, is this from how humans, on either side of the fence, interact with one another?

In Buddhism, wisdom comes from the transformation of learning to experience. Is there Buddhist wisdom to be

found in the fair trading between crows and humans? Is this wisdom embedded in a form of identity? Or, does wisdom transcend identity? The wisdom of crows, I conclude, is when what is learned becomes an actual practice that benefits all.

What wisdom do you practice? Has your wisdom been shaped by how you identify yourself? By how others identify you? Do you practice fair-trading like the crows do? Has your own wisdom expanded, contracted, or become stagnant due to incarceration? Has “incarceration” been more physical, emotional or spiritual throughout your life? What bird do you most identify with?

A reader of this column wrote to share the parallels he found between spoonbills and his Buddhist practice. Roseate spoonbills, residents of the coastal areas from Florida and Georgia, westward to Texas, with rare visits to the southern parts of New Mexico, Arizona, and California, hunt for small fish and shrimp entirely by touch. They use their spoon-shaped bill to “see” their prey. There is a wisdom in being able to see without using one's eyes.

Barn owls share in this sightless wisdom. Researchers are unable to explain how, in total darkness, a barn owl can track its own flight progress to the exact spot where a mouse sits—a mouse that can't be seen and that emits no sound. The owl is able to track the mouse's movements while considering its own movement. Perhaps, wisdom is a non-tangible, non-measurable quality.

A final word, and a personal anecdote, about crows. I work on the grounds and landscaping crew, tending to a large area with trees, shrubs, flower beds, and lawns. As I prefer to work on my own, the crows who spend their days in the areas I tend to are constant companions. With no intent to trade, I bring crackers and peanuts to feed this extended family of *Corvus brachyrhynchos*, or American Crow. The other day, as I worked beneath the canopy of branches of a large Ficus tree, I felt the impact of a round, hard object on my back. A walnut. Walnuts aren't to be found anywhere, not sold, no trees, on this compound. Looking up into the tree I spotted a crow looking down at me. The wisdom of crows.

A lifetime of struggling to identify. A constant bombardment of voices broadcasting whom one can or cannot love, who one can or cannot be. Self-mutism ensues. A path of repressed identity is taken. Yet, within all of the noise from a society that doesn't listen comes a divine silence on the wings of a bird.

Exploring sources of wisdom provides for a different path. Who one truly is will be revealed as one experiences knowledge, insight, and good sense along the way. This message of love can be found in the wisdom of birds.

Jason Morris

# A DAY IN MY LIFE

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1-16-23

I awaken at 5:50am. I ask the guard for a shower and rec. *We don't have staff—sorry.* I'm in solitary confinement and this is common. As I listen to NPR inform me that the male prisoners in fourteen prisons continue their hunger strike protesting inhumane treatment in solitary confinement. I'm in a good mood. I'm not alone. It's 300 men refusing to eat until the state of Texas reevaluates who should be in solitary. They're asking the state to judge them on their behavior and not who they socialized with. Some have been in solitary for decades. In Texas, no air conditioning in the prisons and during triple digit temps this is dangerous. Like me, they complain of lack of rec and showers due to lack of staff. I'm hopeful.

Until a guard walks thru at 9:10am yelling, *Happy James Earl Ray Day!* For those who don't know, James Earl Ray is the man who assassinated Dr. MLK. My mood sinks. I'm 50 years old and I'm in a mental asylum masked as a prison. I've been in solitary confinement seven years. No TV, no phone and we just got tablets (but only for emails).

Everyday it feels like I have a new illness. Carpal tunnel, bunions, floaters in my eye, arthritis and the ever present menopause. I need Elmers glue and scotch tape to put me together.

Yesterday, the white female warden stopped at my door. Every encounter, she feels compelled to comment on my hair. Why do white people feel it's their right to police Black people's hair? No, not all white. I had my hair in a bun on top of my head. But, because it's long and heavy it was leaned to the side as the day progressed. Her comment: *You're not twelve, why do you have your hair like that?* I ask her to move me to another cell because the severely mentally ill lady beneath me keeps blowing out the power by throwing water in the electric sockets. I'm not able to turn my fan on or listen to the radio because she believes "Demons" are in the electricity. The Warden ignores me, as usual.

Last night someone was gassed because they were suicidal. The effects still linger and my nose is still running. It's a new stronger chemical gas.

Today—I wanted to listen to topics about Black greatness. But, I can't. Is this what Dr. King died for?

*Kwaneta Harris*

This is a recent journal I wrote. Today's date is 10-15-2022 and I just finished interviewing Christine Lynn Weatherspoon AKA CeeJay.

She is the first transgender incarcerated here at Richard J. Donovan to have a sex reassignment surgery. Yes she's got a vagina and I've seen it because I'm a nosy bitch and I'm curious & envious because it looked beautiful. They did a good job in a Beverly Hills center where the sex reassignment surgery was done.

It took a total of eight hours and she gave me a detailistic list of events from start to finish. She said after

the surgery she was in pain and they gave her morphine to ease her pain. She's also using a wheelchair to get around. The doctor told her to avoid any form of exercise to avoid sweat in that area due to infections and fungal infections. She was told by her doctor to avoid having sexual intercourse for six months to 1oneyear. Because it can go all bad and she will get bacterial infections for the rest of her life. She said she'll wait a year or so before she gets penetrated in her vagina.

I see a lot of jealousy by other girls done to her. She is the poster child for every transgender here at RJ Donovan and, all up and down the state of California, every trans girl I know wishes they were her.

She's a beautiful, smart, kind hearted girl. I met her in 2010 in Lancaster and she has blossomed into a classy woman with so much potential. She's so giving and loving and she deserves the opportunity she's gotten. I can honestly say she is all that and a bag of chips and she is not stuck-up or thinks she's better than anyone. She carries herself with grace and compassion, which makes her even more beautiful than she already is. One day I wish to be her or just like her.

I kinda wish that she got the attention from all media platforms to recognize her for being a first. All the media should write a story about her because she did it. She achieved the dream and she told me she's never been more happy in her life.

We are in a male prison and she's a legal woman walking around as an inmate. I cannot believe this. I'm baffled and honored to have had the opportunity to interview her and know her story. She's a bad bitch and we need to follow in her footsteps. OK, time to check out.

*Yvette*

December 9, 2022

My alarm goes off just after 5:30am, giving me enough time to get up, get dressed, take a piss, then wake others up who asked me to wake them this morning for breakfast. Then I hang out in the TV room to catch the 7-day weather forecast, along with news headlines for that day. Finally around 6 "Mainline Is Open" is called over the intercom, and we all file out for breakfast at the chow hall.

Right after breakfast I come back and hopefully sleep until 9am, when I get up for the day, make a cup of hot tea, take my daily meds, then read or do work search puzzles until we are called to lunch.

My afternoons get interesting depending on the day of the week. On my scheduled day I will shop at the commissary. Or I will hang out with friends at the library. Or I will simply stay in and draw my comic books. Then I will have my afternoon snack and a cup of cappuccino. On nice days I will even walk the track out at recreation during the afternoon. Then around 4pm we have count time and mail call for the day.

During the evening, depending on my mood I will hang out in a corner of the library with my other gay friends and talk extra flamboyant, or if volleyball is being held in the



MOCHA K. SCROGGIN

gym, be flamboyantly gay in the stands. Or just stay in and draw some more and call home.

After the final recall of the day I will take my shower and have my evening snack of milk and donuts, or honey buns, or whatever is in my locker. After the 9:30pm count I will lay in my bed and tune out the world listening to my music until I feel tired, usually around 11pm. Finally I will strip down, crawl into bed, and slowly drift off to sleep, hoping for another good day tomorrow.

*Spark Dalmatian*

As a prisoner with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), I thrive on routine. Which, in a lot of ways, makes prison a good environment. But as anyone who has ever been to prison knows, it can quickly become unpredictable. To truly see a day through my eyes, you must know and understand the level of anxiety someone with ASD deals with.

We live with constant fear of change. For someone with ASD, even the smallest change can trigger a massive emotional reaction, either internally, externally, or both. These changes can include, but are not limited to, a meal not arriving on time, a change in menu, a forced move to a new dorm/room, a friend leaving, or a transfer of your own. Any change, however slight, can ruin a day.

Noise is another factor. People with ASD usually have sensory sensitivity. This can be bothersome in many ways. Overstimulation of the senses can cause a meltdown.

ASD is a complex disorder. No two people with ASD have the exact same symptoms, and even similar symptoms can be experienced in varying degrees. With that, I'll show you what a typical Monday looks like in my life.

It's morning. I'm woken by the sound of the dorm's loudspeaker making announcements that never inform me or direct me. They're just blasted at me. It's the third time I've heard it this morning. Even though I sleep with earplugs, that speaker is my enemy. It's excruciatingly loud. Might as well get up.

I feel the anxiety rising. I have no idea what time they'll unlock the doors today and I must complete my morning routine or else I'll be behind for the day. I get up, do my Bible devotion, make my coffee, then my bed, brush my teeth, and watch the news. As I do, I hear the sound of keys jingling. I hate that sound. As my door opens, my mind is flooded with sensory input.

It's Monday and we've been locked down for two days. I have to force myself to switch gears from the safety and control of my cell to the chaos of the dorm.

As I attempt to throw my trash away and prepare for a shower, people's voices bombard my ears. Inmates are shouting, coming up to ask me questions, doors are slamming, and that damn speaker squawks again. I cover my ears. The dorm is chaos. It's loud and it's confusing. I don't understand the social rules and often make mistakes when attempting conversation.

I grab my shower bag and head for my favorite shower, the only one I use. The feel of the water in my crocs makes me uncomfortable, so I rush through bathing, shaving, and my daily laundry. Afterwards, I make a brisk trip through that chaos back to the relative quiet of my room.

Once dressed, I meet my friend, who is much like me. He's sympathetic to my condition, so we spend the day in my room using the table to watch a movie, or watch TV. Sometimes we just enjoy the company while reading.

Time for lunch. I couldn't eat breakfast because the texture of that meal makes it inedible. I hope lunch has something I can eat. As the hours pass, I crave lockdown time. Everyone else hates it. I love it because it is quiet. Well... quieter. I know my room well. I don't have to worry about others interrupting my tasks or bothering me with useless small talk. I can shut out the chaos (mostly) and shield myself. I can use my desk lamp as a dimmer source of light that doesn't

give me a headache like the dorm lights do. I don't have to worry about a CO or staff member taking me out for some unannounced reason. I can put in my headphones to drown out the chaos, wear what I want (because the uniforms make me feel stiff/itchy) and I can escape the overwhelming environment that is the dorm.

I complete my final task for the day. I clean my floor and listen to the news. After I call home, it's bedtime. My mind is exhausted. The effort it takes to pretend to be "normal" and the stress of the sensory input makes my mind toast.

I put my earplugs in, I say a prayer, and as my head hits the pillow, my enemy returns. Mr. loudspeaker voice, can you please stop so I can sleep tonight?

*Astro*

So A Day In The Life of Ari is like this. 7am I wake up, pee, and do my treatment: 5 min with #3 dilator, 25 minutes with #4. Then at 7:30am ish the doors open and I hop right in the shower. I grab my breakfast and go back to my room, clean up my equipment, put on location & deodorant & climb back into bed & go to sleep till 11am.

Then I wake up, say good morning, eat some breakfast, and hang out on my pod till 11. Then lunch comes. I eat lunch and lock up at 11:45 for health care movement at 12.

It's count so I'm in my cell until 1pm and I usually clean up my room and have my TV on mute. Then at 1 pm we have pod access. We just hang around and watch movies or play cards. I'm with family on my pod so we all get along and I love it.

At 3:30 healthcare again, so we lock up and at 4 it's count again. I do my treatment. I wipe myself clean and ready for the evening. Then it's the same thing, pod access until 10pm but for me, I do my treatment at 9pm so I can shower before bed. Then I watch a little TV and go to bed to do it all over again.

This is a day in the life of Ari right now. I wanna do some programs to get out of the Max and start working on getting out.

*Ariana Bushie*

I haven't been Incarcerated for long—only 2 years—but I have had a lot of trouble as a transgender woman in my short time being locked up. I have recently got my name legally changed, but Missouri DOC does not want to follow their own Policy and use my new legal name on everything.

I have also tried joining a program here to better my life, but MO DOC is trying to force me to cut my hair to make me look like a man. I feel discriminated against!

I usually sit and draw, color, and think about my hubby. He is super duper sweet and caring. I am only twenty-one years old but I am a U.S. ARMY Infantry Veteran. I served almost two years Active Duty.

I wish that someday all LGBTQ+ members can be treated like normal human beings.

Everyone Remember that: You are not alone, you are loved and accepted for who you are.

*Ashley Delrio*

12/07/22, A Day in My Life

Here in prison land, I've taken a lot of classes that teach bridge building through listening and communication skills. And by a lot, I mean sixty certificates for these various programs. I am in at least one class every week. One of my favorites is the Life Skills class. What is the purpose? Interesting you should ask. I have a serious anger management problem. It is mostly under control. I don't feel I will ever have to hit anyone again.

Prison land has made lazy and anger drain too much energy. I won't get any kudos from the Texas Department of Corrections for volunteering for these programs, but there are hidden penalties for not volunteering. Practicing meditation, yoga, the Alternatives to Violence model, and Twelve Steps also make me a happier, more secure person.

I don't have all the answers. Sometimes there don't seem to be any at all. I have to remain open to possibilities outside. Most of the time, I have no idea what should be done or if anything should be done at all. That is when I have to get on the bridge of communications and ask another person. Part of recovery is asking for help at least once per day... whether I need it or not.

Although I've been working as a Janitorial (SSI) for a while now, there are issues. Sometimes other inmates need my help to traffick and trade their products. Prison Land here is small, like a community college. We can only hold 3000 at maximum. They housed death row inmates here. I personally don't believe in the death row penalty system. What I'm about to admit is very painful for me. Come closer, so I can whisper this in your ear. Sometimes I have to ask a man to tell me what to do.

This necessitates the picket officer calling to the front desk officer on close custody where I work, telling him I'm doing less work and too much trafficking. One has to understand the struggle of inmates who are housed on close custody to know why I do what I do for them.

Fortunately my supervisor just told me to not go the wing while that particular officer was working there because that officer writes cases. The amazing news is I followed his instructions. I learned something. The desk officer helped me to not receive a disciplinary case. It wasn't too painful after all. Normally, I would have gotten an attitude.

The best way to live is to be open to the possibility of change. I have to remember to be open to communication from unexpected people who I think are jerks. I have to walk out on that bridge. I need to practice listening and be willing to try another person's solution or take in consideration what worked for them. I think this may be part of the secret to a happy life. Now the word is out about a day in my life. Be Bold; Be Unique; Be You-tiful. ....

*Mocha K. Scroggins*

A reflective and prospective look into a day in my life. As most know, prison is no place one would think they would spend most of their life at. A place that is falsely advertised about. This is a place of crime, holding people convicted of crimes under the hands of those committing crimes. Everyday is a day of Criminal Negligence, Criminal Conspiracy, Criminal Solicitation, and Obstruction of Prison Officials' Duties.

Every day since September 18th, 2022. I have been dealing with unwanted terror because of the knowing that prison officials are doing nothing about the drugs that are taking the lives of inmates. I have lost three close inmates behind this. Everyday I fear for it might be me next. A day in my life doesn't go by that I think about what may happen today.

Honestly Missouri needs serious help and support to help end these conditions that are causing more like myself to think and have these thoughts.

When will a day in my life receive the help to be normal again?

*David Boone Terre*

I wake up around 0430 each day to head off to my job assignment by 0530. I work in Ice & Beverages, which means I load up 25 barrels of ice, weighing 35 gallons each, to pass out around the unit. I also fill the various coolers and dispensers with ice water and other drinks for Lunch and Dinner. I enjoy the physical work because it keeps me strong and in great shape. It's also one of those spots where older cons find themselves a lot — as we generally avoid bullshit.

I am lucky to have the job as I tend to be very confrontational, but that is a good thing for my spot. I'm no pushover, and the administration values that. After work (I'm off and back at my cell by 1300 each day) I relax in my cell by listening to music and writing or drawing. There are also the

times I hook up if I've got a boy-toy or some such. Right now, I have a cellmate who is cool with my sexuality. We respect one another and that is cool. I've had horrible cellmates more times than not.

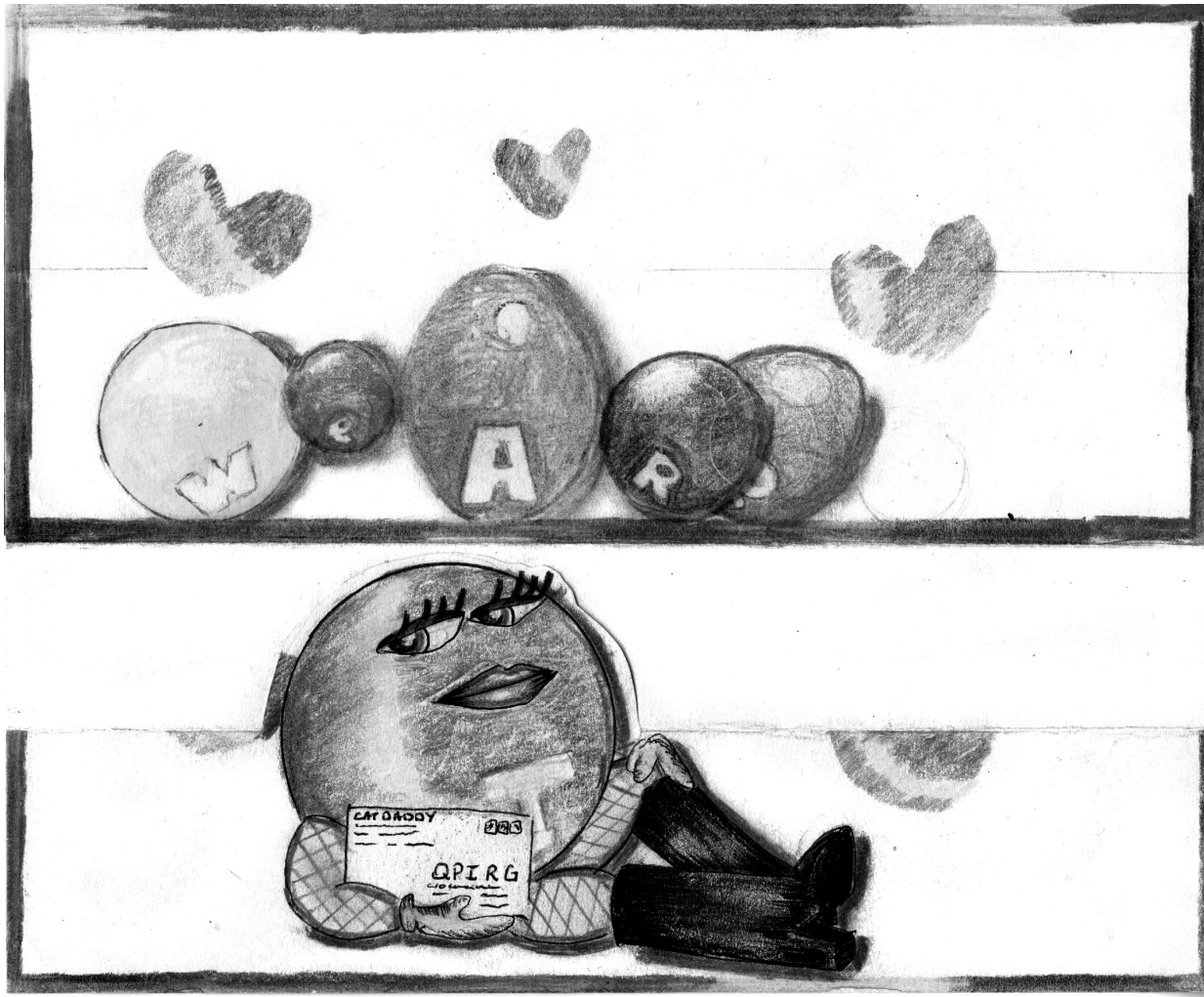
Around 1600 I go to the day room for a few hours to socialize. I have a couple of good friends on this wing and we value that time with one another. We work on language skills, nutrition facts and tips, or just share thoughts (plus joke a lot).

I tend to crash around 2000. At times I've been much more "adventurous," but as parole looms for the first time I'm really trying to hold it together. That's tougher than most people think. I have no tolerance for: phobics (trans, homo, etc.), antisemites, bullies, or close-minded people in general. I still end up fighting a lot even at 49 years old. Really trying to get a hold of that. As of this letter I've been "punch-free" for five weeks!

Now I freely admit to stirring thugs up a lot. I am white, jewish, genderfluid, alphafemme thug to the extreme. I don't bite my tongue, but have been changing my approach. Now I point out unpleasant similarities (when black guys badmouth gay kissing on TV I remind them how whites felt about blacks not so long ago). Education is key and I learn every day myself.

Oh, and I laugh now when someone asks me "Are you really gay?" — "Why," I'll say, "see something you like?"

*Richard Risher*





MARC MCMURRAIN

1-1-23

Hello, today I will explain what a day in life is like and what all I do to fill those days. I used to write a little post about once a week about my day-to-day, but my pen-pal who helped me post it on Facebook got a job and I haven't heard from him in over six months now. I used to post, or rather, have it posted on Facebook @FreeHappyStompingBear. I would like to go back to doing that—any takers?

First off all, I have to explain, I'm in the max, locked in 24/7. We don't get any yard call but once every month or so and to go you'll have to submit to a shake-down of your cell! We've only been getting out for showers once a week. . . so 24/7 in a cell. My current cell is in the "elbow" (corner) and the other wall has cells too, which means my neighbor and I can see each other, pass stuff back and forth which is cool sometimes but not so cool other times, like if he's at his door he has a clear unobstructed view of my bathroom area. And my other neighbors can watch me to, even though we're not supposed to. I keep something over my bars so they can't see me all the time.

My day generally starts around lunch. Quite often I'll go back to bed for a few more hours after lunch. I always put my lunch in bowls for later, 7pm-8pm. I'll lay around, maybe read some until last chow (3pm-4pm), eat, drink some coffee and start my day.

Some days consist of a lot of reading. I may lay here and there and get on a writing kick. I'll write letters to old

friends or different organizations. I write stories/essays for a few places, mainly [prisonjournalismproject.org](http://prisonjournalismproject.org) but some others as well. I have a lawsuit, so sometimes I'm swamped with legal work, reading case law and writing motion. I do a lot of "fishing" to help out my neighbors, gotta fish the phone or a book or magazine or whatever. I wrote and created a Pathfinder adventure, did all the stuff that came with doing that. Sometimes I'll look at the TV, maybe watch a movie on the weekend.

One thing is I don't ever get bored. Others do, and some stay bored. I always have something going, even if it's just laying there visualizing the future and working on manifesting that future. Occasionally I'll draw, but when and only when the Muse strikes me. I can't draw on my own. I'd do a lot more writing if I could spend more than \$10.00 a week. One of my projects is decorating the walls. I'll rip out pages from my magazines and "glue" (stale toothpaste) them to my wall. Little-by-little it's coming together.

Oh, and I'm also taking this course, computer training, from Stratford. So far so good. I'm on the last book and I'll have completed the course. Next, if USA can figure out how to do the Pell grant with prisoners, I plan to do some college courses. Having to do correspondence courses, my options are limited to pretty much just business, so business it is—with a little psychology or sociology just for fun.

I wish I had a motor. . . I'd be inked up by now! I clean up a few times a week, including light clean daily. And that's

day in my life: reading, writing, and fishing. I hang out too, socialize with my neighbors and all that.

If anyone out there cares to help me post my day-to-day please write. I will be most appreciative.

*Happy Stomping Bear*

1/22/23

Sometimes I put on makeup, yet I don't think I look very pretty. I was kind of drained chatting with Sarah tonight. I stay with her for around 40 minutes before she once looks at me. This isn't untypical, as I often notice she very rarely looks at me. I put on makeup, but I'm not sure it was worth it. I didn't really feel that much more feminine as a result. Looking at myself in the mirror, I think that I look ugly. Sarah seems to have zero interest. Gosh, I am lonely.

I had a good chat with Alex. Mostly we talked about changing society, and I didn't enjoy chatting about that between folks. Life can be very tricky to know how to act, what to do and say (or not). I thought today I may like to talk with Mike about how to go about organizing a pride event on pride day. That would be extremely meaningful if I was able to help organize that.

Also I enjoyed going to church that morning. I love how gentle Daisy is when she touches my shoulder to tell me something. This morning she said I looked very pretty (funny, because I didn't even feminize myself much). I do miss having more female connection in my life. Gosh, I am grateful for Alexis. She is amazing, and talking with her feels somehow different than chatting with any of my transgendered female friends, but I don't know what to attribute the difference to. Somehow, it's as though my trans friends are more "flamboyant", whereas Alexis seems more "wholesome" or "wholly-through" feminine.

I don't mean to discount the femininity of my trans friends, just that it seems like my need for femininity somehow gets recharged with Alexis faster than anyone else. Maybe it's because she has gender to give, and isn't plagued by struggles and downplaying or needing to prove anything or second guess herself. // Ciao. <3

*Jane Doe*

In my life, everyday is different amidst the monotony of jail. Each moment in time is valuable and unique, for time is the one thing in life we cannot get back once it is gone. I do my best to make the most of my time while incarcerated, doing the time and not letting the time do me. It is not easy, for I endure many hardships like anyone else.

My mornings and early afternoons consist of Bible reading, Bible study courses, exercising, showering, eating, and washing clothes. My mid-afternoons & evenings consist of recreational reading, fellowshiping with friends & associates, talking on the phone, and writing letters. I facilitate the Bible study group that we have every Wednesday and Sunday. Saturdays are my sabbaths, so I do not work out, but do other things instead (usually cooking or weekend phonecalls). I talk to God throughout my day in various moments for varying lengths of time.

I suffer from mental health issues, so I battle negative thoughts and emotions throughout the day. Medication helps, though my anxiety medication has ran out and is in need of

a refill, which has me a bit edgier and hyper and emotional. The holiday season was rough for me, but I did my best to get through it and I did make it. My days are simple most of the time, which is a blessing.

Today involved a conflict between me and my buddy but we resolved it peacefully. That was nice. I miss my family a lot and this holiday season found me feeling the absence of them in my life. I am determined to go into the New Year with a hopeful outlook and my only resolution is to embrace new things that are positive for my growth physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually. I strive to keep loving God, myself, and my neighbors, which I find to be a battle when I struggle with body image and self-esteem, yet I am making it. I do not judge anybody and I do my best to help others, in any way I can both positively and safely.

My life is not too bad even though I am incarcerated, for I could have been dead long ago. I have learned many things and I continue learning new things on my path every single day. There are times when I laugh, there are times when I cry, there are times when I get lost in thought. I am alive, a human being that is doing his best to make it against the obstacles. I thank God everyday for waking me up. Love really does conquer all evil everyone so do your best to love yourselves, love each other, and love God. If you have someone special in your life, love them. If you have children, show them you love them through actions and words. Be kind to people. Take care of yourself and take care of others. Be mindful of what you say, how you say it, and who your audience is. Embrace light and flee from the evil around and within yourself by being aware of yourself and your surroundings.

I hope what I have learned helps others in their lives.

*Anthony Wheeler*

## MUSIC

The theme of our next newsletter has got us singing and dancing...MUSIC!

You could make us a playlist, send us your lyrics, draw your favourite performer, write a letter to an artist who changed your life—any writing or art on the theme of music!

Questions you could answer: How do you make or listen to music inside? What are your favourite songs, albums, divas right now, and why? How does music connect you to other people, inside and outside? What's the impact of music on your identity? How do you see the relationship between music and politics?

Of course, feel free to send us your submissions about anything, even if it's not on topic.

Please let us know if you want your name or a different name attached to it.

# IN CONVERSATION WITH MISS MAJOR: PT. VI

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In August 2018, Miss Major was invited to be the Grand Marshal of Montreal's Pride celebrations. While she was in town, we organized a discussion with her hosted by Eve Parker, a former PCP member, and Nora Butler Burke, longtime Montreal activist. We've transcribed the conversation for you all, dearest readers. Since it was a long, compelling conversation, we're publishing the transcript in installments. Without further ado, here's part six!

*Miss Major is a Black, formerly incarcerated, transgender elder. She has been an activist and advocate in her community for over forty years. She was at the Stonewall uprising in 1969, became politicized at Attica, and was an original member of the first all-transgender gospel choir. She served as the executive director of the Transgender Gender Variant Intersex Justice Project and is the founder of the House of GGs, an educational retreat and historical center in Little Rock, Arkansas.*

**MAJOR:** There are things that you need to think about within yourself as you start to do care for other people and realize what your limits are—what your strengths and weaknesses are. You can push yourself past your own breaking point and you can't get back.

I want you to take care of yourselves, be the best you you can be, then turn around and say to the bitch just behind you, "come here baby, give me your hand" and you help her stand up.

You may get a *thank you* and you may not, but that's not what you're doing it for. We're not doing this to be rich. Shit, I do good if I get a good meal, not to mention by a right boy! Enjoy yourselves and your lives. Do what you need to do to stay better, be better, and act better.

**EVE:** That's beautiful. We only have time for one more question before we move on to a Q & A portion. With all of your experience, time, and work over the years, what do you know now that you would tell a younger version of yourself, or a young activist today? What advice would you give?

**MAJOR:** I'd tell myself "Bitch, don't go there! Oh god, I think what I would tell young people is: *You have to not believe the things that the government or people tell you, because the hype and the whitewashing over stuff that goes on in most of these countries in the world is so crap-filled that you can't get around it.* And to investigate things, check out the story that they're not telling you.

Television has some kind of thing now where they're doing these series on the '60s and '70s and '80s, and I have a real hard time watching those because what they're showing me I remember seeing on the news at that time, but they're not giving you the flavour of the country at that time—people's perception at that time—how I thought at that time. There's this thing of presenting to people what they feel people want to

see, instead of presenting what it is and letting us come to our own conclusion. We're not a bunch of idiots. We know what the hell is going on. So just show me and I'll decide if I like it or not, if I'm going to accept it or not and take it from there.

And going through that kind of thing, when you hear all this crap, take what makes sense to you and think about it later. The rest of that shit, leave it the fuck alone. "Oh god, where's the garbage can, I don't have time for this."

Because you're gonna hear a bunch of stuff like Stonewall...I heard about this movie and some white boy from Iowa, that child was so white he glowed in the day time. That's not good. There was nobody there that I knew so. But that's the proposition that's out there and that's the thing that these fags do hold on to, forgetting that that they're standing on the shoulders of transwomen and transmen and gender-nonconforming folks, and running around acting as if "oh, they don't exist." Bitch not only do I exist but I'm the reason your ass is here dancing around like that. So, that's what we have to let 'em know, and I will tomorrow, trust me.

## Q&A

**Q:** If you see the Stonewall Riots as a big event, what would you point out as a really trailblazing/course-changing for the LGBTQ event since then that you admire?

**MAJOR:** Well first of all, it's TGLBQ. We'll start off there, ok. The fact that they held realized the T should be first...I don't know their fuckin problem is.

The thing is, I can't think of anything that would have happened to have changed that or made it better or had it be OK today, 45 or however many years later. I wouldn't so much call it a riot as it was a fight for survival. My community had been suffering through the police harassment and at that time in the '60s, all gay bars were subject to that. The police would just go and take their nice suits and knock on the door jam, and the lights would come on and everybody knew to file out. The police were doing that in order to check people's IDs, to catch minors in the clubs so they could shut the clubs down. Knowing this, you always make sure that if you happen to know somebody in there who was a minor, you helped figure out a way to get them the hell out of there without having to go out the front door.

But it would've been nice if there was something I could think of that would've made it better, or changed the situation the way that it went, but it went askew. And as typical white guys do, child, they took it from the people that did most of the work. And so, you know, eventually they're gonna get it. All of them aren't monsters, you know, I have some really good gay friends and I also had some friends that are fagular-riddled, but you know, that's how it goes.

*Stay tuned for the rest of the conversation!*



# LOST IN A CAGE

## LIVING WITH EARLY-ONSET ALZHEIMER'S IN PRISON

My story isn't easy and doesn't have a happy ending. Every day I wake up hoping I'll remember who, what, where, and how I came to prison.

On November 21, 2021, at the age of fifty-two I was told I have terminal early onset Alzheimer's and I'm going to die.

Today I awake lost and confused. Couldn't understand why my room door was locked and wasn't sure how to open it, but the ringing was new in my ear along with the shooting pain in my shoulder, head, and butt.

It wasn't until my best friend checked up on me to let me know that I had fallen the night before in the yard on an icy hill. Turns out I'd slipped the night before, bounded two feet off the ground, knocking myself out. The ringing was a concussion and all the soreness was from the fall. I'm lucky that, at almost fifty-three, I didn't break a hip.

It's funny, the things I forget in short periods of time. You see, Alzheimer's doesn't take away every thought all at once. I could only be so lucky. It's taken away the sound of my mom's voice, the smell of her hair when we used to hug, the way my dad sounded when telling me I'd be okay, *kiddo*.

Slowly it's stealing the most important memories of my partner, who died in 2003. My first gay kiss (as sloppy as it was), the time I food poisoned a date, my first valentine's when I dressed up as cupid running across my university in 1997. Just now I called a friend to look in my photos to see what year I did that.

More and more, every day I'm lost. Every day I wish I could choose the memories to lose. A lot of my friends say they'd get rid of crime memories or memories of hurting their wives, husband, or kids. I can see why but, for me, it's the stranger whose wallet I stole on a one-night-stand because my alcohol addiction was out of control. And the boyfriend I slapped because he cheated. The boyfriend who left me for a doctor in Nova Scotia, or the guy in prison I paid to love me because I was lonely. The one in Sundry, Alberta whose heart I broke when I cheated right before our wedding, because I was addicted to sex.

These are some of the memories I wish I could forget. I truly don't want to forget why I'm serving indeterminate life in prison. It wouldn't be fair to my victim and his family, but eventually I will forget.

I've forgotten details of my case now. I forgot a lot of people I've hurt all the years I was using and I've forgotten a lot of how we met or the first time our eyes met.

The scary part is when I forget to breathe in my sleep or when I'm walking in the yard. You see, Alzheimer's takes more than just your short-term and long-term memories. It takes away daily functions such as using the bathroom, eating, walking, and using your hands. Remembering how to spell the simplest words such as *love*, *hi*, *miss me*.

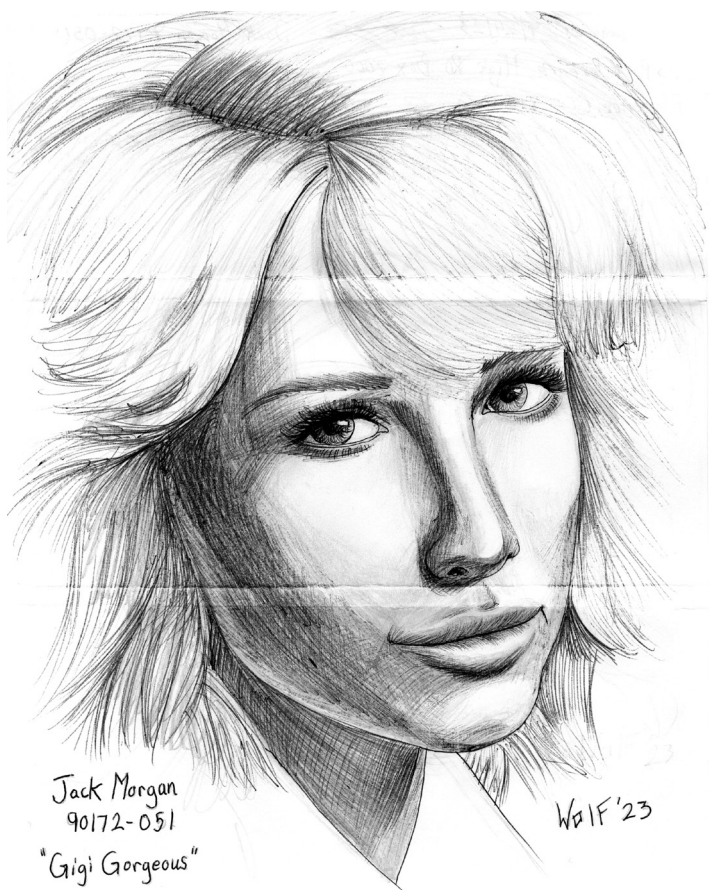
We have bad days as well, blow up at the small things. Frustration is our new best friend. You can be walking somewhere and forget why you're walking, so you turn around, head back the other way. You'll be standing just lost in your own mind. We get frustrated more than a two-year-old being told *no*.

I used to be a happy man in my life. Most days I'm unhappy in my headspace, I don't say why. I know the answer to that. I'm sad for my boyfriend (I wrote boyfriend but realized I don't have one because he got parole), for the rest of the people in my life: past, present, and even future ones.

I'm sure some of you are happy I'm dead or soon to be there, but some will be sad. Some will lay blame. Some will feel relief for me. And the rest, I hope you remember 1 thing we did together that made us smile at one another, or ourselves.

Sorry, forgot what I was writing here...that happens daily now.

Jamie McCallum



# HOMOSCOPIES

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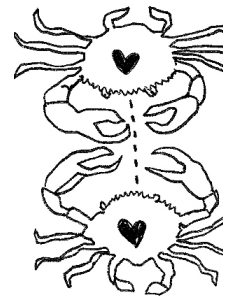
## ARIES

The ram cannot be stopped from doing it. You are going to complete a task, make things happen, keep moving. This is an energy that others are craving. Give it to them! The more you can share your will, the happier your eager recipients. They may even become something like friends.



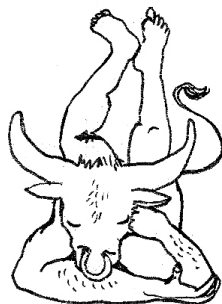
## CANCER

You've been thinking a lot about building family and what that means. It can mean anything! And this makes your process especially complex. Instead of trying to define the thing, you might want to get specific. Now is the astrological moment for you to think not about what love (etc.) means in general but what exactly works best for YOU. If you can make your definition personal, the people you need in your circle will be there.



## TAURUS

Fall wasn't easy and neither was summer. Learning things "the hard way" is no understatement, and now you're left nursing spilled milk, feeling nothing short of destroyed. The upside, sweet Taurus, is that much change has already happened. Change is not your favourite state. As THE BULL, you like things your way, consistent, comfortable. But now the discomfort will make new things possible, and I know you will come to deeply enjoy it.



## LEO

You are flashing in and out of the spotlight, blacking out through the memories, and generally being a messy mix of grounded and gone. This is not ideal. However, you can realize using the guidance of Libra, that there is room in relationships. Make and recover from mistakes- especially the mistakes made by yourself, and you will flicker back into an unstoppable shine. Tldr: don't be so hard on yourself.



## GEMINI

Words pour out of you always, Gemini, but in this astrological moment, the flow is rampant. Use this gushing cosmic transit to create whatever you can- people care what you have to say and will gain lots to listen in whatever form you're willing to transmit. I want to be covered by this hot smart stream. Keep it coming.



## VIRGO

In the coming weeks, please do not underestimate the value of being, looking, and feeling adorable. Baby yourself, lift the moods of others, don't undervalue the parts of you that are, admittedly, "too cute." If you can channel that which is adorable, you can also harness the Daddy that tames it.



## LIBRA

It's your time! You claim to hate your birthday but bringing people together to kiss you and eat cake is pretty much the life dream. Let those who know you also know each other and you will feel your most accomplished sense of purpose. You are divine and everyone needs to experience this collectively in order to form something like a group. Together you will thrive.



## CAPRICORN

You are perfect. No notes.

Just kidding, Capricorn! I know you know that you have much work to do over the frozen months. But I promise if you keep at it at your usual hot top pace of relentless toiling, you will eventually get to chill harder than you ever have. ♠



## SCORPIO

Things don't feel easy. You will likely be tempted, especially for the final days of the month, to conclude catastrophically, that getting what you want, especially in loving (banging) is futile. Don't forget that this is wrong. You are designed to love (and bang) fiercely and forever, and no one is better suited to be their next dreamdate, SuperMom, or flaming eternal than you.



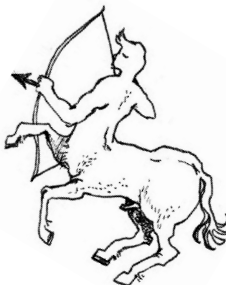
## AQUARIUS

It's difficult as an independent genius to find practical ways to get paid. When money gets stressful over the coming season, you will need to pivot hard to get your finger into the pie. If you feel totally stuck, ask a Capricorn. Friends or mentors will be needed to provide you practical ways to make your abstract magic into something finite in this crap capitalism.



## SAGITTARIUS

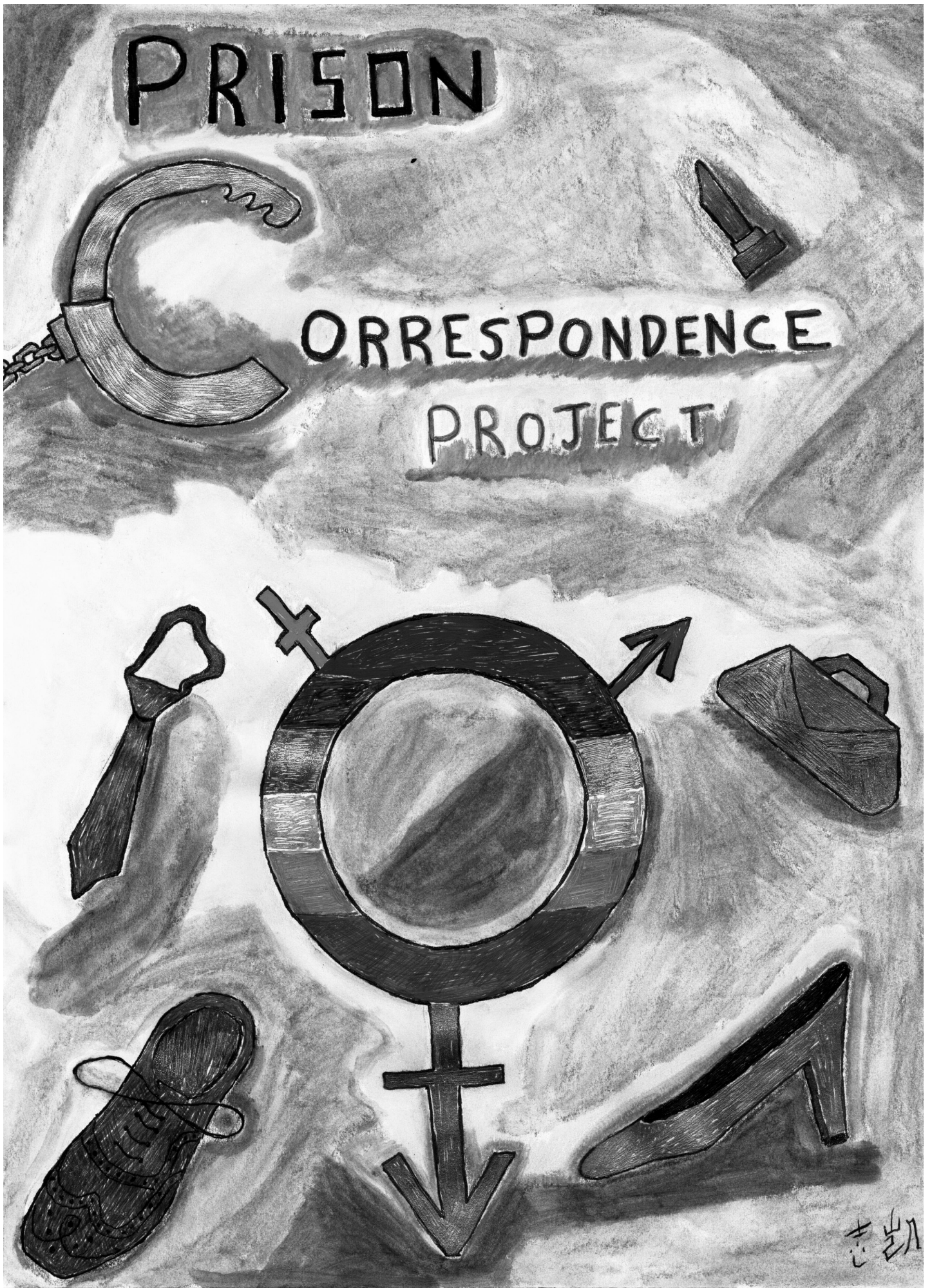
It is interesting occasionally, even for you Sag, to move not always forward on the timeline but also back. Are there parts of your past you could revisit, even if just to put them to bed? If so, spend a hot little moment thinking, even fondly, about past moments, memories, even items that could still be significant: thong underpants, a turtleneck sweater, that first tattoo...if you can connect older moments to the coming ones, you will feel elastic.



## PISCES

If empathy is your superpower, it might be a good season to become a regular person. No heroics, no special outfits, no duelling, sparring, vanilla sex. Just be an observer who lets other people feel for themselves. It won't be easy but it will be educational. In a good way, I promise.





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