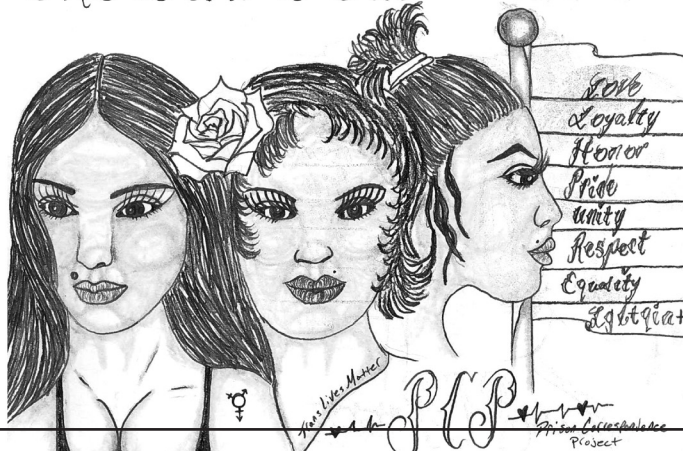


BOBBY THOMPSON



The Word is Out



ANGEL GARZA

WINTER 2026:
MUSIC

Welcome to issue 26 of The Word is Out! It's been a while, we've missed you!

How have you been, darlings? We've been going through a lot this past year—us and you all, I'm sure. On our side, there was a mail strike that lasted over a month back in November, so we were behind our mail for a little while. On the bright side, it allowed us to get caught up on a bunch of tasks! And we have been on top of our mail since then.

This year, we partnered with local organizations again, such as our local anarchist bookfair, the Defund the Police festival, Prisoner Justice Day, and Wild Pride, a pride festival pushing back against commercial pride festivals. And this spring, one of our collective members presented a workshop named Inappropriate Content about prison mailroom policies and censorship. It was a success!

We've also been working on raising awareness and advocating against transphobic prison policies. In early 205, we amplified the experiences of members in US Federal prisons who were prevented from accessing gender affirming care and moved to different prisons due to an executive order. Locally, we worked on a campaign against a transphobic housing policy in provincial prisons.

We successfully (and finally) digitized all our resources, so we're not only relying on big unwieldy binders! We talked about doing it for a long time, and it only took us two evenings once we actually got to it.

This issue's theme is MUSIC! Featuring your favorite songs, playlists and songs you all wrote! We asked you to share with us what music means to you and you all did not disappoint. We even made a playlist of your recommendations!

New resources added to the library: We have a new resource on re-entry, a topic we get a lot of requests about, so we're very happy to add it. We also have one about forming a reading group in prison, and some more! Let us know if there are topics you'd want to see more of in our library.

As always, you can write to us to request up to five resources. If you want the updated resource list that includes our entire library, send us a request by mail.

Finally, some housekeeping: we are officially moving to a yearly newsletter instead of twice a year. I know, it's disappointing, but it's what we've been able to do for the last few issues and we want to be realistic with you all. Our capacity as a team has changed (and the costs have long since exceeded our funding), but this way, we can make sure each issue is the best it can be! We hope you understand.

Shout out to our contributors for this issue: Amber Fayefox Kim, Angel Garza, Anthony Martin, Bobby Thompson, Brittany Alanna-Marie Rianone, D-HERO, Divine K. Sexton, Dwight, Earl Pickering, Iris Da Puppy, Jacinda Lee Allenbaugh, Jason Morris, Jeffrey R. McKee, Mar-Eleanor Moore, Matthew Feeney, Max Reynard, Robert Barnes, Roel Deluca, Shae Graeme, Stacy Erica Taylor, Submissive Lacey, Richard Mercaldo, Tom Donahue, William Davis. Also shout out to Zhi Kai Vanderford, whose work was featured on the back page of our last issue that was mistakenly attributed to a different artist.

Thanks for being a part of the project. We're so happy you're here!

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

Hello! Here are the resources we've added to our library this year. You can always 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! Also please write to us with any suggestions of resources, topics, or themes you'd like to see us add!

LGBTQ+ Prisoner Resource Guide by American Friends Service Committee: Resource guide for the LGBTQ+ community behind the walls.

How to Start Your Own Study Group in Prison: Personal reflections and a step-by-step guide on using reading groups to build prisoner unity and power.

My First Time: Smut by an anonymous inside PCP member. Starting with a massage, ending with a good time.

HIV Basics by CATIE: Basic knowledge about HIV.

This is Trans Smut: Two homebrewed stories of lust. leather. grime. t4t. group. motorcycles. dykes. punk. doll. tboy. musk. acab. mosh. butch. fem. outdoors. etc.

The Neo Satanist: A challenge base opinion piece that is not aimed as to trample on the beliefs of others. It is aimed at challenging your view of yourself. By the author of Dema Days and Dema's Dreams.

Re-Entry Resources for Prisoners: A list of general, federal, and state resources for re-entry.

Canadian Resources for Prisoners: A list of resources for incarcerated people in Canada

ORGANIZING VICTORIES

Minnesota Sex Offender Program is a prison where we're all serving indeterminate (de facto life) sentences as preventative detention for future crimes we will never commit. After we completed our DOC prison sentences, they transferred us to this "secure treatment facility" run by DHS instead of DOC.

About the only difference from DOC is that, despite calling us "clients," we are actually patients and thus have some additional legal protections under Minnesota Patient Bill of Rights (§ 144.651). The biggest is our right to organize and run a "Resident Advisory Family Council" (RAFC) that allows our elected Patient Council to participate in weekly video meetings with outside support. Our outside support has grown from family members to also include attorneys, therapists, ministers, and even a retired legislator. Once a month we meet for an hour with the Facility Director, Clinical Director, and Ombudsman to present our proposals for policy change.

Some policy changes we've helped bring about include the ability for patients to call toll-free numbers, allowing patients to seek post-secondary educational opportunities, promoting voter registration and the in-person voting process recently signed into law.

The RAFC also worked directly with the Mitchell-Hamline School of Law and provided input on their 4/1/24 open letter to Governor Tim Walz that was signed by 100 notable individuals and organizations (www.mitchellhamline.edu/sex-offense-litigation-policy). This scathing report calls for MSOP to be sunset and the \$110 million dollar yearly operating expense be reinvested in proven victim advocacy programs.

This year our RAFC also sponsored a very successful "Freedom" themed 4th of July writing contest that resulted in 45 patients submitting 111 poems, stories, and essays.

Realizing that incorrect data in our records was being used against us when applying for transfers to less restrictive alternatives, the RAFC wrote an educational how-to brochure entitled "How to Do a Data Challenge" that we distribute to fellow patients. MSOP retaliated by giving me a disciplinary violation notice for handing this brochure to another patient before group instead of having it mailed to him.

But the brochures worked. The Executive Director was overwhelmed with data challenges and started extending the deadline to respond. I finally filed a request for Advisory Opinion from the Commissioner of Administration on this issue, and on 7/15/24, Advisory Opinion #24-001 was issued (<https://mm.gov/admin/datapractices>). This four-page report cites the Executive Director's violation of the 30-day statutory deadline in responding to data challenges and noted that she didn't have the authority to change the law.

On 9/10/24, my first data challenge appeal went to a formal consent case hearing in front of an administrative law judge. During the four-hour hearing, a fellow patient and two therapists were called as witnesses and MSOP was represented by the Attorney General's office. Thankfully my 87-year-old father is still a licensed attorney, so he stepped in and hit a homerun. We won the data challenge appeal and last week and my (now former) therapist received the judge's court order to add a single sentence to my quarterly report. Coincidentally, the same day, the facility decided I should be moved to another treatment team on another living unit... exactly what I had been requesting for the last year!

So it's a great start to the new year, with lots more victories in store. Remember, the secret is don't ever, ever give up!

Matthew Feeney

EDITOR'S NOTE: Since writing this letter, after getting policy changed to allow post-secondary education at his facility, Matthew is now one semester away from completing a Masters in Humanities from CSU-DH!

I have a success story I'd like to share with you and your readers. I've been here at Wallens Ridge since February 2022 and, after a few months of being here, I noticed there were no programs or incentives for military veterans!

As a highly decorated navy vet and as a man who fearlessly deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, I felt more should be done for incarcerated vets. I'm a fiercely passionate Latino who does not know how to accept *NO* as an answer,

ha! Every time I asked prison staff about veterans programs I kept hearing *no we don't do that* or *I don't know!* I simply asked staff, *when was the last time a Veterans Day ceremony was held? Is there a Veterans Pod? Can Veterans apply to enter university while incarcerated?* The answer was always *no*.

I felt so strongly that more should be done that I reached out to the higher-ranking prison staff. With their permission, I wrote a few letters to the Veterans Affairs office. I always ended my letters with questions like *can your department set up military friendly functions?* I asked, "What can y'all do for fallen heroes not being advocated for and possibly forgotten in the system?"

Well, after many discussions, meetings, and closed doors, I finally found a *yes*. On Nov 12, 2024, I am proud to say Wallens Ridge had it's very first Veterans Day Ceremony in almost ten years. My brother and I shared some amazing memories, outstanding food, and we were even allowed to take "service specific photos" for our families.

My wisdom to hundreds of veterans wherever they may be is don't take *no* for an answer. As a proud openly gay military veteran I stood my ground and, with the support of other vets, we made a change in an antiquated prison system. Please don't give up on yourselves and fight for better treatment. You all have earned that.

D-HERO

I wanted to contribute my victories here at Adult Diagnostic and Treatment Center. I've only been here a year and a half (I did 18 months in South Woods State Prison before being transferred here). In my three years, I have helped trans females get on hormones, fought for proper and consistent distribution of bras and panties, have makeup and other female canteen items in progress, and we finally have an LGBT+ Mental Health Group after much arguing, advocating, and talking to the Ombudsman and Rutgers department heads.

Our therapist is a supporter (and fan of ska music!) and is willing to learn, understand, and research! She's my favorite therapist! I'm proud of myself. I've never allowed myself to feel accomplished in the past, but y'all's victory stories helped.

Our transgender community is very small here, but we are family. Helping our community inside makes me feel like a mom, which I may never be, but who knows? My one sister, Raven, rekindled her fire and is doing lawsuits for better treatment of the LGBT community, all our surgeries, and it is bringing our community closer. We are few strong! Couple of She-Ras over here! Woot <3

Brittany Alanna-Marie Rianone <3

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 PCP,

First I'd just like to say how grateful I am that you publish these stories. Some of us feel like we are unique going through the prison experience alone, and then your periodical lets me know there are people just like me fighting through their own trials all around the world.

Barbara Grier once said, "I am absolutely convinced if everyone would come out at once and stay out, we could put an end to most of our problems." I can't tell you how many closet cases I live around. They are the worst. When you're alone in the showers with them, they're trying to get with you, but when they're around their boys, it's all "fuck those faggots." Even our own don't always stick together. Either too afraid of being labeled, or they hook up with the jealous type who wants to isolate them. And they comply.

I can't even find a penpal these days because no one does snail mail anymore. But it's some comfort to know there are people out there who understand my/our struggle. Stick together my friends. I have to believe things are still getting better. Slowly, but better.

*All my love,
Dwight*

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.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: MEND JOURNAL

Mend celebrates the lives and creative work of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people as well as individuals who have been impacted by the criminal justice system. This annual publication showcases writing of all types, including fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. While prospective authors may submit pieces that describe their experiences with incarceration, the publication welcomes contributions on any topic.

Submissions are accepted on an ongoing basis. Writing submissions can be submitted by email or at the mailing address below. Legible handwritten submissions are welcome. Art submissions are accepted only via email.

Email submissions: mendthejournal@gmail.com

Mail submissions:

Editors

Mend

c/o Patrick W. Berry
Syracuse University
239 H.B. Crouse Hall
Syracuse, NY 13244

All submissions should include:

- Contact information (mailing address as well as email and phone number, if available).
- A 50-word bio to be used if your piece is accepted.
- A brief note confirming that you have been impacted by the criminal justice system.

Guidelines:

- We accept only previously unpublished material.
- You may submit up to 5 pieces of writing.
- You may submit as many pieces of art as you like.
- Written submissions should be no more than 6 pages (or 1,800 words).
- Art files should be submitted as JPEGs (highest resolution available).
- Electronic submissions should follow this naming convention: LastNameFirstName_Title

All accepted written pieces will be considered for an annual award that recognizes exceptional writing and includes a \$100 prize.

If you have questions, please contact us at mendthejournal@gmail.com or at the address above.

ADVICE COLUMN

Dear Amber,

Hiii! Hope you are doing good and your mental health is well! I am trans woman (M to F), out four years, on HRT four years this June and polysexual =). I'm writing you/asking advice on ways to build resilience to rumors. This place is B.A.D. with them. They get to me because they vastly limit people I interact with, cause no one wants to hear a rumor about them saying they are either dating me, or with a "tranny" (I'm not a car part!). And while, yes, I hang with a few girls, a guy friend would be nice that isn't looking to get some kitty. I'm trying to deal with rumors affecting me and it mainly consists of venting and getting used to being alone.

My BF at home tells me it's not a necessity to have friends here, but he also gets I thrive off positive energy. Both my BF and therapist say to ignore them. I guess I'm just venting again. -_- I have three years left. I have my best girl friend and a kick butt personality, so screw the haters. Ugh I feel like I wasted space with this, I'm sorry!

Take care of yourself and sending big posi-vibes <3
Thank you for all you do for the community!

[Got Gossips] with a K

Dear Got Gossips with a K, Giiirl!

I hear you and that struggle is real for all of us out and proud queer folk! If I'd shagged a tenth of everyone I've been rumored to have hooked up with over the years, my poor bum would be decimated. And I've heard all the trite one-liners of well meaning advice. *Just ignore it. Words are wind. Shine it on. Rise above it. They're talking about you because they don't have their own business to mind. They're just jealous 'cause you're hot.* (OK, not so much me on that last one, but a girl can dream, can't she?)

The reality is, all those one-liners assume we're perfectly put together enlightened people who are just having trouble with the one thing. Now, I can't speak for anyone but me, but I'm not your fairy tale princess. I can't out nice anybody. But nobody can out Ice Queen me. When people gossip about me, I know, down to my bones, that I truly do not care about their lowly NPC peasant opinion of me. At least, that's the story I tell myself. And that's really all we can control. The stories we tell ourselves.

The story I tell myself works for me, because, if I'm being honest with myself, I'm a bitchy asshole. Yes, I try hard to make people feel better after talking to me than they were beforehand. And I am invested in and work for the well-being of my friends. But that doesn't change the fact that all of that goodness requires conscious effort on my part, and for every nice thing I think to say, there are dozens of horribly mean things that cross my mind. I'm really not a nice person.

Building resilience starts with being honest with oneself about who one is, then crafting a story around those qualities. You said you thrive off of positive energy. Well, is a bunch of gossipmongers the kind of energy you want to surround yourself with? What story can you tell yourself to help you deal with the gossipmongers and the people who let themselves be so easily swayed?

I don't bother with fighting myself or forcing myself to try and be nice. Instead, I let my natural bitchiness work for me. You want to gossip about me? Fine, you're beneath my notice. That candy I bought to hand out to everyone for Halloween? Now you don't get any. You want to treat me like a leper because you're scared of someone gossiping about you? Well, then I'm not going to grace you with my awesomeness. Hero up or piss off. I might have a life sentence, but I ain't got time to waste on weak BS.

So, your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to spend some time finding the story you can tell yourself to help you deal with the gossip. Are you a green thumb, weeding out unwanted people from the garden of your life? A composer, looking for good vibes in the song of living? A saint, suffering through the company of sinners with divine grace? Or are you more like me than most people are willing to admit? If so, welcome to the edge of the map. Here, there be monsters.

*Her Royal Iciness, Queen Amber Fayefox Kim
~has a nice ring to it, don't cha think?~*

Dear Amber,

I've been in several committed relationships where I've been hurt badly and just plain used. I can't see to trust or let go of my past hurt. I find myself in a wonderful, healthy relationship with a guy who truly loves me and cares, but my trust issues are pushing him away. Do you have any advice on how I can move forward and actually let my current hubby in? Thank you so much!

Inability to Trust

Dear Inability to Trust,

You've already taken your first and most important step, admitting to yourself that your past pain is hurting your present self. Now comes the infinitely harder part: talking to your significant other about it. Trust issues are hard to fix, because they grow out of the experience of having trusted someone who didn't honor the gift of your trust. The only real way to counter those old painful memories is for you to gift someone with your trust, and have that person be worthy of that trust. What I'm hearing is you're struggling with giving your hubby that gift in the first place, so he hasn't had the chance to show he's worthy of the gift. Or worse, you're giving him the gift, then taking it back for no reason he can see because, well, he can't see the fear and pain motivating you to take it back.

Most people talk about trust using metaphors of walls, armor, boundaries, and lines. While this can be useful, especially for people who are working on not trusting too quickly or too much, I have found that these metaphors hurt those of us who carry a past full of scars. It's easy to fall into territorial thinking and react to the smallest disturbance as if it were an international incident. Five minutes to midnight! Pull up the nuclear launch codes! Send in the marines! Because... we've been hurt before and we don't want to be hurt again. So, we burn them before they can burn us. In the end, we're still alone and hurting. Just me and a bag of Cactus Annie.

Treat your trust as a gift. If you give someone a birthday present, you'd never think to demand it back because they didn't care for it the way you think they should care for it.

Instead, you'd communicate to them how to take care of the gift you'd given them, and you may choose what gifts you'll give in the future based on their treatment of gifts you've given them previously. You also most certainly wouldn't withhold a gift for one person because you gave some jackass a gift many years ago and they smashed it to bits before the end of the night. Lastly, think about the gifts of trust you've already received from your current hubby. It is easier to be generous when someone has already been generous with us.

I know that's quite abstract, so let's come back down to earth. I too, am a walking bundle of past hurt. And, for some reason, I'm attracted to other people who are every bit as damaged as me. This of course makes trust hard, but it's still manageable. Start small. Look for little ways you can extend gifts of trust to your significant other. And look for the small ways your significant other is already extending gifts of trust to you. Notice: these are gifts. The only way they can be given is freely, without let, lean, or loan. That's a fancy way of saying no strings attached. You're not giving permission to let something happen. You're not leaning on them to sway their choices, and it's not a loan with some expectation of (re)payment.

Every time you notice your hubby has given you a gift of trust, or has honored a gift of trust you've given, say something. Out loud. Acknowledging that trust happened, and it was good, will help train your brain to realize this person is safe, and in turn make it easier for you to give greater gifts of trust in the future.

For me, because of all the abuse I carry, this starts super small. For example, early in a relationship, when my significant other gives me a hug, I thank them. During a hug, I've trusted them with my physical well-being, and they've trusted me with theirs. I say *thank you* because I have to point out to my own brain that doing so was safe and I didn't get hurt. The first few times this happens, they usually say, *for what?* And I'll answer, *for being you*. Although, by this point, I've had my own super hard conversation with them about my past and damage, maybe they don't need to know just how bad it really is while we're still in the honeymoon phase. Then again, if I were to fully take my own advice, I should probably tell them that too. Because shit, trust is hard.

*Blessings and Solidarity,
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.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We're always happy to hear what you all have to say about these letters and advice, but since the question askers are anonymous, we unfortunately can't put you in touch with them. If you have any requests for advice for Amber, please send them to us for our next issue!

NEWS UPDATES

MOVE TOWARDS MAIL SCANNING SPARKS DEBATE

New York State’s push to expand mail-scanning technology in its prisons has sparked growing concern among advocates who say the policy threatens prisoners’ rights, privacy, and access to the courts, even as officials frame it as a safety measure.

The rapid rollout followed a wildcat strike by correctional officers earlier this year, which ended in March. As part of the agreement to return to work, the state committed to accelerating the use of scanners designed to detect drugs in incoming mail. Officers argued that drugs entering facilities through correspondence put staff at risk and contribute to instability inside prisons.

By late July, the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) had installed scanners at 36 of New York’s 42 prisons. Citing emergency conditions related to the strike, the department bypassed the standard public rulemaking process. It is now seeking to permanently adopt the policy, drawing criticism from legal groups and incarcerated people who say their voices were excluded.

Much of the debate centres on how mail scanning affects basic rights. While New York already photocopies most personal mail, the new policy introduces chemical screening that can delay or block delivery altogether. Advocates argue this further erodes human connection for people behind bars, many of whom rely on letters as a vital link to family, support, and emotional stability.

Legal mail is a particular flashpoint. Attorney-client correspondence is constitutionally protected, yet the new scanners apply to legal mail as well. Critics say the technology, purchased through a \$4.4 million contract with RaySecur Inc., has produced false positives. Under DOCCS’ proposal, legal mail flagged by a scanner could be withheld without independent confirmation, raising fears that confidential communications could be delayed or denied based on machine error.

Civil rights organizations warn that allowing automated systems to interfere with legal correspondence undermines due process and access to counsel. While prison officials and vendors argue the scanners improve safety, advocates say there is limited evidence that mail scanning reduces overdoses, and scientific research suggests incidental exposure to contaminated paper is unlikely to be deadly.

As similar policies spread nationwide, New York’s experience highlights a central concern for prisoners’ rights advocates: whether expanding surveillance and security technologies inside prisons comes at the cost of fundamental legal protections, dignity, and meaningful human contact.

Adapted from “The problem with screening the mail in prisons” by Rebecca McCray and Jamiles Lartey (2 August, 2025), The Marshall Project

COMMUNITY-LED ALTERNATIVES TO PRISON FLIPPING

A growing debate is emerging in the United States over what to do with shuttered jails and prisons, as some former facilities are being transformed into luxury venues such as boutique hotels, apartments, wedding spaces and tourist attractions — a trend critics call “prison flipping.”

Advocates for decarceration and community-centered redevelopment argue that most of these conversions gloss over the violent histories of incarceration and instead commodify sites of suffering for profit. They say many adaptive-reuse projects celebrate an aesthetic of incarceration without acknowledging the harm experienced by those who lived and worked there.

Some alternative approaches are gaining traction. In Portland, Oregon, the abandoned Wapato Correctional Facility has been repurposed as the Bybee Lakes Hope Center, a hub offering shelter, gardens, childcare and art studios for people experiencing homelessness. Similar efforts in Santa Cruz, California, involve turning old jails into historic sites and educational venues that confront, rather than erase, difficult local histories.

Artists and organizers also highlight projects across the country that envision radically different futures for decommissioned carceral spaces. A film by activist Ashley Hunt maps community-focused initiatives such as youth centers, training facilities, and campaigns aimed at closing prisons and reinvesting funds in underserved neighborhoods.

However, many closed facilities remain unused, raising questions about their fate. Experts argue that repurposing plans should be developed before prisons shut down to prevent them from being taken over for new forms of detention or profitable redevelopment that ignores community needs.

Architects and abolition advocates emphasize that redesigning these sites must involve people directly affected by incarceration and prioritize healing, housing, public spaces, and systems that reduce reliance on incarceration. They say truly transformative reuse requires confronting the larger justice system, including alternatives to arrest, bail reform, and robust reentry services.

Adapted from “The fight over prison flipping” by Abigail Glasgow (20 November, 2025), Inquest

SEND US YOUR ART!

Please send us your art for the next issues of *The Word is Out*, including your renditions of our header — see the beautiful drawings by Bobby Thompson and Angel Garza on page 1 for inspiration!



THE WISDOM OF BIRDS

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

“When I looked at the painting I felt the same convergence on a single point: a sunstruck instant that existed now and forever. Only occasionally did I notice the chain on the finch’s ankle, or think what a cruel life for a little living creature — fluttering briefly, forced always to land in the same hopeless place.”

This passage from *The Goldfinch*, a novel written by Donna Tartt, speaks to the protagonist’s reflective insight on to what he, Theo, describes as a “time warp: a way of seeing things twice, or more than twice.”

The painting that he looks at is, in real life, an actual masterpiece, also title *The Goldfinch*, by the Dutch artist Carel Fabritius, who was killed in an explosion in 1654. The painting of a tethered bird, thought to have been completed just prior to his death, was recovered from the rubble of Fabritius’s studio, along with his body. Theo, in his observations, describes *The Goldfinch* as having a “magic and aliveness.”

It is the metaphor of a tethered bird which results in a pause of breath. It places the reader, the observer, at the cusp of Theo’s time warp where one can see things from different perspectives, thus resulting in more than an egocentric reality.

The bird in the painting, quite obviously, did not attach the chain to its own ankle. Is the painting a portrait of a goldfinch that Fabritius created, or captured, in its own restricted environment? Or, did the artist create a rendition or recreation of a hopeless place that he knew so well?

As a once unobjective observer of my own incarceration, I found myself contemplating the despair, loneliness, and sense of hopelessness I often experienced. Today, as I study and observe the lives of birds who regularly visit the feeders — rambunctious Purple Finches, the ever upside-down White-breasted Nuthatches, the precocious Oak Titmouse, the magnificent Acorn Woodpeckers, and the solitary Steller’s Jay — an appreciation of interrelatedness arises.

Despite what some may think, the bird feeders do not result in bird laziness, a delay or change in migration, or a greater likelihood of predation. My own ability to see things twice, or more than twice, as Theo describes, provides for clarity. The feeders are a spot to land; a consideration or conclusion that occurs with ever-increasing clarity. While incarcerated, it is possible, perhaps inevitable, to consider the cause and effect of how prison became a spot to land.

As I currently find myself immersed in the search for a metaphorical context for all of this, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, or is it a Cooper’s Hawk, interrupts my state of transfixation. Is the collective wisdom of all these birds providing a message, a thread, a spot for where to consider the source of being tethered?

Returning to the imagery of the novel, this extraordinary boy, after repeated glimpses of the restrained bird posits that, “all space appeared to vanish between me and it so that when I looked up it was the painting and not me that was real.”

My own meditations on reality often drift from birds to Buddha. Am I, too, tethered to a perch? The goldfinch in the painting, although chained, is not within a cage — do such metaphors enhance objectivity?

The subjective factors one might apply while observing things is a key concept with Buddhism. Much emphasis in conventional discussions on reality tend to separate the observer from the observed. However, the Buddha taught that it is foundational to understand the interrelatedness of all things. It is said that the Buddha said that there is no one thing that is independent, as all things are dependent on external causes and conditions. This is where the perspective of the observer becomes evident by understanding that reality is empty of separateness.

Goldfinches and other songbirds provide proof of the oneness of all things by their nocturnal migrations. The night air is cooler, thus less turbulent. These cooler temperatures result in less loss of body water due to the exertion of wing flaps. Fewer predators are present, and the stars are more visible for navigation purposes. Daylight hours are spent refueling and resting.

Consideration of landing spots, along with the origins of that which restricts, binds, or tethers are important points of exploration for all who migrate, literally and metaphorically. Be encouraged to fly, to migrate, to question, to understand. Yet, to do such things with the belief that you are alone is to defy the wisdom of birds.

Jason Morris

AUTHOR’S NOTE: This is the fourth installment of The Wisdom of Birds — the first one appeared in Issue 23: Spring 2021, of The Word Is Out. The first three columns were all written while I was incarcerated. This column is being written in August of 2025.

On September 25, 2024, I left behind the walls and fences of Lompoc. A 50-week period of halfway house, with the tease of home confinement, was granted as the means of completion for my eleven year sentence. (With good behaviour

credit, combined with a one-year reduction of prison time for the successful completion of the Residential Drug Abuse Program — RDAP — I will be/was in BOP custody for 8.5 years.)

On September 11, 2025, which has yet to arrive as I write this, I will be out of custody. Currently, I am on home confinement, which began on July 10, 2025. Seven and one-half years of prison time, 10 months of halfway house, two months of home confinement.

Please know that the context in which this current column is written provides for a glimpse into my personal insights and challenges as I attempt to unravel the metaphorical content of what you have just read.

Writing, and its hand in hand companion of reading, spawn a love for so much. A love for Theo as he seeks flight in his time warp. A love for writers and their audiences. A love for the wisdom of birds. For the sun, the moon, the stars. The love of another, and for oneself.

It is cynicism and capitulation, both foes of truth and courage, that are employed as tools of immobility — a means of keeping one in the same hopeless place.

What does “the same hopeless place” look like, feel like, smell like? Why are there such places and what is the allure? Why return over and over again?

Donna Tartt, in *The Goldfinch*, helps to explore the concept of arrested flight. What chains exist that restrict forays of freedom to such an extent that the point of arrival is the same as the point of departure?

I am at a point now, and a place, where I would like to hear from you. I invite you to write to me with your thoughts, feedback, and your own sources of wisdom.

I will respond to all. Please note that I do not have email, thus all replies will come via post mail. Please write your return address clearly. Thank you.

Jason Morris
P.O. Box 104
Glen Ellen, CA 95442
USA

HOW I OBTAINED A PERSONAL HAIR DRYER IN A MEN’S PRISON

For some odd reason when I tell people about the hair dryer I recently purchased in a men’s prison the reaction is always the same. Their eyes drift to the top of my head and with a puzzled look they respond, *why do you need a hair dryer?*

I’m always surprised the first question isn’t *how?* given hair dryers have only been allowed in the states woman’s prison until recently.

Although I am not part of the LGBTQ community I benefit from their advocacy work including being able to have a personal hairdryer in a men’s prison.

I was especially appreciative of the LGBTQ’s advocacy this past winter when the heat quit working in my unit during the coldest days of the season.

While the rest of the unit was walking around bundled up in coat and hat, shivering in the day room and cells. I was kicking back in my cell, in shorts and T-shirt, enjoying my makeshift ceiling fan/hairdryer.

Helen Keller once signed, “There are no such things as divine, immutable, or inalienable rights. Rights are things we get when we are strong enough to make good our claim to them.”

The prisons LGBTQ community has claimed many rights for themselves and others, including the right of the prisons young and vulnerable to be free from rape and forced prostitution.

In 1977 Ed Mead, a queer prisoner, formed Men Against Sexism at the Washington State Penitentiary. MAS is believed to be the first openly gay prisoners’ organization officially recognized by a prison administration.

At the time MAS was formed, “weaker prisoners were routinely bought and sold like [property] the young and vulnerable ones raped, and then forced into prostitution.” Mead wrote in *Lumpen: The Autobiography of Ed Mead*.

The group’s aim was to end sexual violence and support queer and trans prisoners. “Straight prisoners were not going to put their prison status or personal safety on the line for a bunch of queers...”

Mead wrote in his autobiography adding “...the buying and selling of weaker prisoners had been stopped and rape had gone from being an established test of manhood to a very rare occurrence...” because of the groups actions.

In the last decade Washington States LGBTQ community has advocated for and succeeded in the right to trans health care including sex reassignment surgery and personal shirts, makeup, hairdryers, curling irons in the men’s prisons.

Although I do not directly benefit from these rights, other than my hairdryer, the LGBTQ community has opened the door for me to advocate for better healthcare and recognition as an individual instead of an offender. Maybe the next benefit will be the return of personal clothing that was authorized in all Washington State prisons from the late 1970s until 2009.

Jeffrey R. McKee
Initially published by Black and Pink Seattle-Tacoma

MUSIC

Being incarcerated, I have limited access to music. I've never purchased a tablet, but I've borrowed others to listen to. I do have an AM/FM personal radio with headphones. I cannot express enough the healing power of music. I've been through some truly rough time, and have contemplated suicide and even attempted it a couple times. Music has gotten me through my dark times as often my only companion helping me to process the pain and anguish I've felt.

Music has often been my only friend, and I truly believe that I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for music. Music can fit any mod, whether happy and joyful, heartbroken, being in love, and even anger and outrage. To me, music is a balm for the soul. The healing power of music is largely underestimated. In short, music has saved my life and I could not imagine a world without it!

Jacinda Lee Allenbaugh

I listen to music on my tablet through GTL/ViaPath, a streaming service, paying for a subscription, not by the song or album. But this is coming to a change. New provider is taking over soon. I love music, from opera to Country to Cajun French, to Hardcore Rock. I LOVE LOVE LOVE an artist by the name of Conchita Wurst, she won the European version of *The Voice* for Germany. Stunning beauty with the voice of an angel. She makes me feel alive when I am of the edge of darkness. Certainly has kept me from killing myself. She certainly is a DIVA!

Music connects my wife and me, as we share a lot of song back and forth, different genres to listen to. Music keeps me connected to my granddaughter who at 27 yrs old likes her hardrock heavy metal, which surprisingly I also enjoy, even though I might not completely understand what is being sung.

*Much love,
Stacy Erica Taylor*

Music for me is like my sanctuary. It helps me focus, write, play games that don't need sound and get away from the struggles of prison. Very good for meditation, concentration, satisfaction & pleasurable vibrations. I'm more into Instrumental-Techno-Trance-Dubstep-EDM-Jazz & Rain & Thunder sounds. Why? Because the different sounds from melodic to heavy bass for those who seek *Pleasurable Vibrations*. Music can also tell you a lot about another in what they listen to & what they use it for. Here's some examples: working out, concentration, entertainment, meditation, healing, relaxation, yoga, massage and sleep therapy and, once again, pleasurable vibration for us techno-trance & sound system heads.

Music also has connected me to a boy I like a lot and he's a country boy! Yay! And if it wasn't for him, I probably would have never listened to country. Now we try to find country songs together that suit one another it's such a turn-on and a little romantic. I guess for country songs I like:

“Love you Again” by Chase Matthew, “Girl like You” by Jason Aldean, “Small Town Boy” by Dustin Lynch, “Me For Me” by Tyler Hubbard, “Locked Up” by Sam Hunt.

Music has always told me to be myself, love who I am and to free myself. You're never truly you until you free yourself from doubt and from others who only wish to see you fail. Take time for yourself and self-reflect on how to better yourself, challenge your ego, ask questions and find out who you truly are and what feels right for you.

Submissive Lacey

What's the impact of music on your identity? I used to identify with music, as I *was* a musician before being incarcerated—a Guitarist played and collected fine guitars and sang my songs. I don't know if I have any guitars now or not. My 1965 Gibson White Rose performers model, my American made Fender Staticaster or my special edition Gibson Blues Guitar with p90/pick-ups six way tone adjustment selector and amps, my Yamaha PA system and a Bruce Springsteen Acoustic electric (a 12 string acoustic) etc.

I guess I must live in another time and place. Nobody seems to play the old golden tunes I used to treasure and play Classical Rock—the Blues and country—having been down for 25 yrs now. The question is, *can I still play?* Basically forgotten all my songs, the chord structures and lead licks. I seem to have been left all alone with this other 25 years to follow. No one writes anymore.

I think about my recording studio and the things said above. I no longer feel I have an identity!

William Davis

Letter To My Favorite Artist Lil Baby:

It's an absolute pleasure of mine to be writing this. I want to first give a shoutout to PCP for creating this opportunity. Lil Baby as a musical artist has become very familiar in my life. Recognizing his professional showmanship. One of my favorite songs he wrote is “Bigger Picture” which captivated my mind set even more. I'm very intrigued by his wordplay and style of flow as a rapper. Also his sense of business/street smarts. I'm very aware on how he gives back to his community. How he's received the key to his city and has his own holiday. I respect how much he knows the importance of taking care of his family. I get a thrill on watching the growth of his potential. He has made me as a musical artist really step my game up. Just viewing from a distance through TV, magazine covers, etc, has attached major sauce to my characteristic. My latest album I purchased from him was “Voice of the Heroes.” May he continue getting better and be the best version of who he is! *ORION*

How do you make or listen to music inside? I make music first by the stillness of my mind. I pause and contemplate in which direction I want to go. Never do I force a song. If the words in my head doesn't appear naturally then I

LABOR

Our next newsletter's theme is LABOR! Or *labour* for our Canadian members :)

We'd love to hear what all of you have to say about work in all its forms – jobs you've had, jobs you want to have, work conditions, training, school, chores, even working on your hobbies! Don't be afraid to think outside the box; a lot of different things have to do with work.

What kind of work do you enjoy? Do you like working with your hands, working with other people, or working by yourself? How do you motivate yourself? Are there chores you like doing, or ones you really can't stand? Are you learning a new skill? How are the jobs in your prison? Have you had to fight for better working conditions? Have there ever been strikes? What about unions?

Don't limit yourself! Submissions can be anything, from art to stories, from a description of your day to poems. And of course feel free to send us submissions even if they're not about this topic.

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

don't write it down. In writing a song you always know if you got a hit by how you feel about it in the beginning. It's like a ecstatic rush of eagerness to fulfill the rest of the song. With patience at the same time. Thrillness. I listen to music on my tablet but I sold it a while back.

What are your favorite songs albums, divas right now, and why? When it comes to this particular question there are so many songs, albums and divas to name. Maybe because with me I catch something from all genres. Music is life. I receive the notes and voices by ear from a different taking. I can tell any artist something good about their music.

How does music connect you to other people, inside and out? Music connect me with people, inside and out by the deliverance of the message being shared. However the degree of that message being broadcasted is the degree that that message will be received. It's different for all individuals.

What's the measure of your listening intake?? How do you see the relationship between music/politics? I see the relationship between music/politics from a educated conscious perspective. Music carries knowledge. I constantly try to spit at a high volume. Knowing that it's reaching all type of people from all fields of play. If the president can listen to your song or album without judgment, then you got you one!

Anthony Martin

Music is very important to me and I cannot imagine going a day without listening to some form of music. Whether on the radio where I work in Food Service, or my own MP3 player (now tablet,) I'll listen to pretty much anything.

My taste in music is rather eclectic, ranging from classical to pop and everything in between. I have music on my tablet from the nineteen thirties (Nat King Cole) to the late two thousands (Twenty One Pilots).

I grew up in the seventies and eighties and the music from that era takes me back to a simpler time. I have four siblings and when we were young we would play "disco" wiffle ball in the yard to the music on the radio. Thinking about that makes me smile.

There is one particular song by the Five Stairsteps called "Ooh Child." Maybe you know it: "ooh child, things are gonna get easier. Ooh child, things will get brighter..."

*Peace and love,
Tom Donahue*

Max's playlist: these aren't all explicitly queer, but they've given me hope, inspiration, songs to dance to and cry over. For those in the U.S. federal B.O.P., as of this writing all the songs are available on the music system.

PATRICK WOLF - The Magic Position - indie pop

An unapologetically joyful queer song. I'm not partial to weddings, but if I were this'd be the exit music. (Patrick Wolf has a lot of queer songs, though sadly the BOP removed all but one album, or else I'd add "The City" and "Time of My Life" too.)

JANELLE MONÁE - Don't Judge Me - soul/pop

"I know I got issues, but they drown when I kiss you." A sexy Sapphic song. ("So Afraid" is also great, and like this one, is much more positive than its title might imply.)

WOLF ALICE - Blush - pop

"Curse the things that made me sad for so long," they sing. An affirming song of belonging: "Figured out I'm good... Don't chicken out, it's all good / you're allowed to be what you could." ("Don't Delete the Kisses" is also great.)

AU PAIRS - Stepping Out of Line - pop

Prison is all about categories and being forced into them. This is about fucking them. With queer subtext.

GARBAGE - Queer - '90s alternative

Unlike some of the songs here that I think are more queer than they say out loud, this one is probably less so – it uses the term more as being unashamed about sexual desire and nonconformity. Still, this was probably the first time, as a kid, I heard the word "queer" in a positive light.

NICK DRAKE - Things Behind the Sun - folk

"Don't be shy, you'll learn to fly / And see the sun, the day is done... Just what you'll be." His sexuality was ambiguous, but his guitar-playing was incredible.

070 SHAKE - Come Back Home - electronic pop

I don't know for sure that this is queer, but there are a lot of overtones ("I'm sorry Mama / Your little angel is sinning / Danced with the devil"), and it's definitely about seeking acceptance. Similar queer implications in their song "Glitter."

KING PRINCESS - Talia - pop

Guttingly beautiful song about loss

NINA SIMONE - Wild is the Wind - classic soul/lounge
A song to listen to at midnight, Simone's voice is yearning personified. "You touch me, I hear the sound of mandolins / You kiss me / With your kiss my life begins." I also love how she describes them "like a leaf clings to a tree" – but we know leaves must fall.

TILLY AND THE WALL - The Freest Man - indie rock/pop
Allyship in helping a friend pull out of despair and addiction. Really speaks to me.

THE MAGNETIC FIELDS - I Think I Need a New Heart - indie rock/pop
A wry, sly tone on relationships. Also good: "When My Boy Walks Down the Street."

CIGARETTES AFTER SEX - Apocalypse - dream pop
A good kiss is like the end of the world, when time hangs open just how the singer stretches out "lypse"/"lips".

STEPHEN TRASK - The Origin of Love (from "Hedwig and the Angry Inch") - musical
I'm not really a "musical" guy, but this is a classic, creative retelling of the Greek myth of the original structure of human sex and sexuality.

X-RAY SPEX - Oh Bondage, Up Yours! - punk
Come for the kink-positive punk anthem, stay for the saxophone. Polly Styrene, the frontwoman is an icon.

CURSIVE - Bad Sects - indie rock
A short story about a churchman who falls in love with a male parishioner.

WEEZER - Pink Triangle - '90s alternative
This is a song by a straight dude about himself but HEAR ME OUT. He's making fun of himself, for being so into a woman he didn't realize she was obviously a lesbian. "Married in my mind's no good" is the right kind of positive-masculinity message.

T.REX - Cosmic Dancer - psychedelic folk-pop?
"I danced myself right out of the womb." Bizarrely wonderful.

BUZZCOCKS - Ever Fallen in Love (With Someone You Shouldn't Have)? - punk
Barely-submerged queer punk desire.

VNV NATION - Where There Is Light - EDM
I don't know the singer's background, but "I want to be where I don't need to hide myself / /And remain there 'til the end of time" seems pretty queer-coded.

Max Reynard

I listen to music on my tablet, usually during count time and at night just before I fall to sleep.

I feel connected to people who are not incarcerated with knowing they are listening to the same songs. Granted, they may not experience the same emotions that I am, but we are sharing an experience caused by the songs.

My music library has an impact on my identity as far as it demonstrates my state of mind on certain social and political issues as well as my thoughts on relationships.

Shae Graeme

How do you make or listen to music inside? The best way for me to make music would be singing songs by every artist that I can think of. The other way would be by radio or downloaded music on the tablet.

What are your favorite songs, albums, divas right now and why? My favorites are pretty big, I have so many. Only, my favorite songs consist of romance, break ups, or sex. If I could say favorite album(s), I'd say Jordy-Mind Games, NF-Hope, Onslaught-In Search of Sanity, Tesla-The Great Radio Controversy, etc. My favorite diva would be Kim Petras and Lady Gaga. I'm not sure why, but I can say that each and every single song, artist, etc. I came across finds a place in my favorites, simply for being real and sharing that with others.

How does music connect you to other people inside or outside? My music draws my emotions out and often other's feel the same way or they don't. For me, my music brings me a sense of peace. It allows me to escape my pain and share my voice with others.

What's the impact of music on your identity? Music has impacted me ever since I was a child and that will never change. Music is a passion only one can dream of and I share that passion with others whenever I can.

How do you see the relationship between music and politics? Music has always shown people the ideals of expressing one's emotions with the world and through that you get to see the bigger picture.

Iris Da Puppy

PCP COMPILATION PLAYLIST

Contributors: Brittany with a K, Iris Da Puppy, Submissive Lacey, Max Reynard, Shae Graeme, Stacy Erica Taylor, Tom Donahue

Automatic (Live at Jacksonville FL) - Less Than Jake
Bat Dance - Prince

99 Red Balloons - Goldfinger

Boy Crazy - New Found Glory

I Wanna Be Like You - Jonas Brothers

Alternative Girl - Reel Big Fish

Bark to the Beat - McKenna Grace

Let's Do the Time Warp Again - The Holophonies

Oi DJ - Big D and the Kids Table

Pizza Day - The Aquabats

Rollin' Over - Skinny Lister

Someone New - Hozier

The Gigantic Robot Kills - MC Lars

True Trans Soul Rebel - Against Me!

Under Pressure - The Used/My Chemical Romance

Calling All the Monsters - Amber Pacific

The Haunted Mansion - Paul Frees

Unholy - Sam Smith/Kim Petras

Shower - Becky G

Mind Games - Jordy

Hope - NF

In Search of Sanity - Onslaught

The Great Radio Controversy - Tesla

Love you Again - Chase Matthew

Girl like You - Jason Aldean

Small Town Boy - Dustin Lynch

Me For Me - Tyler Hubbard

Locked Up - Sam Hunt
Go - Grimes & Blood Diamonds
Spring Breese (Martin Roth Summerstyle Remix)
- DJ Tatana
Access (Original Mix) - Spring in to Trance
American Dreams by Oberon - Dark Sessions Radio
Witchcraft (John B Remix) - Pendulum
Under the Stars (Original Club Mix) - 50 D. Trance
Tunes, Vol. 3
Submission (Whunder Render) - Mayko & Malicious
Secret (Space Raven RMX) - Dj Sakin vs weimar - 50
Techno Trance Anthems (Vol. 3)
Satellite (Original Above & Beyond Remix)
- Oceanlab
Sandstorm - Darude
Ravers In the UK (Dj Gollum Remix) - DJ Manian
Welcome to the Club - (Original Mix) - Steve Hill
vs Technical
One More Time (Paul Miller Remix) - Paul Miller
pres. Motion Blur
One by One (feat. Tiff Lacey) [Dima Krasnik Remix]
- Javah feat. Tiff Lacey
Freefall (Binz Dubstep Remix) by DownFlex - Trance
Emotions, Vol. 6
The Dungeon (Album Edit) - Spring in to Trance
Devotion (feat. Cameron Hayes) - Dimension &
Cameron Hayes
Children (Blue Ocean Maxi Remix) by Passion - Best
of Trance Emotions
Castle in the Sky by Kim Petras
Blackout (Wideboys Remix) - Breath Carolina
Black Church - Dimension
The Magic Position - Patrick Wolf
Don't Judge Me - Janelle Monáe
Blush - Wolf Alice
Stepping Out of Line - Au Pairs
Queer - Garbage
Things Behind the Sun - Nick Drake
Come Back Home - 070 Shake
Talia - King Princess
Wild is the Wind - Nina Simone
The Frest Man - Tilly and the Wall
I Think I Need a New Heart - The Magnetic Fields
Apocalypse - Cigarettes After Sex
The Origin of Love (from "Hedwig and the Angry
Inch") - Stephen Trask
Oh Bondage! Up Yours! - X-Ray Spex
Bad Sects - Cursive
Pink Triangle - Weezer
Cosmic Dancer - T. Rex
Ever Fallen in Love (With Someone You Shouldn't
Have)? - Buzzcocks
Where There Is Light - VNV Nation
Don't Let Go (Love) - En Vogue
I Miss You - Harold Melvin and The Blue Notes
Comin From Where I'm from (Remix) - Anthony
Hamilton

How Can I Mend a Broken Heart - Al Green
For The Good Times - Al Green
I'm So Glad You're Mine - Al Green
Ether - Nas
Hate Me Now - Nas
Can't Truss It; Black Steel in The Hour of Chaos -
Public Enemy
As - Stevie Wonder
Black Parade - Beyoncé
Who Is He and What Is He to You - Me'Shell
NdegéOcello
Comfortable; I Can't Breathe - H.E.R.
I'm Still #1 - Boogie Down Productions
My Philosophy - Boogie Down Productions
I'll Be There For You/You're All I Need To Get By -
Mary J. Blige
Come Home - Anderson. Paak
Hotel - Montell Fish
Better In Color - Lizzo
POF Pressure; Shea Butter Baby; Chicago Boy - Ari
Lennox
Wicked; Jackin for Beats - Ice Cube
Transgender Dysphoria Blue - Against Me!
True Trans Soul Rebel - Against Me!
Unconditional Love - Against Me!
You Are Unstoppable - Conchita Wurst
Up For Air - Conchita Wurst
Colours Of Your Love - Conchita Wurst
Somebody To Love - Conchita Wurst
Firestorm - Conchita Wurst
Heroes - Conchita Wurst
Rise Like A Phoenix - Conchita Wurst
The Outside Of Me - Conchita Wurst
See Me Now - Conchita Wurst
That's What I Am - Conchita Wurst
Find Me - Forest Blakk
Swipe Right - Forest Blakk
The Most Beautiful Thought - Forest Blakk
Bandida - Pabllo Vittar
If You Ever Change Your Mind - Calum Scott
Stop Myself (Only Human) - Calum Scott
Dancing On My Own - Calum Scott
Flaws - Calum Scott
Won't Let You Down - Calum Scott
I Am Her - Shea Diamond
Trying My Best - Anson Seabra
Walk On the Wild Side - Lou Reed
She Keeps Me Warm - Mary Lambert
Mana Takatapui - Jen Cloher
If You Love Me Now - Muna
Summer Madness - Kool & The Gang
Flowers - Miley Cyrus
Under And Over It - Five Finger Death Punch
Never Enough - Five Finger Death Punch
Boss Bitch - Doja Cat
Lost - Jonathan Roy
Ooh Child - The 5 Stairsteps

HARM, ACCOUNTABILITY AND HEALING PERSPECTIVES FROM INSIDE

In the Spring of 2020, the murder of George Floyd by police officers sparked international uprisings against police and prisons. Concepts like defunding the police and abolishing prisons were suddenly taken up in the mainstream and proliferated like never before. It felt simultaneously more possible and more urgent to grapple with the vast questions that drive prison abolitionist work. In an effort to keep this growing movement grounded in the experiences and voices of prisoners themselves, PCP began a writing project centered on a question that comes up again and again in our work: how do we, as prison abolitionists, understand and respond to harm?

We know that incarceration does not offer a solution to violence, nor does it prevent it—on the contrary, prisons are hotbeds of physical, psychological and structural violence. So what do we do when members of our community hurt each other? In order to imagine a world beyond prisons, we must imagine new ways—and embrace the existing alternatives—of understanding where harm comes from, of responding to harm when it happens in our communities, and of taking accountability when we ourselves cause harm. Inspired by the work of projects like Generation Five, INCITE!, and the Creative Interventions toolkit, we wanted to develop a resource that foregrounds the perspectives of our own inside members.

The submissions that we received were thoughtful and heartfelt; writers reflected on moments in their own lives, holding compassion both for their past selves and for the people around them. As we read the submissions, we realized that we would not be able to produce a clean, tidy answer to the questions we sought to answer. What we can do is to begin to think, grieve, fight and dream together.

As such, instead of publishing a single resource on the subject, we've decided to publish excerpts of the collected contributions over the coming issues of The Word Is Out. Below is the first of the series, a piece by Mar-Eleanor Moore in which he reflects on trauma, the lasting impact of abuse and blame, and the ways in which harm reproduces itself. This piece includes some description of sexual abuse.

Telling My Parents I Reported: 4th of July Phone Call

“I haven't shown your father any of your letters. You need to stop blaming everything on your father and take responsibility—you were old enough to know better!”

“He started molesting me when I was five!”

“So from five to 12 you had ALL that time to knock it off!”

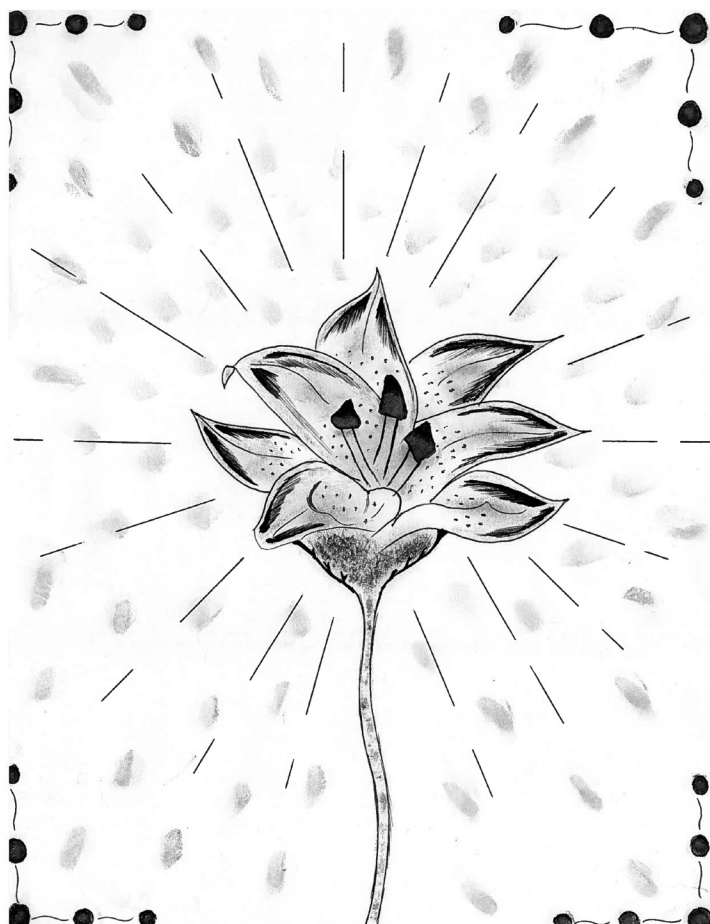
“You need to stop holding a child to adult standards.”

“Holding a— holding— h-h-holding a child to— [click]...” her voice trembles and wavers in anger and age as my stepmother screams at me this 2021 4th of July, and it is evident as ever that she will die before she changes her politics. The dozen years I've spent trying to change my

parents' politics is to no avail. I have failed. They may never have the compassion I've fought for them to see. I have failed at whatever romanticized victory I had envisioned of sharing the truth and being welcomed home and finally finding closure in being disowned before 18. Childhood sexual abuse victim, and they still blame me.

I've called for many months, and written too, since the beginning of COVID, at about the time Spain went on national lockdown, while a dear lover is there in Alicante. Stressed about her safety and getting back to her native Australia—hearing nothing in response to letters. Stressing about my parents' health on top of this, at the same time—hearing nothing in response to my calls and letters. I know, from this 4th of July, they were being withheld.

I've been blamed, held responsible for incest, or as my therapist says, “being raped,” since I was 12, when my brother walked in on my uncle sitting on my stomach, penis over my heart, trying to get him erect enough to penetrate me. From five to 17, he progressed from molesting me, putting sharpies in me, my performing oral sex, to my receiving anal sex at 10 years old. I was depraved, fanatical, determined to become a professional at “playing doctor.” All I could think about was



sex. But it's not sex; it's abuse—so says the literature of experts such as Wendy Maltz, Beverley Engels, Ken Graber and many others who say it's never the victim's fault.

No matter how sex-obsessed the victim is, or how often the victim pursues or reinitiates the abuse, a child sexualized is not at fault. Childhood sex trauma is severely emotionally damaging and no child should be held responsible...but my parents assert that the child is responsible for the abuse and the response to it.

To the trauma, to the shame, to the silence and stigma, to the racist, homophobic, transphobic, xenophobic language and culture of my father who screams "FAGGOT!" at the top of his lungs, out the window of his truck at the skater on the sidewalk in skinny jeans: I am responsible for upholding my mental health, my academic performance, my I'm-okay-I'm-not-depressed persona—I am responsible for all of this.

When I was caught at 12, my stepmother said, "you can't talk about what happened because they'll say you were more mature and hold you responsible." I, at 12, and my uncle with disabilities at 16 or 17.

Father, separately, said, "you can't bring up what went on because mom works with children [the longtime director of a childcare center] and you could jeopardize her job." Since 12, I have explicitly been bound to silence and held responsible.

Full of shame, believing that I'm heterosexual but every family and societal message dictating that any contact with another man is gay, and that any gay act makes one eternally gay. No gray area, black and white, no redemption. My father promised repeatedly that he would beat me until I was hospitalized the day I turned 18—he outed me as gay (screaming in my face "Are you gay?!" until I folded) then disowned me. Saved from suicide from incest trauma and shame at 17, and my father outs me as gay just a couple months later. I never made it to my feet. 29 in mid-August, I've lived a life of drugs, sex, crime, and incarceration and felt I was finally building the bridge with my parents this prison term.

We began to speak. It felt so good. We more or less spoke for two years, avoiding the nasty parts. To talk of family and start to feel incentive to do good. Finding closure to old wounds simply through presence and consistency. One day, early into COVID, a conflict of politics occurred—not red vs. blue per se, but the sex and gender politics of the family shattered incest and how having my manhood taken and being emasculated by the experience led me to HRT. I wrote explaining these feelings; the reasons I transitioned, and de-transitioned, MTFTM; that I am writing a memoir about my childhood abuses and gender journey—all bridge-building ceased. My part, all I could do, is reach out. They ceased to answer calls and I wrote multiple letters to no avail.

On the 4th of July, I finally got through! An answer, finally. From the moment we connect, it's tense. Then it is again, after this year of COVID, absent from building our bridges, that they assert that I was responsible for being abused. I lose it for a moment and they say if I don't lower my voice, they're hanging up and we're never speaking again. I lower my voice.

As a minor they took me to therapy once when I was 15, years after being caught at 12. My father eavesdropped on all I said to the therapist and screamed at me that I was a liar the 20-30 minute drive back home. I had wanted to pursue

psychology, neuropsych, my faith was completely lost in therapy and ever withered, my faith in family. We argue about this on the phone—about being blamed and not taken for therapy. My stepmother yelling "you refused!" Years later, yes, of course, who wants to get vulnerable and open up just to be screamed at for half an hour that you're a liar?

"From five to 12, you had ALL that time to knock it off!"

For all my life, I lost my innocence. I have been blamed for being raped, blamed for acting out, punished. Forced to stand with my nose touching the corner of the wall for an hour, whooped by belt or hand, and as my parents attest, *you were grounded for half your childhood*. And I was, which meant I was to sit upright on the edge of my bed, to touch nothing but stare at the wall and *think about your actions*. Conditioned for incarceration. Might be lucky to do chores or read recreationally, having to ask if I may fall asleep lest further punished. While not as harsh a childhood as many, nor as easy as many, it was my vicious cycle—abused, blamed, acting out, punished, back to abuse and pursuing sex and crossdressing for attention and to escape out of habit or conditioning, more acting out.

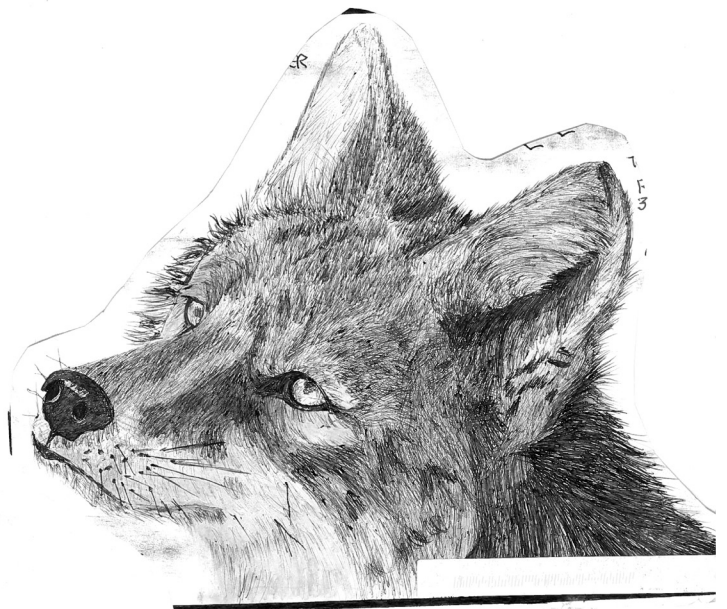
I have believed myself to be, for much too long, responsible for much too much. Closure and family unity, long dreamed to just be embraced and loved, encouraged and supported, safe to communicate and self-determine my gender and sexuality, explained to that abuse is different than sex—that would mean so much! It would be, in the context of reality, me having to set aside all of my politics founded in egalité, 2nd wave feminism, queer studies, intersectionality, Black Lives Matter, and to reside in a patriarchy and heteronormativity that blames victims for their abuse. My happy ending isn't a bridge built, but a line drawn in the sand. I know where I stand. I am proud of my stance.

Accountability is NOT taking responsibility for being abused; taking responsibility for everything leads to primary and secondary dependencies, co-dependency, and shame.

Accountability is healing. Accountability is education! Breaking intergenerational abuse! Breaking a culture! Breaking our chains!

Heal now, forever; heal others. <3

Mar-Eleanor Moore Mar-Eleanor Moore



FILING A TITLE 42 U.S.C. 1983 LAWSUIT

The following is a general walkthrough of filing a Title 42 U.S.C. § 1983 lawsuit, written by one of our inside collective members who has studied law since the 70s. It is not legal advice.

First things first. To write something to be published in a newsletter would be vague at best, and only the minimum of information.

I could write that you must make sure to exhaust the administrative process, file a grievance every time you are wronged. You must complete the entire grievance process at all available levels. Make sure to always maintain copies of anything you write. Writing a letter of complaint alone will not suffice for exhaustion of process. If you do not follow through with every step, you will be found to have *procedurally defaulted* your claims. Make sure you file within any deadlines that are part of your administrative process. If you file an appeal or a grievance past a deadline you may lose the right to raise a particular claim.

Keep records! You will need to produce enough information for a court to believe you as opposed to prison staff and officials. Keep a diary of all the relevant facts, who you may have spoken to, wrote to, and when you did. Make sure to keep copies of everything. Use carbon paper if you need to, or write out an identical copy. If you can, send copies to someone you can trust and rely on on the outside. Once you start the process of writing grievances or informal complaints, you will most likely be targeted by prison staff. Your legal papers may be removed or *disappear* during a cell search, or even when you leave your cell to go somewhere.

Keep your information, your filings, to yourself, as much as possible. Don't draw unnecessary attention to yourself. Safety first.

When you finally get to the process of filing in court, be ready for possibly years for litigation. I spent five years in court before settling a Title 42 U.S.C. § 1983 civil lawsuit. There is so much back and forth between you and the court, you and the defendant's attorney. You'll spend a bundle on copies and postage.

Be prepared for possible false disciplinary reports to be used to separate you from people who may be helping you or even valuable resources you may not have access to in the RHU or *hole*. They may try to goad you into acting out, or just engage in some very creative writing.

Make sure you go after the right people for the right reasons. Many defendants may use Sovereign Immunity to hide behind. You need to be detailed and reactive. If there are witnesses, ask them to write a statement or affidavit for you.

The federal court will charge you \$300 to file your lawsuit. They will get their fee no matter what, 20-25% at a time of whatever you earn or receive from friends or family.

It is almost impossible to get an attorney appointed to help you with your lawsuit. You need to be pretty severely handicapped, very ill, brain damaged, etc., to get a federal judge to grant you counsel to help you.

There are many different kinds of issues: shelter, food, clothing, medical care, personal safety, use of force, hazardous conditions, access to the courts, religious freedom, searches and seizures, property, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. Of course there is also discrimination and attacks on those of us in the LGBTQ community.

There is also a statute of limitations to take into account. That could vary from state to state. Even though you are in federal court it is the state statute of limitations that almost always applies to your time window to file your complaint.

There are dozens, if not hundreds of books, written about how to pursue a civil rights lawsuit under the Title 42 U.S.C. § 1983. Unfortunately, none of them can turn you into an overnight litigator. It takes years to learn the intricacies of the process. It takes years to learn how to research the case law and recognize what will be helpful, to separate the wheat from the chaff. It takes many years to learn to read, understand, and write legalese.

I've got many years in the study of law. I started dabbling with the law in the late '70s. I wish I could reach out to every single one of you in need and help you. It would be impossible. If you have family or friends on the outside who could write to me, explain your situation, what you've done to date, what is your goal, have them write to me. PCP cannot act as a go between or they could face problems that could keep their good will and assistance completely out of prisons. I'll do what I can to guide as many as I can to help with your fight. If you're fighting for financial gain, give up now. You're not doing this for the right reason. The goal is to keep others from having to endure what you have endured. The goal is to change the system for the better, for all of our brothers and sisters.

If you have someone who can reach out to me:

Richard Mercaldo #ED4296
SCI Coal Twp (PADOC)
PO Box 33028
St Petersburg, FL 33733

I wish the very best to all of you with all your endeavors.

*Sincerely,
Richard Mercaldo*

IN CONVERSATION WITH MISS MAJOR: PT. VII

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

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

Q&A

Q: I was thinking that the trans elders that I know are 20-30 years older than me, and that's pretty young, but people just disappear and step out of the scene. So what do we need to do in order to keep contact? Often the language changes all the time and we come up with new words, new self-identities, and older people who fought for our rights are alienated by it. How do we make it a kinder space, a gentler space for everyone? Also I wanna know about House of GG—how is it working, what is it, what can we do to help. Can you tell us about why you chose to move in the South?

MAJOR: For my girls in the south that I knew. And if you're interested in House of GG, that's House of two Gs, not *G I G I*, that's typical bullshit: houseofgg.org, and they'll give you all the information that you'll need.

The thing to keep in mind is, if you want to really connect to older people, then you gonna have to put some work in to do it. We've been beaten, badgered, annoyed, pushed, tried to deal with some younger people that put in our place. Can't go out in public 'cause they'll run over ya. I have a scooter cause I have a problem walking around in the cityk, and people walk into my scooter to show you how much attention they are not paying, on their goddamn cell phone texting. Thank god it doesn't have gas or I'd run over them.

But it's a matter of getting and making the connections to them, and going to where they are, and being prepared for the 'no we don't wanna be fuckin bothered' but remaining persistent, keep going until you get through that wall, because we have to protect ourselves. The fact that we're older doesn't mean that we're any tougher than anybody else or that we're wiser than the rest of the world. We're just people, and that connection has to be done with some sense of safety and sense of regard for who the person is that you're attempting to get to

know better. You need to realize, too, that when AIDS came here, people were afraid to make friends, because you could meet somebody on Monday and they'd be dead by Thursday, so all of a sudden people weren't goin to the bars, folks weren't meeting other folks. It was a really rough time. If I'd have had a straight life, as a 70-year-old person my friends would be dying around me. But because of my life and who I am, my friends are already dead, so I don't have them here with me now. The closest people I have to me now are my daughters today. The oldest one of them is 55.

If that's what you want to do, please pursue it. You'll have to work with them and teach them what the new words are and what the vernacular is. I have some kids who try and get me to grasp it too, and I'm sorry, I don't have time for that. Give me a leg or an arm, I can grab that, but other than that I don't have time.

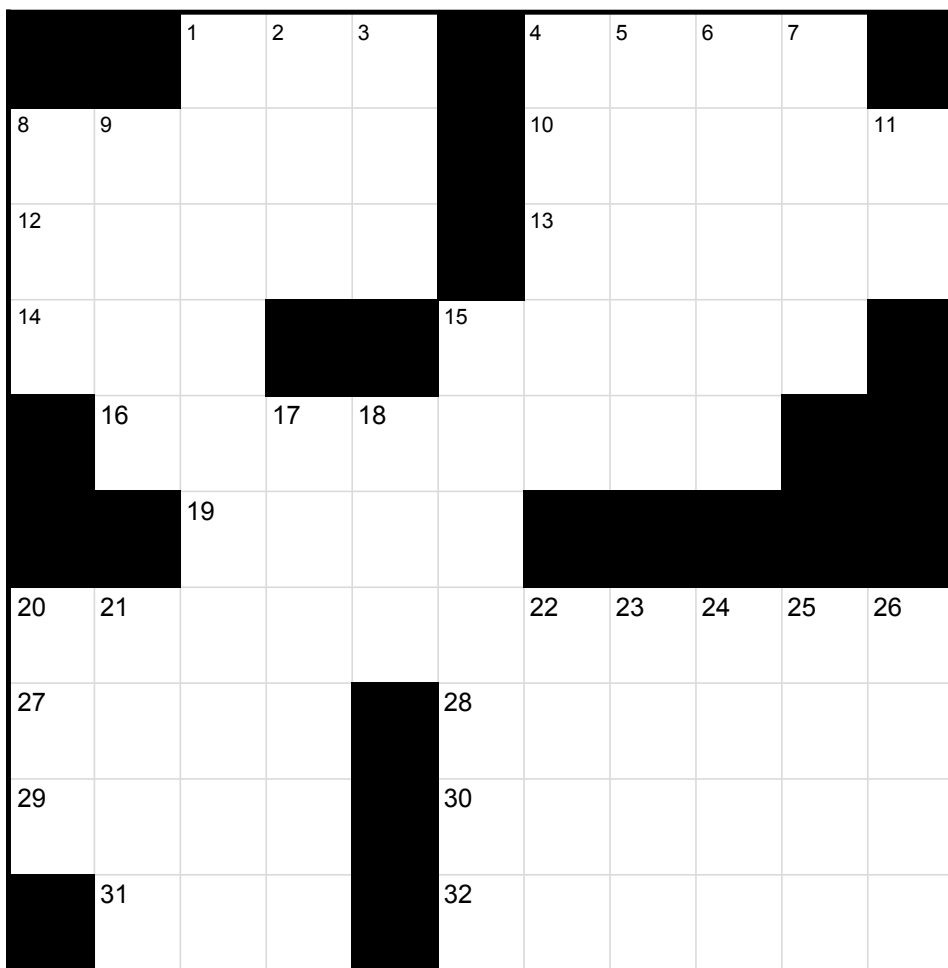
Q: You've done this work for so long, in different periods that those of us who are younger associated with really crucial moments in social movements. I'm really curious how you, looking back, conceive of the work you were doing in relation to radical left milieux of whether it was a part of it at different times or in conflict with it, if the left at the moment had caught up or whether it was on side?

MAJOR: You know what, I never even had a chance to look at it like that because when you're so busy doing the work and connecting to people, there wasn't a chance to step back and go *hmmm oh that's what this is*. I never knew, and my only chance to really think about it now is when I see the documentary and I think about *oh god I remember people that had this happen*.

It's work getting to know people. It's not an easy thing to do because of how this society has us sectioned off, categorized, and stuck in these goddamn boxes that we don't even need to be stuck in. It's a matter of, for me, relating to people on their two feet as they are and as they present, not to create anything in my mind or what my perceptions would be, but who they actually are. And appreciating that, then taking it from there. So even though there were different pockets of people and different things going on, there wasn't a chance to give it a title or realize if it was left or right, if they were comrades or friends. It was just people. I wanted to just do whatever it was that they let me know they needed, and we would work on it together. Good question, thank you.

*Stay tuned for the rest of the conversation!
We're almost at the end!*

CROSSWORD

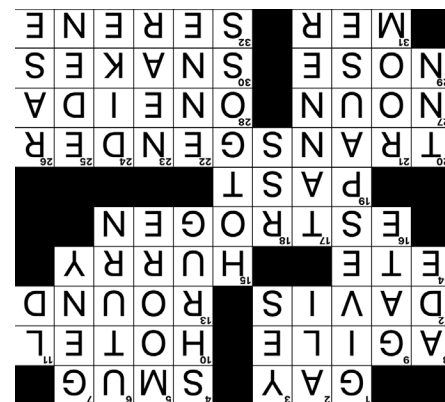


ACROSS

1. Old-fashioned word for happy
4. "Told you so!"
8. Nimble
10. "_____ California" by the Eagles
12. Miles or Angela Y
13. Merry-go-_____
14. Summer in Montréal or Nice
15. Speed up
16. Hormone that can help clear skin
19. One of three, with present and future
20. Someone who changes from man to woman, or woman to man, or to something else entirely
27. Any thing
28. Five Nations tribe
29. Central facial feature
30. One way of getting down, if you're getting up by ladders
31. Prefix for -maid or -man
32. Calm

DOWN

1. Makes one hesitate
2. Boxing legend
3. Affirmative
4. "Who knows?"
5. Demi, in G.I. Jane
6. Complete reversal, in a car
7. Millennials, alternately
8. Fruit drink
9. Point of entry
11. Calling someone far away, initials
15. Dramatic tea
17. Leather worker
18. Feed for looking at blogs, initials
20. Spike TV's former name
21. There could be many in a mansion, or just one in a studio
22. Feminine suffix
23. Opposite of far
24. Water barrier
25. Genesis setting
26. Tear down



PERFECTLY...IMPERFECT!

Feeling like—I'm a 10, a 20, a 30,
and infinity

all-at-the-same-time!

Feeling like—a 1-3, on a scale to 9.

Feeling like—This is who/what
we were

who/what we are -and-
who/what we will ever

be...

Even if, it's all in our mind(s)!

Feeling like—I/We was/were,
made for this Only!

- And- Only this, was/
were made...

For I/We!

Feeling like—Our Imperfections,
Miscues, Mistakes

Is/Are Perfect-Made as

Bc.

-And-

Being Trans-"Perfect" is
Imperfect thinking that's holding
back...

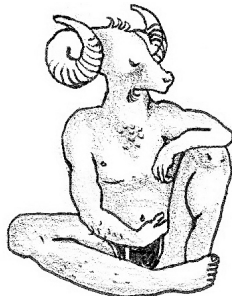
"I/You/We"!!

Divine K. Sexton

HOMOSCOPIES

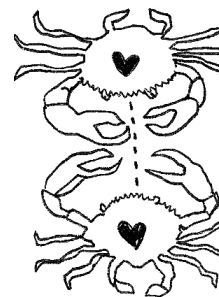
ARIES

Now that leather daddies are mainstream, it seems that you, Aries, need a fresh new someone to guide you through the coming months. What the stars recommend is using this astrological moment to find a new kind of guide who will support you in the complex process of getting whatever it is you most want. Total bonus if this guide is your exact type.



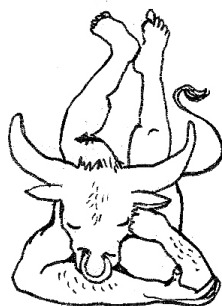
CANCER

You are divine and rare. There is no one right now with more gorgeous style, a more melodic quality of voice, a cuter little skip in the step. People will emulate your looks. The compliments will arrive nonstop. You can play at modest but that glow really does just seep out in buckets. I want to roll around in it until it's inside me too.



TAURUS

There has been much talk of self care these days and while it's always sweet to extend love inward, it might do you good this fall to get out of your own drama and into the perspective of others. Caring for things outside yourself will actually make you feel better. Bathe the gays you adore in attention and it will come back around in a faster flow.



LEO

Like most of us nostalgic for summer and beach cruising and naked mornings, we all long to be deeply relished for all the particular things that make us perfect. I hope you find many admirers who will adore that way your hair gets messy when you fret or how your beard grows in significantly each time you sleep. You deserve to be intensely worshipped but failing that materializing anytime soon, you still will be fine.



GEMINI

Things have not been an easy and while it might appear that your days are circling from one chaotic implosion to another cycle of doom, what is actually happening is the cumulative production of a tornado of potential roiling energy that could create something uniquely beautiful that is also fun. For a gemini, this is the best possible news.



VIRGO

Vicious gossip as of late may leave you questioning the integrity of people you trust. Your sign is ruled by Mercury which teaches us that conversation flows in ungovernable streams. You wouldn't be wrong to be vigilant but ultimately you are amazing and you know what's real. All this verbal mess will be useful in promoting you to speak candidly and clearly with everyone you love.



LIBRA

As Libra season is upon us, we surround ourselves with ghosts and bats and spooky feelings to conjure up what feels acceptable and what to let go into the dark of midnight. Libra wisdom is not just for witches! If injustice is everywhere, we can start by finding even one or two others who understand our values and who speak meaningful things we need to hear. This will help everyone feel better with what happens next the moon is full. P.S.- happy birthday!



CAPRICORN

You've been a good boy, Capricorn. Daddy is pleased so you get a little extra room right now to really think on what you might do with the possibilities that start to open. Imagine, for instance, you could have all the bears in the cosmos. How precisely would that play out? How would it feel to touch their beards? With a hand? With your face? You have already achieved so much of life's purpose so really carve out the time to long for what's next.



SCORPIO

As we move fist deep into autumn, Scorpios are blessed with something they actually cherish: a secret. If you don't yet know what I'm referencing, I presume you will very shortly be gifted a barely believable truth, or confided with a story so spicy you will think of it late at night just before you get off. Scorpio, you can wait decades for this grade of confession. Don't accept shame when you enjoy it.



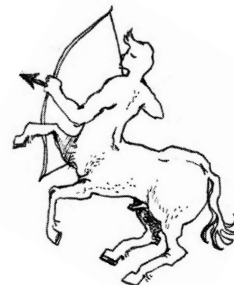
AQUARIUS

As always, you are causing a stir. Your lengthy courtships are harnessing so much tension, even those uninvolved are dying to witness what's next. We want to see those biceps, the giggles, that first kiss. Just which face will you will wear when the preamble ends and the beehive wig comes out? Once you end the build up and really connect, much of the muck of the past months will be lifted and all will feel blissfully clear.



SAGITTARIUS

My gorgeous archer, you are about to develop a penchant for craft. Whether making something useful, edible, dildos, or simply a thing of beauty, you will have a productive bout at the end of the month that could last well into winter. If you aren't sure exactly where to direct your talents, begin with making literally anything at all. It may feel awkward to write a poem or sing in the shower but if you fail to get onto a creative level, frustration will mount.



PISCES

The current astrological transits suggest developing a new kind of relationship to the naked body. Whether your own, another's, or on some mythical or conceptual abstraction plane that only a Pisces can access, the more you can reverse any preconceptions you hold about the human form, the more you can learn something crucial and timely about your present. Consider taking up life drawing, navel gazing, or consuming smut. In the everyday interaction of what is already present underneath a layer of clothing, something profound will be learned.



Thinking of
You
ALL
At
PCP



E. Pickering
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