



ISSUE 23: SPRING 2021: HEALTHCARE

## Welcome to issue 23 of *The Word is Out!*

What's up darlings? How we've missed you!

Working through the pandemic has certainly forced us to get creative—but you know we're great at that! This winter, for the first time ever, we hosted a digital volunteer session, where friends, pen pals and first-time volunteers from all across the city of Montreal—and beyond!—helped us by typing up newsletter submissions, resource submissions, and other writing from you, our beloved inside members. We also masterminded a method of outsourcing resource requests for volunteers to complete at home! As you'll see in our "Behind the Scenes", we've gone the extra mile to keep things moving and shaking at PCP!

We've also been participating in some fantastic events, at a distance and over the internet. In August, PCP helped organize a socially-distanced gathering at a park for Prisoners' Justice Day. This is an annual memorial day for those who have died unnatural deaths in prison, as well as a day of action for those still fighting strong against cruelty and dehumanization behind and beyond bars.

At the start of the school year, we hosted a workshop for "Dis/Orientation"—an alternative orientation event series for students—which provided a critical introduction to the Canadian prison system.

On social media, we've introduced a monthly writing prompt for pen pals. So far, topics have ranged from personal reflections to sharing and discussing articles. We're aiming to put an end to pen pal shyness, one conversation starter at a time!

Some of the PCP collective members have also been involved in various campaigns. These include a campaign to defund the notoriously militarized, violent, and racist Montreal police force, and another called "Choosing Real Safety: A Historic Declaration to Divest from Policing and Prisons and Building Safer Communities for All."

You'll also recall that our last newsletter included callouts for writing on several topics, including our much-anticipated smut resource "Pretty Third Party Surprise," and a compilation of prisoners' writing about the process of taking accountability for harm. We're delighted with the responses we got, and we're looking forward to sharing the final product with you in the future!

In the meantime, enjoy this big fat issue of *The Word Is Out*. We'd give a big kiss to each and every one of you if it weren't against public health guidelines.

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

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

In Memoriam: Tiffay Joy	2
Herbalism in Prison	2
New Resources	2
Organizing Victories	3
Letters to the Editor	3
News Updates	4
Behind the Scenes	8
Themed Submissions: Healthcare	10
The Wisdom of Birds	16
In Conversation with Miss Major	17
Homoscopes	18

## IN MEMORIAM: TIFFANY JOY

In September 2020, our letter to Tiffany Joy Michelle Gillen, a longtime newsletter contributor and Inside Collective member, was returned and marked “DECEASED.” We tried calling the Florida Department of Corrections to find out more information but couldn’t get through.

In the months before Tiffany Joy’s death, we were in extensive communication about her advocacy efforts. We’re deeply saddened by her passing, and we want to use this space to remember her.

Tiffany Joy was a transwoman incarcerated in Florida. She first joined PCP in 2016, when she wrote a beautiful article for the *Fierce & Femme* issue of our newsletter. Opening with a dedication to victims of the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Tiffany chronicled her relationship to her femme identity while incarcerated. She described using red M&M’s as eye shadow and wrote, “I won’t give up shaving my underarms, it’s a must, shaping my eyebrows which I enjoy doing and spending lots of time on my finger and toe nails. I miss having them done. Just a few normal enjoyments... Jailhouse G-strings—been there done that.”

Throughout 2020, Tiffany Joy worked hard to demand better therapy for incarcerated survivors of sexual violence like herself. The mental health support she received in prison was appalling. The only therapist available, who saw her for five minutes every month, told her to cut her hair and grow a beard to avoid sexual harassment from other inmates.

In June, Tiffany Joy composed and sent a powerful letter to trans advocacy organizations and rape crisis centres around the United States. In response, one of the groups called the state PREA coordinator to begin an investigation. The prison initially locked up Tiffany Joy in protective custody for over five days, but she was eventually scheduled to see a mental health expert. Despite securing support for herself, Tiffany Joy told us that her fight wasn’t over—she wouldn’t stop her advocacy until conditions improved for everyone in prison.

Rest in power, Tiffany Joy. Your spirit won’t be forgotten. Others will take your place in this fight.

Here’s an excerpt from Tiffany Joy’s article “Volunteer 4 Advocacy” in our 10-year anniversary newsletter in 2017, themed Queer & Trans Organizing:

*In the free world, my advocacy participation was, at best, minimal. It wasn’t until I landed in prison that I came to realize, “My god, there’s a lot of work that needs to be done here.” How out of touch I was with advocacy work! I let valuable years slip by, letting others fight the battles. Ignoring their active participation in the movement towards abolition and unselfishly focusing their efforts on the entire LGBTQ family. Why? Selfishness? Laziness? Too busy? My excuse was ‘I didn’t know how.’ Well, look around you: I can assure that the person next to you, the PC organization, and/or even myself would be more than happy to share on how. All you have to do is ask. Just a few hours of your time each day, week, or month can change lives for a lifetime and maybe even save a life.*

*Remember me, “Tiffany Joy,” and this simple message I have laid out. By doing so you’ll also be remembering all the Tiffany Joys who are suffering and the importance of advocacy.*

*I am profoundly grateful for all LGBTQ advocacy groups and individuals, especially the PCP family to whom, if not for their involvement and interaction with me, I would still be a lost unheard soul.*

*The more support we recruit, the more powerful and united we become...to overcome. So with diligence, engulf yourself with advocating for and with the LGBTQ family. It’s the right thing to do and there may come a day you’ll need someone from the family to advocate for you!*

*Much love and solidarity to all,  
Tiffany Joy*



## HERBALISM IN PRISON

When I was 21 years old, I entered one of Britain’s highest security prisons for women and began a 3.5-year prison sentence for my role in a campaign to close down an animal testing company. I was no stranger to the prison system with my first partner getting sent down at 16 years old. I was, however, expecting to be totally removed from nature. Yet even on my very first day I encountered dandelions breaking through the concrete. A couple of months into my sentence, I got a job in the prison gardens weeding and mowing grass in the small triangular prison yards.

Even in these hostile environments, I was amazed by the diversity of plants I encountered. I began to read more about herbalism and got some funding to do a distance learning course in herbal medicine. My life changed forever. On the wing, people would laugh at all the random leaves and roots I had drying in my cell. Yet they'd come to me and say "Nicole, can I have a few of those things you gave me for period pains?" or, "Nicole, what can I take for my headache?"

In 2019, I published a book called the Prisoner's Herbal that explores the medicinal uses of the common plants I found such as dandelions, nettles, chickweed, and mallow. It also contains detailed descriptions of how to use things like fruits and vegetables, salt and pepper, and other spices in medicinal ways which you can occasionally access in prisons.

We all know inside that medical neglect is a constant reality. In prison, we called the "Healthcare" wing "Healthscare." Learning about herbs helped me reclaim some autonomy over my health. Connecting with plants in prison, however, isn't just about medicinal or nutritious uses—it's about friendship. It is about contending with the isolation, despair, trauma, and violence with something alive and beautiful. I slept with a dandelion root under my pillow and it made me feel less alone. During days we were locked down, I would draw herbs or read books, even dream about plants.

I wanted to share about a special plant to me. Dandelions have the Latin name of *Taraxacum officinale* and have been used for thousands of years in traditional medicine. They have amazing yellow flowers that bees adore and toothed leaves. The leaves are edible and have a bitter taste. You can also eat the roots and flowers. The plant is high in iron, vitamins, and other minerals. The bitter flavour of dandelion helps stimulate the juices of the digestive systems in the stomach, pancreas, and liver. With help to digest our food better, dandelion can aid with constipation, gas, and indigestion. The inulin in dandelion root can also help create a better balance of helpful bacteria in the gut. Dandelion's support for the liver makes it useful for people during and in recovery from drug and alcohol use. Dandelion also has a diuretic action—this means it can increase the amount you urinate (pee) and can support people with fluid retention, such as swollen ankles. Dandelion can also help with joint pain, sprains and bruises, warts, stings, and blisters.

Another big section in the book is about how to use things like spices or condiments in medicinal ways. One example is black pepper. I was in prison with an older Scottish woman called Helen who was always cold when we were working in the prison gardens together. She swore by pepper tea—simply pepper from the prison kitchen added to hot water. It was a warming mixture that helped her resist colds. Pepper can also stimulate digestive juices which is why it is commonly added to food.

Learning about plants is an amazing journey. One important part is knowing the importance of herbal safety—this means accurately identifying a plant so you are not accidentally eating something poisonous. It can also mean understanding the energetics of a plant and its actions, and if they interact with any medications. All of this is explored in *The Prisoner's Herbal* book.

I feel a major part of learning about herbalism is also about connecting with our different heritages. My ancestors

are mostly English, Welsh, and Irish so I love learning about traditional medicines on these Isles. Many forms of plant medicine have been traditionally repressed by colonialism and capitalism, and so learning about herbal medicine from your own cultures can be very empowering and an important part of resistance.

If you would like to receive a free copy of *The Prisoner's Herbal* book please write to: The Prisoner Herbalism Collective, PO Box 220340, Brooklyn, NY, 11222.

Or ask a friend or family member to go online and request one from this website: [solidarityapothecary.org/prisonersherbalrequest](http://solidarityapothecary.org/prisonersherbalrequest)

Nicole Rose, from the *Solidarity Apothecary* and the *Prisoners Herbalism Collective*

## 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!*

**The Faggots & Their Friends Between Revolutions:** a 1977 utopian fairytale novel by Larry Mitchell drawn from experiences of queer communal living

**Racial Capitalism & Prison Abolition:** an illustrated zine that makes theories of Black Marxist and prison abolitionist scholars accessible

**PREA List:** a resource list put out by the National PREA Resource Center

**Dema's Dreams: The Elven Wedding Part 1:** An elf walks into a bar... (smut)

**Basic Whichery:** an introduction to the foundational skills of paganism by Amber Fayefox

## SEND US YOUR ART!

We haven't received a lot of art for the last couple of issues, which is super sad! We've missed your beautiful pictures. Please send us your art for the next issues of *The Word is Out*, including your renditions of our header—see Y.G.'s beautiful drawing on page 1 for inspiration!

## ORGANIZING VICTORIES

Good news! We have now established a policy with the prison specifically for gay and transgender inmates. We have been able to get certain items approved as well, such as female undergarments, both tops and bottoms, eyeliner, and feminine hygiene products. We have done well considering there are currently only three of us who are actual known voices for our rights in here.

*Silver McClanahan, South Dakota State Penitentiary*

You made a call for submissions with regard to organizing victories. While we have no earth-shattering victories, I would like to report that our institutional librarian has added a collection of 20 (and growing) LGBTQ+ books to the facility library. A year ago one could type “gay” into the search feature and get zero results...now we have an entire collection! She also added *Out* and *Advocate* magazines to the periodical collection.

*Marc Freligh, SCI Mahanoy, Pennsylvania*

*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.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear family,

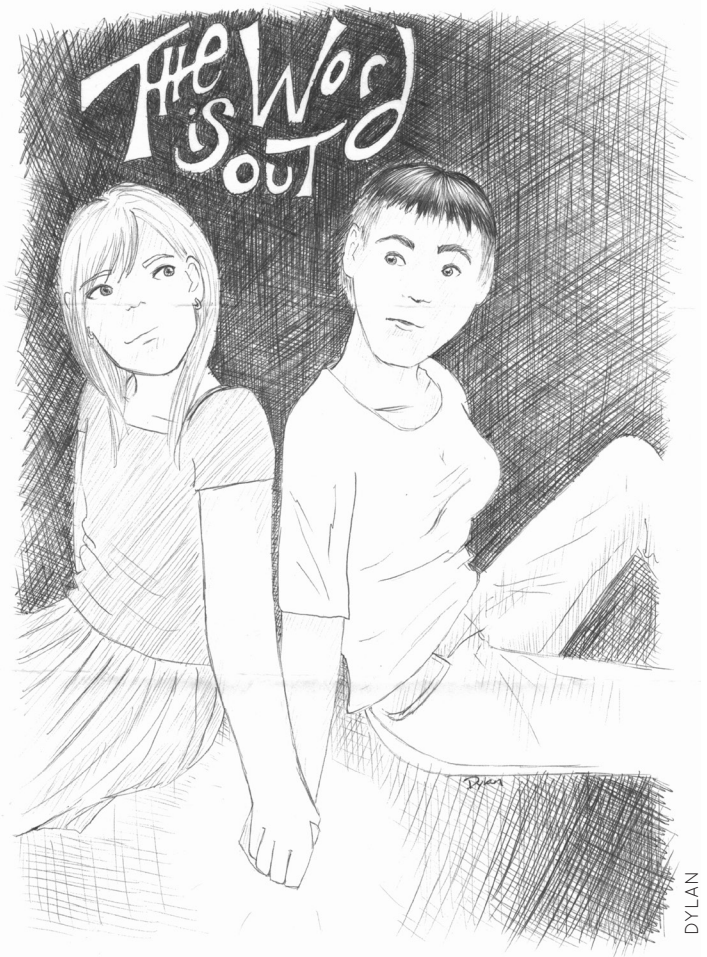
A shout out to all of you that have put the Summer 2020 newsletter together. I must say that I read it and was very touched by all the authors’ words. Keep up all the good work.

I just came out to DOC April 17 as transgender. It’s been a real struggle because I don’t have the support of my community here at this prison so I’m going on this new journey all alone. But at the end of the day I know I have myself and that’s all I really need. Ms. Jazzie Farrari—I read your shout out and must say I was touched by your words of wisdom and strength, and I would like to know how I can contact you. It’s tough not having anyone that I can talk to especially when I have a lot of trans questions that I want to ask my sisters. I’m being forced to come up with my own support people and it’s not easy when I don’t have any resources to reach out to.

Well to my trans sisters and family all across the country please know that I’m in the struggle with you all and want you all to know we will all come through our struggles together as a team. Love you all and I’m with you.

*Adrean*

As a small town young man, I grew up largely unexposed to all the wonders of the LGBTQ community—I didn’t meet a homosexual until high school, or a transgender person until prison! But great publications like yours educate and enlighten me as to the reach and beauty of our community.



I am openly bisexual and I thrive on my LGBTQ family I have here. Pages on grief are helpful as I process losses, the homosscopes are hilarious (love to my fellow Sag’s!), and your positive outlook is infectious. Thank you so much!

*Ian Burrow*

I received your issue 22: Summer 2020: Grief *Word Is Out* newsletter in the mail. It was the very first one I ever read and want to let you know I liked it. You could tell all the contributors were being real and keeping it 100%. It reminded me that I’m not the only one going through pain and mental and emotional torment from a Fucked Up World. So thanks to you all who put it together. I look forward to the next issue. I’m confined in Texas and it was news to me that the inmates filed a suit against TDC but does explain why they are giving us soup at the Sgt’s desk. It’s cool to get Texas news from a newsletter out of Quebec, Canada. Also am looking forward to more of the Miss Major story!

*Michael Crowley*

I would like to congratulate you on an absolutely fantastic summer newsletter. The submission by Shon Pernice “Mind Fields” was a remarkably honest look at suicidal ideation. The conversation with Miss Major was, as always, an inspirational read. And what a great job on the horoscopes!

*Marc Freligh*

*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.*

# NEWS UPDATES

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## FORMER FEDERAL JUDGE SEEKS TO CORRECT THE INJUSTICES HE HELPED CARRY OUT

During his 22 years as a Federal Judge in Brooklyn, John Gleeson has moved into private practice to lead the fight in courts around the U.S. using the 2018 First Step Act to open the door for thousands of inmates convicted under law 924(c). One of the people he convicted, Francois Holloway, kept up a correspondence with Gleeson for several years, eventually convincing him of the unfairness of the situation.

As Mr. Holloway filed one motion after another trying to get his 57-year sentence re-evaluated, Judge Gleeson began to speak out against those mandatory sentences that he believed were unduly harsh. The payoff from Judge Gleeson's efforts will be apparent on Tuesday in a highly unusual hearing, when the judge is expected to resentence Mr. Holloway.

"Section 924(c) requires the imposition of one of a series of mandatory minimum terms of imprisonment upon conviction for misconduct involving the firearm and the commission of a federal crime of violence or a federal drug trafficking offense." For years, a federal law 924(c) resulted in decades-long "stacking" prison terms for people convicted of crimes that included a gun.

Sentencing experts characterized Judge Gleeson's effort as exceptional, saying it could be a blueprint for judges who want to revisit sentences that are legally required but, in their view, unjustifiably long. They have won eight cases in district courts, against five losses. They have nine active appeals. The pair helped win the release of 11 inmates of the more than 2,500 people who entered prison after being convicted of multiple counts of 924(c) since 2000.

## BIDEN'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM PLATFORM

President Joe Biden campaigned on a long criminal justice reform platform, and he is now in a position to begin translating those goals into policy. The success of some of Biden's criminal justice goals will hinge on how he implements them. It is too easy for lawmakers to apply their energy for criminal justice reform in ways that will fail to make a dent, or actually reinforce mass incarceration. For example, Biden has proposed to:

1. Release people convicted of nonviolent drug crimes by using the president's clemency power. Using clemency in a broad manner could significantly reduce the federal prison population. However, if the initiative is plagued with unnecessary layers of administrative oversight, as with Obama's clemency initiative, most applications could again be denied or "set aside."
2. Ensure that people leaving prison have housing, by expanding funding for halfway houses. Housing for formerly incarcerated people should be a priority, but halfway houses are nothing like normal housing. They are often run by private prison companies, and by staff who

control when residents can come and go. The government should instead invest in voluntary transitional housing, affordable housing, and permanent housing for the homeless.

3. Use grants to encourage states to place "non-violent" youth in community-based alternatives to prison. This proposal is one of a number of programs in Biden's plan that applies to "non-violent offenders" only. However, the differences between the labels "violent" and "non-violent" are fuzzy, imposed by the criminal justice system, and conceal important parts of every individual's personal history. Community-based consequences are more effective than incarceration for youth charged with all kinds of offenses, including violent ones.

It's important to remember that state prisons and local jails incarcerate vastly more people than federal facilities do. Local and state lawmakers don't need to wait for the White House to make much-needed law and policy changes. The president still has a great deal of power to reshape the criminal justice system. The legacies of past presidents (such as the Clinton administration) are clearer than ever right now. There is no time to waste.

*From Wanda Bertram for Prison Policy Initiative*

## TRANSGENDER ACTIVIST SUES GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Ashley Diamond, a Black transgender woman represented by the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) and the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), sued the Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) for the second time for its failure to protect her from sexual assault and provide her with adequate healthcare while incarcerated.

In February 2015, Diamond filed a lawsuit challenging the abusive conditions facing incarcerated transgender individuals in Georgia prisons, which led to a historic settlement agreement and rebuke of GDC from the federal court and the U.S. Department of Justice. Despite the policy changes her lawsuit created, Diamond was met with similar unconstitutional conditions when she re-entered GDC custody in 2019.

The current lawsuit argues that the GDC failed to protect Diamond from sexual assault and knowingly put her in danger, in violation of the Eighth Amendment and Fourteenth Amendment Equal Protection Clause to the U.S. Constitution, by denying her protection from sexual assault. GDC affords others simply because she is transgender. The Eighth and Fourteenth amendments prohibit "cruel and unusual punishment", and unequal treatment by the law, respectively.

After re-entering GDC custody in 2019, Diamond has once again been housed in men's prisons where she has been

sexually assaulted and harassed numerous times by other incarcerated individuals and GDC staff. According to the filed complaint, she also has been denied necessary treatment for her gender dysphoria. The lawsuit alleges that GDC continues to provide inadequate medical care to incarcerated transgender people, and that for Ashley, its failures have resulted in a flare-up of severe gender dysphoria symptoms such as anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, and self-harm.

According to CCR and SPLC, the Georgia Department of Corrections is “fully aware of its legal responsibility to properly evaluate, treat, and protect all incarcerated transgender women, yet its systemic failures and targeted mistreatment of Ms. Diamond continue.”

“My hope is that the future is brighter for people like me,” Diamond said. “I hope this lawsuit forever changes the way transgender people in Georgia are treated. This fight is not just my fight, it’s our fight.”

*From Lainey Millen for QNotes*

## **WHAT PEOPLE IN PRISON NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE COVID-19 VACCINE**

Incarcerated people have been among the hardest hit by the coronavirus in the United States. At least one in every five people in state and federal prisons have caught the virus since the pandemic began, and over 2,000 people have died. Since COVID-19 vaccines became available, incarcerated people and their families have been telling The Marshall Project that they’re not getting key information. So we surveyed 136 imprisoned people to collect the most common questions. Then we got answers from vaccine experts, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) fact sheets, and other reliable sources.

### **HOW DOES THE VACCINE WORK?**

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines work by injecting a small piece of genetic material called “messenger RNA” into your body, which teaches the body to make a harmless “spike protein” like the one found on the coronavirus. Your body learns to recognize the spike protein as something foreign and produces virus-fighting antibodies to protect you against it. Unlike the other two vaccines, the Johnson & Johnson vaccine only requires one shot. It works by injecting an inactive version of a common virus called an adenovirus into your body. The adenovirus carries instructions to your cells to create the spike protein, which sparks an immune response. All three vaccines are highly effective in preventing hospitalization and death from COVID-19.

### **WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON SIDE EFFECTS OF THE VACCINE?**

All three vaccines can cause mild side effects one to three days after receiving a shot. Some common side effects are irritation, swelling, tenderness and muscle pain in the area of your arm where you got the shot. Some people have reported fever, chills, headache and tiredness, especially after the second dose. Experts suggest you plan for a day of rest and take a pain reliever.

### **ARE THERE ANY SERIOUS SIDE EFFECTS?**

A tiny percentage of people who received the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines had a severe allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. Most of these reactions occurred shortly after the shot, which is why you should wait about 15 minutes before you leave the place where you were vaccinated. Be sure to tell the person giving you the shot if you have a history of severe allergic reactions or if you’ve ever had to use an EpiPen.

### **HOW DO I KNOW THE VACCINE IS SAFE?**

Health officials have not reported any deaths caused by the COVID-19 vaccines. Compare this with over 500,000 people who have died of coronavirus in this country. “COVID is a very severe disease,” said Larry Corey, a virus expert who leads the COVID-19 Prevention Network. “The vaccines are effective in preventing death, hospitalization, and being on a ventilator.” Some people who took our survey said they feared companies were using prisoners as guinea pigs. More than 100,000 people participated in clinical trials for the Moderna, Pfizer-BioNTech or Johnson & Johnson vaccines before they were released to the public. The overwhelming majority of those participants were in the free world.

### **WHO GETS THE VACCINE FIRST IN PRISON?**

There are no universal distribution guidelines for state prisons, local jails and detention centers, although the Federal Bureau of Prisons does have clinical guidelines that they’ve made public. According to those guidelines, federal prisons will distribute the shots to people based on four “priority levels.” People who work in “health service unit jobs” or live in nursing care centers are the first priority. Second priority are people 65 and older, and those with health conditions that put them at a high risk of being hospitalized or dying from COVID-19, such as cancer, heart disease, sickle cell anemia, or type 2 diabetes. On the third priority level are people ages 50 through 64, and those with medical conditions that may put them at risk of severe COVID-19 infection such as asthma, high blood pressure, and liver disease. After these three groups get their shots, prison officials are instructed to give them to anyone else who wants to take it.

### **SHOULD I TAKE THE VACCINE IF I’VE ALREADY HAD COVID-19?**

When you recover from COVID-19, your body begins to produce protective antibodies. If you are exposed to it again, these antibodies can identify and, in most cases, defeat the virus. This is called “natural immunity.” But the amount of natural immunity that people build up varies, and experts are still studying how effective it is in preventing future COVID-19 infections. That’s why the CDC advises that people wait to take the vaccine at least 90 days after recovering from the virus.

### **DOES THE VACCINE PREVENT ME FROM CONTRACTING THE NEW STRAINS OF THE CORONAVIRUS?**

Experts are still researching how well each vaccine protects against the new coronavirus strains that have emerged in different parts of the world. Though every strain is different, early studies have shown all three vaccines to be effective in preventing severe infection.

“The only real tool we have to combat the virus, besides not acquiring COVID, is vaccination,” said Corey, of the COVID-19 Prevention Network.

### SO IF I GET THE VACCINE CAN I STILL SPREAD THE CORONAVIRUS?

Maybe. Experts are still studying whether vaccinated people can carry and transmit the coronavirus to others. For that reason, the CDC still recommends using precautions such as masks, social distancing, and frequent hand-washing even if you are vaccinated.

*From Ariel Goodman for The Marshall Project*

## CONSPIRACY THEORIES 101

### WHAT'S A CONSPIRACY THEORY?

A conspiracy theory is an explanation for an event or situation that involves a secret plot by powerful groups, when other explanations are more likely. Many conspiracy theories rely on anti-Jewish hatred. Conspiracy theories often have zero credible evidence, but they are almost impossible to disprove in the minds of believers. Belief in conspiracy theories is generally based in the faith of the believer, not on evidence.

### WHY DO PEOPLE BELIEVE THEM?

Irrational beliefs like conspiracy theories can satisfy a number of emotional needs, including:

- the tendency to see patterns where none exist,
- the need for security and belonging,
- the desire to feel special or unique, and
- the desire to feel in control.

Conspiracy theories also reflect how we naturally understand the world and events in it. We did not evolve to process complex information about global politics or science. We evolved to survive on the savannah, where threats were a daily reality. In the wild, it pays to assume that:

- unseen threats are hiding everywhere, or
- that “others” have evil intent.

The conspiratorial mindset may have been an asset in the past, but it is now a drawback. When it comes to dealing with important issues, conspiracy theories are a major obstacle to evidence-based action.

### WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

This brings us to what is the most important difference between conspiracy theories and investigations into actual conspiracies. With actual conspiracies, the existence of a plot is testable. Investigators can build a theory from credible evidence. If there is no proof, then there is no reason to believe this plot exists. Also, real conspiracies:

- unravel quickly once revealed, and
- take a lot of work and involve a lot of people.

Example: Watergate. Nixon resigned less than 2 years after the first article about it was published. The secretaries, security guards, and other low-level employees involved were the first to talk, because they had nothing to gain from the conspiracy.

Conspiracy theorists work backwards, assuming that there must be a plot, and look for evidence to prove it. The lack of proof is taken as evidence of the craftiness of the group behind the conspiracy. Theorists can wait years and years waiting for evidence that never appears.

If you're worried that a friend is becoming invested in a conspiracy theory:

- empathize,
- ask where their information is coming from, and
- introduce some doubt. (“I don't know if you're right or wrong, but if you were right, I would expect the following to happen...”)

It's important to use good judgement. Sometimes it is too difficult to change the mind of a conspiracy theorist. Focus on people you're close to, rather than strangers. Know when to walk away.



# BEHIND THE SCENES

Even though PCP has been around for over a decade, we realized last year that we never really gave our members a behind the scenes look at how our project works. If you've ever wondered who's answering your letters and sending you resources, here's your chance to learn all about us!

## ONCE UPON A TIME...

PCP was founded in 2007, when Liam, a former member, visited friends in North Carolina who were running a prisoner penpal project. They needed help so Liam brought a handful of letters back to Montreal and started PCP with some friends, including Bridget and Josh who are still part of the project.

They started matching prisoners up with penpals. Soon, word about PCP spread and the project quickly grew to hundreds of people. We operate from the office of Quebec Public Interest Research Group (QPIRG) Concordia, a resource centre on the Concordia University campus that supports grassroots activism around social and environmental issues.

PCP is a completely volunteer-run organization. We receive some funding from two university-based QPIRGs in Montreal, but make up around 75% of our expenses through individual donations and other fundraising efforts.

## ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Right now, the project is run by a few different groups of people.

- **Core Collective (Montreal):** there are seven collective members who answer the 100-200 letters we get every week, add new members to the online database, send resources, create content for the newsletter, work on special projects like special publications, fundraise, and coordinate PCP overall. The core collective members are Chelsea, Fred, Ivory, Josh, Kristin, Maggie, and Stevie.

- **Newsletter Collective (Vancouver):** five former PCP members who have moved to Vancouver help put together the newsletter, including printing and mailing the newsletter that you're reading right now, and helping to fundraise for costs associated with mail outs. The newsletter collective members are Aimee, Caitlin, Cooper, Kim, and Bridget.

- **Email Checkers (Vancouver, Montreal, New York):** three people answer the 100 or so emails we get every week. They respond to people on the outside interested in participating in the project, create penpal matches, and answer questions from outside penpals who run into problems in their correspondence. The email checkers are Caitlin, Kristin, and Patrick.

- **Inside Collective:** around 30 people from the PCP inside membership read and respond to our monthly meeting minutes and offer feedback on

specific problems we're facing in the collective. The Inside Collective members are Amber, Bernard, Blair, Carlos, Cherrie Bomb, Chris, Cinda Marie, Divine, E.L., Gavin, Kevin, Jacob, Jamilah, Jason F., Jason M., Jennifer Rose, John, Joshua, Maria, Rayne Violet, Rich D., Richard M., Richard R., Rob, Shae, and Slo-Mo.

- **Casual Volunteers:** back when our office was open, 4-6 volunteers would come to our biweekly drop in nights to help us answer letters, enter data, and complete other ongoing tasks.



PCP office!

## INSIDE MEMBERSHIP

PCP has grown a lot from the handful of letters that started the project 14 years ago! As of March 1, 2021, our inside membership includes:

- 5828 people who have been active in the project at some point, including people who are currently released or inactive
- 4370 currently active inside members
- 2100 penpal pairs
- 2270 people waiting for penpals
- 3444 people on the newsletter mailing list





*Screenshot of an online meeting with the Montreal collective during the pandemic! Clockwise from top left: Josh, Kristin, Frédéric, Ivory, Chelsea, Stevie, Maggie*

## COVID-19 OPERATIONS

Since March 2020, our office at QPIRG Concordia has been closed due to the pandemic, with all QPIRG staff now working from home. We do occasionally go into the office to send resources (check out pictures from a recent work session!) but have started mostly working from home.

These days, Josh picks up mail from Concordia University once a week, reads everything, then divides letters according to tasks that need to be completed: things like adding information to our database, sending short responses, sending form letters, and putting together resource requests. Each task is assigned to a collective member, who receives the package from Josh.

Once collective members complete their tasks Josh picks up all the packages, stamps letters with US postage, puts them in a box, then sends the box to Patrick in New York as a parcel. When Patrick receives the package, he drops off individual letters in the mailbox. Then the letters continue their journey to all of you!

We send mail from the US because it's far cheaper than sending international mail from Canada. Before the pandemic, we would send boxes with friends to drop off in the US whenever they drove across the border.

## PCP FAMILY

Hopefully this gives you an idea of how PCP operates! It's been so amazing to build the PCP family over the past 14 years. We know that some of you have been waiting a long time for a penpal and that it can take us awhile to get back to you. But know that we really appreciate hearing from you and having you as part of our little project!

## NEW ADVICE COLUMN!

Next issue will include a new advice column from 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. Here's a word from Amber:

"Hello My Darling Fam! I'm here to answer all your questions.

"My name is Amber Fayefox Kim. I'm 33, a voracious reader, and I love dancing barefoot in the rain while ignoring the cops yelling at me to put my shoes back on.

"I believe in comforting the disturbed and disturbing the comfortable. I'm a queer trans woman and am all about helping my LGBTQ, people of colour, Indigenous, and immigrant brothers, sisters, and wonderfully androgynous siblings.

"I want to hear about your struggles. The difficulties of carrying the ever present burden of living in a racist, classist, sexist, oppressive society. The pains of trying to navigate relationships (romantic and not) while incarcerated. Trying to organize for a better tomorrow. I want to hear it all. Please send your questions to PCP.

Love, Blessings, and Solidarity,  
Amber Fayefox Kim"

# HEALTHCARE

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There is no doubt that the global pandemic has changed every aspect of what was considered normal living. From Zoom calls to terms like “masking up” and “social distancing” entering into mainstream language. You go to the grocery store and toilet paper and bleach are as scarce as clean water in third world countries. Life within the walls of Eyman/Cook Unit however, is bad, if not worse, than being homeless on the street.

“Hey CO, could I get a new mask?” one inmate asked. “Why can’t you just wash the one you got?” the CO replied sarcastically. “I’ve had this mask for two months now” explained the inmate. “No!” the CO responded back while closing the door at the Captain’s area.

As per an email we received on November 24th, we are required to wear our mask now for almost every occasion, except when eating, sleeping, or using the restroom. At GEO Unit in Florence just two miles down the road, mask exchange occurs three times a week and they receive toilet paper every Saturday. At Cook, requesting a mask is torture and toilet paper comes every ten days. We’ve been promised five envelopes, a writing tablet every month, and two free 15 minutes calls per week because of visitation being closed due to COVID-19. While the calls do happen, like all Arizona prisoners, we do not get the writing supplies we were promised.

We also have very poor access to, and management of, cleaning supplies. Porters were specially hired to clean all contact surfaces on the recreation field, housing units, in classrooms and the library at GEO facilities, but at Cook this does not happen. Arizona DOC fails miserably to help keep both inmates and staff healthy and safe by their negligence and unwillingness to comply with safe and practical cleaning requirements as mandated by the Arizona Department of Health and CDC. Even now, inmates are sick and in fear of catching COVID-19. If you complete a Health Needs Request form you will be risking possible removal from the facility, because medical will alert their supervisors to evaluate your conditions. This brings added fear to inmates, especially for those with jobs, like me.

“Why can’t we have extra jobs for inmates to help clean the yard?” an inmate asks the Captain. “Because, inmates don’t do jobs like that.”

Inmates are required to leave an open seat on each side of them in the chow hall and stand at a distance while waiting in line in the chow hall at GEO. But here at Cook Unit, the staff shoves us in the chow hall and forces us to pack every seat to save their own time. On the other hand, staff sit closely in the ramadas on the recreation field (unmasked) and do not social distance. This puts us at risk because they are the ones exposed to the outside world.

I know there is no one-size-fits-all solution for every problem for the coronavirus, but efforts to mitigate exposure are grossly mishandled by the new staff at Cook Unit, including Captain Bowers. The problems in the world are getting worse, not better. It’s the staff coming and going who pose the greatest threat. We as inmates are willing to comply

with reasonable methods to stay safe. The entire organization of the Eyman complex needs to be accountable for their lack of diligence ensuring the absolute physical well-being of their staff, inmates, and others coming into the facility. The cost of providing cleaning supplies should not ever outweigh the cost of lives, unless they want lawsuits—it could happen.

These issues need to be brought to light. Instead of CO’s getting hysterical over petty issues like two guys talking across the centre fence, there should be a greater focus on the worldwide issue of stopping the spread of COVID-19.

*Nova*

A couple of weeks before I was locked up, I tested positive for HIV. That was four years ago. I have been blessed to have been given one of the latest and best medications, Biktarvy. My viral load is undetectable and my CD-4 cell count is where it should be. Since I’ve been locked up, I have a chronic care visit every three months. I have also been a go-to for other inmates with questions and concerns regarding HIV.

The prison I’m at has mediocre healthcare. There are some staff who are respectful, and there a few who will roll their eyes in your face. Maybe it’s because I have no expectations when it comes to proper treatment that I have yet to have a bad experience. I do what I can for myself to avoid physical and mental health services offered in prison.

When the president issued a stay-at-home order back in April 2020, the FBOP called for all facilities to stop transfers and go on a 22/7 lockdown. Luckily, at the time, my boyfriend and I shared a cell, so I didn’t mind the lockdown. First N95 masks were issued, one every other week. Then three cloth masks per inmate were issued a month later. Masks are mandatory when it’s your turn for two hours in the day room. A lot of inmates think COVID-19 is a joke. In late May, my boyfriend was taken to a quarantine unit for 18 days before he was released to ADC, Arizona Department of Corrections.

After a month in ADC, my boyfriend became sick with the coronavirus and spent two weeks in the hospital. It scared the crap out of him. So COVID-19 is not a joke. The 22/7 lockdown sucks, but it beats the alternative of seeing people, who have become family, that you care about, become sick with COVID-19. After a few COs tested positive the facility went on 24/7 lockdown for three weeks. No other cases have occurred since.

The unfortunate side effects of this lockdown are many people gaining weight due to lack of exercise, but where there’s a will then there’s a way. Since my boyfriend left, I have been on an exercise schedule, and I have mostly stopped buying sweets. The physical affects the mental. So get it where you can even if it’s only a half hour a day. Making a routine will help the day go by and help you sleep well. Pray and/or meditate. The mind, body, and soul are a trinity that requires balance. Dance to your music, write poetry and letters, and check in on your brothers and sisters around you.

I know there are other facilities with outbreaks, and the staff are careless. Don't lose hope y'all, and don't let fear take over. The world is in chaos, and in need of love and care. Show love to one another, wash your hands, wear a mask, and remember the Golden Rule, because we all deal with stress in our own way. Rumors are circulating that my facility will ease up on the lockdown in late September, but anything can happen until then as September just started. We're going to get through this. Be good. Be safe, and if you can, help someone else.

*Nicky*

From my observations over the past five months California prison administrators seem to have stuck their heads into the sand and are losing at a battle of tug of war between science, common sense, and the Governor. Governor Newsom has been on TV expressing his belief in science, the reasons for an adherence to COVID guidelines and the need for everyone to wear a mask. He's been doing the right thing in the eye of the public and advising correctly, but in private he chose to imitate Trump followers by mingling in large crowds without a face mask and giving the middle finger to science.

I'm speaking to you directly from the biggest prison in the California prison system, SATF-Corcoran, and like most Americans we're bumbling along through this COVID epidemic. The prison is surrounded by fruits & vegetables that are frequently sprayed with the most harmful pesticides known to mankind. The Earth itself in this valley gives off poisons that attack our lungs and causes Valley Fever with the slightest breeze. With all the identifiable hazards here and medical staff trained in treating these afflictions, why is it so hard for them to follow science?

For many months SATF was a safe island of protection against COVID. These facilities had no cases—or minimum until recently—and it seemed that our administrators had a clear scientific grip on the situation. Unfortunately, October 2020 arrived and it seemed, with Trump losing the election, these Trumpian staff members chose to disregard the wearing of a face mask in favor of reverting back to pre-COVID thinking and attitudes. In the same manner as The Last Plague that swept through Egypt in the middle of the night, COVID made its way through and around SATF snatching up inmates. Only this time there is no Passover to mark our cells with so that death will pass on.

Science dictates that if a person tests positive for COVID-19, that person should go into quarantine for 14 days or until they test negative. SATF's administrators followed that guideline but then lost all common sense and threw science to the wind when it came to bed space. What did these geniuses do? After they moved the person who tested positive from the pod, they allowed the remaining inmates in the pod to move freely among others. Then to make matters worse, when a pod was left with three or more empty beds, the administrators rehoused other inmates in that pod. These actions by the people we trust to abide by science and follow state guidelines were in effect causing and promoting more COVID cases simply to fill up bed space.

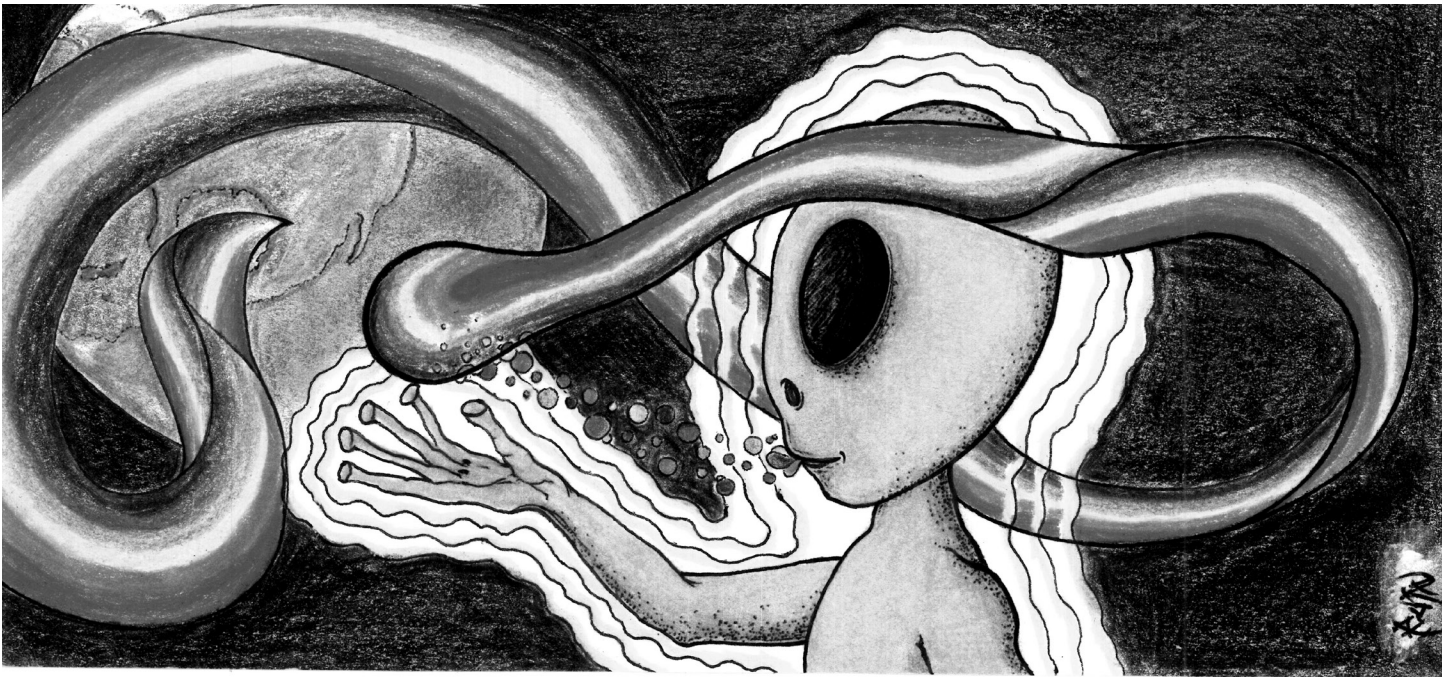
There is a viable way to minimize COVID-19's grip on the population and they don't need to scramble for bed space

to do it. They should simply open the gates to those inmates who are within 180 days to parole. That's both a scientific and political method to lower the state's responsibility for inmates getting exposed to the virus. Of course, that's too much like the right thing to do, coupled with the Governor's aspirations towards a possible run for President in the future. In the meantime, state guidelines say that "any person who has come in contact with someone who later tests positive should also go into quarantine for 14 days." The guidelines do not state that they should be set free into the prison population. I'm sure the powers-that-be know this so there must be another reason that administrators deviate so far from scientific methods that prevent infection. I won't venture into conspiratorial spheres but it's worth an extra look, because none of them are as stupid as their actions evidence.

With a lack of common sense and a failure to follow science, this whole prison complex is now filled with COVID-19. Facilities G and F are now hot beds of COVID orgies directed by the administrators indicating which inmate will sleep with which other. And there are a lot of inmates to match up because Facilities F and G consist of three buildings each, divided by four sections and 10 pods of eight men. No wonder the virus has spread so fast.

In no way do I just blame these administrators for their incompetence in dealing with this virus. I know most of them (even the staunchly Trumpian staff) are just as scared of this thing as I am. I do also blame inmates who do things knowing that this virus is circulating among us yet continue to act as if nothing's the matter. For instance, I stopped shaking hands years ago during cold and flu seasons simply so that I didn't catch it and for me rejecting an outreached hand is a normal thing. But I see inmates exchanging everything from hugs, handshakes, daps and kisses to sharing cups, spoons, bowls and every other item that can potentially spread the virus. Follow me, this unnamed brother who I've known for several years made his way to a table that I sat at in the chow hall. He sat down with his tray, pulled off his facemask, dipped his spoon in his food and stuffed it in his mouth. After chewing a few times, he nonchalantly stated "Man, I feel sick!" Every part of me wanted to jump across that table and slap that food out of his mouth. I could even picture it in my mind, but that impulsive thought quickly subsided with the knowledge that I go up for parole board in 2023. And I'll let you in on a secret, ain't nobody in this world meaningful enough for me to do an extra day in this evil system beyond the 31 years that I will have by my board date. Wisely I stood up and told him "don't ever speak to me again!" then I walked out of that chow hall.

Listen people, I hate to be that way but we're playing with our lives here and I can't allow the deficiencies exemplified by the administrators, the contradictory actions of the Governor nor the doings of the homies to prevent me from doing what I know is best for myself and my girl. Even she had to decide how to proceed and if she had chosen the wrong course we wouldn't be together today. My girl "Lil Juicy" once was a social butterfly who had to be in the middle of the trans pack, chicken necking and needing to be seen. I was cool with it, I let her be her, but as soon as this virus hit, I was forced to sit her down and pull her coat to our new normal. "Stay yo ass in the cell!" She didn't like it at first, but she did it because she wants to live and she respects my call.



Anyway family, please pray for those of us who are in the belly of the COVID-19 monster trying to bob and weave this death sentence. Please take all those steps you know you need to take in order to be safe and not laid up on some bed with tubes stuffed down your throat. Don't ever allow your feelings or "I don't want to hurt their feelings" type of attitude to be the reason. And by all means if you're feeling sick, get attention, stay six feet away from the people you say you give a f#%k about. Believe in science.

*Much love family, Big Cee*

My PTSD began early in childhood from sexual abuse, but I was fortunate as I could keep it generally under control with sporadic therapy. I have never been afraid to seek out a psychologist. But all that changed the day the police carjacked and kidnapped me and threw me in jail. I had zero criminal history and being trapped in such an alien environment caused my disassociation to manifest full force. For me, dissociation causes me to freeze. It became difficult to think and make decisions and the world seemed unreal, as if everyone outside myself seems like a fake world. Before incarceration I could easily snap out of it; in prison, I felt paralyzed.

Because I had never been in jail before, it took me several months to stop behaving like a zombie. Once I began to resurface, I made every effort to function in this horrible reality. Those first few months my "Public Pretender" was able to manipulate me, especially since I knew nothing of the gross inequity of the legal system. I was forced into indignity by the police. I had always been a "boy scout" who didn't necessarily trust police, the largest organized gang in the U.S., but thought they might at times be necessary. In jail I found nearly every one of them to be vicious brutal bullies with few exceptions. This, of course, made my PTSD worse. Thankfully, when some inmates could see my near comatose state of mind, they showed me kindness: a book, a little extra food, etc.

After about three months in jail, once I realized my lawyer was colluding with the prosecutor to set me up, I began

going to the law library to study law relating to my case. No one else was fighting for me. The more I study law, the more I hate it because of how it is set up to harm poor citizens. But it is necessary to study it if one wants to protect themselves.

A saving grace for me was a caring therapist who visited me weekly and who I felt I could trust. I was lucky, because most prison therapists are worthless. In jail and prison, one must primarily care for themselves. Protect yourself physically and psychologically.

While in jail I developed foot sores from the cheap, ill-fitting shoes. I also lost nearly 40 pounds from small portions of non-nutritious, unhealthy meals. I'm certain the stress and mistreatment did not help at all. The kangaroo trial, a manipulated farce, was a daily struggle and stress. Having no legal support did not help at all.

When I reached prison my foot injuries became serious. Before my illegal incarceration, I was in very good physical and mental health. The deterioration happened because of incarceration. I developed a serious bone infection which needed massive doses of antibiotics. Being transferred from prison to hospital and back again several times triggered my PTSD to where I became a zombie again. The EMTs, cops, and most medical personnel did not care and even became verbally abusive when I did not respond quickly enough or could not respond at all. Verbal and sexual abuses (three times by guards, once by inmates) were done to me when it was obvious that I was shut down. I have always been a loving person but being abused was raising hate in me.

Unfortunately, the battle to protect oneself falls primarily in our own struggle to protect ourselves. I am fortunate that I have my interests in life to busy me as I work for exoneration. I read diverse topics voraciously and I write constantly. I write legal motions, penpal letters, fiction and non-fiction stories; study topics, draw cartoons, help others write letters and their legal documents, etc.

My bone infection led me to being housed in the prison hospital which blessed me with single housing, a better bed, slightly better food, and a building without politicking. It

isn't perfect and many of the problems are still there, but any situation which gives small improvements makes it better. Everyone isn't the same and how PTSD manifests itself for you will most likely be slightly different for each of us.

We all deserve love and respect because of the fact that we were born and are alive. Love, respect, and appreciate yourself. For me, my spiritual life helps keep me balanced. I don't drink, smoke, or do drugs. Being interested in many things and attempting to enjoy life has been my high.

I regret that I was so naïve about the cruelty and criminality of laws, cops, lawyers, courts, and prison. I am less naive now, so I have begun a book about how the justice system ensnares us to make money off of us, how it continues the slave system, how both the guilty and innocent needlessly suffer.

Find your center, hope, and strength and work towards your freedom. I hope you can do this to help battle your PTSD and regain a life in your control.

*Mike Phillips*

I have rarely had positive things to say about the healthcare system in the two BOP facilities I had long term residence at thus far. My first facility was seemingly always in a state of understaffing in medical departments. Upon my arrival there in August 2015, I immediately requested access to medical check-ups, a new STD test (always intelligent!), an appointment with the optometrist because of my eyesight's growing nearsightedness, and a dental appointment for teeth cleaning.

By the time the hurricane that all but destroyed my facility in October 2018 hit, I had never received an optometrist visit, or a dental visit, and had to turn around the blood test because the nurse told me that she would only spend her money to order one if I told her I had been having unprotected sex with other inmates and the names of those inmates, and that it should be known that she will be forwarding that "confession" to my facility's SIS department for investigation and possible discipline.

For the past two years I have been at my current facility, with similar results. I cannot see the dentist or optometrist because they were years behind schedule, and of course COVID-19 has stopped everything. Inmates are routinely told that the cure for their ailments is to "buy meds on commissary" which is not always an option for indigent inmates. I was personally told during a visiting sick call in our quarantined unit that a new set of glasses I need, as my frames are broken and now held together by tape, will not happen anytime soon because they cannot presently handle anything beyond COVID-19 issues or a catastrophic emergency.

On the positive side, we are routinely being provided with fresh masks and get hand sanitizer squirts at mealtime. We have signs across the yard and facility encouraging social distancing, proper hand washing procedures, and when medical staff do their rounds, they are usually positive in their attitudes. Our quarantine in our units, which is broken only by an hour outside at rec and around 45 min inside for shower, phone, etc., has gone on since April, and looks to go on indefinitely. We have had a few positive cases, but they have been promptly quarantined. We have had one death,

an inmate who tested positive for COVID-19 and had a heart attack. Others in his building say he complained for several days to medical staff before he was taken seriously and then passed away less than a day after he was moved for examination. May he rest in peace.

Our medical staff tries but they are understaffed and surely overwhelmed by this unprecedented crisis. My prayer is for us all to stay healthy and clean as much as possible in this time, and to help one another. Thank your medical staff for their efforts, even if they seem small.

*Ian Burrow*

Around the 12th of August I attempted suicide by jumping from a second floor, 19 foot high balcony. Why did I do this? I don't know. I don't remember that entire day nor do I recall the first three days I was in the hospital.

The guards said I was upset because I couldn't speak to the Correctional Manager. The two inmates who witnessed the whole incident told me that a guard called me a "stupid bitch", "fucking queer," and had referenced a sexual assault that happened to me in the sweat lodge on the Native grounds on October 10th, 2019. They were basically saying I deserved it because I am queer!

Since the guards gave very little details as to what happened, I am leaning towards believing the inmates' accounts. The inmates' version sounds like me; the guards' version makes me sound like I did so for no apparent reason.

This is the second time I've jumped from a high place, the first time being the 45 foot high MacKenzie Bridge in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. I fractured my right hip, broke my left wrist, severely sprained my right wrist, cracked my right temple open, broke most of my ribs, cracked my sternum and re-broke my back. Plus, I also got a severe concussion. What keeps me going? Well, everyday I wish I had a gun to blow-out my brains, so it's very tough to keep going.

I believe in that One True Love, that soulmate! I keep looking and hoping he'll find me out here at Pacific Institution in British Columbia, Canada. Love is real. You just need to find it or be found by it. So, yeah . . . love Keeps me clinging to life! Without love, I'd be dead long ago. In the meantime, I get to love through being a prison escort. It makes me happy, at the very least.

*Autumn Phoenix*

In prison, being part of the L.G.B.T.+ community, there's a lot of sex or sexual activities that one can get HIV/AIDS or STDs from! What do we have to do to be safe? Get tested by the High Security Unit and that should be that right? Nope, because the healthcare personnel won't let me be tested at all unless I've been exposed to "a lot" of fluids. You can't get anything unless that happens! I've been in prison since 2007 and I don't get out until October 17th of 2026. I've had sex (anal and a lot of oral). That's a lot of cum/body fluids that could get me an STD or lead to me having HIV/AIDS. I was done fighting with HSU staff on getting tested. So when I get out I'll get my full health checked out.

With this COVID crap going on, you really don't get tested or anything, but we get our temperatures taken every

morning before we go to work or groups/classes. The staff here get tested every month and for two days we're locked down until they are done with the testings. Other than that, it's a waiting game for anyone waiting to be seen by doctors or to go out for a medical trip.

*Christopher Martz*

The healthcare in Wisconsin may be better than other states. We fill out a request to see HSU (Health Services Unit) and then within 24 to 72 hours we are seen by a nurse, who does triage to determine if we are placed on the waiting list for the doctor (which can be up to 2 weeks) or give us aspirin.

Since COVID things have been different. Wisconsin has roughly 20,000 inmates. Two years ago the state spent somewhere around 6 million dollars on a new HSU building. This also included a new long term unit.

On November 25th, 2020 Wisconsin public radio announced that we were around 15% infected and that there had been 11 deaths. OSCI has 11 buildings that house 200 inmates. The building I live in has been on lockdown since September 28th, 2020.

My cellmate and I have tested negative and cannot go to work but it appears that the inmates who have tested positive and went through quarantine are being allowed to go back to work. I believe HSU is being overwhelmed.

From my cell window I can see the rear doors of four units and over the last month and a half, we counted at least 20 times an ambulance taking someone to the hospital.

On a personal note, I am HIV positive and honestly receive better healthcare than others. I see an infectious disease (ID) doctor twice a year outside of the DOC. I still have to fill out requests to talk to whoever, but overall my ID doctor handles most of my health care.

*Blair Diehl*

Before the days of COVID-19 there was a chorus of voices, from whispers to shouts, about the poor state of affairs regarding medical care here at Lompoc. Then COVID-19 hit and those voices became cries of despair as nearly 1000 inmates contracted the deadly virus and four inmates died. One of the four who died was a close friend, thus I must own the bias I have against the BOP. However, what is presented here is all supported by facts. Those interested can read up about Lompoc's inmates' lawsuit against Lompoc and the BOP as a result of its/their response, or lack of, to the pandemic: Torres, et al. v. Milusnic, et al. Case No. 2:20-CV-04450-CBM.

Here at the FCI, where two of the four deaths occurred, mass testing for COVID-19 produced nearly 900 positive cases. That was on May 7, 2020. The first FCI inmate died on the floor of his dorm after repeated visits to medical, cries for help, and finally his death on May 25, 2020. Six days later, the second FCI inmate died from COVID-19 (my friend).

As court proceedings moved forward, the revelations as to the true nature of medical care at Lompoc exposed a nearly non-existent regular and chronic care medical services situation. This conclusion applied to both the COVID-19 response and care before the onslaught of the virus. On September 25, 2020, as directed by the court, Dr. Homer

Venters submitted his report "COVID-19 Inspection of BOP Lompoc". Perhaps, for all of us, the most sobering and damning finding by Dr. Venters was revealed: "Multiple patients who died from COVID-19 appear not to have received regular or timely medical assessment after being identified as ill with COVID-19... resulting in terminal hospitalization".

Understanding as to why previous cries of help, pre-COVID-19, went unheard was made evident when Dr. Venters included in his report the following, "...the intimidation and threatening of detained people to behave in a manner prescribed by correctional staff during the inspection is another very concerning example of a punitive response to the COVID-19 outbreak in the facility."

I withhold commentary or judgment in recounting the state of healthcare here at Lompoc. I daily send Buddhist prayers for a cessation of suffering for all of my fellow inmates, here and around the globe. Combined, our whispers and shouts, will result in change.

*Jay Sun*

Everyone should know that OSCI (Oregon State Correctional Institution) is now locked down, except for a selected few. All other BCE (Bureau of Correctional Enterprises) workers are, and have been locked down for a couple of months now. It could have been longer. While everyone else is locked down getting paid, a select few of about eleven of us are still working at BCE pulling long hours, 12, 15, 16, and even 20 hour show shifts.

This isn't right: they don't want to put in the work to keep things running so we are being run into the ground. We deal with scabies, pee, poo, Covid-19, Norovirus and many more unsafe things that could harm or even kill us. But the DOC (Department of Corrections) doesn't have a plan in place to combat these issues. We work in all this nastiness and have to fight these Correctional Officers for a shower.

There are 150 people on this unit and only one person is allowed in the shower at a time. They only have six toilets and eight urinals to accommodate 150 people. And that's not the half of it. OSCI is housing infected Covid-19 inmates on this unit and others, with inmates who are not sick. By doing things this way, we are being mistreated and punished for not being sick. This is neglect. Housing the sick with the non-sick is a risk to my health and those around me. OUR HEALTH AND LIVES ARE IN DANGER!

We can't use the phone to contact our families and let them know what's going on. All of this is just a PR stunt, because if the DOC and institution heads cared, they would have handled this situation a hell of a lot better months ago. Since I myself and others work around filth, you would think they would let us wash our clothing. We need to argue and act like an ass just to be able to do that. It's really messed up right now. This is cruel and unusual punishment. We want you to let everyone know about this. Twin.

*Jimmie Eskridge*

A report conducted by medical staff from UCSF on the San Quentin population re: COVID 19 outbreak has declared that they recommend the prison population be reduced by

50% (and I have heard that they are making some plans for this). A Stop San Quentin Outbreak Coalition was formed with the help of former San Quentin inmates Adhan Khan and Eric “Masarat-E” Ambercrombie who have taken to the airwaves through social media and radio. The Coalition even reached the front gates of the prison (more than 100 of them), all of them chanting “Free Them All”. I myself had seen this on a few of the local news stations. Furthermore, they held a press conference with 3 elected officials from the State Senate and Assembly. The Coalition is urging California Governor Gavin Newsome to pay heed to the demands of their findings. They are:

1. Visit the prison himself to witness deplorable conditions.
2. Stop all transfers.
3. Reduce the population by 50% by granting releases without any categorical exclusions (lifers, LWOP’s, sex offenders etc).
4. The governor must prioritize the release of transgender inmates who are at a disproportionate risk. Furthermore, the CDCR must ensure that those transgender persons still incarcerated must have access to hormones and healthcare immediately—before and after release.

Monumental, I’d say. I’ll follow up and try to see if they have been successful in having these important/urgent demands fulfilled. I know that CDCR is planning on reducing the population by 50%, and we shall see how they go about doing this. . . and whether it will have any precedence for other institutions throughout California. When and whom? None of us are sure yet.

*Rob Poizner*

Family is something that we all have, and I hereby state that what I’m about to write is the absolute truth. This place is made to destroy us mentally and physically. I have been in the system for several years now, all flat time since I was thirteen. I’m twenty-eight now. I’m healthy mentally and physically. I can go long periods without corresponding with my family because of the energy that we share but I still get emails from my family which is a good thing. Never cross your family and you will receive a reward that’s so beautiful.

Since this coronavirus pandemic started, I have been worried about my family. This place doesn’t make it no less of a hardship. They took away our visits for a short time and since they gave our visits back there has been so much confusion. Our family members must go through so much to see us. They have to schedule an appointment and they must wear a mask that’s not even worn by the staff members in this place (the staff members are the ones believed to be bringing the virus in.) I’m no snitch or nothing that they may state but our lives are at stake here.

I love my life and I’m sure that others do as well. The bad conduct in this place is sad and the unprofessional behavior from these staff members are nothing but the way of the oppressors. I told a staff member that if he coughs again without covering his mouth, I will file an IRR on him and then I was called a snitch. I would rather see paper and pen put on them before weapons. They are lost.

I try to watch what I touch now. I eat packaged food and any open food I put salt on it to give it some type of sterility. We are living in the end times and we must live accordingly. We must stay strong. I don’t take medication but to others I hope that they remain well. Death is the most beautiful thing in life, our next abode will be much more pure than this one. We aren’t from this planet anyway. If we were, we would be able to handle everything that this planet has to throw, the sun wouldn’t be able to burn some of us to death and so on. But who am I, just an offender that’s aware of the evils all around the board. This place has opened the third eye on me.

I hope that this written formation finds its way into the right places. Power to the people and love for those who love back.

*Tyanna Hubbard*

## RELATIONSHIPS

The theme for our next issue is RELATIONSHIPS.

How do you maintain meaningful relationships within the limitations of incarceration? How has being inside changed your relationships? How have you built networks of interdependence and care in prison?

We want to hear about your relationships with other prisoners and people on the outside: friends, family, lovers, mentors, community, younger generations, comrades, penpals...the most important people in your life. What obstacles do you face in trying to keep connected? What are your strategies for building and maintaining ties? What mistakes have you made and what lessons came from those experiences?

Tell us about your support system for collectively surviving homophobia and transphobia, and how you care for other LGBTQ prisoners.

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.



*We're excited to introduce a new column by Jason Morris, one of the Prisoner Correspondence Project Inside Collective members:*

*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.*

The swallows will arrive today. A journey of a thousand flaps of wings, one that began with a single beat. The culmination is months of nesting and soaring. Flying for hours at a time, returning to build nests of mud and grass with faith and a wisdom that, at the least, is metaphorical for humanity to ponder.

Do they, barn and cliff swallows, truly return to the same territory year after year? On cool mornings, as fog lifts and temperatures warm, is it torpor they use to conserve energy? Is there order to what many view as chaos? Who is the fool? The observer, perhaps, as it is April 1st each year that the winged bundles of seemingly limitless enjoyment appear. No need for a calendar. Why count the days? Today is the day the swallows return.

Is it too cliché to search for some hidden or greater meaning in these observations of birds, of life unbound? Are there parallels to be pondered, or is this a skewing of obtuseness?

Yet it is an inexplicable joy that bursts forth as one drops the duality which humanity so often calls upon as a

means of explaining phenomena. Words attached to such occurrences tend to diminish the significance, the karma of Nature. Adjectives, labels, containment, this or that, pale in the light of... that which cannot be described.

Songbirds and swallow, are known at birth as "altricial young." Hatched naked and helpless with eyes closed, requiring constant feeding, warming, and protection by the parents to survive. This is in contrast, the yin to yang, of geese, ducks, and chickens, to name a few, that are born "precocial young." Eyes open, fully feathered, capable of walking, swimming, feeding and maintaining their own body temperature within a few hours after they hatch. Metaphors abound.

Where do such differences lead to, and why? Despite its helpless state at hatching, an altricial young bird is delivered a steady diet of high-protein food resulting in substantial brain growth after hatching. In adulthood, songbirds and swallows have proportionally larger brains than those found in their precocial cousins. Nature versus nurture? More metaphors? Geese, ducks, chickens (roosters!) loud and proud... sigh. Swallows and songbirds... oh my!

As one observes the surrounding environment, is it possible that cause and effect are one? Can the one exist without the other? Is the value of a vessel, a cup, a bowl found in the decorations that adorn it, or in its emptiness? When facing a bridge too broad to cross, build a bridge to span it or be content with what one already has? Observe the swallows, the answers may be found as they dip, dive, and arrive.

(Thanks to David Allen Sibley's book, *What It's Like to Be a Bird* and 365 Tao by Deng Ming-Dao for the bird and Tao references.)

*Jason Morris*



# IN CONVERSATION WITH MISS MAJOR: PT. IV

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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 four!

*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.*

**NORA:** I was talking to one of the Pride organizers yesterday at the event about how it came to be that you were going to be invited...no disrespect to you, apparently, they said that they needed somebody older that we can honour as a Grand Marshal. Thankfully someone thought of you and they were like, *we don't know who that is!* Eventually people came around and figured out it would be a smart idea to invite you.

In the movie about you, you said you would like some company: "some other people who've been through this, who've lived as long as I have." This highlighted a couple of things for me. There's a lack of elders in our community. When we talk about elders, often that ends up meaning someone who's made it to their 40s, maybe their 50s, right?

Then I was also thinking about how it's sad that we don't think of any elders here in Montreal, so that an organization like Pride wouldn't think of somebody like Farah Abdil, Mirha-Soleil Ross, Michelle De Ville, Jackie Rêve, Diane Gobeil... These are trans women and transvestites who were trailblazers in the '80s and '90s in Montreal, and they're a bit younger. They're in their late 40s, 50s, 60s, for the most part, but they were central in the response to earlier waves of the AIDS epidemic here in Montreal. They were founders of important sex-worker and drug-user organizations in Montreal and Toronto and they've been vital voices in challenging police violence and negligence. Yet they've been really relegated to the shadows. Like I don't think most people at Pride would know their names. They still live in and around Montreal and even what recognition they do receive is often for their legacy, with little attention to their material conditions today.

That also resonated with something that comes out in your movie. You've done all this amazing work organizing and supporting so many other people, but you need a fucking house over your head, you need to be cared for as well. So I want to ask you just a bit about your own reflections.

What work needs to be done to strengthen intergenerational connections, to ensure that our elders are given the support and care that they deserve, and to also create opportunities for younger generations to be able to be a part of the community with older generations who have crucial lessons, insights, and wisdom to share.

**MAJOR:** The interesting thing about this is—they had the audacity to call somebody an elder at 40 or 50 years old! Those people do not want to be called elders at 40 years old!

I'm sorry, when I was 40, I was still wearing the three-inch heels and showing my beautiful ass every chance I got. And needed to get laid on a regular basis! I did not have time to be called a goddamn elder, know what I mean?

And they do this because they have scared everybody else who is an elder person into the shadows. It becomes a thing where I go in and just hide and be quiet and don't say anything, because you don't want bring more attention to you than you can handle.

As trans people, we suffer a lot from the moment we realize who we are. We get raised with people telling us, *don't bother be your own person, live your own life, we're so proud of you!* You finally start doing that and the first question that comes out their mouth is, *well why can't you be like everybody else? Why can't you just follow the crowd? You know why can't you be like your sister?* Well fuck her, you know what I mean?

It becomes a matter of, how do you negotiate this and maintain and be who you need to be for you? We can't live our lives for our friends or our parents, you know? We're in this skin, we have to do this. For me to be 77 years old, I feel I do good to get off my ass and walk from my bed to the bathroom, because there are days my body does not want to do anything. I can handle being an elder because I'm over 60. Got it. But that doesn't mean that I still don't want to get laid, cruise, rent men—I chase all the guys that I can possibly have. And just because there's gray up here doesn't mean that the fire is not kicking down there—the bitch is hot.

In getting it to mingle older and younger people... young people need to realize whose shoulders that they're standing on. That things haven't—they have the audacity to think, *oh it's always been like this!* You know, *I'm applying for a job, working and McDonalds or whatever.* Bitch it wasn't always like that! My generation, we couldn't come out when the sun was shining, you know? We'd get attacked before we got to the bottom of the stairs. There needs to be appreciation on both sides. A lot of older people, friends of mine, don't want to deal with younger people—they're too ignorant, they're too slow, they're too stupid, they don't want to think, they don't really care—well, then teach them. Work with them. Talk to them. You know, like all these knew terminologies for partners and cispeople and...you know what, fuck all that shit! You know, these are people, talk to them!

*Stay tuned for the rest of the conversation!*

# HOMOSCOPIES

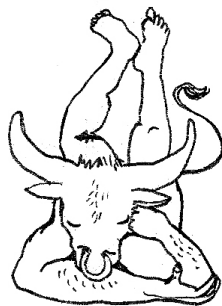
## ARIES

Happy Valentine's Day, Aries. We love you because occasionally we can channel that hot fiery dominant energy you seem to so effortlessly possess. And sometimes, we even get to experience it from you directly, which is just the dreamiest thing. Tie me to anything you want to, I'm here for it! Getting to watch you take what you want makes the rest of us remember that we also have the power to make people do very hot things. And with that power we will force this horrible mess to turn into the gayest spring yet.



## TAURUS

Because it's a pandemic, I've been baking many cakes: I am in this role inspired by you, Taurus. Wearing nothing but a tiny apron and some striped tube socks, I fold my wet ingredients into my dry, waiting eagerly while the oven gets warm enough to justify my impractical outfit for this wintery time. The patience you have to make sure that your dessert is prepared just-as-directed demonstrates the essential astrological links that exist right now between hunger (lucky Jupiter), patience (slow burn Saturn), and taste. Also in my mind: the prospect of watching you lick clean a wooden spoon.



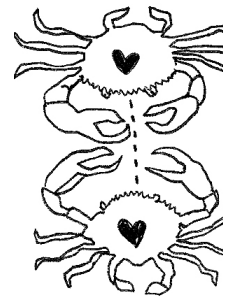
## GEMINI

The conflicting impulse of your twin desires creates a tension lately that we can all get thirsty for. You can somehow both enjoy the solo pleasure of unremarkable evening alone often as much as you are tempted by those wild risks of satisfying reckless connections- connections that are currently elusive, often imaginary, and certainly frowned upon. The Gemini demonstrates—while appearing handsomely color coordinated even in sweat pants—how alone time and hot contact are always in conversation: the more time we can linger in our own imaginations, the more satisfying the moment will be when we can't.



## CANCER

Everyone wants a turn in your bathtub, Cancer. "We could make the Cancer sign," sings Teyana Taylor, inviting everybody to imagine what we were already thinking about as we slog through the lonely agony that is COVID winter. This desire for simultaneous and collaborative pleasure will be a central motivator in the coming months as vaccines roll out, spring rolls in, and the moon moves into your sign. We turn to the moon's shadowy but undeniable lessons to guide us through the initial awkwardness of finding each other again and sharing smutty fantasies of mutual comfort in this rough time. Give it to me, Cancer, so I can give it right back.



## LEO

Winter months are very hard on you, Leo. How with your perfect butt can anyone ask you to recede into the COVID shadows and limit your contacts? How can you feel like yourself without an audience, with no well-placed sunbeam, no group sex? What could possibly fix this? With the sun in your opposing planets, I advise you to try perusing activities that will come to fruition but only in time for the summer months. Initiate a fresh flirtation. Begin a film script. Learn to make pottery, poetry, pastry dough. If you are already preparing in earnest for summer (aka your time to shine), I have no doubt the effort itself will cheer you up a little in the present.



## VIRGO

Though I kill houseplants, I do enjoy flowers and benefit from the butch/femme garden efforts of anyone but me. Please, everyone around me, do put on your overalls and tend to all that I'm too oblivious and unskilled to groom on my own. I say this because your horoscope, poor Virgo, all too often gets reduced to the well-worn gardening metaphor. My twist on all this is that instead of commanding you keep digging, toiling and so forth, your role could be instead to simply appreciate the work of others. If you can spend more energy enthusiastically cheering on those who take charge, your labor too will become essential.



## LIBRA

There is no better guest to the party, Libra, than one who is vers. Versatility, which so many of us just completely adore, showcases your special ability to rotate your lofty take-charge competencies with the receptiveness of a very eager bottom. While you are certainly cursed with the problem of not always knowing which of these positions to occupy in a given situation, you ultimately rule at the kind of open communication required to move so admirably between very opposite roles. With Jupiter in retrograde, now is the moment to help others find their inner vers: your smart guidance, good listening, and encouraging words really can give us the self-awareness needed to attain balance.



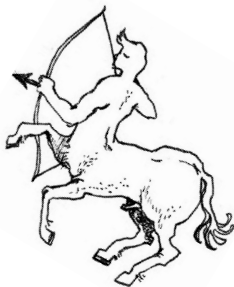
## SCORPIO

Thank you, Scorpio for helping us go deep with our bedtime routines. Whether this winter makes you our pillow talk hero, a best friend penpal, or a number one crush, you will provide a trusty support system for us to notice new patterns. Your affections can uncover undeniably where we keep on messing up, and you help us see where we can absolutely improve. The long winter months and the retrograde movements of Saturn can feel so depleting but with you by our side, much can be learned: you inspire our selection of early-to-beds, butt plugs, and endless journal entries, creating nightly routines and goals amidst all this gloom.



## SAGITTARIUS

The drag of this isolating pandemic has forced even you, Sagittarius, into a state of stillness, stuckness, and sometimes even calm. You got bored! And boredom for a Sag should be the direct path to fun. Being prevented from your usual constant movement and grand entrances in/out of others' lives means that the connections you do make in COVID will feel unreasonably finite. While of course painful and frustrating for you, to get to be on the receiving end of this limited focus will be something very unique for others. For anyone who now comes into contact with your singular focus, this might become just be the luckiest thing of all time.



## CAPRICORN

What advice can I even impart to someone who already seems so oddly satisfied? You express such enviable confidence! Since your last birthday, you seem to exude a very sexy smugness. What to get for the girl who has it all? Rather than telling you which path the stars want you to follow, I would instead like to know how I can follow your lessons, mirror your movements, find myself a pair of those little jockstrap underpants. You demonstrate so much precision and control, I just want to hug you, make you a pizza, and show you how deeply I admire your work.



## AQUARIUS

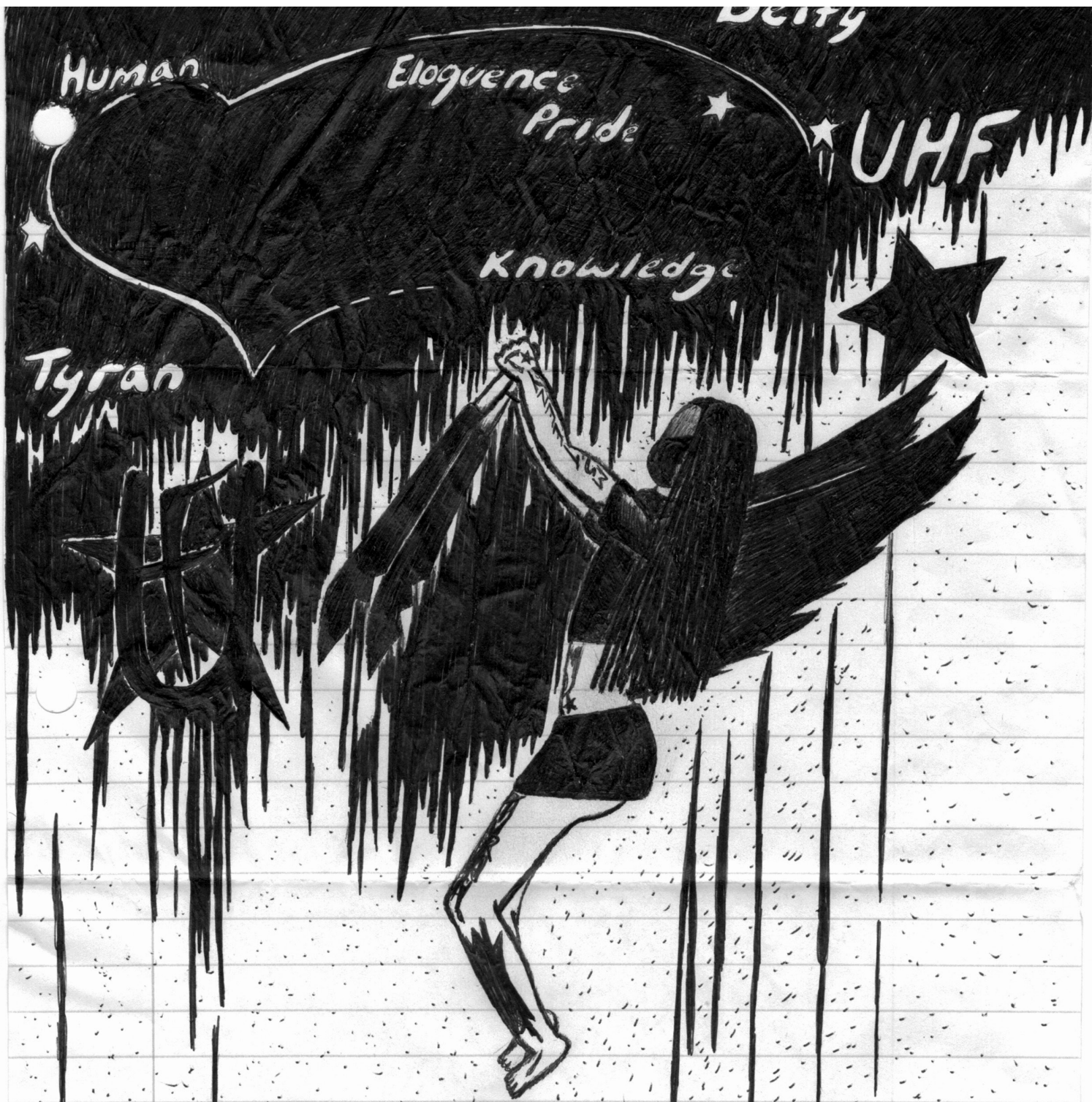
I just read the recently-published diaries of Lou Sullivan, a trans man who transitioned in the 1970s, fought injustice the medical system, had lots of faggy sex, fell madly love with other men, and cared for his family and friends until he died of AIDS in 1991. Each time Lou met another gay trans man, he was overjoyed that he was not the only trans "youngman" in the world. He was just so delighted each time he discovered a new transfag out there to learn from. And I learn from Lou, Aquarius, the way I learn from you. With an Aquarius or two in my bubble, I don't feel alone: I know I'm not the only unfulfilled slut in the room. Keep a diary of your life, because someday someone will need to read it too.



## PISCES

This has been a most challenging astrological moment for project completion. Happy endings, good closure, lucrative payouts, and completely draining orgasms are seriously not the stuff of early 2021. If any astrological sign can make lemons out of this underwhelming state of things, it's Pisces. A Pisces can find devastatingly beautiful insights in a half-written letter, a half-detailed ball gown, and even in an impossible to-do list. Your empathy takes the futility and pain of a messed up time and helps us put energy into other things (ACAB!) You have the power to find a little twitch of satisfaction even in disappointment, edging, the unresolved. In our collective frustration, you show us the awe of a problem so big we have to reroute and regroup, remaking the world to get our fix.





I am Quing Tyana Hubbard and I will continue to fight the war that will never end with my family. Everything pertaining to my art and words are rights from me and all of my family that's beside me. All things in life happens for many reasons, we must remain strong.

By, Tyana H.