



**Welcome to issue 22 of *The Word is Out!*  
We've missed you!**

Welcome new subscribers and old friends! We hope that you're all taking care during the pandemic. Even though our mail is super delayed, know that we're thinking of you.

In our News Updates section, we've included some stories about how COVID-19 has affected the prison system. Activists inside and outside have been fighting fiercely for early releases, access to cleaning supplies, and information on the impact of the virus on prisoners.

On page 5, we have an article written by Lisa Strawn on the incredible Transgender Day of Remembrance event that she organized at San Quentin back in November 2019—the first ever inside the prison! Lisa also helps run the transgender support group at San Quentin, which was inaugurated in May 2019. We've included some advice that she has for all of you who are thinking about putting together an LGBTQ support group at your own prison!

You'll notice that we have lots of calls for submission in this issue. At our collective visioning retreat back in January, we came up with some exciting new ideas for both the newsletter and other resources that we want to create and distribute. So please send us your themed submissions (page 13), victory notices (page 5), letters to the editor (page 19), erotica (page 2), and stories on accountability beyond the prison system (page 4)! We welcome both writing and art.

On page 19, you'll find the new resources that we've added to our resource library. You can write to us to request up to five resources! And if you want the updated resource list that includes our entire library, send us a request by mail.

This issue's topic is GRIEF. We asked you: how do you deal with loss, whether of another inmate, a family member, lover, or friend? How do you process your grief? What resources have you found useful? We hope that the beautiful submissions we've compiled here can give you strength. Just a note: suicide is mentioned in the last article in this section.

Shout out to the contributors of #22! Brian Fuller, Chris Ridley, Cody Riley, Eric Duprey, Eric Hudson, Fasa, Sean Price, Ms. Jazzie Farrari, Jennifer Rose, Jeremy Rutherford, JJ, Lisa Strawn, Matthew Feeney, Melba Colgrove, Michelle Autumn, Rayne Violet, Shon Pernice, Travis Frazier, Tyana Hubbard, Vinson W. Filyaw, and the anonymous artist who created our adorable header (if you made this, please let us know). And for everyone whose contribution we couldn't fit, thank you so much for sharing and please continue to send us your work!

Enjoy those Homoscopes,  
*Prisoner Correspondence Project*

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**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

# SINCE WE'VE BEEN GONE

Dear PCP family,

As you can imagine, these past few months have really thrown us for a loop! Our operations were almost entirely brought to a halt: our office and our mailroom both closed, which meant we weren't receiving any new correspondence! In addition, with the borders only open to essential travel, we weren't able to use our usual method of delivering mail to our members. Thankfully our hardworking collective members and volunteers were able to find a way to rescue material from the office and work from home. A past collective member (remember Olivia?) even managed to raise the money to cover the extra costs of sending mail during the pandemic.

We were keeping busy before the outbreak reached us, too! Last fall, we participated in events like Montreal Pride Community Day and the annual LGBTQ book fair *Queer Between the Covers* to sell some zines and merch, and to recruit pen pals. We teamed up with local hairstylists for a haircut fundraiser, and soon after worked with a group of tattoo artists who hosted a pay-what-you-can flash tattoo fundraiser. In December, we participated in an event organized by artist Phil Collins (not that Phil Collins) called *Bring Down the Walls*, a series that originated in

New York in 2018 bringing together conversations on prison abolition with house music and night life. We were invited to participate in a talk about understanding incarceration and imagining a world without prisons, which was followed by a dance party—what more could you ask for? Finally, we recently wrote an article about the project for the Spring 2020 issue of *Broken Pencil Magazine*. Hopefully it'll bring more outside pen pals our way!

Our Inside Collective has grown a whole lot larger since our last newsletter went out. We want to thank everyone who wrote to express interest in helping us on the executive side of things, and we're so excited about working with you and getting to know you better! We're also so grateful for everyone who submitted content for the newsletter, and we want to remind you that we're always accepting submissions from everyone, even if you just joined the PCP family yesterday!

We hope you enjoy this issue of *The Word Is Out*, and let this be a great big long-distance hug from all of us collective members here in Montreal and Vancouver!

xoxo Aimee, Caitlin, Chelsea, Cooper, Ivory,  
Josh, Kim, Kristin, Maggie, Patrick, Stevie



*We miss having access to our resource library!*

## WRITING CONTEST

Every year or so, we update our resource library, adding new things we've found along the way and retiring a few items that are out of date or not getting requested. Last time we added a smut zine called *Pretty Third Party Surprise* that has proven very popular. There's just one problem...it doesn't exist.

It must exist somewhere. But we can't find it. We've searched our files, we've searched the internet. We still can't find it, and every month we receive dozens of requests for it. So naturally, our only remaining option is to turn it into a writing contest!

The prompt, as listed in the resource list:

*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.*

Submit your hottest, sleaziest story and we will compile the five best submissions into a zine that everyone can request from the library. We're also looking for a cover image that will get past mail room censors! As always, please let us know if you want your name or a different name attached to it.

# NEWS UPDATES

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## A NEW TACTIC TO FIGHT CORONAVIRUS: PROVIDE HOMES FOR RELEASED PRISONERS

California and New York are the first states trying an experiment to provide government-paid hotel rooms to homeless people, including those released from jail under emergency orders, in an effort to limit the spread of the virus both behind bars and in this state's sprawling homeless encampments.

In New York City, the Department of Homeless Services offered rooms to homeless people released from Rikers Island, the city's jail. But perhaps nowhere is the housing need as pressing as in California, where the pandemic overlaps with a historic homelessness crisis.

California governor Gavin Newsom signed an executive order that includes \$50 million to lease hotel rooms or buy travel trailers for homeless people, including those released from jails. On Friday, the governor said the state had secured 7,000 hotel rooms so far.

"Being placed in a motel room means having your own living space, your own shower, your own bed, and it allows you to self-isolate," said Eve Garrow, a homelessness policy analyst and advocate for the ACLU of Southern California. "Honestly, I feel that it will save lives."

Oakland's agreement allows the government to lease 393 rooms in the two hotels near the airport. Since coronavirus began appearing in the Bay Area, the Alameda County Sheriff's Office has released hundreds of people from Santa Rita Jail, one of the state's largest lockups. Many of the inmates simply return to their homes, but those without shelter can be considered for a hotel slot.

Other counties throughout the state have also started lease negotiations, including San Diego and San Francisco, where county supervisors unanimously approved a resolution that included housing for people who had been in jail.

## INMATES SUE FOR SOAP AND PAPER TOWELS AS CORONAVIRUS SPREADS IN JAILS

Prisoners are running out of soap and cleaning solution, then wiping their hands on their uniforms because paper towels aren't available. Detainees are using the same towels they use to clean jail cells to bathe and dry their hands. And there's no hand sanitizer allowed for prisoners.

That's the grim situation described in a lawsuit from the American Civil Liberties Union and DC public defender's service brought on behalf of four detainees and prisoners in Washington, DC's city jail on Monday.

The lawsuit landed on a day that at least one other group of prisoners, in a Texas state prison, asked a judge to mandate they have more soap and cleaning supplies.

"Even the best run, most humane, most medically up to date jail is a giant petri dish. You have lots and lots of people living in close quarters. Social distancing is virtually

impossible," said Greg Lipper, a DC-based defense attorney who has clients in the jail. "Most jails, especially city jails, have a lot of people going in and out. DC is no different."

The DC jail now has six confirmed coronavirus cases, according to a spokesperson. Though fewer people are being locked up now, authorities in DC haven't made the same decision as other cities to release large groups of prisoners. And former inmates who've broken their parole are still being temporarily detained in the DC jail, bringing people in and out of the jail, according to defense attorneys.

"Defendants have not provided additional soap free of charge since the first distribution of the single bar of soap, nor did Defendants inform residents when they will receive more soap," the lawsuit said. "Consequently, some residents have already run out of their single allotted bar, while others are not using the single bar because they do not know when the next bar will come."

"On at least one unit, a closet full of cleaning supplies and clean rags is present, but residents are told they will be punished if they attempt to access or use those supplies to clean the unit, their own cells, or their hands and bodies," the lawsuit added.

The lawsuit alleges the jail is violating its residents' constitutional rights, including protection from cruel and unusual punishment. Ultimately, the lawsuit asks a judge to release prisoners and detainees and provide inmates with hand soap, paper towels, toilet paper, running water, tissues, no-touch trash cans and hand sanitizer. The inmates also seek access to daily showers and clean laundry.

## COVID-19 BEHIND BARS PROJECT TRACKS SPREAD OF VIRUS IN PRISONS

Who will account for those with COVID-19 behind bars? Adryan Corcione, a transgender reporter who writes Shadowproof's "Trans Behind Bars" series, kept hearing the same story over and over again.

"I'm in touch with a few incarcerated people, and they were expressing concern about COVID-19 and the lack of information there was available," they tell NewNowNext.

A friend commented to Corcione that someone should map known cases behind bars.

In a matter of weeks, Corcione and developer Eli Sadoff have tracked COVID-19 in prisons and detention centers around the world using media reports, information passed on by people in detention, and details sent in by prisoners' friends and family. The site has more than 470 pins of locations where the virus has been reported.

The COVID-19 Behind Bars map allows anyone to report cases. While it may not be exhaustive, Corcione and Sadoff hope it will be of use in providing some data where there has historically been almost none. They also hope it will help other journalists reporting on prisons during the pandemic.



You can contact Covid-19 Behind Bars at:  
ATTN: COVID-19 Behind Bars  
Corcione Media LLC  
P.O. Box 40062  
Philadelphia, PA  
19106

## TRANSWOMAN FILES LAWSUIT AGAINST FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a federal lawsuit challenging the Florida Department of Corrections' denial of medically necessary care for a transgender woman currently detained in a state men's prison. The lawsuit, filed in Tallahassee in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida, was brought on behalf of Reilyn Keohane, a transgender woman currently incarcerated at the Everglades Correctional Institution in Miami. The complaint seeks an injunction directing Defendants to provide Reilyn with medically necessary hormone therapy and access to female clothing and grooming standards.

Reilyn, 22, has known that she has a female gender identity since the age of 12. With the support of medical and mental-health professionals, Reilyn has been living as female since age 14. At age 17, she had her name legally changed from a traditionally male name, and she began hormone therapy under the care of an endocrinologist at the age of 19. While awaiting trial for an attempted murder charge in 2013, Keohane was abruptly removed from her hormone therapy by the Lee County Jail. Believing she would be allowed to resume hormone therapy after being transferred to DOC custody, Keohane accepted a plea deal in 2014.

After arriving in DOC custody in July 2014, Keohane repeatedly made clear to DOC officials that she needed to continue her treatment for her gender dysphoria, which included both hormone therapy and the ability to groom and dress consistent with her female gender identity. Not only was she denied restoration of the hormone therapy, but her hair was forcibly cut and she had her female clothing items confiscated. She filed numerous grievances to restore her treatment, but they were repeatedly denied.

Reilyn wrote a letter describing her experiences and the discrimination and harassment she has faced as a transgender woman being denied treatment for her gender dysphoria in prison. It reads in part: "I know that I am not alone, that other women have been in my situation before, and had it better, or worse. [...] I will fight this prejudice every step of the way so that there will be a better future for all other people who are thrown in prison, so that we may all have the treatment, dignity, and respect that every human being deserves, even if they have done wrong."

The lawsuit, which names officials from the Florida Department of Corrections and one of its contracted medical providers, Wexford Health Sources, Inc., in their official capacities, asks the court to find that the DOC's denial of treatment for Reilyn's gender dysphoria is a violation of the Eighth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution's ban on cruel and unusual punishment.

## ACCOUNTABILITY PROJECT

PCP is putting together a resource for people who have caused harm and want to take accountability for their actions.

Doing time is often presented as the only way for people to pay their dues. But for many, the stigma, isolation, and violence of life in prison end up repeating cycles of harm. We want to hear about ways of taking accountability beyond prisons and punishment, and create a resource that works towards both personal and collective transformations.

We're inviting you to share your insights on what people need in order to make positive changes. Send us your personal reflections and past experiences that can help others heal, take responsibility, and build new relationships.

Some questions to consider for your submission:

\*What circumstances in your life have led you to commit harm? What beliefs and social dynamics contributed to hurtful actions and where did those come from? What could have brought a different outcome?

\*What mental barriers prevent people from coming to terms with past actions? Can you think of specific interactions or relationships that helped you repair damages and enact positive change? What made them effective?

\*How do you contribute to a healthier, safer community overall? What kinds of resources and outside support help make this happen?

\*Do you come from a community where lots of people end up in prison? What social and economic forces contribute to this? What would it take to change these patterns?

Please send us your submission using the header "Accountability Project" by **November 15, 2020**.

If your piece is selected, you will be paid a small honorarium. Let us know if you want your name or a different name attached to your submission.

The completed publication will be distributed in our resource library as well as to the broader public.

# TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE AT SAN QUENTIN

Last fall, Lisa Strawn organized the first ever Transgender Day of Remembrance at San Quentin State Prison. We're reprinting an article that she wrote for *UltraViolet*, the newsletter published by LAGAI – Queer Insurrection from the Bay Area, as well as some advice she has for all of you who are thinking of organizing an LGBTQ support group inside your own prison!

## TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

On Nov 20th San Quentin held the first Transgender Day of Remembrance. For 2 hours the standing room only event paid tribute to the lives of 22 beautiful trans people killed this year.

As the organizer of the day I wanted to make sure of 2 things. That the lives of the 22 were important especially transwomen of color. And that the transgender population at S.Q. lets [everyone] here see what inclusion really looks like as opposed to how it has been. There were over 50 outside guests including 5 beautiful people from *UltraViolet*—of which I was in tears to see them there. Also in attendance Senator Scott Wiener, his aide Cassidy Denny, Ella Baker Center and a big group of supporters from C.D.C.R. headquarters in Sacramento.

For 2 hours the guests and incarcerated women and men from S.Q. got to enjoy 15 performances that received standing ovation and some shed tears. From my vantage point up front I could see what the day meant to all who attended. The day was filled with speakers, music, poetry, reading of the names of the 22 and also a remembrance to all who have lost their lives to violence. The message was clear that violence can never win. We all have to remember that the only way all lives matter, is to make sure trans lives and Black lives matter.

Transgender Day of Remembrance at San Quentin could not have happened without the Trans and entire LGBTQP gender fluid population, the Men in Blue who performed and showed up to the event. And the support from Ms. Lopez, and Mr. Spohn who run the groups for the Trans and gender queer people. But also the staff who made sure the day happened and brought in the outside guests. There was an effort by everyone and I can say that I will never forget the day and I will always be glad that I can be who I am, a transwoman in a Man's prison and be proud. Never let anyone tell you that you can't be who you are. Embrace who you are. Your life matters and so does your voice. Please share this with everyone you meet. I am proud of you all and please say that to others you meet each day. Transgenders are people too.



## ORGANIZING AN LGBTQ SUPPORT GROUP IN PRISON

The first thing to put together anything in a prison, is to have a vision for what you want and not give up on what you want to do.

Getting help from staff is something you have to do your homework on. Again, have a good concept for what you want to do and put it on paper so others can visualize what you want to accomplish. Remember you will need rules for all to follow in the group. So plan on listing it out to present to staff also. And whatever the purpose and goals of the group will be as well.

Keep in mind that nothing is easy in prison and may take time. But don't give up on a dream to make it better for the LGBTQ people inside. Anything is possible if you believe. You will have to find a place for where you have the group and a time. Keep in mind you can utilize any space, chapel, chow hall, gym or other areas. It can be done.

Don't forget to get ideas from the LGBTQ community at your prison for what they want from the group and where they want to go with it.

Also find organizations outside that can send you information that can be discussed in the group.

Again, just be passionate about what you want. Have an open mind and keep the vision a reality. Hard work pays off if you follow your passion.

## ORGANIZING VICTORIES

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.

# GRIEF

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The morning after the Tecumseh prison riot in Nebraska, I awoke hoping that the chaos of the night before was just one of those vivid dreams. You know, the dreams we inmates have that are so blood curdling that you wake up and thank God you're still in your cell.

But the smell of burnt plastic, clothing, and even human flesh stole away any hope that what happened the night before was a dream. I rubbed my eyes and felt the oily tears I shed, even while sleeping, then turned on the small TV on my desk. My hand, on autopilot, punch in the channel to the local news, and there was the unhopd-for reality:

Across the bottom of the screen the ticker read, "Deadly inmate uprising at the Tecumseh State Correctional facility." My eyes were swiftly pulled from the ticker to the video clips shot with telephoto lens from a safe distance. I could see the fires and columns of smoke rising from the previous night's event. Then my heart sank, twisted, and imploded as two individuals were displayed on the screen, one of whom was my friend Sean. I remember I screamed out loud, "They killed Sean! Oh my God, they killed him!"

I watched and listened in disbelief as the news anchor gave random commentary on facts that were sketchy at best. I glanced out my tiny window to see several COs patrolling the yard with less lethal shotguns and live ammo MP5s. They were busy shuffling bound inmates from a completely unlivable and burned out housing unit. I stared at the commotion, hoping I could stave off the anger and pain from learning my friend was dead.

But I couldn't do it. I lost it. I jumped up and screamed so hard my throat hurt for days after. My friend had been killed—no, murdered—and I could do nothing about it. The cell walls began to close in and the room was spinning. I soon felt as if my skin was on fire, right before I ran headfirst into my cell door. I collapsed in a mess of shaking tears. I balled for hours and wanted so bad to be anywhere but locked in my cell.

By late afternoon, I had pulled myself off the floor and was able to shower and call my family. They were very relieved to know I was safe, but they were unable to understand the loss I felt for my "prison friend," as one family member called him.

As the days moved on, the factual reports of what happened to Sean surfaced. I honestly can't even stomach repeating what happened to him. The brutality he faced unto death reshaped my understanding of just how evil our race can be.

That was almost five years ago. Sean is still gone and there is now a scar on my heart. I grieved his death hard and rough. It didn't help that after the riot we were in 24/7 lock down for eight months. But I prayed, wrote, and talked my way through every bit of it. I found great peace in verbally expressing how this loss hurt and wounded me. I learned that it's true, no man is an island. No man or women is alone in their pain. I learned that the phrase "no one will understand me" is a lie. It's a lie that has so many people suffering in silence for so many different reasons.

Through opening up to trusted friends and staff I found that I could validate my loss, express my emotions, let go of hopeless feelings, readjust my life, and carry on.

Today I'm more than comfortable than ever with grief. I see men hurting and tormented day in and day out by grief here in prison, and it breaks my heart. So, I took classes to learn how to counsel my fellow prisoners and share with them my many stories of dealing with grief and restoring hope. I help men find ways that work best for them to express their loss over the tangible and intangible things.

Friends, grief is good and has a viable place in all our lives. Yes, it's a bitch to go through. It strikes our softest and most vulnerable spots without mercy. But until we surrender to it, and let it do its work, we may never be free to hope again.

JJ

Grief is a quiet thing  
Deadly in repose  
A raging horror, a thunder of abuse.

Raucous—  
Demanding—  
Incomprehensible—  
Tearing all that one has ever loved.

Hopeless,  
Forlorn,  
Fear-ridden and misunderstood;  
Ceasing a moment, and through the years  
Returning . . . to destroy.

To rage,  
To curse all that is happy—  
Or contented,  
Or trusting.

To threaten every beauty that is true.

Grief?  
It's a quiet thing.

*A quote, found and recorded by Melba Colgrove*

Hello PCP Peeps!

I hope you're all well and unencumbered by this topic, of any form of grief. When you hear the word grief, the first thing that comes to mind is a person's death. I'm fortunate in that in my nearly six years of incarceration, I've never experienced a personal loss of that nature. But that doesn't mean I'm unfamiliar with grief, and unless I'm mistaken, it's something we've all had to deal with in here.



When I was arrested, it was a lot like I myself had died. I lost nearly all my friends and most of my family. And I grieved the loss of those relationships that had meant so much to me. To me, it felt like the same grief process. I still haven't accepted that those people are gone from my life. I lost my entire way of life. My career, which took years to secure. My education, which was nearly complete. My freedom, which, even out there, will never quite be the same. The hardest for me, though, was the loss of proximity to my four children. I loved being a father. I was there for every event, every milestone. And then I wasn't part of any of it at all, and I can't get those years back, I can't restore what I lost. These losses are not loss by way of death but, in a way, they're sometimes worse. Because I will be out there again in less than three years, and still will not be able to restore what was lost, even though those people are out there still.

I deal with my losses by holding onto what is left and rebuilding what is not. I can't change the past, and I can't change where I'm at, but I can do what I can to maintain the relationships that have survived, especially with my kids. I write plenty of letters on paper and on JPAY, and I'm able to talk to the kids once a week on the phone. As for rebuilding, I've found new community and new ways of participating in the world. Most of that involves writing.

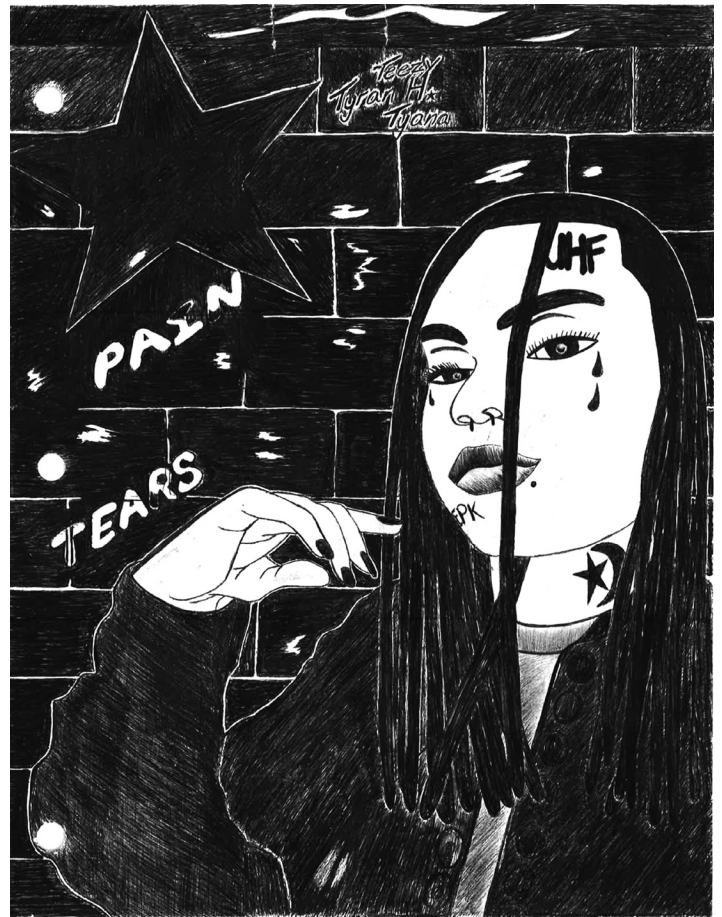
Through organizations like Black & Pink and PCP, I'm able to share my voice with others in the same situation, others who can relate. My writing also helps me participate in my faith community as a Wiccan and Unitarian Universalist pagan. Organizations like PCP can even help me make new meaningful friendships. Again, a rebuilding effort made possible with my pen and paper. I try to consider that all of my losses have helped me gain perspective. This experience has taught me how precious those rare connections are, and how important it is to maintain and preserve them. It's taught me how valuable our place in a community is, and how important it is to be an active part of that community. I do my best to recognize the good that has come of this situation rather than fixate on the bad. That is how I deal with my grief inside.

*Rayne Violet*

My grandmother Willie Mae Crenshaw was my world. I have never met a beautiful black queen like her. She taught me how to be proud of being gay. She taught me how to love all of god's creation. I lost my grandmother the year of 2009. My life has been so lonely since that day, my world was turned upside down on that day.

I remember entering the caseworker office for my emergency phone call. Hearing the sad news that my grandmother was murdered was heart stopping. This was the biggest death in my family because I was extremely close to my grandmother—I grew up on her loving, her caring, her food and so on. I never went a day without calling my grandmother on the phone, hearing her voice, causing her to laugh. I miss the way that she stated “heyyyyy...baby” with the most warming voice that I have ever heard in my lifetime.

I love granny and I will see you again. Before I close this letter, I want everyone that's reading this to always cherish their loved ones. We never know when that day will



TYANNA HUBBARD

come. May god bless my mother, loved ones, and everyone else's mothers and loved ones.

*Tyanna Hubbard*

My father died in 2012, a few years after I'd been sentenced to federal prison. I was thankful that Jasper, my boyfriend at the time, was there to help me through my grief. We had been a couple for several months before my dad's death, but I really fell in love with him when he comforted me, and I appreciated the tender side he'd revealed to me.

Jasper and I both grew up around the woods and shared an affinity for the natural world. My dad, who used to love to hunt when he was younger, used to take me for walks in the woods with our dogs when I was growing up. I have very fond memories of my dad taking me to our cabin in New Hampshire every winter to go out into the woods and cut down our family Christmas tree. Jasper grew up on a farm, having come from a Mennonite family, so his childhood was spent out in the country as well.

One of my dad's favorite things to read was a wildlife column written by an amateur naturalist that appeared in our local newspaper. He enjoyed the columns so much that when the author collected them into an anthology, he bought the book and kept it by his recliner so he could re-read them whenever he wanted. After his passing, my mom sent me the book. I showed it to Jasper and explained how much my dad liked the author's nature writings.



Jasper said, “Why don’t we read one column to each other every night after lights out, in honor of your dad?” Now, Jasper wasn’t a very emotionally expressive person, and it took me a moment to realize that this was his way of expressing care and affection- and helping me through my grief. So every night after lights out I waited for him to come over so we could huddle together and read to each other, illuminated by the glow of my book light. Not only did our readings help to ease my grief, but they also brought us closer together.

*Eric Duprey*

Dear Family,

I don’t think I’ve wrote before but hey, about time I did. Your next theme is on grief and loss of loved ones, but my grief has been the lack of a voice.

I have a 70-year sentence because a country jury deemed my “bodily fluids” a “deadly weapon” because I am HIV positive. Never mind that I was undetectable and that no fluids were exchanged. U=U studies weren’t available at the time, in 2011. I’ve been here nine years now. Groups like Lambda Legal and Center for HIV Law & Policy have refused to help because my cause does not “lend to publicity.” At some point publicity became more important than justice.

I responded to an internet ad for sex from someone local who claimed to be 18. Two weeks later I learned the truth—he was 16—when I was arrested. After my trial, my jury forewoman said the jury didn’t care about the age because he’d lied. Their choice was made based solely on my

HIV status. My max sentence without HIV was 20 years, so 50 years of my sentence is simply because I’m positive. I see cases like Micheal Johnson in Missouri “recklessly infecting” partners and he got 10 years. Now he’s on parole.

So in response to grief? My grief takes on the form of anger most times. Anger that my voice is silenced, and that justice is silenced.

*Cody Riley*

## BLURRY RIGHTS, VIVID WRONGS

I hope this letter finds all of you doing well. My purpose for writing you is to open up a discussion about how people treat each other. Every day, it seems the news has stories about horrible acts of violence. There must be a complete paradigm shift in how this continuing cycle of antagonism/retaliation is perpetuated. If not, then I’m afraid we’re only going to see these seemingly endless atrocities escalate.

We are facing a worldwide crisis in mental healthcare. I have first-hand knowledge of how it is to “fall through the cracks in the system.” If there is ever going to be measurable progress in diagnosis and treatment of psychological disorders, we must first remove the stigma that prevents full disclosure of these painful and personal struggles. Only then will we be able to properly identify the problems and make well informed decisions in regard to treating these issues proactively.

It used to frustrate me when I would seek help and the main criteria for treatment is “Do you want to hurt yourself or others?” Well of course not. That’s the entire reason for me seeking help in the first place. I want to deal with this now, before it gets out of hand and affects my quality of life or those around me.

Unfortunately, it was then that I gained the valuable insider knowledge as to why these overworked, underpaid people in charge of intake and screening were so jaded. Right there in the waiting room, the guy next to me leans in and says with a grin, “Just tell them you’re hearing voices and they’ll give you the good stuff.” Then another woman starts explaining that if I say “this and that” then I might qualify for a “disability check.”

I wanted to scream at both of them: “Shame on you!” I wasn’t there to get dope! I wasn’t there to run some pathetic con artist game to extort state funds. I like to work. And I’m certainly not some dope fiend. I’m just an old blue-collar guy of average intelligence who’s known for a long time that much of the stuff going on in my head is not right.

I know I’m not violent or mean. I’ve never started fights, and I’m certainly not a bully. However, as far back as I can remember, I was painfully aware of my limits for tolerating foolishness. Oh sure, I was taught right from wrong. I was supposed to hold myself to some higher standard and either walk away or turn the other cheek. But what about them, the bullies? It didn’t make sense that I have to follow the rules while they do whatever they please.

All my life I’ve tried to stay out of the way. Since I already know I’m a weirdo, it’s my little way of avoiding problems. Inevitably, this leads the bullies to seek me out. They thrive on conflict and controversy. Making others



miserable brings them their dark pleasure. They always underestimate the objects of their treachery. They fail to realize how quickly the tables can be turned and hunter becomes hunted.

If anything good is to come of this calamity that is my life, then I must keep striving in my effort to prevent what has happened to me from continuing to happen to others. This task is exponentially exacerbated because I'm trying to do this from inside these prison walls. But maybe, just maybe, folks will now be all the more interested in listening to what I have to say.

After all, I have this perfect case study in worst case scenarios: "This is what will happen when complacency takes precedence over compassion!"

Why is it the school bully can take a kid's lunch money 10 times but on that 11th time, when the kid stands up for himself and smashes the bully in the nose with a tray, he ends up in the principal's office? Why is it that people can enter others' homes and rob them, yet the homeowners cannot defend themselves nor their property? Sound preposterous? Well it's not. I'm serving 25 years because I fought back against the three men who *robbed me*.

We must inject some integrity, accountability, and equanimity into all matters regarding criminal acts and social justice. Why is it that millionaire NFL players are allowed to viciously rip the helmet off another player's head and bash them over the skull (that is *agg. assault*) but if one doesn't have the cash to participate in the organized extortion racket that is our corrupt legal system, then you're not allowed to defend life and property from home invasion robbery? Why do we continue to accept such blatant duplicity? Is our due process of law really up for sale?

I did not choose to do what I did out of anger. That choice was made for me when they invaded my home. Instead, I was forced to take a stand out of fear. When the wolves entered my door, I acted bravely, decisively, and instantly. And for the government to deny me that right is just plain wrong. None of us know how we will react in such dangerous and stressful situations. Nor does anyone of us know what is going on inside of another person's psyche at any given moment. That's why we must change now and make that conscious decision to treat each other better!

It's often difficult for me to find the right words. I'd never be able to properly explain this, even if I wrote 10 books or 1000 letters. I'm sure that I've already written several hundred. Few get responses. I refuse to be deterred in the least. I will keep on keeping on until I find those right people, who will help the multitudes who have been wronged, find our voice.

We are just now beginning to see those elitists who abuse their power for the purpose of proliferating their own corrupt, greedy, ulterior agendas brought to justice! I pray that the rest of us "everyday people" find the courage and determination which is necessary to return power to the populace and make our democracy just as our founders intended it to be! Thank you for your time and consideration.

*Brain Fuller*

## TOXIC AVENGER

I am overflowing  
with toxic sludge.

A walking waste disposal site buried full of  
rusted scorn, tattered taunts and jagged insults.

Who would I be now if  
Anti-bullying agendas  
LGBT support groups  
and Positive Sexuality programs  
were a part of my formative years?

Where attraction between two males was accepted  
and mutual masturbation  
didn't have to include  
mutual intoxication.

Where love could flow freely  
buzzing the senses, filling the heart  
acknowledged, accepted, embraced.

Where would I be now?  
Not in prison.

*Matthew Feeney*

To address the theme of grief for your next issue: this is an issue I've dealt with recently.

My grandmother, who I affectionately call "Nana," passed away on August 10, 2019. I was very sad, but it actually took about three months for the full effect of this reality to kick in, and around the "Thanksgiving" colonialist holiday (which my Native brothers and sisters have designated a national day of mourning for the victims of the American Genocide), I became extremely depressed and even to the point of feeling suicidal.

In addition to this death in my family, we've had at least five trans women that were murdered over the past several years in the California state prison men's facilities. One of these fallen sisters was Carmen "Pumpkin" Guerrero, who was killed around Halloween of 2013 at Kern Valley State Prison, where I was incarcerated at the time. I actually crossed paths with the hater that killed her, Miguel Crespo, who I confronted directly and fought in 2017 at Salinas Valley. I believe strongly in Natural Law rights of individual and collective self-defence, so when he approached me on the yard I deemed him an imminent threat to myself and other women!

Anyway, how do I deal with all these terrible traumatizing events of death, hatred, and violence? How do I deal with grief? I have some advice for anyone in the LGBTQ community.

First, concerning the death of a loved one or family member, find a way to honor and memorialize them. For example, recommit to strengthening family ties, and provide or contribute to the family in some way with material aid. If you become severely depressed, consult a mental health worker or social worker.

Another thing to do that has had a positive effect is to become more involved in community activism or support groups that help others, or that build resistance and solidarity against social injustice, such as prison abolitionist, anti-racist, or radical queer and feminist projects.

*Jennifer Rose*

My sisters and brothers in the LGBTQ community:

It's me, Ms. Jazzie Farrari, once again writing to share a few lines of encouragement, especially to all the transgender women who find themselves behind the dreary grey walls and razor-wire topped, electrified fences of male prisons.

Needless to say, doing time isn't easy. But you, like me, can overcome the daily turmoil of prison life, particularly the loneliness and isolation. When I began my prison sentence, the prison authorities forced me into protective custody. Their reasoning for such a move was because I look too much like a girl. I was put in solitary confinement, where I spent a lot of time in deep thought. Prayer and my hope for a better day sustained me through that very dark period of my prison term. But as I stated earlier, I spent a lot of time in deep thought. Instead of looking outward for some help, I looked inward, making an honest assessment of myself. In doing so, I became acutely aware of my faults, strengths, and past failings. I also became aware of how positive and negative thoughts affect emotions and actions. I embraced it all and reached deep down into my soul, into that pool of strength, making it possible for me to touch the face of the universe and assert my strengths with the affirmation that "I am a human being. I am a woman of excellence."

In time I learned how to better control my emotions and actions, because by looking at me, my past and present, I was able to see how I sabotaged myself by saying and doing the wrong things. Because of my destructive behavior and poor self esteem, I was very selfish and short-sighted. I would second guess positive, intuitive thought and ultimately dismiss them. I turned down good opportunities, feeling unworthy of them, and was afraid of success. I didn't know what I really wanted or needed, always looking outside myself for validation and fulfillment. I didn't appreciate what I had in myself and in my family, thinking that I didn't have to prove myself to anyone. Plain and simple, I realized I'd failed to improve myself. I chose drama, turmoil, and debilitating stress over comfort, community, and peaceful resolution of problems. Like a pig that wallows in mud, I wallowed in drama, anger, and self pity.

I came to see all that about myself. Now, knowing what's important to me, knowing what my values and goals are, I can better meet each day with a positive outlook, by matching my attitude and actions with my values and goals. I'm more focused today. More organized, observant, understanding, and open-minded because I've given the weaker side of myself permission to be strong and competent. I'd reset the default button of my mind and life. No more insecurity, dependency, poor self esteem. I do feel a very powerful self worth and see myself as others should and do see me—as a strong black woman.

I'm not as dependent as before on the approval of others because I'd found myself in that solitary cell. Self

affirmation is a very powerful weapon for the transgender woman trapped in a male prison. As long as I have me and am happy with me, that's all that matters.

I love all of you and am in the struggle for life.

*Ms. Jazzie Farrari*

Having lost three family members over the past four years, I'm all too familiar with dealing with grief while behind bars. The hardest part for me was not being able to say goodbye. All of my family is from other states, so I was not allowed to attend any of the funerals. This in turn increases the guilt I feel for not being with them at the end, the guilt of being the one that put myself in prison.

How did I deal with it? Taking long, hot showers, hanging my head under the spray to wash away the tears. Tears in prison is like blood to a shark. You can't let them see you cry.

*Chris Ridley*

The worst feeling to have in prison  
steals all others like a thief  
taking loved ones away in a second  
this terrible feeling is grief

It steals your body away from you  
leaves you feeling alone and afraid  
losing everything that you've become  
all successes you've ever made

Helpless, hopeless, lost and numb  
always come side by side  
but grief brings all these feelings  
finding out a loved one has died

Losing my papa, dad and brother  
then nona and so many more  
grief has stricken me so many times  
leaving me broken on the floor

Grief can be overcome though  
with tenacity and strength  
no matter how bad it may seem  
with help I went to so many lengths

*Jeremy Rutherford*

You asked how some of us grieve or deal with loss from the inside. Well, I think it might be prudent to also hear from those who don't deal with loss because we don't know how.

I've been a "cutter" since I was 13 years old. I'm now 48. Unfortunately, I'm still a cutter. I guess it's like any affliction or addiction... I'll always be a cutter. I may not always cut, but I'll forever be a cutter. The scars don't lie.

Since I've been incarcerated, I've lost my mother, my father (both have died), and multiple friends or partners. My

wife left with my kids and I've lost my house. I get out in Oct of 2020 and I have no family left to go out to.

The last time I cut was back in July 2019. I haven't cut since. Why? Because when my fiancé Andy saw the wounds he cried and put his arms around me. He said, "Why can't I fix you?" I replied, "I can't be fixed." Then he said, "I'll never stop trying though." Then he kissed all my scars and called me beautiful. I haven't cut since. I know you aren't supposed to get better for others. You're supposed to do it for yourself, but I don't believe I deserve it. I know he does, and I don't deserve him at all. He is such a beautiful perfect angel. He saved me.

My current release plan now? I'm going to Maine to help his family out while I wait on him to come home to me.

Now we are being separated by transfer, but I know we'll make it. I believe in him with all my heart. He's worried I'll cut again cuz I'll be depressed being apart from him. I worry too. But I can promise to try my hardest not to and instead of cutting I just sit down and re-read the hundreds of letters he's written me, telling me he loves me if I get sad.

So, to sum this up, how do I cope with loss? It's simple now: I love. And it's all because of my angel Andy, my baby-boy. I love you, kiddo. Thank you for not giving up on me. You saved me, and for that I promise to make all your dreams come true.

*Sean Price*

Grief, helluva topic. I lost my grandpa (dad's side) while I was in the county jail. Hurt like hell, but still hasn't fully set in. I have two younger sisters who want nothing to do with me because of my mother's hatred of my lifestyle. My pop, who adopted me when I was 11, has stayed by my side through everything. For me, grief is a very selfish thing. I hold it in, not sharing it with anyone. I know that's very unhealthy emotionally but it's how I deal with it. Losing my pop terrifies me! When that happens, I don't know what I'll do.

*Richard Risher*

Since being incarcerated I've lost my father, who died from AIDS complications in prison. Then my mother died five months later from a drug overdose inside of a motel room. Honestly, I lost it for several months. Fortunately, I was around some fellow brothers and sisters who helped in my recovery and, a lot of them, I didn't even know their names. That's why I'm such an advocate for the family. So, to all my beauties, support one another because sometimes (especially in here) we're all we got!

*Eric Hudson*

## **SELFISH VS. SELFLESS : WHEN SUICIDE SPEAKS**

I've given numerous presentations to outside guests about life inside prison. In one topic, Psychological Prison, I discuss the process of how an inmate is informed about the death of a loved one. I begin by asking the inmates on my

panel to raise their hand if they have had a family member die while they were incarcerated. The majority of hands go up. I cover the inmates' notification process and possible outcome if they show any form of sadness: suicide watch in segregation. That is the worst place to be while processing pain. You are locked up, no sheets, only a smock to wear, nobody to talk to, no access to your personal property, and alone. You are not going to attend a funeral, like shown in the movies. Closure most likely will not start until you are released, and the death becomes real. I have never had to experience that scenario in my nine years of incarceration—until now.

I called my mother on a Wednesday morning and she sounded ill. I asked if she was feeling ok and she replied, "Dalton drowned." I asked her "What?" in disbelief. Her response was repeated the same, but in a flood of tears. She proceeded to inform me of what little details she knew. I was stunned, not sure what to do, how to feel. Or what my purpose was. It felt like I was punched in the stomach and the sinister feeling of impending doom began.

My daughter, the one thing I held dear to my very existence, got married on Saturday, flew to Florida on Sunday for her honeymoon, and had to witness the last moments of her new husband's life on Tuesday. In addition, she almost lost her own life attempting to rescue her soulmate. My son-in-law was taken off this earth just as he was about to embark on a new chapter in his life. How much trauma could a 22-year-old newlywed college student endure? And why?

I tried to process this on a prison telephone, in an open area, and do my best to suppress my tears. On top of the surge of emotions, there was still situation awareness of where I was: prison. When others saw you sad, they asked questions. I did not want to be pestered with "What's wrong?" Another point to consider was that I was in shark-infested waters, surrounded by swindlers and predators. My tears were drops of blood in this sea of carnivores. My pain became another's gain if I was not careful.

As a parent, you want to protect your children, and comfort them when they hurt. I am a combat veteran and would do anything to shield my kids from witnessing an unnatural death. The baggage is far too great, and the emotional wounds may take a lifetime to heal. Death is a strict teacher. Its rules are unflinching, and it doesn't care what you think about fairness. In my situation, the burning of failure penetrated my soul. I could not comfort my daughter due to my wrong choices in life.

## **MIND FIELDS**

Suicidal ideation had been no stranger to me. My pain was unbearable now. I had zero control, and death would take it all away. The one thing I did have control over was my own life. I wanted some morsel of control back. If I killed myself, I would be free of the failure of a father that I had been. I also blamed myself for this horrible event. I am incarcerated for manslaughter. I killed my wife. Was this God's punishment? Was this an "eye for an eye" or "the sins of the father" type of stuff that I had seen on Sunday morning television? Was my daughter's pain and loss due to my past behavior? I think it is. Did my daughter blame me? In my frame of mind, not being able to get a hold of family, or leave messages, the answer





was *yes*. Access to a firearm at this very moment looked like solution.

The rays of living were eclipsed. I wanted a divorce from life. Divorces were acceptable and this terminology made it ok. As unhealthy choices were being planned, I started brainstorming what resources were available to end my life. This was the planning phase. There was no quick way out—suicide—in the prison setting, but it had been accomplished in the past. I knew what I must do.

I found myself trapped in a thick darkness from which there was no escape. My heart had been ripped out and my soul was missing. I was a zombie, a hollow bag of skin. I hurt in such a way that intense physical pain would be a relief. I was focused on the here and now and the most obvious consequences of my actions did not register. My loss of control backed me into a corner as my mental calculations and reasoning become primitive. I wanted control back. My life was control, so I would take it.

As a former soldier and combat medic, I was familiar with fearlessness. Who did I reach out to when I was used to being the one they called for help? A sentence in the Soldier's Creed states, "I will always place the mission first." If my mission was to end my life, that was my priority now. I became consumed with tunnel vision. This may be one explanation why active duty military and veterans have a high success rate with suicide. There are approximately 20 suicides a day in this category of our population. (Source: *VA National Suicide Data Report 2005-2016*)

When I made the decision to kill myself, my senses, although numb in appearance, were hypersensitive to

justification. Even after I decided to die, I still listened to key words, expressions, and the body language of those I encountered. If I sensed that you didn't care—a wrong blink, look, word, or laugh—that was confirmation of my lack of value. I was actively looking for someone to disregard me, prove that I was worthless, not believe that I hurt—I'd show them. Or treat me like a victim—I'd be a victim soon enough. The questions "Are you ok?" or "How are you doing?" were worthless and you would get a one-word response every time. You already knew something was wrong with me. Don't be stupid. If you asked, "Do you want to harm yourself?" You'd get a big fat lie of "nope." You were not going to lock me up, punish me, prevent me from killing myself, or poor babying me. However, the question "How bad are you?" would get my attention. You verified my world of pain, you respected it, and so I was challenged to think about an answer. I had to process this question from my dark place, due to the fact that I did not have an automatic reply for it. No one-word bullshit answer. That was your open door to buy me some time. My invisible walls had to be breached before the inevitable.

On the mission to end my life, I still sought rationalization to reinforce my decision. I made a few telephone calls to non-family members who would not be biased. One resource walked me through the Bible verses that had been my fixation, one of the justifications to kill myself. He searched for it while we spoke and then educated me on the context of the whole story, not the eternal damnation of a single verse. That lowered the threat level a notch, but I still wanted out. I was reacting in desperation, caused by intense emotional pain.

I called resource #2 and talked about my daughter's tragedy. After hearing me out, as I talked in circles, he expressed empathy, but then spoke of a story I had recently written. I mean come on! My new son-in-law drowned, daughter witnessed it, and I was done living. And this guy was talking about one of my stories? That confused the heck out of my one-sided thought process and emotions. That sly individual took my focus off the grave momentarily, and I had to process one of my accomplishments. Someone was buying me more air to inhale as my focus shifted. I had no clue what was going on in our conversation, as I wanted to go back to the tragedy. The refocus was a condiment in the recipe for my survival. At no point did I tell anyone of my intention to kill myself.

I spoke to staff soon after I had discovered the horrible news, when I was deep in the hunt for justification. I was offered to speak with mental health and the answer was premeditated, "No." I just wanted to die. However, after speaking to those previous resources, I gave in and informed staff that I was willing to see a counsellor. I wanted to see my mental health specialist just one more time. The next day, during my appointment, another key discovery gave me purpose. It was brought to light that I might be the only person my daughter could relate to, since I had been intimate with death during the war. I might be the only person she could connect with. Now, I had synapse firing parts of my brain that were shut down. The mental walls had been breached. She might need me. Enough said! I could honestly say that mental health and their bag of tricks interrupted my path to suicide.

After several people refused to give up on me when my depression made loving me a task, it came down to this: Yes, I hurt bad, I blamed myself, and this pain wasn't going away anytime soon so I could not minimize it. Let's talk fairness. The main reason I could end my life was due to the question of "Could my daughter, a 22-year-old widow, handle two funerals in a week? And due to my actions?" I could not do that to her. Not now anyway. So I needed a purpose, a mission. I am a soldier.

1. Start asking outside organizations, churches, veterans' groups, and anyone else if they could send a card or money to support my daughter. Asking for addresses, letter writing, and phone calls takes focus and determination.
2. Call my daughter. Utilize my experiences battling PTSD and trauma to be a mentor, friend, and part of her support system.
3. Obtain a sympathy card. The best one I can find. Go to the chapel, get the word out to other offenders that I will buy one, or have someone make me one.
4. Write every detail of this experience down. Offer insight into my self-destructive thought process. It may save someone's life and be of use to mental health professionals.

After completing this mission, then I would revisit the need to end my life.

## AFTER ACTION REPORT

As a former non-commissioned officer (NCO), the standard US soldier, airman, sailor, or Marine isn't going to respond readily to terms like co-morbid conditions, cognitive strategies, and psychoanalysis. Those words are for mental health professionals at their meetings. That is like trying to understand cryptology, or nuclear propulsion, for us boots on ground type warriors. I prefer rock drills and plain talk.

My previous situation of despair will be discussed by utilizing three popular military war movies: *Top Gun* (1986), *Flight of the Intruder* (1990), and *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001). Those films ignite the senses and emotions with adrenaline, fear, anticipation, death, and will to survive. Those fighter jets are an awesome display of firepower and strength. The pilots operating the aircraft are admirable, and fearless, until the danger zone is reached. When enemy fire strikes your life source (aircraft), it becomes sensory overload. Army term: a significant emotional event (it scares the crap out of you). Your mind is bombarded with flashing lights, beeps, emergency messages, and radio traffic of impending doom. You have the choice to fix the problem, pull the ejection lever, or crash to your death in the blaze of glory. But when tunnel vision takes over, and you aren't breathing oxygen effectively, death is imminent. Pride, embarrassment, fear, or pain may be the reason you forget about your lifeline of ejecting. Life is a blur until a hint of reason can pull you out of the tailspin. I am not reading the gauges right, and the parachute is under my seat, but I don't realize it is there. However, even when I eject and the chute open, I still have to navigate issues, identify problems, and tend to my injuries.

In *Behind Enemy Lines*, actor Owen Wilson is shot down in Siberia. He is being hunted by a sadistic foreign army,

just witnessed the execution of his co-pilot. He is battling the environmental elements in a county where friend and foe is a blur. The scene where Wilson is speaking to his commanding officer, actor Gene Hackman, after a failed rescue attempt, Hackman senses Wilson's despair and loss of hope. That equates death. Hackman pauses (on the radio), then engages Wilson with a series of petty questions concerning Wilson's gear. Wilson's hostile surroundings do not matter—nor the murder he witnessed hours earlier, nor the delay in his evacuation. His essential gear to survive, the items he possessed, becomes his immediate focus. That redirection gives Wilson just enough focus to push through the despair and live a little longer. The small items he does have control over are significant enough for another hour of living.

Sound familiar? What resource #2 did? He deflected my current state of mind even though I felt the tragedy should be the immediate focus. That bought time. In suicidal ideation, the clock is ticking. Buying time, buying life, opens the door to be able to have a glimpse at my purpose.

In a sharp contrast to what we learn in the Soldier's Creed, "I will never accept defeat," the failed mission to end my life is the one compromise to take pleasure in being unsuccessful. Suicide is a virus, it makes you sick mentally, and it infects others.

*"At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with gratitude of those who have lighted the flame with us."*

-Albert Schweitzer

Shon Pernice

## HEALTHCARE

The theme for our next issue is HEALTHCARE before and after the COVID-19 a.k.a. coronavirus pandemic. It's been a big topic on all of our minds, and we want to hear your experiences, thoughts, and stories about healthcare inside.

How was it going when things were normal? How did things change when the pandemic started? Any particular positive or negative experiences with the way your prison has handled COVID-19? What kind of care do you get or not get cuz of your queerness? What healthcare needs aren't being met? How do you take care of your own health (mental or physical) and how do you care for your community?

Writing! Poetry! Art! We love to see it all! As always, 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: PART THREE

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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 our very own Eve Parker, a former member of the Prisoner Correspondence Project, 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 can't fit it all in this issue—but we don't want you to miss a thing, so we'll be publishing the rest of the transcript in installments in forthcoming issues of the newsletter! Without further ado, here's part three!

*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 is a father, mother, grandmother, and grandfather to her own children, and to many in the transgender community. 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.*

**EVE:** I wonder if we can talk about another organization where you did a lot of work with the community and it was a large focus, or a large part of your life: the TGIJP, the Transgender Gender Variant Intersex Justice Project. First, can you just talk about what TGIJP did and a little bit about its history and how it came to be?

**MAJOR:** TGIJP came to be with Alex Lee and myself. Alex was a studying lawyer at the time and he was in school, noticing the complete increase of incarceration for the trans girls working in San Francisco. When he got his law degree, he started an agency called TIP (Transgender in Prison). From there it turned into the Transgender Gender Variant Intersex Justice Project.

What we got to do was we got to connect with the girls in the prison system—not just the jails but the prisons—and in doing that, giving them some place, someone to write to about the horrible things happening to them in there on a daily basis because they had nobody to go to, nobody to listen to them. They're not in touch with their families and nobody really cared in the system itself to make things better.

What we wound up doing was starting a letter writing program. Then, since Alex was a lawyer, we got an opportunity to go in there and visit them, talk to them and have them get a chance to verbally tell somebody about the things that they

were going through and suffering. And we helped to give them some kind of solution—not so much to alleviate it and make it better, you know I may be old but I don't have no wand, I can't bingo Sally you ready to go—but I can talk to them. I can give them a sense of wherewithal and appreciate who they are as they are. And know that they're loved no matter what they have to do. They don't have to jump through hoops, be tall, be passing, be on hormones...all they have to do is be breathing and be a trans person.

You know, through doing that we had the opportunity to get the letter writing program done, and Alex would go to court with some of the girls who weren't doing prison time yet. Fighting for them, we got a chance to talk to some judges, send in letters stating that this person doesn't need to be in jail; maybe they need rehab. A lot of people think, *oh yeah you're a transgender woman, all you can do is hook, and then of course if all you're doing is hooking you do drugs, and if you do drugs then of course you're not trustworthy and then of course you're a thief and it's a matter of time before you kill somebody because you haven't got enough sense to survive going through that path.* Bullshit. We had the opportunity to help clarify some of that. And the sad thing is that as much as we've run, as far as that goes, it hasn't gone anywhere. It persists today still.

What they're doing in San Francisco is trying to create a safe space to hire transgender women who come out of prison, so they can make a fair wage and earn for themselves. So that they can be independent, stand on their own two feet, have some sense of pride in who they are. If they want to still hook, then fine, Ima tell you how to hook safely so you don't have to go to prison, you're not gonna get infected with a disease, you're not gonna wind up dead against the curb—cause you gonna check out your John, someone is gonna know who you're with. You're going to do it safely. It's an opportunity to give the community a chance to do what they want to do for themselves.

A lot of agencies come in and want to try to help and it's like, *oh we have a truck load with 20,000 shoes.* Well that's nice, I don't need shoes. I need a sweater. We have shoes, I need a fucking sweater! So listen to the community, do what they ask. You need sweaters? Get them goddamn sweaters, a shoe ain't gonna keep you warm, you know?

So for me it's a matter of making sure that all of you have a sense of who you are and who you want to be and you should be able to express that freely, any way you choose. And it's not just how you dress, it's what your aura is, how you feel, the sense of pride you have walking somewhere. I want the community to feel everyday like they're kicking it on eight





goddamn cylinders and people can kiss my motherfucking ass as I take care of my goddamn business.

**EVE:** Amazing. When we were brainstorming questions we were interested in this thing about—you’ve done a lot of organizing in different structures, like in an NGO (or non-profit) and also just a group of people doing something out of need—and we were wondering what the differences of doing organizing in those two structures is. What do you gain and lose by doing this kind of radical community organizing in the structure of a not-for-profit versus in a grassroots organization?

**MAJOR:** I feel like I don’t lose anything. What I gain is the spreading of knowledge, confidence, information, because you just can’t run out there and don’t have any idea where you’re going. Like you don’t leave your house going, *oh god where am I going today?* There has to be some kind of plan. And the thing is that, you know, in working with organizations who are just starting and trying to figure out what to do to help the community, I want to give them the information that they need, the structure their grassroots stuff need to get to the people that they’re trying to serve. And to the people who are behind them, in their corner, like their friends and things like that.

Because a lot of things get carried away with having really good intentions, but you don’t have good follow-through. So if I can help by having to teach them how to follow through and to be the best at whatever it is they’re trying to do, then I want to do that.

One of the things that working with non-government organizations, stuff like that, is...I wound up going to Switzerland and speaking out to the United Nations, and it was the first time that they even accepted hearing the word *transgender*. But after talking with me for a while, when they gave their judgement over all the organizations—there were twelve of us—in their speech back to us, they let me know that in their point of view the United States is creating harm by holding somebody in the hole (or segregated unit) for more than 15 days as a form of torture. Well, my community has been in hole for like—there’s this girl who just got out of prison and was in the hole for 26 years! So what do we do to help correct that? We have to work with other people to try to get that thing done and change and give them the strength to do it, along with the information.

*Stay tuned for the rest of the conversation!*

# HOMOSCOPES

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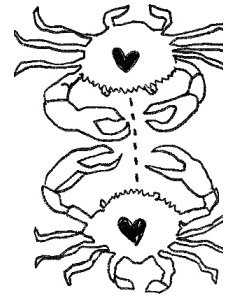
## ARIES

When COVID-19 started, Aries, you were ready. Aries is about breaking out, showing up, going good and hard at the gates, and tearing everything all the way open. Everyone is looking to you to use this virus to completely end all of prison. Everyone out here on the outside is in awe of your work and your sheer gay force, and we are all massively cheering you on.



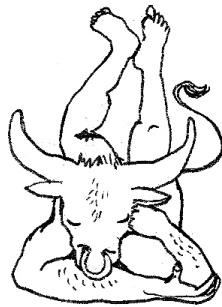
## CANCER

It's just true how everybody really likes you, Cancer. You make a safe home anyplace by providing secret ease and rough gay love. We also enjoy how you always find that exact right best special little gesture that just soothes and calms and moms and daddies. We will all pull toward you as things go on, and we feel intensely appreciative of your surplus of hot crabby vibes.



## TAURUS

This has been a particularly chilly May and we wish we could all be spooning a Taurus. Up here in Canada, everyone is walking around in ski masks, hoping that COVID-19 fashion will protect us from viral droplets and also, snow. I want to hold your body and nuzzle in for something warmer. We are all thinking of you and dreaming hard that you will soon be out here with us, shivering, kinda naked, and ready.



## LEO

Wow, Leo! What even is happening? The more people have been “distancing,” the more you have been holding attention, getting what you need, keeping it gay. How can so many homos fawn and adore and claw at you so effectively when everyone is forced so far apart? I love how you can somehow be super chill and not chill and respectful while fun! Please guide the rest of us into COVID summer and please make it thirsty.



## GEMINI

Happy birthday Geminis! It's amazing how even in quarantines, you find all the adorable ways to talk, flirt, move, sext, and connect. Getting all your love letters makes the hardest days soft and perfect. You're like ice cream in quarantine—thanks for being pleasantly sticky and deeply refreshing and for soaking everything in me all the way through.



## VIRGO

Oh Virgo. You always said we should wash our hands all day and keep better organized and follow protocol and up our vers leaning bottom game. And now, your cash is king! Please keep us in line, hold us till we get safe, make the ritual of the day to day hurt in all the best ways. Virgos forever.



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## LIBRA

Well, you tried bringing everyone together because crisis but people totally betray each other and then there is drama. Gay drama. But, you are doing a very important service of finding pods, sorting feelings, keeping it good. This crucial invisible mending that you do gold. You are extremely important.



## CAPRICORN

Well, no one does it better than you at the best of times and here we are so, I have a crush. Give me your lists, your force, and that mouth, and I will remain eager to let you top this pandemic. I respect and await your reasonable and feasible plan. If you tell me what to do, I will finally listen. Together, lover, we can transform COVID into the gayest rage.



## SCORPIO

A love letter to you, Scorpio, for saving me from COVID-19. You, a fixed water sign in this tough time, have gone deep and made this whole mess endlessly meaningful. You are special, Scorpions, because you make chosen family, you have cool gay hairdos, you snicker at all the right moments, you share a perfect cup of tea, and you aren't scared to cry for what you want the world to become. Thanks for being in my pod, and for helping me prepare for anything.



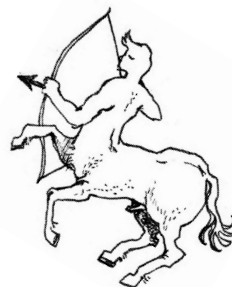
## AQUARIUS

You have good ideas. Please use your special sign to show us how to never go back to "normal," how to be our gayest yet, how to truly end policing with this disease. If any one sign has any special powers, it is Aquarius! You all will win at COVID-19. Please teach us how to survive body to body, to make a thirst trap from 6 feet apart, to hold each other sweating and loving and yearning right through it.



## SAGITTARIUS

Sag, you are a full party sign in pandemic times. You make sad empty rooms into disco rave dance floors. You turn the worst last rations into endless hot treats. You look sexy AF in surgical masks. Your latex-ed hands are beyond the perfect size to go anyplace. Thanks for making a virus into hot fun.



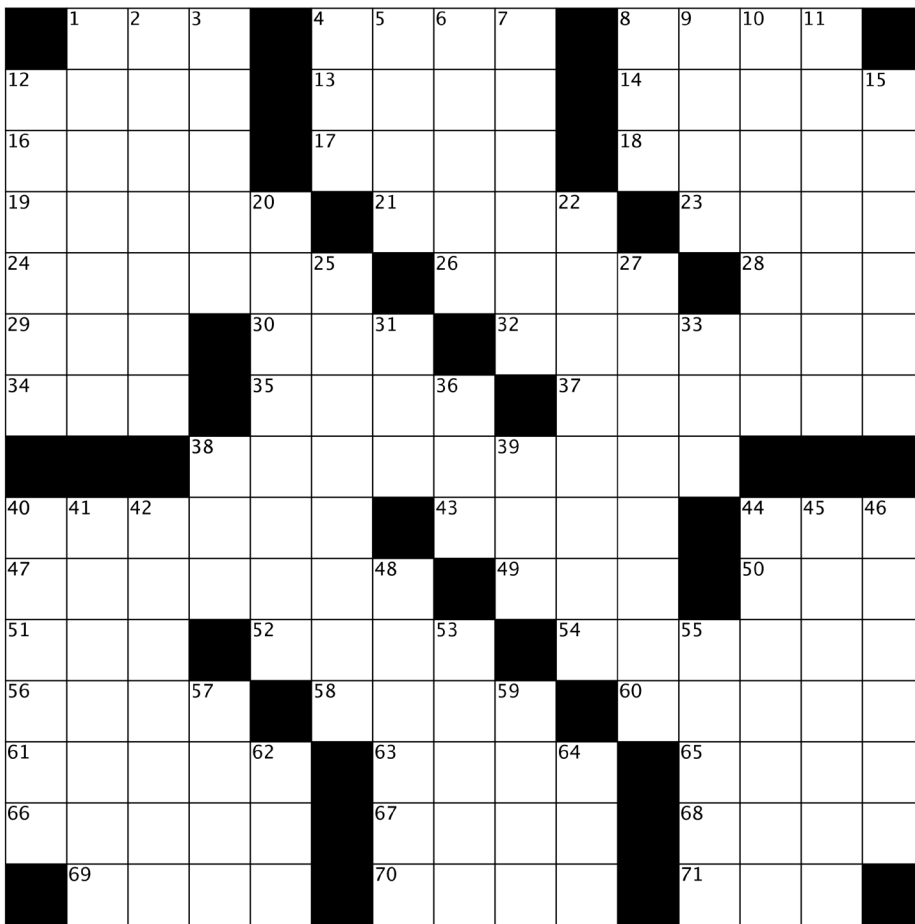
## PISCES

I am fully so excited about you. I love how you are gay and trans and winning and bably and respectful and cautious yet open in this weird time. Pisces wisdom makes disaster days into the faggy space of exhausted giggles and open smiles and fighty fun. You build the best kind of longing, even/ especially when all our bodies are forbidden to touch.





# CROSSWORD



4. "This is a test. For the next 60 seconds..." org.
5. Word after cash or before bag
6. Labor camp
7. "A Streetcar Named Desire" role
8. Muslim pilgrimage
9. Ancient Greek contest
10. Bernie Sanders or Ted Cruz
11. Poor farmer
12. California city
15. Outlines
20. Nasty cut
22. Mitten state
25. Resident of Thebes
27. Bird immune to stings
31. Marry
33. Weather-reporting abbr.
36. Metric equivalent to lbs.
38. Get-\_\_\_\_(starts)
39. Stool pigeon
40. Geronimo's people
41. Galleon
42. High crime
44. Many
45. You can't make them without breaking some 2-across
46. Babies
48. "A Million Little \_\_\_\_\_"
53. Cool
55. Guitar licks
57. Otis's pal
59. Common food fish
62. Said in Strasbourg
64. NNE's opposite

## ACROSS

1. Mdse.
4. You need to break some to make 45-down
8. Padlock's place
12. Fly, as a moth
13. Dry Champagne
14. Author James and others
16. Campaign
17. Clearance
18. Whale-dweller
19. Computer key
21. Ointment
23. Space org.
24. Sacred Egyptian beetle
26. Facile
28. Bar feature
29. Not gross
30. Amaze
32. Nail polish remover
34. Poetic praise
35. Half a fortnight
37. Card game
38. Charlie Brown catchphrase
40. Throw a tantrum

43. Epic tale
44. Boar's mate
47. Root vegetable
49. Ink, briefly
50. Flightless bird
51. Equal
52. Raised platform
54. Something one might get on
56. Study last-minute
58. Skinny
60. Métis leader Louis and family
61. Member of a devout Jewish sect
63. Big bosses
65. Liberated
66. Bothersome bacterium
67. Rock band founded by Mark Oliver Everett
68. \_\_\_\_\_ Domino
69. Tough tie
70. Hearty meal
71. Mercedes roadsters

## DOWN

1. Looked quickly
2. Give orders
3. Castrated bull

*Created by Drew Nelles*

# 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!

## How to Talk to Wrestling Fans About Prison Abolition

A comic zine that appeals to that special wrestling fan in your life, but it'll help you talk to everyone you meet about piling the carceral state.

## The Last Plantation

A comic zine by E.L. Tedana who is incarcerated in Texas. Created to bring awareness to prison slavery and the state's dependency on free labor.

## Untreated Mental Illness in Prison

A comic zine by E.L. Tedana & J. Coffey, both incarcerated in Texas. Depicts the issue of sleep deprivation and mental illness within the confines of prison.

## truE Fluidity

A comic zine by E.L. Tedana who is incarcerated in Texas. Depicts the creative ways prisoners make art on the inside with unconventional supplies and inventive techniques.

## Me Inside of Me

A comic zine by E.L. Tedana who is incarcerated in Texas. Represents the author's journey from self-sabotage to self-acceptance.

## Girdick 1, 2, and 3

Estradiol-infused transfeminine fits of rage and analysis in zine format, written by queer trans artist Camille Auer.

## Guide to Legally Changing Your Name and Gender While Incarcerated

Resource published by the TGI Justice Project on changing your legal name and gender while incarcerated in a California State Prison.

## A Transgender/Gender Non-Conforming Guide to Parole Preparation

Resource published by the TGI Justice Project sharing strategies for trans/GNC people facing parole and how to navigate the challenges that arise when preparing for it.

## Registering with Dignity: A Practical Guide to Reentry & Life on the Registry

An extensive 2017 guide published by Sex Law and Policy Center on reentry for people on the sex offender registry. Includes information on constitutional rights, community supervision, housing, employment, social support, treatment, and more.

\*\*Underlined resources are over 15 sheets



TRAVIS FRAZIER

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Do you have some feelings about what was in this latest issue of *The Word is Out*? Great, cuz we're now accepting your responses to publish in our next newsletter. Please use the header "Letter to the Editor" and keep your submission under 100 words. Note that we may not be able to fit in all your cuties (but we'll try)!



# R.I.P. To our Fallen Loved, Cherished & Remembered!

39% of Community

1. Love only those who show you Trust  
2. Loyalty equal Trust!

3. Honor  
4. Pride  
5. unity  
6. respect  
7. Equality (LGBT)

Take Pride in your equal & remember to never put a label on them, there free will to chose one's life style is being unique. Accept & let your equal be the image that they seek, not what you seek only you can see the flaws in your-self, don't let others judge you. Be proud in your own skin you have a choice & a voice it takes one voice to speak to the right ears to make a change like the ripple effect, I'm Bi, but no matter what (L.B.G., T.Q.A.I.O.P.) we are considered fags in the eyes of outsiders, well I'm a Proud, Loud STRONG FAGG!

Strong  
We Die Together  
We Grow Wings and Fly Together  
Forget Labels  
MAGGI

7 Laws of Pride!  
We Ride Together

IM GAY, IM Proud  
IM Bi-SEXUAL  
IM Transgender  
IM Lesbian  
IM Queer  
But IM 100% UNIQUE & AND PROUD IN MY SKIN  
Only I Can Judge Me!!  
Be Proud In Your Own Skin!  
Bi-LAW OF EQUAL!...

Love  
Loyalty  
We die Together  
We Grow Wings & Fly Together  
Honor  
unity

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MAGGI FASA (L.B.G.T) PRIDE  
727 MOBIL  
Founder G.B.G.

Be Proud Be your self