



Welcome to issue 24 of *The Word is Out!*

Our loves!

We're so glad to be back with you with the 24th edition of the Word Is Out! It's been a bit of a tricky time for all of us here on the collective, so we've had to dial things back a little, but rest assured - we ALWAYS look forward to the newsletter publication, and even MORE to hearing what you have to say!

With the US/Canada border re-opening, we've been able to get mail across with less delay. Last weekend, one of our most dedicated members popped over the border to mail out no less than 800 pieces of mail! Still no in-person volunteering, but just this past February, we had a very successful reprise of our virtual transcription party - a quick thank you to the 30 people who showed up so your words could be shared in this newsletter!

On our social media, we've been sharing short little profiles into some of the beautiful relationships that have sprung up from this project. It's been so fun getting to see what penpals love about each other! Off social media, we're updating our ever-growing resource library to make it more useful for you.

Last summer, the PCP outside collective gathered for a day-long political visioning. We discussed topics like our personal analyses, how we understand PCP's mission, paths

towards abolition, political strategy, and LGBTQ liberation. We're currently working on turning transcripts from this into a publication for the resource library.

In the past year, we also gave an online workshop to Chicago Legal Aid's Domestic Violence Task Force. In the workshop, we discussed ways that punishment and incarceration perpetuate cycles of violence and how transformative justice offers an alternate path forward.

Oh, and did I mention that we're FIFTEEN YEARS OLD this year?? That's right. If PCP was a person, we would be learning algebra at school. Luckily we are not a person, but an organization that's proud to have been here for you for the last 15 years. And here for you still for the next 15, or 20, or 50 years, or until the abolition of all prisons. Whichever comes first!

Shout out to the contributors of #24: Amber Fayefox Kim, Antonio, Brian Fuller, Chriss Cross, Cordaryl Williams, Derrick Spoon, Halo, Jamie Ross, Jason Morris, Jessyka Ashleigh, Jose, Mary Ann Jalamos, Michael Desmarais, Mocha K. Scroggins, Penni B, Rayne Violet, Rolf, Shariff Taylor, Victor Marroquin, Wayne Walker! And for everyone whose contribution we couldn't fit, thank you so much for sharing and please continue to send us your work!

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 so that it is received within the appeal period.

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

— Oscar Wilde

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NEW RESOURCES

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

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) Skills Training Workbook: A self-help workbook based in CBT, a form of therapy that focuses on challenging negative thoughts. For anxiety and low mood. NOT prison-specific.

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) Skills Workbook Chapter 1: Basic distress tolerance skills workbook based in DBT, which combines cognitive behavioural techniques with mindfulness and acceptance. NOT prison-specific.

Prison Law Booklets (Canada): A series of short booklets explaining your rights re: maintaining your own documentation, temporary absences, filing grievances, searches, segregation, and complaints to the Canadian Human Rights Commission. Disponible en français.

Why the Alt Right is Wrong: Adapted by PCP from a YouTube video by Contrapoints. An argument against far right ideology.

Straight to Hell 68: Latest issue from one of the longest running (man-on-man) smut zines out there (words and explicit pictures with the genitals blacked out).

Florida Trans Prison Policy: A short overview of Florida trans prison policy, including a list of relevant legal cases, along with advice on advocating for yourself.

PRISON LIBRARY SUPPORT NETWORK REFERENCE PROJECT

Need information or trying to do research? Let the PLSN be your human search engines! Send your information and research-related questions at: **Interference Archive ATTN: PLSN, 314 7th St, Brooklyn, NY 11215**

PLSN will mail you as many pages as they can about anything you ask them to look up.

Types of things they can help with:

- Information about community resources, organizations, and services
- Articles from newspapers, magazines, academic journals
- Excerpts from books on any topic
- Material published online on topics you're trying to learn more about

Types of things they can't help with:

- Things that go against your facility's mailroom policies, e.g. stamps, letters from other people, Polaroids,
- Penpal requests
- Legal advice; however, they will do their best to refer and connect you to appropriate legal help or information

How to get in touch: When you write, include your question and what you need as specifically as possible. It helps PLSN to know what types of information or formats (books, articles, websites, etc.) you want the most, if there are resources you've used that have been helpful, and if there is anything you've already tried that wasn't helpful. You can also let PLSN know about any policies enforced in your facility's mailroom that they need to keep in mind.

What to expect: Write to PLSN at the address above. They check their mail weekly and will respond within a week of receiving your letter. Because PLSN is a small group of volunteers, they can only answer one question at a time. **Each time you hear back from PLSN, they will let you know that they can answer another question and that the service is still going.**

Who is PLSN: PLSN is a network of volunteer librarians, community organizers, and prison abolitionists focused on helping people inside access information and do research on their own terms. PLSN does this because they believe access to information is a right, not a privilege, and believe anyone surviving the violence caused by policing and prisons deserves their support. They do this work as an independent collective of volunteers to ensure their professional or institutional interests never become more important than the needs of people inside who need them to have their backs.

Join this project: If you or someone you know who's been incarcerated has ideas, suggestions, or questions about helping people access information inside a facility, PLSN wants to hear from you! Just write and tell them how they can work with you to make sure information is available inside to people when they need it.

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 Chris Cross's beautiful drawing on page 1 for inspiration!

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

My name is Sebastian. I live in Poland. I am a nurse, a teacher, a sign language translator and a writer. I worked with deaf, blind, orphans and children. I love books, movies, game boards, rollerskating and running. I am also a writer. My latest book is about the COVID pandemic called *The Art of Falling*.

Recently I've decided to write another book, this time about solitude and loneliness. It's not always bad. Sometimes we decide to be alone and being alone may be really beneficial. But it may be hard to have no one to share all good and bad things happen in life. Being alone is so common these days and yet we don't talk about it very often, especially now, when we are all told to surround ourselves with people who are positive and energetic. Having ups and downs is a case of weakness. How crazy is that? Would you be eager to participate in this book project and answer a couple of questions?

I would like to know how you perceive the loneliness and solitude in prison. This book is meant to be truthful. I do not expect anything. But all your answers are surely valuable. We all have a story to tell and yours may be the most interesting of all.

A couple of questions:

- Have You ever experienced loneliness and how do you cope with it?
- When do you feel alone the most?
- Does imprisonment change the way your friends treat you? And if so, how?
- What was the most difficult moment for you during imprisonment?
- If you could change your past, what would you change?
- If you could design your future, what would you want?
- What is your best childhood memory?
- What would you like to do the day you are free? How would you arrange this day?
- What is the most important thing in life?

If you write me back, I will certainly answer you back with all my gratitude. For this project, I will also include other people such as artists, travelers, disabled, mentally ill and all who experience loneliness or isolation.

This book is not meant to be sad and depressing. It is meant to be true. That's the most important thing.

Sebastian Kuklo

Sitarska 68/23 Białystok 15-850 Poland

ORGANIZING VICTORIES

I'm writing to update you on my situation here in prison. As you can imagine, the fight to not only get recognition but treatment for Gender Dysphoria is nigh on

impossible most of the time—but I'm taking big steps in improving my situation. First, I'm on HRT and have been since Sept 2016! I've been issued sports bras! I'm getting at least some Mental Health treatment for the symptoms I've been suffering as a result of my GD. The Mental Health treatment doesn't go anywhere near far enough in helping me to deal with my GD itself, only with the resulting depression, anxiety, and bipolar mood swings, not to mention yet another cause of PTSD. But I'm still fighting!

Jessyka Ashleigh, Texas

In Washington DOC, we've pretty much won that battle of trans inmates having access to gender affirming clothing. Now our focus is on housing and medical treatment access. We didn't just try and fight each issue as an individual thing; instead, we focused on building a network of support both in and out of the prison to support us in advocating for our various needs.

We used what I call a venn-diagram philosophy to the issues we raised. If you draw two overlapping circles, the one on the left can represent the issues of incarcerated cis people, and the one on the right the issues of incarcerated trans people. A vast majority of the issues trans people face in prison are shared in some way with cis people and go in the middle part where the two circles overlap- perhaps to a lesser degree, and the details are different, but there is much overlap. We fight for all the trans issues, just keeping in mind, cis people need to (for example) safely shower with dignity too.

First up was getting our own house in order. We created "LGBTQ study and discussion groups" in multiple prisons throughout the state, which we used to get organized. If you have a Toastmasters, they have an excellent leadership training program to teach you the skills of how to create such a group, with a board who is accountable to the membership, committee chairs, project managers, an achievable list of goals, activities and all that good stuff. If you don't have a Toastmasters, have someone contact some of the local clubs. They have a strong culture of creating prison clubs within their organization. The \$6 monthly dues is well worth it. The public speaking skills you'll learn there will also come in handy while advocating for your needs.

We reached out to Disability Rights Washington, a watchdog organization whose job is to come into the prison and make sure incarcerated people with disabilities are getting their needs met. I highly recommend getting in touch with your local version of this. By framing many of our issues as being a part of medical treatment for Gender Dysphoria, we were able to have their support (and the leverage that comes with that). We also reached out to queer anarchists in the state and convinced them to set up a local chapter of Black and Pink. Never underestimate the power of having some crazy protester friends who are happy to do a phone zap when prison officials are misbehaving.

These groups, along with the prison's education department, have been an excellent source of sponsors for our study and discussion group.

Once we had this foundation in place, we were able to have letter writing events to the governor, members of the

state legislature, and other interest groups. We invited these people to our study and discussion groups to educate them on our issues. We also reached out to administration and the prison guards union and invited them to come to the meetings as well, though with much less success.

As for arguments, hammer the WPATH standards hard, and use examples of other states who've already done it. California, Hawaii, Washington, I can't remember where else. Get their policies and use them as a jump off point for your proposals.

Amber Fayefox Kim, Washington

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

Thanks for your recent summer issue (my first since asking to be on your mailing list).

I loved it, especially all the health related-COVID information. I was symptomatic/positive in August of last year, with long term symptoms (shortness of breath and persistent cough). Since Prison Medical can often be ineffective, I chose a holistic approach of conscious breath work, meditation, and yoga (and of course—science—the vaccine!). My breathing has returned to normal, albeit I still have a cough.

I also loved your article on conspiracy theories. When I used to fly for TWA in the 90s, we experienced a deadly crash. So many, myself included, believed we were victims of "friendly fire" from top secret military exercises! I believed in that for a couple of years.

Your assessment was spot on, especially with holding onto feelings of control. Because, after all, if it was just a faulty wire—which is what it turned out to be—then my "office in the sky" is potentially unsafe. It was easier to believe in the alternative. Thanks again, and I look forward to your next issue!

Rolf

I would like to start by saying that I just received my first issue of *The Word is Out* issue 23 and I really really love it. I've included with this letter some art that I created just for y'all. Yes, I read y'allz distress call that y'all have not been receiving much art for the last couple issues of *The Word is Out*. I believe in having my people's back no matter what, so here on out I got y'all with the art y'all need. I mean, I really appreciate what y'all are doing for all of us behind bars, it's my way of giving back to my family at PCP.

Now I would like y'all to know that the screen shot of y'allz online meeting with the Montreal collective—I did cut it out and put it in my photo album. Yes, I had to! Y'all are family now.

Victor Marroquin

I just finished reading your "The Wisdom Of Birds" column introduced in PCP's *The Word is Out* issue 23. I like and love spoon birds, and am looking forward to reading more "The Wisdom of Birds" columns in the future. Maybe your column in the future will be about my favorite bird, the spoonbill, which has six different species: the royal spoonbill, the African spoonbill, the black-faced spoonbill, the Eurasian spoonbill, the yellow-billed spoonbill, and the roseate spoonbill. The spoonbill's name comes from its spoon shaped bill, and I find weaving themes of the spoonbills into the teachings of Buddha easy. For example, as I lie in the spoon position, meditating as if I am reclining Buddha, as I making spoon hand signs, meditating as if I am doing Mudra, and when I am making origami spoons, origami love spoons and origami marriage love spoons meditating as if I am a monk in the sixth century. Keep writing "The Wisdom of Birds" columns for myself and others to read Jason Morris, and thank you.

I just finished reading your last newsletter and I am more in like, love, and spoon with PCP, *The Word is Out*, the LGBTQ community and all. It was the spooniest being able to match the face of Chelsea with the letters Chelsea hand wrote me. It was also the spooniest to read what was written about the wooden spoon in my Taurus homoscope.

Derrick Spoon

Thank you for all you do...from words of encouragement to a simple hello that enables us to smile.

As a bi-woman in prison it's hard to be around such crude and rude people. But when I receive your words, I am able to hear from the true LGBTQ community and family. I would love to hear more from more but I'm thankful nonetheless. Blessings of love, health, joy, and freedom to all of my brothers and sisters in the community and the world.

Mary Ann Jalamos

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

MISSISSIPPI BILL ATTEMPTS TO BAN INCARCERATED TRANS PEOPLE FROM CORRECTING ID DOCUMENTS

A proposed Mississippi bill would ban trans people from changing their name or gender marker while in prison. Known as the “Real You Act of 2022”, House Bill 1099 would prevent trans inmates from requesting changes to their identity documents unless a district attorney, county sheriff, commissioner of the Mississippi Department of Corrections or a department chaplain makes the request on the inmate’s behalf.

Senate Bill 2356 is a companion bill that seeks to prevent incarcerated trans people from changing their legal name. These two bills which apply to all forms of government documentation, including driver’s licenses, state IDs and birth certificates, were introduced amidst a surge in transphobic legislation being pushed across the United states. The majority of this legislation targets trans youth in athletics or trans youth seeking gender affirming medical care.

The Mississippi House passed HB 1099 on February 3 by an overwhelming majority, but the senate version of the bill has not yet come up for a vote. At least 17 states already ban people with criminal convictions from changing their name, though some states lift the restriction after a sentence has been completed, while Florida and Iowa permanently ban people with felony convictions from ever changing their name.

If either of these bills become law, they would only increase the already intense stigma that exists for trans people in prison. Because of the overpolicing and racist and transphobic profiling that trans people of color face, these bills will disproportionately affect trans people of color, and more specifically Black trans women who are particularly likely to be incarcerated.

Rob Hill, the Mississippi state director at HRC’s Project One America states, “Lawmakers must listen to the majority of Americans—including a majority in Mississippi—who oppose anti-LGBTQ discrimination, reject these politics of division, and strive to build a country where everyone is treated with respect. . .We send love to every person harmed by this bill and solidarity to the many advocates working to defeat this legislation in Mississippi.”

EVEN HIGHER LEVELS OF DRUGS AND CONTRABAND FOUND IN TEXAS PRISONS AFTER PANDEMIC RESTRICTIONS IN EFFECT

Despite ramping up mailroom restrictions and closing Texas prisons to visitors during the first year of the pandemic, drugs and other contraband were discovered in Texas institutions at higher rates than before pandemic policies went into effect, say Marshall Project and Texas Tribune reporters Keri Blakinger and Jolie McCullough. According to Blakinger and McCullough, in the pandemic’s

first year “a controlled experiment” unwittingly happened in the Texas prison system, which showed the main source of drugs and other contraband is not prisoners’ visits and correspondence with family and friends, who before had so often taken the blame.

For instance, Blakinger and McCullough point to how inmates’ contact with loved ones was the target of Texas’s most recent anti-contraband program “Inspect 2 Protect,” which went into effect just months before the pandemic. Amongst other measures, Inspect 2 Protect increased presence of drug-sniffing dogs on visitation days and restricted mail to only plain text on white paper with limited photographs allowed inside.

Blakinger and McCullough’s article goes on to investigate possible causes of the increase in contraband. According to their interviews with Texas prison staff and inmates, most believe guards and other prison staff were the main source of drugs and contraband during the early pandemic. Social distancing policies and crisis-level short-staffing halted the practice of prison employees searching each other before starting their shifts, so it was that much easier to get contraband inside. And because the influx of contraband went up, not down, after banning visitors and restricting correspondence, it is clear that prisoners’ contact with loved ones was never the main way that contraband entered Texas prisons even before pandemic restrictions took effect.

Source: Keri Blakinger and Jolie McCullough. Texas Prisons Stopped In-Person Visits and Limited Mail. Drugs Got in Anyway, (2021, March 29), *The Marshall Project*. Retrieved from: <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2021/03/29/texas-prisons-stopped-in-person-visits-and-limited-mail-drugs-got-in-anyway>



ADVICE COLUMN

Dear Amber,

I'm a 24 year old (25 in 2 weeks, August 19th #Leo) black transgender female. I'm not on hormones and rarely wear the little bit of makeup they offer in the PA DOC because I don't want to be placed on single cell status. At the same time I think some people may be confused by my gender and finding a relationship has been a major challenge. All the guys go for the more developed girls. So I'm really conflicted: do I go for the hormones and risk single cell status, in order to look and feel more like a woman and better my shot at a relationship, even though it will be awful for my mental health? Or do I put mental health first and wait for HRT? Thanks for your advice!

Lonely and Choosing

Dear Lonely and Choosing,

The decision to start HRT is a big one, as is the choice to let someone into your heart. Neither of these are choices you want to be making for the wrong reasons, and each of these are choices which need to be made independent of each other. HRT causes a bunch of permanent changes to a person's body in both trans men and trans women. It's a choice that needs to be made by yourself, for yourself, and if it's not going to make you happier in your own skin regardless of your relationship status, then maybe it's not a choice you should be making just yet. However, if HRT will make you feel better in your own skin, but the long hours of being alone without a cellmate will hurt your mental health, try thinking about how living alone would be like for your mental health if you had half as much gender dysphoria. If that's something you can handle, then it may be time to discuss the possibility of starting HRT with someone you trust. It's your body, your mind, and your life—don't go sacrificing any of that just to get laid.

Amber Fayefox Kim

Dear Amber,

I'm a 31-year-old Black man who loves transwomen and gay femme males. Fear of abandonment has kept me in the shadows of the truth until recently. Islam and Christianity make up my family's religions of choice, and they're not too proud of me speaking about who I am. Guess loving and being there for me was only contingent on my sexual preferences. My question is how do I find and maintain a healthy relationship (romantic and not)? Something beyond your basic prison relationship? I feel like I'm at my best but I have no one to share this new and better me with. Any ideas?

Abandoned and Seeking

Dear Abandoned and Seeking,

Navigating queer life and a conservative family is more than difficult: respecting our true selves on one side and fulfilling our family's expectations on the other. It sounds like you are taking some positive steps towards sorting through all that which deserves some serious kudos.

As for seeking relationships which are more than the basic prison relationships, the first step is to understand what it means to build relationship in the first place. The foundation of every real relationship, romantic or otherwise, is friendship. Society has fed us a story which says relationships are built on "mutual benefit," or the "pleasure of shared company." If you pay attention to international relations a "friend" is someone you trade with. None of these are right, none of these help. Real relationships and real friendships start with mutual care, concern, and trust. Everything else flows from this.

Care is actions taken to help make the other person's life better. It can be as small as kind words, or as big as a release address. We care for the quality of life of the people we are close to. Concern is keeping the person in mind when you're making decisions or when they're not around. We are concerned about the wellbeing of the people we are close to and the impact our actions can have on them. Trust is the understanding that the people we are close to have good intentions for us. We trust that they will act with care and concern for us.

If you're looking for some pragmatic actionable advice, that's actually really simple. Avoid the gambling tables and the addicts. Go to school, even if you don't necessarily like the classes. And don't settle for just anyone who will give you some attention. Build yourself some healthy friendships and, if you're meant to have a significant other at this point, trust the universe to give you a friend who will eventually become your love.

Amber Fayefox Kim

Dear Amber,

I often feel that relationships in prison focus too much on the physical and other means of maintaining closeness, or of intensifying it, fall to the wayside. What sorts of activities do you suggest that can bring two lovers closer without any fluids being involved? The sorts of things we can continue doing even when distance becomes an obstacle, as with a transfer?

Platonic Love

Dear Platonic Love,

I have also seen the over emphasis on sex you mentioned. However, I have also seen loving relationships where sex was never on the table. The following is some of what I've seen in those loving, nonsexual, relationships.

- Take turns asking each other personal questions about likes, dislikes, one's past, and (realistic) future plans. This is particularly good for people who are in a long distance relationship.
- Sign up for various tournaments through the recreation department. Ping pong, basketball, soccer, or (my favorite) volleyball, are all wonderful activities to do together as a couple.

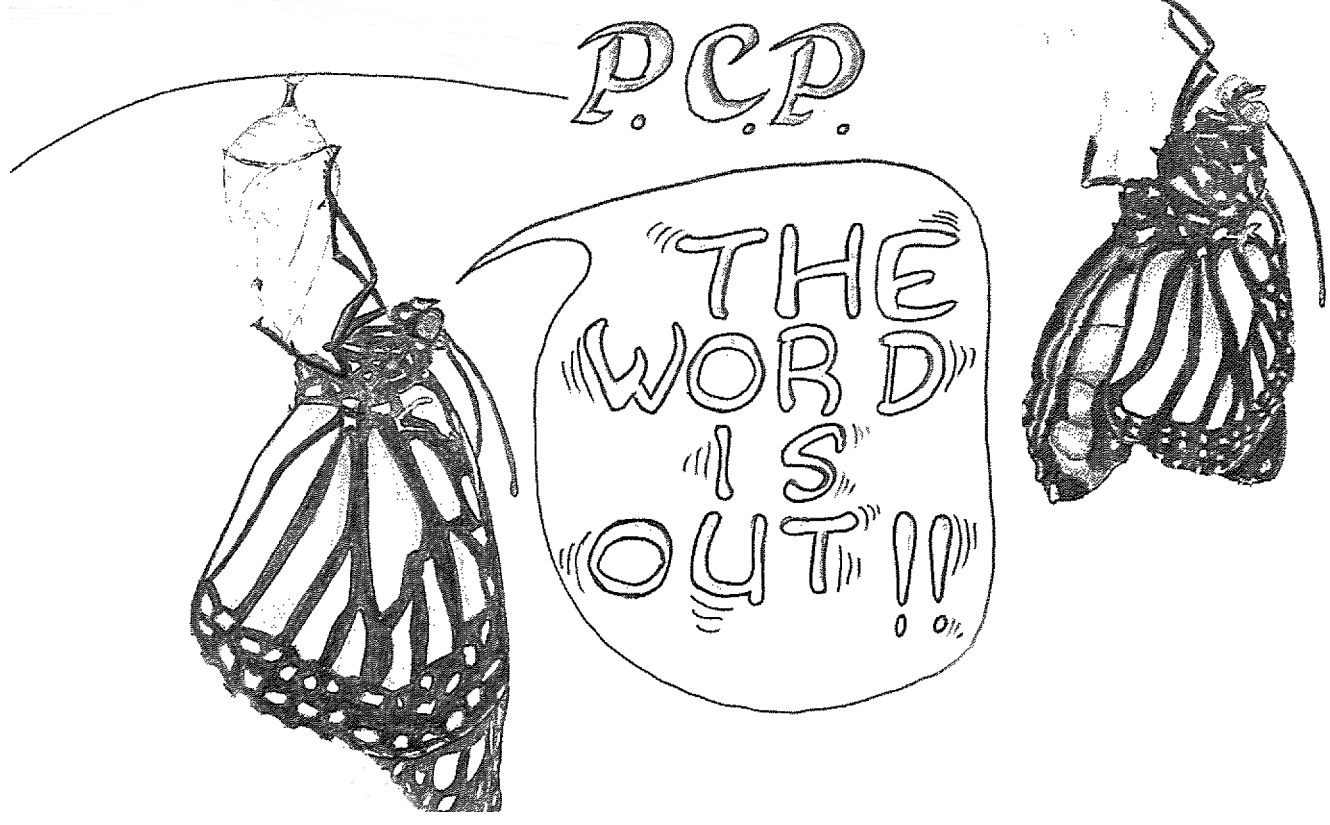
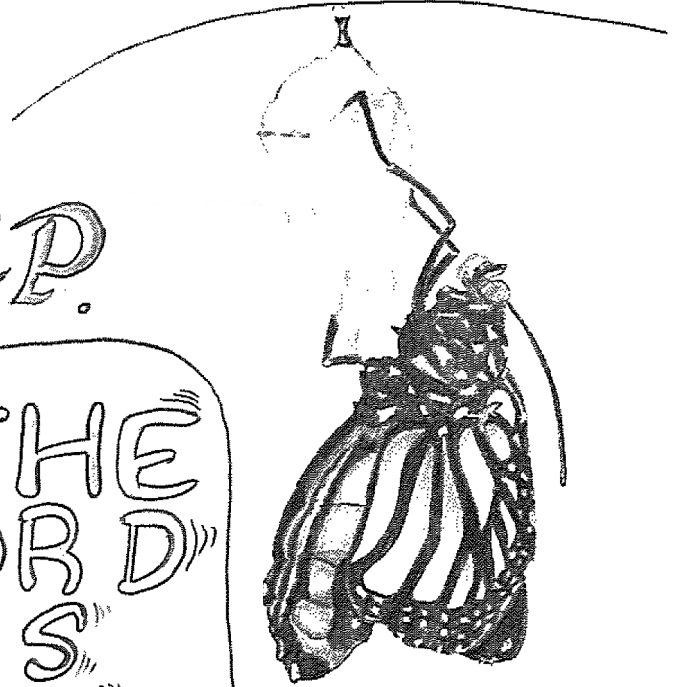
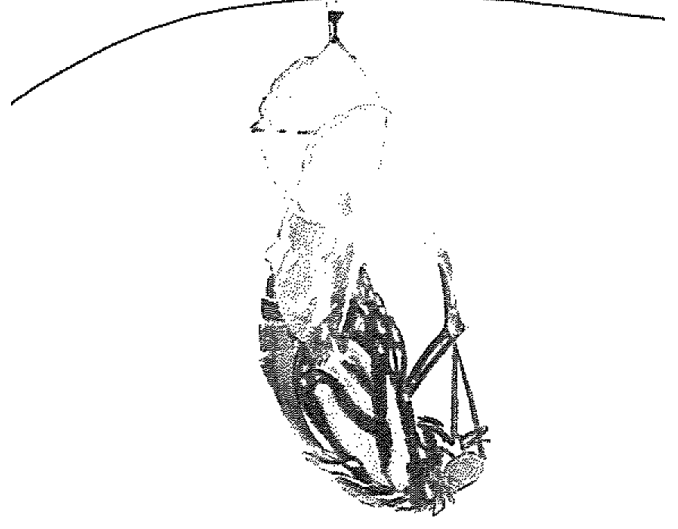
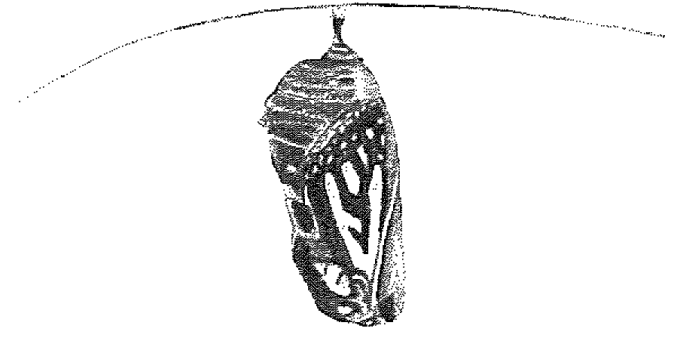
- Cook together. Eat together. Clean up together. As opposed to the “you cook, I’ll clean” division of labour.
- Go for a walk, or sit and bird watch. Wrens, starlings, finches, sparrows, ducks, pigeons, crows, and even those ever present flying poo bags, the seagulls, are always good entertainment. Take turns narrating what the birds are saying as they bicker over the bread you feed them.
- Have regular TV shows you both watch so you can talk about them when you hang out. Nature, Nova, and other documentaries on PBS are really good for this, as is basically any reality TV show ever. If you’re able to watch them together, even better.
- Take a class together. Communication classes are particularly good for more than just a “weekly date night,” but a tune-up to your relationship as well.

Really, just do any activity you would normally do to just pass the time together. When you intentionally do something together, that helps build that feeling of specialness. Some of my favorite afternoons with a significant other have been spent playing hearts with friends. I play cards all the time. It’s who I’m playing with that makes it special.

At the end of the day the real question is, “How do I make my significant other feel Significant, Special, Important, and Loved.” The vast majority of that is spending time together and investing kindness and caring, which in my mind is the entire point of getting into a relationship in the first place, regardless of which side of the prison wall one happens to live on.

Amber Fayefox Kim

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



FIVE DECADES OF PRISON WRITING IN RFD MAGAZINE

Raving Flamer's Diary / Remembering Forgotten Dreams / Revolutionary Faggot Desire /

I've been an outside penpal with the Prisoner Correspondence Project for the last ten years or so. Shoutout to G in SLO!

I'm also a witch and I visit, read cards with, fill chapel libraries, and correspond with Pagans of all sexualities in Quebec prisons. When I was young, I started to travel, and my life was changed by meeting other queers who make magic. It felt like the biggest spell coming true, falling in love chanting around bonfires all night at faerie land projects around North America, drunk on faggot ambrosia, and the hidden doors of collective lands opened up for me. These movements are around 50 years old and they stretch a half-century back in time in these places.

In the 1960s, queers were joining the feminists, socialists, anti-war people, and pooling money to buy land and building their own houses outside the gaybourhoods of the cities of North America. An elderly friend of mine remembers one single valley in Oregon that had a dozen communal land projects within walking distance, each with their own flavour: Lesbian separatist, bisexual Marxist, Radical Faerie folk-dance focused. They had names like Maoist Sissy Farm and New Sodom. From that same valley, a newsletter for rural gay men, RFD, was born, with the intention to help other rural faggots make community through isolation.¹ RFD originally referenced the Rural Free Delivery service offered by the US Post Office though every issue the initials takes on a new meaning.

Immediately, it became clear that some of the most isolated queers outside of cities were our siblings in prison. For the second issue of RFD, a policy that the magazine would always be free to people in prison was enacted—subscribers could pay a little extra to pay for extra stamps. And then the queers behind bars started writing in. And writing. And writing!

By the fourth issue, there was an entire section called Brothers behind Bars (later Gays in the Joint)—people inside were posting their personal ads and getting penpals! Writers inside and outside used the magazine's section to radicalize rural gays and keep people informed about prison strikes and their demands.

¹ A few years after the first RFD issues were published, activists Harry Hay and Don Kilhefner, queens who believed there is something inherently magical about the queer experience, called a gathering of spiritual homosexuals in the US Southwest. The first gathering was successful beyond their wildest wet dreams. If you've ever felt the rush of a spell come true or a stroke of divination lead you to the right place, try combining your energies with queer siblings! Horny nature wizards unite! A lot of people think the RF stands for Radical Faerie, but RFD came first.

Montreal's very own queer underground folk bard of the radical left, Windi Earthworm, wrote an update for the Summer 1979 issue of work done to close the solitary confinement wing of the New West pen in British Columbia, Canada called The Prison Walls will Crumble. Prolific inside organizer Ed Mead wrote for years updating queers about strikes in the late 70s and 80s.

One of my favourite pieces to grace RFD's prison pages was an ad for wooden Peter Pipes available for mail order from Colorado State Penitentiary. The 4-inch dick-shaped smoking pipes cost \$15 and came carved in 6 varieties of hardwood by "a stall full of sissies". The queen who wrote in advertising them declared:

Dear beautiful RFD folks, sissies, butches, throughout the land, and gays in the joint, I have read RFD, smiled, and often reread it, for over two years. I am gay and love it [. . .] I hope this letter doesn't blow your liberal minds; don't print it if you think I'm too unread. Believe me, this is where it's at. I've been down since 1976 and am writing because I no longer write the thirty some lazy friends whom distance has disenchanted. I would love to send gay/prisoner fiction, poetry, and art work. Place my enclosed ad [for dick pipes] please, as it is for real, honey. Love and peace.

I live in Los Angeles now, down the street from the biggest queer archive in the world, which houses a rare collection of every issue of the magazine going back to 1974. I often head down to the archive's loft to sit and read the old queens' writing like a holy book. Last time I went, I brought a rock with a natural hole in it from the sea. I peered through my ocean rock and relaxed my eyes. Through a hole in time. I whispered a word of solidarity through the smooth stone: "There will be a world without prisons." Love yous!

RFD is now the longest-running queer publication in history, just shy of its 50th year. Shoutout to dear friend Bambi who is the current publisher, based in Western Massachusetts.

Jamie Ross

CAPITULATION VIA COMPLIANCE

I've always loved the beauty of words. It's a shame that I'm forced to waste them addressing such ugliness. For decades, I let the fear of inadequacy supersede the urgency of my purpose. My reasons for writing to you are simple. Those of you on the outside have far greater intelligence and resources. Everyone knows about systemic malfeasance. Our misperception of a problem which appears too big to solve is the very paradox which allowed this monster to grow.

The Prison Industrial Complex was built under the guise of public safety. Now we know, it was only a clever ruse for one of the biggest racketeering schemes the world has ever seen. The one thing corrupt people who abuse their power fear the most is TRUTH! They operate outside parameters of ethics, morals, and even the law. Regardless of how intricate this web of deception is, there is always a way in.

People will treat you as bad as you let them. Every day I see the encroachment upon our civil, human, and due process rights. In their arrogance, government officials falsely believe that if they perpetuate their crimes slow and subtle enough, nobody will notice. Now we've deteriorated to the point these parasites feel they can blatantly violate the law with impunity.

Recently, I was fortunate enough to witness the power of One Man and his PEN. He didn't seek counsel or try to form alliances. He simply told the truth and stood up for what was right. This spontaneous act of selfless dedication to a cause is going to pave the way for the freedom of thousands. Please take a minute to ponder what we could accomplish if we could get people in every prison in America to do the very same thing.

Perhaps we'll never get the unity to attack every wrongful conviction or grievance collaterally across the entirety of our state and federal systems. So, I asked myself

some crazy, yet valid questions: What do these corrupt elitists fear most? What's most precious to them? Well, if it's their money and power they love so much, then why don't we hit them where it will hurt the most, their pocket books?

There is not a jail or prison in this nation that is run properly. Most of them are falling apart (toxic building syndrome, unsanitary, substandard living conditions; inadequate nutrition, medical, and security; numerous policies, procedural, code violations; faulty electrical, plumbing, structural, and safety issues, etc.). I don't need to list everything. I'm sure y'all get the idea. Let's simultaneously attack them on everyday compliance issues. When they find it's going to cost more to fix these facilities than they're worth, then it will cut far enough into their precious profit margins and bleed the beast dry. Closing prisons increases the parole rate; thus, reducing the demand for filling bed space. This will also decrease wrongful convictions and may even cause these crooked lawyers and judges to stop the bribery and extortion and actually follow our constitution.

Maybe we could expand this method beyond the boundaries of our criminal injustice system. It might have an effect on the rampant greed and corruption which will destroy both our nation and our planet if it continues. None of us can force someone to care. We, at least, have to try and inspire those who do care to think outside of the box.

All I have now are some correspondence supplies and the burning desire for change. On the other hand, y'all have social media and the internet. You are educated people with good vocabularies and better ideas. It will take a coordinated effort. However, all of us know that when we unify ourselves toward the common good, nothing can stop us.

Brian Fuller



RELATIONSHIPS

I have no problem with this issue's topic of relationships. After growing up in a generation of loss due to HIV/AIDS, followed up by terms within county facilities, state hospitals and prisons, I find myself down to my dying father. Having turned fifty years old and buried several lovers, I actually shy away from relationships. I'm scared of getting rejected, experiencing loss, or just the failure to give enough to warrant receiving some care in return. This all makes the effort for a healthy relationship too much. I look at today's generation's youth, teens, and young adults. I fear for them because of constant health, social, and financial drama. Every possible relationship must suffer a wide array of tests and investigations instead of pure attraction to get to another human being. Attraction comes from within whether in friendship, or something more. I hurt from the losses of friends, family, and lovers, due to my constant inability to stay out of lockdown facilities.

It's very, very unfortunate how the use of separation is easily exercised by youth/adult penal reform housing. In my older age it's become one of those things that is on my bucket list—to enjoy my silver years with at least one friend or even a relationship. All my life has been exposed to the motto “human beings aren't meant to be alone.” I guess it's time to teach today's generation and lead by example. Be well, be safe, go be sociable today.

Penni B

Relationship Building 101: A Lesson from Prison

How does one build, rebuild or maintain relationships while in prison? That's a tough call given that the most important relationship, my relationship with myself, was nearly in ruin upon entering the system.

Like a construction site for a long term project, I am a work-in-progress. Having come from the depths of drug and alcohol addiction, a suicide attempt, and generally poor decision making, I am now clean and sober since November 1st, 2017. But this is just the beginning—the hard work is what comes after: making amends, introspection, journaling, helping others/doing service work, repairing lost relationships and perhaps forming new and healthier relationships.

One of the most important friendships I had was with a lesbian couple, Cheryl and Angel. If there were any people in my life who I could communicate with when going “off the rails” it would certainly be them. I chose to ignore the honest path, covering up my triggers with a smile and a distant, “I'm well, thanks for asking!”

If I sit in resentment, stewing in the juices of blaming others and entitlement, then I miss out on the valuable road to intimacy. So, I continue to send them each a birthday card and a holiday card. I do so without expectations, choosing to instead leave a door open, if even to merely hear their words: with you, I'm angry. You hurt us.

I may never hear that. Or I might be the recipient of a much greater diatribe. Perhaps see it for what it is—an expression of love. I leave that door open because what we once had was very valuable. But I also give them space, and recognize that I may never hear from them.

Acceptance is key. Another key is to eliminate assumptions as much as possible. In the case of my brother and his wife, when I wasn't hearing from them, I assumed it was because of my incarceration. While I recognize the hurt and shock I may have created, in the end, it was merely ‘life’ itself that was intervening: he with retirement from one career at the beginning of another; she with aging parents, an important all-consuming job; and the two of them with college-aged children and a home. Not too long ago, I heard from them with the most gracious note inquiring when I was going to try transferring closer to home, if I had an email address, and ending with a “we miss you”. Acceptance is key — oh, and don't assume.

In other instances it's all about maintaining healthy boundaries, especially where my own self care is concerned. Like anyone, I do get lonely from time to time. OK, a lot of the time, especially during this lockdown-upon-lockdown called a pandemic. At this point, I must tell on myself. On a couple of occasions, I've written to my old dope dealer and sex partner in hopes of fostering a friendship, or whatever. Not proud of that, but I try not to judge myself too harshly. It should be of no surprise that I've never heard back from him. Many in recovery would say that I was holding a reservation in my program. I would agree.

Recently, I put myself out there on prison pen pal sites, ensuring that my recovery is first and foremost. The self esteem quotient that celebrates my old life tells me that the reason I'm not hearing from too many people is because my “clean/sober” date equates to “he's no fun”. But I'm learning to just let go— and trust the process. I recently heard back from someone. I just responded, careful to maintain good boundaries. I didn't reveal too much of myself, exhibiting diarrhea of the mouth, nor did I make my response equivalent to a Grindr advert. I was myself. Authentic. Honest.

Lastly, when it comes to LGBTQ relations here behind the walls, I try to be supportive and try not to lock anyone down. If I get a gay publication, I'll share it. A gay themed book, I'll share it. A smile of understanding, I'll share it. However I have noticed myself engaging in internalized homophobia, trying to either “butch it up” if I feel others might be uncomfortable with me, or avoiding those I deem too effeminate, lest I become known as the queer “go-to.”

Acceptance. Don't assume. Trust. These are part of a few ways I maintain, build, or renew friendships and relationships. In doing so, my level of self-awareness has grown exponentially.

Rolf

I've been incarcerated for seven and a half years, and it was a long time before I let my guard down and allowed myself to feel and act on my attractions. Unfortunately, I'm in a place where any love that can evolve from those attractions is against the rules. Such love is contraband, and, upon discovery, it will be confiscated by any means necessary. Still, we're resourceful in here. I had a relationship at my previous institution, but despite being together for nearly a year, once they were released, they were truly gone. Not a peep.

Fortunately though, the most positive relationships in my life have been accessible through my writing. In letters, I've found great comfort and I've found strong community. I was an IT professional out there, and I leaned heavily on email—I'd have reached for the keyboard before the pen. I can still appreciate its convenience but I've really come to love the tactile and intimate nature of the written letter. I feel truly known when someone has really peeled back the layers and found the core of me. And for you horny bitches out there, I've had written exchanges that made my toes curl much more than my former lover ever did in person (that might be the bitterness talking). The pen is mightier than the pen. . . is. Or it can be, anyways.

I've made such dear friends and drawn so much closer to some of those who are family. If I'm afraid of anything, it's that I'll forget how many times I asked in vain, "How long does it take to write three fucking lines?" I don't ever want to be the source of that frustration. This is one thing I intend to carry with me out the gates in a pinch less than 12 months—this love of interpersonal writing. Even this piece of writing brings me closer to the queer community I love. Even the newsletter, which is largely comprised of writings submitted by all of you, makes this feeling of community possible. Sometimes, being read isn't all that bad. Stay lovely, everyone!

Rayne Violet

I met him in Matsqui medium in Abbotsford, BC. The first time I looked at him I knew that he was different—not like the rest of us there. He did not seem to belong, and that was a good thing. He did not strike me as a criminal but as someone who'd made a mistake and was now in prison for some amount of time. The day, about a month later, that I saw him with a black eye, I knew he was being victimised and could use a friend.

We did not seem to have much in common—age difference, raised in different parts of the country, family dynamics not alike, etc. Yet, a bond quickly developed between us. We spent more and more time together; either walking the track, shooting hoops, playing cards, or just talking. We learned each other's histories, current situations, and goals. I'm a lifer, he was doing just three years. When we met he was only 15 months away from stat release.

As time passed, our friendship grew and our feelings for each other also grew. At first we were just acquaintances; then we became friends, and that turned into an unbreakable bond of love for each other. We adopted each other as brothers and the togetherness, support, and love was the strongest I'd ever felt for anyone in my life before. Sorry, this is not a gay love story. He was heterosexual and had even admitted to me a slight degree of homophobia, as he'd never really known a

gay person and was ignorant of how "those people" are. This was before I had told him that I am gay. I dreaded the day that I decided to tell him, not because I wanted anything sexual from him but I feared that once he knew I am gay, he'd shun me and no longer want me as his brother. It was foolish of me to think that way, for the love he felt for me would overcome anything I may have done or been. He actually laughed when I, with much anxiety and trepidation, told him. Said he'd had his suspicions for a while but was waiting for me to say it, if I so chose. No secrets between chosen brothers!

Admitting his ignorance, he asked many questions about the gay lifestyle and what it meant for me to be gay. Much time was spent educating him on the LGBTQ community. His feelings for me never changed. Over the course of our time together, we learned much about ourselves. We grew as people, just as our bond and our love grew. Of all the people I've been close to in my life up to that point, he has had the greatest positive impact on my life.

Sadly, most prison relationships, whatever kind they are, end sooner than either person wants. The last time I hugged him I cried a lot. Whether by release or transfer, people move on. January 20th was my brother's turn for stat release. Covid hit our area about two months later. Yet, he was able to get a good job and a place to live. His letters oozed with hope and happiness. Life was going to be wonderful for him. I was so proud of his achievements and elated that he was no longer in prison. My brother's major flaw was an addiction to drugs. While together in prison he never did any drugs. If he felt the urge, he'd come talk to me and we'd discuss that urge and find ways to remove those thoughts from his mind. All was well.

On September 27, 2020, my brother died in his room of a fentanyl overdose. My friend, my brother, the guy I loved, was dead. Now, over a year later, I still mourn his loss, my loss. Many around me say it is time to move on, that I'll find another. How does one forget such a wonderful relationship and move on?

Micheal Desmarais

Relationships. They certainly require sacrifice. I am tired of having to hide who I am, just to be able to fit in and make it in prison. I am able to connect with people on a deep level, but it feels like something is missing. That's because something IS missing; the freedom to be myself. Or is the freedom there, and I simply lack courage to come out and be myself? I must admit to my own cowardice - it sickens me. I choose to sacrifice a part of myself in order to maintain friendships in here.

Other than my family, my most sacred relationship is with you all, my LGBTQ+ community. Right now, this newsletter and PCP is my only link to you all. I'm mighty grateful for the opportunity to be part of this, and the chance to express myself in a safe, loving space. I thank you all and love you all.

Slowly but surely, I am developing the courage to come out to my family. First, my dear sweetheart Momma. She accepts me and loves me for who I am. But will my Father? Will I force him to choose? Part of me is thrilled at the prospect of coming out to him. If I can come out to him, I can be proud of myself and come out to the world.

Reading what you all write, and seeing the courage and pride you all have, and the love for each other, gives me hope and courage. There is a whole community out there who are just like me, and have my back. And I have your back and every one of you. In love and solidarity.

Chris Cross

I'd like to write a bit about your theme of relationships. I'm transgender so pretty much everyone that sees me knows what I'm all about. Prison is such a homophobic environment, as I'm sure you've all heard a million times. I'll use my current dilemma as an example.

I had just pulled up to this new spot and I get to my cell with my property and no one talks to me—ok normal, so used to it! A few days go by and I get a kite from someone on my company. They say "Oh hey, I don't mean to bother you, just wondering what your name is (it's Halo, btw) and just wanted to tell you, you can send me a kite if you wanna talk." This is his shot. Ok cool, I know he's scared to get found out. I play along cause he's cute so I send him a kite back and say, "Hey what's up? Yeah that's cool, name's Halo, she-hers, and we can write back and forth." It moves along over a few days. He's in a gang so now I've gotta' be extremely careful that no one finds out or his friends will get rid of both of us. Time passes and we've been corresponding for a couple weeks now. We've exchanged nasty letters, watched each other masturbate, touched each other, but we don't get privacy like we want so we try to write each other a lot to keep in contact. There is human nature to consider. Humans are social animals, we can't go years without touching someone. I mean, the rules are crazy, and people's ideals are crazy—how can you hate on something as beautiful as love/lust?

My strategies are that I don't care what anyone thinks or says, and I don't talk or gossip to people. This means that people feel safe confiding in me; a lot of people nudge the door of the closet open and poke their heads out when I'm around and I treat them with kindness, and respect their fear. Some of my many mistakes were trusting and depending on other members of the community to be there for me when it really matters. I've learned that if you talk to anyone about anything, you better not expect that to stay a secret.

And haters! OMG! So it's just best to stay out of groups. I just do my own thing and that works out best for me. As for surviving trans and homophobia—I just laugh at it. I really feel more evolved than them. I think it's funny that people can be that stupid and ignorant! I'm proud of me, of what and who I am. I wouldn't change me, I'd change the world.

I'm not sure how it is everywhere, but in New York State prisons, there's an unwritten rule that you don't fight with a "homo" or you'd get clowned by everyone, and they would suspect it's a lover's quarrel. That means there isn't much violence against me but it does hurt to be ignored and shunned all the time. As for other LGBTQ prisoners, I'd do anything for them. I hang with them, talk to them, break bread with them, all the things others do but exclude us from. I just like to make community with them, but I don't participate in gossip or any of that nonsense. I just try to make them feel welcomed in my presence and comfortable.

To be honest, there's so much hate in here and the officers tend to treat us the worst, they either hate us or try to feel us up. When that happens I always write a plea complaint, which always gets shot down. The prison sends me back a letter saying my charges were unfounded, that they rely on the officer's statement, and didn't see a reason to review the camera and microphone footage that's everywhere here. How is that possible—to rely on the perpetrator's statement and not even bother with the hard evidence? I wish the court system was like that, then there would be no need of all these prisons! Well all thank you for the wonderful newsletter! I send my love and solidarity to all of you, and all of the LGBTQ+ community inside and out! Thank you for caring about us!

Halo

In prison it is hard to keep relationships alive. As for me I have found the love of my life in prison. Her name is Avery. She is a trans woman. We have been together for 1 year and 6 months. For the first year everything was fine, then we got busted on camera kissing. We got split up. And now we can only talk to each other with our friends' help in the real world. Being split up has taken its toll on us both. But, you have to keep in mind that true love can overcome anything that comes its way.

As for building interdependence, that has taken me 5 years. When I first came to prison I had no one to count on but myself. I was completely alone, so I went through a month of feeling sorry for myself. I pulled myself out of that by putting my feelings into drawing and finding a way to use my drawing to make money. At first it didn't work because I couldn't draw. And yet, it was something I could put emotions behind—I would zone out and forget everything. For me it was the only outlet that helped.

The obstacles I'm facing in keeping connected with people is the fact that they just put off writing back when I write. They don't want to think about where I'm at or what I'm going through so they push it out of their mind by not writing.

My number one mistake was not being myself. I tried for so many years to be myself with my family but I was told I was wrong and boys don't do that. I had one day once a year where I could be my true self that I normally had to keep hidden from my family—Halloween. I would be able to dress the way I wanted, put makeup on, high heels, and do my curly hair the way I wanted. It was so empowering but every day after Halloween I had to put my mask back on again because my family was so against me being who I really was on the inside.

After nine years in prison I found Avery, my wife. She helped me tell my family. I didn't have much contact with any of my family since they cut me off when I came to prison. I was finally able, with her help, to tell them all that I am bisexual, on hormones, and have found my soulmate. Did they accept me? No! But I didn't care, I was finally able to be myself. And I was overjoyed. Yes, I would have loved for them to be in my life but I can't help them. I can only be true to myself, no matter what comes my way.

So the lesson I share to all of you is to be true to yourself. Yes it is hard, but you will find out who really has your back when you stay true to self. I love being who I truly am and so will you. Our support system at IBC Corr. Fac. MI

isn't made up of many people. We talk to one another and if any of us has a problem we figure it out in the best way we can. I would say I'm the logical thinker and the backbone of the group. If any of them need anything done on the legal side I'm the guy/girl to talk to. I wish you all the best and hope this brings you courage to be yourself.

Jose

It's hard to maintain a meaningful relationship while being incarcerated for numerous reasons, the worst of them all is being separated. Being here has made me understand love can be found in strange places yet we don't have to look for it. The things we work so hard for scare us because we always have the thought of 'what if' in the back of our minds.

We tend to do everything in our power to stay away from things that could cause a separation or worse heartache. It doesn't necessarily happen to everyone however I haven't met many in it for the full aspect of a relationship, meaning the good, bad, ugly and plain out devastating.

Some of us feel that relationships only pertain to a partner which is only the tip of the iceberg. Our relationship with family and friends start to falter as well. It's hard when the saying "out of sight, out of mind" always tends to come into the equation. People are busy trying to stay stable. My experience was crazy. When it came to family everyone loved me yet turned their back when I needed them the most. It can't get any worse than being shunned for being gay. Smh!

Relationships are a part of our life. Some we cherish while others we just develop from being around people. We still have to remember to always have an open mind to any type of relationship because it could be a learning experience or our future knocking at the door.

Cordaryl Williams

I wanted to share with everyone how I manage to maintain relationships through the limitations I experience by being incarcerated, and without a lot of options to stay in touch.

First, let me begin by telling y'all it's very difficult to keep family and friends on the outside interested or focused to consistently write letters, send pictures, do important (to me) errands for you, or place money on the phone or in your trust account so you can go to the canteen. If you really desire to continually communicate, I had to have deep, serious conversations with each member to express that I needed their ongoing support and love to make it mentally during my time because there will sometimes be rough patches. The other key is not repeatedly telling family or friends the horrid everyday details that happen to you or others in prison unless it's something that threatens your life. Try to talk or tell them about positive aspects of what you're doing daily to better yourself.

Appreciate thoughtfulness. It shows that you don't carelessly view your relationship in a one sided way, that you reciprocate the love shown. That's one of the true characteristics of a real relationship. You can do everything I've stated to a tee but the biggest fact is, the family or friend has to love you enough or truly want to maintain the relationship.

Since I have almost no family or friend support, I've had to create my own network of friends by putting myself out there on pen pal sites, writing advocacy organizations, surrounding myself with a handful of like-minded people, and keeping myself open to meeting new friends instead of being a recluse like I used to be. This is how I maintain relationships in prison and keep the bonds strong. I hope what I wrote helps anyone incarcerated or on the street connect better with their loved ones so no one is separated, isolated, or lonely.

Shariff Taylor

My Relationship With My Lover

I have been in a relationship with my lover for some time now. At the facility we're in there are more female officers that work here than male officers. You would think it's a blessing to have more female officers that can understand the love you have for your lover, wanting and needing love. These female officers are the opposite—they are a curse to be around. They befriend us to find out who our lover is and then try to keep us apart from each other. Some officers will report it to the administrative office. After learning about this from other transgender people and the LGBTQ community I know that if asked, my response will be that I'm single.

To have a lover and have to hide your relationship is hard, but we make it work. When I met my lover for the first time I put on him on the Steve Harvey ninety day trial. Allow me to explain what that is. On the Steve Harvey Show he was telling ladies that sometimes they move too fast in a relationship, is why they find themselves not in one. He was saying that they have to first get to know a guy for ninety days without kissing, touching, or having sex. After the ninety day period if he's still around he's worth a chance at romance. I did the ninety day trial with my lover and yes, he is still around. I totally adore and love him so much. Sometimes I'm in awe because I had to come to prison to find out what true love really is.

My first kiss with my lover was like fireworks, and it wasn't the 4th of July yet! Now for our sexual experience—some may call it spooning. Making great love to him for the first time was mind blowing. Now it's an addiction and you want to always have that. Overall we listen to one another and I would give our communication skills eighty five percent. I'm still working on the jealous part of me but tell me who's not jealous of their lover getting attention? We overcome the obstacles we face by staying drama-free, and trusting, being loyal and faithful to each other.

Hopefully, when my lover makes parole soon to return to society, he will stay connected with me until I return back to society, so we can be together in the free world. We both talk about marriage. In terms of building and maintaining ties, if one of us got separated from the other, we both have family and friends support that we can write to to help us give each other messages. Being in love with my lover, true love that is, there's no boundaries to what one will do for each other. What mistakes did I make? I was being too clingy and always wanted to be around my Lover constantly. Every individual needs space at times. My mind is set on going to the free world with my relationship to live our best life, where we can do what we want, when we want, without limitations.

And now that you guys know the word is out! Love you and be safe during these pandemic times.

Mocha K. Scroggins

I noticed that the theme for this issue is “Relationships” and I just lost my fiance to suicide in November 2020. Everyday is a struggle. Before I get into that, my relationship with my dad actually improved because of me coming to prison. I call him everyday if I can but with his busy schedule we usually talk twice a week. I don’t get any mail and my friendships with friends who are out in the free world are strained as we don’t talk on the phone, nor do I get mail from them. I am hurt by this but what can I do?

Being 41 years old now, I’ve really been in one true dating relationship in the free world. The reason for this is the gay community I’ve dealt with is mostly concerned about the size of your dick and if it ain’t big they don’t want you. Bisexuals that I know just use guys until the right woman comes along and breaks the guy’s heart to be with the woman, both in and out of prison. It is a sad world we live in. What happened to love and pure romance? I’m for sure the last of a dying breed of hopeless romantics, and I found pure love in prison with a guy I’ll call ‘Tristan.’

I never expected to find love in prison but I’m glad I did. When I first got to High Desert State Prison in 2018 in Indian Springs, NV and was finally housed, Tristan was a 28 year old Filipino hottie. Still to this day no-one matches how hot he was. I was instantly drawn to him, but I was a lost 38 year old with no self-esteem because of all the heartbreak I’ve suffered my entire life. I was closed off from myself and I didn’t want to have any form of relationship (friends or more) in prison. I just wanted to do my time alone and go home.

However, I was so drawn to Tristan I had to form a friendship with him. The first time I ever talked to him was when he was getting a haircut. I said, “I’m going to go take a shower and when you get done don’t think about joining me.” His response was not at all what I expected as I was joking. He had the meanest expression and said with a thunderous tone, “I don’t wanna shower with you!”

During lock-down I was scared that he might PREA me. For three hours I was panicked. On the way to chow, I made sure I was in line with him to clear the air. I said, “Um, about earlier, you do know I was just joking right?”. He laughed and then looked at me with the biggest shit-eating grin I’ve ever seen and said, “Yeah—I know, so was I!” From that day on we spend every tier, yard, and gym time together. He became my best friend. He helped my self-esteem, got me to open up, and see things differently.

Six months later, I told him I was attracted to him. I didn’t know if I made the right decision by telling him this. I put a strain on us for two weeks when I finally got a note for him informing me that since I told him about me being attracted to him he can’t get me off his mind. He wants to develop something but slowly. Lo and behold we did develop it into me asking him to marry me. Even though he had a girl on the streets, he said yes. We discussed how we would handle the future, the property I’d inherit, and living in another state. I loved him with all my heart and soul. He was the ying to my yang. He was my corn to the cob. He was my everything!

On November 22, 2020 Tristan committed suicide, leaving me heartbroken and lost. He loved who I was—I didn’t have to fake anything and he knew how our first date was going to go once out of prison. People saw how I took care of Tristan and now with him gone they are feeding on this loss telling me they have feelings for me knowing they could hook me into helping them like I did Tristan. In eight days it will be ten months since his suicide and I am struggling like it just happened. I’m still heartbroken and lost and don’t know how to move forward.

I tried to replace him but that just got me being used. I’m too scared to get close to people now because of the extreme heartbreak and pain I’m in. I don’t know who to trust and who not to trust. Everyday I want to say “F**k it” and join him, but I gave him my word I wouldn’t and I can’t put my dad through what I am going through. In the last ten months, I have lost Tristan, my soulmate, to suicide and my dog Van to a hit-and-run driver. If I was to lose my dad, I honestly don’t know what I’d do as I would then have no one. I didn’t know how to move forward in my relationship network with the loss of my partner. I’m going to take each day as it comes and see where it takes me.

P.S. The only thing I’d do differently is make sure all my friends’ mental health is okay. Also, if I could have saved Tristan or trade spots—I would!

Wayne Walker

A DAY IN YOUR LIFE

The theme for our next issue is A DAY IN YOUR LIFE.

For our next issue, we’re getting nosy! We want to read your journals, diaries, a typical day in your life, or any of your thoughts about the act of journaling. Not all journals are written! We’d love to see your art too!

Journaling for you might look like a log of events, a peek into your day-to-day schedule, or deeper reflections about what’s been going on lately. Maybe it’s a comic about something that happened today, or poetry describing something you saw.

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

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



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.

It is early, the coastal fog creates a contrast of grey on grey. Lompoc's dreary cement facade in the foreground as the Pacific Ocean's dynamic natural air conditioning rolls in, cooling the soon to be blazing interior of the continent's western coast. As they have done every spring, the swallows are back to build nests. A journey's beginning, middle, or end? Why here for "home"?

I am pondering birds, seeking inspiration from a species that will become the vehicle for this column. Lompoc, the prison, once part of the sprawling Vandenberg Air Force Base (now Space Force Base!) has aging structures constructed at a time when young men eagerly, some fearfully, had enlisted to defend this country. It now houses men of all ages, any of them uncertain, some scared, all incarcerated to protect this country.

A solitary western gull patrols a nearby rooftop. A trio of crows, wary yet precocious teenagers, finding comfort and bravado in their camaraderie as they dare to provoke the larger and older seabird. Is this long sentry and its tormentors my inspiration? Some new yet hidden metaphor awaiting this pen to bring it into the light of prose?

Perhaps, the answer to my quest for wisdom comes from a family of red-tailed hawks. More permanent in residency than many of the imprisoned who walk the grounds below the introduced, exotic eucalyptus trees that provide structure for the raptors and their prolific nests.

Yet, I keep coming back to the question—why here for "home"?

On a similar morning while sitting in the chapel area, a musty room where us Buddhists gather to meditate and breathe, I find myself contemplating the wind-sculpted Callistemon citrinus. This crimson bottlebrush, just outside one of the

many large windows, is busy with Anna's hummingbirds and honey bees. The bottle-brush shaped blooms are a source of nourishment for the observed and the observer.

A few notes on birds and the human environment: rock pigeons thrive in cities around the world. Mourning doves avoid nesting in noisy places. Bluebirds might be limited in nesting if people didn't build birdhouses for them. Birds in urban areas sing at night because it is quieter in those hours. Barn swallows and chimney swifts nest almost exclusively in structures built by humans. Crows, brown-headed cowbirds, and grackles feed on corn and other crops, thus subsidised by human agriculture.

A theme begins to emerge in the distant verdant hills as the shroud of fog retreats. What defines or determines a dwelling place? Instead of, "Why here for home?", perhaps "Why here for home?" is the question I'm considering.

The Buddha taught that mindfulness (right mindfulness of the Noble Eightfold Path) is the energy that brings us back to the present moment. Mindfulness is the foundation of our dwelling place. Thich That Hanh, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk, poet and peacemaker wrote, "When we are truly home, our body, mind and feelings will be a place of refuge for ourselves and others".

Is this energy, of the present moment limited to any one species? Can refuge be found regardless of surroundings? All that I view outside that window is here for who? For whom? In the wonderful novel Ishmael by Daniel Quinn, the character of wisdom (non-human) proposes that humankind accepts a myth as fact: that all that there is was created for man. Once humans appeared, creation ended, the objective reached. Nothing left to be created once humankind showed up.

And yet, the wisdom of birds proves otherwise.

A prison. A Ukrainian landscape. A market in Buffalo. An airstrip in Afghanistan. A school in Texas. Why here for home? Do birds take note of this?

There is wisdom all around us. Be mindful. Be kind. Take notice of all the lessons. Here is home for all.

Jason Morris

IN CONVERSATION WITH MISS MAJOR: PT. V

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 five!

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.

EVE: It seems like family is very important to you, in many different forms too. I'm curious what family does mean to you and how maybe that has changed for you over your lifetime.

MAJOR: Well, it hasn't changed it's just grown exponentially, and it's family of your making—it's family that you choose. We don't get to choose who our parents are. We don't have any control over that. If you're lucky, you get a good set. If you're not, you just get what you got, deal with it till you can get away and do something else. And when you get away, you create a family for you.

As human beings we are tied to this need of another person—not necessarily a lover, a friend is good, even find a good dog. But someone who loves you unconditionally, who can handle your faults as well as your good points. Someone who isn't going to criticize you for something you believe that you can do, and believe in you, and foster you, and give you the care and concern to move forward.

The family that all of you here have created through your lives as the adult people that you are, those are the things that you should nurture and hold on to and caress and help grow and continue to be a part of. Because without those, what are you living for?

Yeah, things are rough, and things are hard and we definitely suffer, but you don't have to suffer in pain, there's always going to be something to laugh at. Keep a sense of humour, keep your wits about you, and keep yourselves safe. And you can do that with people around you that love you and care about you. And there's all kinds and forms of love, there's all kinds of things that can give you the strength to move forward, to stand up and be fucking counted. You don't want to be, tomorrow, the same person you were today. You want something to have happened to you during your day that makes you go "Ooh! I gotta remember that." That's another

goddamn memory. As you get older, you'll find that those memories can turn out to be the most comfortable thing in your very existence. Because it's a feeling and an emotion that you've had, that you can bring back up.

One of the reasons I still go around and see my documentary every time I get invited is because one of the things that happens when I watch is all of the years that I've been living, different parts of that is in this documentary. For me, I'll know where a certain phrase came from, because I'll remember the person that I first got that phrase from. And I'll feel warm inside and I'll miss them, and hope that wherever they are, whatever part of the sky or ground, that they'll go, "oh, made you thought about me" that was so sweet, you know. And I get that when I call people and talk to them on the phone it's like "What? You calling me? Oh god! So nice to—that's so weird!", yeah well, hi!

So, create those things and impress them and hold onto them, you know because things happen, people change, folks move away, and you don't want their going away to be this wall that you've run into. You want it to wish them well, hope that they prosper, and hope that they're okay, and that the thought of them gives you a sense of comfort and joy, and style.

EVE: Since you mentioned, why don't we talk about your documentary for a little bit. You said some comments about watching it reminds you about parts of your life, I'm sure you've seen it a million times.

MAJOR: I just saw it last night.

EVE: You just saw it last night! Are you happy with the final product? Do you think it represents who you are and who you've come from?

MAJOR: Oh child, fuck yeah! The lady and guy who did that, they did a damn good job. Just having them around and do this—it was never an inconvenience, they were never in the way, I didn't have to live my life and have them intrude upon it. They were part of things as it flowed.

It was two and a half years in the making, and it wasn't an obnoxious or strenuous thing. It was really an interesting project. But it's a comfortable thing because one of the things that you get from it is it's not this compilation of what people think I am, it's me with people around me who care about me, and who are interested in making this for the girls that are coming up behind me, you know, which is why I did it—so that my community would realize, we can get to be older people, we don't all have to die by 35, which is up from 26 when I was growing up. You know I was like "Oh! 35, yeah".

But it's been a thing to get you to realize that it's not just about me and what I do and who I am. It's me and connections to the people around me. To folks like you all, who I know, or may know later, or come back next year and

see again. So, it's a family thing, it's a thing encompassing what things happened to get me to who I am today.

NORA: Another question related to the movie: you were talking about different phrases in the movie and one of the most powerful moments is when a whole chorus of transwomen come on the screen and all recite the "We're still here, we're still fuckin here." I think it speaks to that collective spirit—it's not just "I'm here" but "We're here." I think it speaks about survival within a lifetime, across collectivity, across generations as well. I was just wondering if you could reflect a little bit about that.

Part of why I want to ask you to do that is just, even over the past couple of weeks, and over the years, I've seen so many friends, comrades—mostly young transwomen—really struggle and often they're leaders in their own communities. They are some of the most visible activists who are leading the cause at the moment, and on the inside are really struggling to still stay here.

There's a lack of a sense of longevity and being able to watch all the different kinds of work that you've done over the years. When we're in our own crises, we can often lose perspective of the ways we've sustained work through time when we're in movements that are oriented around these very pressing issues.

So, that spirit of "We're still here," which I think is so important and so strong throughout your work—I was just wondering if you could reflect on that. Just spending time with you last night, talk about the importance of self-care and remembering to take time for yourself. . . just wondering what that looks like for all of us in this room who maybe don't have the appreciation of that longevity, the long haul.

MAJOR: Well, you know, it's not just for activism, it's for living your lives. I mean, the pressures of just being a black person is annoying without me even being trans. So it's like "Well shit, on top of all that I gotta put up with this crap." And then "Oh god, I have a dick and I'm still a woman—ok explain womanhood to me." And so it becomes a matter of realizing who you are. No matter what work you do or what life you have to live, you have got to learn to take care of yourself first.

You can't be a good activist or a good person without some modicum of self-care. The only reason I have been able to do this these 50 fuckin years is because when things got weird, I stepped back, got my shit together, and then moved forward. And you have to realize that first of all, if you're going to be an activist or you care about the community, you can't say to everybody, there's all these people who want to be saved. You have to realize that they were getting along before you came along, and after your ass falls apart, has a mental breakdown, collapses in a corner and dies—they're going to still get along and go "Oh, I remember her, poor thing, hope she's okay," and keep on going. So, you have to take care of you first. You have to remember that you are not irreplaceable. You've got to take care of you so you can keep going.

If you're falling apart, having a nervous breakdown and worrying about something that someone else is doing in their life that you're trying to correct, and you're not taking care of you, you get sick. You can't do that. You know, if

something happens to you where you are stuck in a situation and can't figure a way out, then step back from it.

Don't let the stress of this world, and people around you, push you into corners or walls that you can't get out of. For me, it's like, I want people to live a life like I did after I came out of prison. Put your back against a wall, don't let no motherfucker sneak up on you, and take care of the shit that's in front of you as you can. When you can't, let it go.

And come back to it—because if you don't take care of it, and it does take too much, then what good are you? Who have you served? And then, do you come back from those type of things? I've had friends who've lost their cookies over stuff. When AIDS became popular, one of the things that was amazing in the beginning is that, the medicines that they had these guys and my girls on, was like a bag of M&M candies, so you push them into all their different little colours, and then you throw in some of the ones that have nuts in 'em, and then you go "These you take with water, these you take with juice, these you take every 3 hours, these you take with something else, these you don't take anything, these you have to have not eaten for 4 hours." And then you put em all back in the bag and they tell you "OK, here now go out and take care of yourself." That's a lot to remember to do. And so people weren't getting the chance to follow the regimen.

And what wound up happening was social workers who were trying to get them to do this. Some of the pills had to be cold, or the pills had to be room temperature—and so, you wound up being frustrated because you can't help in the work that you do—but liking somebody and really wanting them to do well and step out of the melee that they're in and do better. And so you really strive hard to do that.

And then, you know, people have mental issues. They have things that they have to think about for themselves, and so they don't do it. And so my friend drove herself crazy huntin down this one guy who she wanted to make sure he took his pills and stuff like that. She wound up going completely nuts on me and never got back from it.

Stay tuned for the rest of the conversation!

HOMOSCOPES

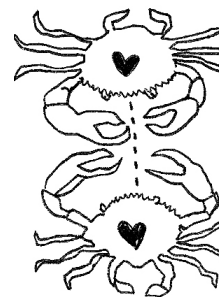
ARIES

It's your time! You make the gay magic happen and we all marvel at your big big energy as we wait patiently for spring. yours is not a sign of all year sunshine nor of forever winter- you make change happen and please don't stop. You take pleasure just as gladly as you give it and that is essential. Keep going.



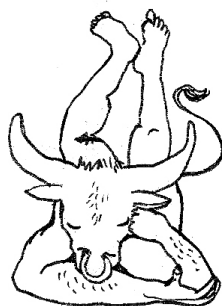
CANCER

Caregiving is a beautiful thing but this is not the best time to nourish externally. Put some of that spit and polish back onto yourself, Daddy. If you can just focus inward (or at least on the external places closest to your insides) you will find the payout far more satisfying. Your fulfillment over the coming weeks can even bring unexpected joy to the people on whom you most wish to dote.



TAURUS

All the comforts you have are delights you have worked for, and all you need to do now is keep at it. I hesitate to recommend patience as I don't wish to feed a natural inclination toward any brat tendencies, but essentially, boy, dig your heels in. The stars ask you for petulance, persistence, and perfection. Please don't quit!



LEO

As you seek to expand your family, don't forget to tend to the daily rituals that make you feel gorgeous. Growing and loving in all the ways you want to doesn't require giving up the fun that makes you famous. Adoration gives you what you need to be in connection to others. All that drive and charm and heart that makes you perfect is not what you need to sacrifice, you are beautiful in all the ways and giving more love doesn't require extinguishing it.



GEMINI

Those around you might be feeling a little overwhelmed by your desire for connection and conversation. It's not that you aren't charming as ever so much as this is a problem of timing. With mercury in retrograde, you might be feeling less understood than usual, needing to constantly replay and repeat. In other words, if it's worth saying, say it again and if it isn't, you ought to—very lovingly—shut up.



VIRGO

From garbage you eagerly build a stunning existence that inspires people you don't even know yet. You are quick and cute and full of wisdoms even on days that feel horrid. Anytime you question your own ability to make a significant impact on others, remember that even when things are trash, you remain entirely perfect.



LIBRA

Injustice is constant which doesn't sit well with you. You do not thrive in disharmony and you can't passively watch things deteriorate. The astrological situation of late calls on you to restore balance not by changing those things out of your control but by leaning hard into whatever joys you can locate. If it feels good, let others know how to share in it. Find release in all the gayest ways possible and get whoever you can to join in. Think: groups.



CAPRICORN

You have a soft leather vibe these days, Capricorn, and this is really working for you. You materialize what you need not by impulse but wisely, and this is really working for all of us. Your discretion, in fact, is infectious. Everyone around you can't help but gently top and eagerly witness the lead you have given. The pace you set is a gift. Thanks for letting us follow.



SCORPIO

Sometimes when you protect yourself, other people take this badly. It's not simply about opposing your boundaries—you deserve to set limits and feel entitled to whatever it is that lets you do you. I will remind you, Scorpio, that no one likes to feel excluded, especially not by someone like you, a queen we so long to befriend. All I'm saying is, if those you've shut out seem sour, it's not that they don't value your autonomy as much as they are grieving the chance to get close to your magnificence.



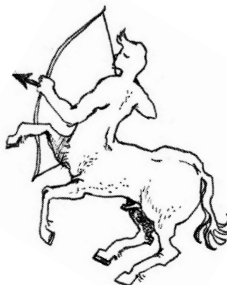
AQUARIUS

Your recent transformations, both physical and otherwise, are turning a lot of heads. If you can internalize just how beautiful you make your followers feel, some of that lasting anxiety you secrete away might just dissolve into something different. Large amounts of change can feel overwhelming but now is the time to let yourself become just a little bit unrecognizable, even if only in private.



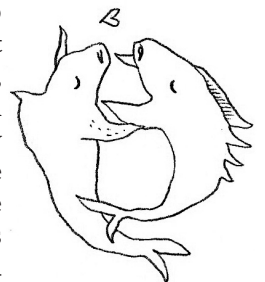
SAGITTARIUS

A Sag should be moving, thriving, and mingling, and what better time astrologically than now to find the little gems, hidden corners, and dirty secrets that allow you to find novelty everywhere. If you can look at the usual things with a newfound openness, the potential for curiosity will also be winning. It's time for those perfect hands to reach deeply.



PISCES

Happy birthday, sweet Pisces! Your watery wisdoms this month are so important not just interpersonally but for art. All art! Anything you can draw, write, or perform, anything you can make or see or share that can bring any beauty or meaning or question to the day is a total emotional present for the rest of us, even though our birthdays must wait. Give us what we need and show us something cute, or dazzling, or whatever; we will treasure anything that comes out of your body for serious.





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Antonio's
Vision!